

## TRUMP'S NEW AFGHAN STRATEGY: POLICY OPTIONS FOR PAKISTAN

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### Abstract

*The paper analyses the U.S. President Donald Trump's new Afghanistan strategy. It argues that the policy is flawed as it focuses on a military approach rather than a political solution for Afghanistan. It also does not address the internal vulnerabilities of Afghanistan, especially reconstruction and nation building. Afghanistan's turmoil is essentially a product of internal dynamics of the country, which comprises of a burgeoning insurgency, ethnic and sectarian fault lines, religious extremism, rampant corruption and fragile governance institutions. The prevailing scenario is the result of more than 16 years of various military strategies employed by the US which failed to stabilise the war-ravaged country. Furthermore, suspicion and mistrust between Afghanistan and Pakistan have obstructed the peace efforts. Under the U.S. South Asia Policy, India has been given a larger role in Afghanistan while taking a dim view of Pakistan's counter terrorism efforts. It has raised serious concerns in Pakistan. Against this backdrop, the paper examines the limitations of Trump's South Asia policy, for Pakistan and what strategic adjustments the country needs to make in this scenario. It suggests dialogue among all stakeholders including the Taliban which is necessary for peace in Afghanistan.*

**Key Words:** *Terrorism, Afghanistan, Pakistan, US, Proxy War, Regional Instability, Quadrilateral Talks, South Asia Strategy*

### Introduction

Exploitation of Afghanistan's internal fault lines by various powers of the world for their interests is a perpetual phenomenon in history. The prevailing scenario has created a critical security situation in Afghanistan; consequently, generating a spill over effect for its neighbours,

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particularly Pakistan, China Iran and the Central Asian States. The U.S. policy for Afghanistan has seen a major shift under the US President Trump. The present U.S. strategy announced on 21 August 2017 predominantly refers to American policy guidelines for Afghanistan and South Asia. While urging the Pakistani government to do more in countering terrorism in the region, President Trump praised India by declaring it the closest ally of the US suggesting a greater role for India in Afghanistan, especially in the area of economic assistance and development.<sup>1</sup> The new strategy is condition-based rather than time bound with a focus on tackling terrorism rather than Afghan nation building. Furthermore, the US support for the Afghan Unity Government is conditional depending on its commitment and performance.<sup>2</sup>

Pakistan believes that it has been an equal partner with the coalition forces in fighting against militancy in the region. Pakistan has made enormous sacrifices in terms of military damages, human lives, refugee influx and intense economic cost that weigh heavily on own economy. However, Trump's new national security strategy blames Pakistan for allowing militants to operate from within its territory and insists that Pakistan has to take decisive action against militant and these very terrorist groups. Pakistan being an immediate neighbor of Afghanistan is among the most impacted countries from terrorism; however, the country still strives to safeguard its national security and play its role to assist regional and international efforts for curbing the menace of terrorism. Even then, Pakistan's role in fighting terrorism continues to suffer from suspicion.<sup>3</sup>

The chaotic situation and the prolonged thirty-seven years of warfare in Afghanistan ranging from the Soviet intervention to the Afghan civil war and from the Taliban rule to the US invasion have resulted in over 2 million dead, with 700,000 widows and orphans in the country.<sup>4</sup> Moreover about 1 million Afghan children live in refugee camps outside

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<sup>1</sup> Ume Farwa, "Pakistan's Evolving Regional Policy; Impact of Trump's South Asia Strategy," *South Asian Voices*, October 27, 2017, <https://southasianvoices.org/pakistans-evolving-regional-policy-impact-of-trumps-south-asia-strategy/>.

<sup>2</sup> "The New US Strategy on Afghanistan and South Asia: Challenges and Prospects," *IISS*, October 18, 2017, <https://www.iiss.org/en/events/events/archive/2017-7df9/october-7570/afghanistan-and-south-asia-9f79>.

<sup>3</sup> "Pakistan Ranks Third on Global Terrorism Index," *Dawn*, November 18, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Imrana Begum, "The War on Terrorism and NATO'S Role in Afghanistan," *SSRN Electronic Journal* 11, no. 3 (2010): 16-21, [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1615961](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1615961).

their country though over 3.5 million Afghan refugees have returned but a considerable number of Afghan refugees remain outside to date.<sup>5</sup>

Economic instability is another concern for the local population that has further exacerbated the situation with the Afghan refugees returning after the drawdown of US-led allied troops in 2014. This has affected the country's economy greatly, resulting in growing unemployment. A large number of Afghan youth are struggling for their future and seeking better employment opportunities abroad, particularly in the Europe. The political instability, insecurity, unemployment, poor economic condition and corruption are the biggest problems of present-day Afghanistan.<sup>6</sup>

### **Strategic Situation of Afghanistan**

The prevalent strategic scenario in Afghanistan is marked by internal commotion, security vulnerabilities, political uncertainty and ambiguity in the minds of ordinary people. At the governmental level, the opinion on vital national issues usually appears divided and the same division is exploited by external powers for their vested- interests and to destabilize the country. In fact, this situation has been a matter of concern for the neighbouring countries as well. While giving a briefing to the Security Council, Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan highlighted:

Without enhanced efforts by the National Unity Government to increase political inclusiveness, strengthen accountability and improve the Government's credibility, particularly in the security sector, we are likely to face more crises in an increasingly fragile environment.<sup>7</sup>

Repeatedly, Pakistan has emphasised the need to find a political solution to the Afghan conflict. Pakistan's permanent representative at the UN stressed that "continued reliance on a military option, or enhancing troop numbers without an accompanying political strategy, would only lead to more violence and bloodshed".<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> James A. Piazza, "The Opium Trade and Patterns of Terrorism in the Provinces of Afghanistan: An Empirical Analysis," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 24, no. 2 (2012): 213-234.

<sup>6</sup> William Maley, "Transitioning From Military Interventions to Long-Term Counter-Terrorism Policy the Case of Afghanistan (2001-2016)," *Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism Studies* 6, no. 2 (2016): 39-43.

<sup>7</sup> United Nations Security Council, "Government Must Work to Improve Trust in Security Sector amid Rising Tensions, Terrorist Attacks, Special Representative Tells Security Council," June 21, 2012, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc12882.doc.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

The conflict in Afghanistan is creating several vulnerabilities for Pakistan that have a lot to do with hostile forces. The strategic situation of Afghanistan calls for assessing the prevailing conflict, security environment and the militant groups operating there. Pakistan is in the immediate neighbourhood of Afghanistan and shares a vast border of 2,430 km, besides having multidimensional commonalities of language, religion, ethnicity and cultural bonds. This makes it significant that an insecure and unstable Afghanistan is not in Pakistan's own interest by any means. The regional security is also a variable in setting the course of relationship between the two. Particularly, the erosion of cordial and friendly relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan is because of militant insurgencies. The insecurity in Afghanistan is mostly a product of the internal dynamics of Afghanistan along with a deadly mix of ethnicity, sectarianism, religious extremism, corruption, weak law and order situation and bad governance as well as foreign interference. The drawdown of foreign troops and the ineffective writ of the Afghan National Unity, the government encouraged the Taliban to gradually re-emerge and intensify offensive strategies for capturing larger parts of the Afghan territory. The Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police have so far remained inept in countering the Taliban incursions.<sup>9</sup>

While on the other hand, the international efforts that have been going on for 16 years to bring peace and stability in the war-ridden country reflect failure of various military strategies to materialize the desired objectives of ensuring peace and stability in Afghanistan. Moreover, the recent situation portrays a position where Afghanistan is passing through severe political, economic and security transition mostly dominated by feeling of uncertainty about the future of the country<sup>10</sup>. However, the Afghan National Security and Defense Forces (ANSDF), with the support of the coalition forces are struggling to protect the urban population against militant attacks. Still, the Taliban have been successful in controlling most of the rural areas, which usually remained as uncontrolled and unconsolidated gains out of bounds for a persistent absence of government authority. Moreover, the recent attacks carried out by the Taliban, including attacks on 209 (Afghan National Army (ANA) Corps headquarters in April 2017 and similar such attacks in the high security zones of Kabul, has diluted the confidence of the people in Afghan forces' capabilities to handle security matters in an appropriate manner.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Pervaiz Nazir, "War on Terror in Pakistan and Afghanistan: Discursive and Political Contestations," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 3, no. 1 (2010): 63-81.

<sup>10</sup> Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín and Antonio Giustozzi, "Networks and Armies: Structuring Rebellion in Colombia and Afghanistan," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 33, no. 9 (2010): 836-853.

<sup>11</sup> Muhammad Munir, "The Situation in Afghanistan," *Pakistan Observer*, August 4, 2016.

## Current State of Conflict

In the aftermath of the 2014 drawdown of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), the Afghan forces have hardly demonstrated an efficacious aptitude for preventing insurgency. Though, the Afghan government is quite assertive about the capabilities of ANDSF to retain control of the major population centers, transit routes, urban centers and provincial capitals. However, the Taliban have repeatedly belied such proclamations and seized high priority areas of Kunduz and Helmand provinces, including major communication lines across the country.<sup>12</sup>

The high profile attacks conducted by the Taliban from December 2016 to June 2017 numbered 42 that killed around 194 security personnel including international coalition forces. Such massive and high profile attacks have significantly undermined public confidence in the coalition forces and the capability of the Afghan government to ensure people's security. The capture of Kunduz by a few hundred Taliban in September 2015 and the inability of over 7,000 Afghan troops assisted by coalition forces, to defend Kunduz weekend the confidence of the Afghan people in the government. Moreover, during 2016-17, five Eastern and Southern provinces, including Ghazni, Kunar, Kandahar, Helmand and Nangarhar witnessed intense fighting.<sup>13</sup> The US has spent \$70bn training Afghan forces since 2002, and is still spending more than \$4bn a year, according to a report by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), published on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2017.<sup>14</sup>

The government at the local and provincial levels seeks assistance from various insurgent groups and private militias, including warlords who have been maintaining control and security of their respective areas. The Afghan government allocates a significant amount of funds for the militias to address these security challenges in areas under their control.<sup>15</sup>

Despite Taliban's tactical successes in increasing their hold over much of Afghanistan, the deadlock in Afghan peace process still persists. The security situation in Afghanistan still lingers between the Taliban and

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<sup>12</sup> Jan Angstrom, "Escalation, Emulation, and the Failure of Hybrid Warfare in Afghanistan," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 40, no. 10 (2016): 838-856.

<sup>13</sup> "General Security Situation in Afghanistan and Events in Kabul," updated December 21, 2017, <https://www.ecoi.net/news/188769::afghanistan/101.general-security-situation-in-afghanistan-and-events-in-kabul.htm>. (accessed October 4, 2017)

<sup>14</sup> "SIGAR Report puts Afghan Security Deficiencies in Focus," *Aljazeera*, September 22, 2017. <http://www.com/news/2017/09/sigar-report-puts-afghan-security-deficiencies-focus-170922063148773.html>.

<sup>15</sup> United States' Defence Department Report to Congress, "Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan," June 2017, [https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/June\\_2017\\_1225\\_Report\\_to\\_Congress.pdf](https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/June_2017_1225_Report_to_Congress.pdf).

the Afghan government for control of the country.<sup>16</sup> In addition, this demonstrates a shift in the Taliban strategy for their prospective role in the political affairs of the country. Consequently, this also devastates US, India and Afghan authorities' efforts for a Taliban free Afghanistan. Therefore, the inability of Afghan government 'to rein in corruption, establish rule of law, provide security, or otherwise perform basic governance functions led Afghans to turn to local rulers, militias, and the Taliban, further undermining the government's influence'.<sup>17</sup>

The brutal attacks by the Taliban and ISIS in Afghanistan in January 2018 underscore the futility of the US role; the US has more than 14,000 troops in Afghanistan, accompanied by at least an equal number of security employees from American contractor firms. These attacks were all different, but equally negative in both their impact and implications.<sup>18</sup> The first attack was on the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul on January 21, 2018. At least 22 people, including four Americans killed in the attack that saw a fourteen hour siege by the Taliban. The second assault occurred on 'Save the Children' office in Jalalabad on January 24, 2018, killing at least five people and wounding 12 others. The Islamic State claimed it. The third attack was on an interior ministry building and foreign embassies in Kabul on January 27, 2018. For this attack, an ambulance loaded with bombs killed more than a hundred people and wounded more than 230, and Taliban claimed its responsibility.<sup>19</sup> On January 29, 2018, Afghan military academy came under attack by the Islamic State militants that killed at least 11 Afghan soldiers and wounded 16 more.<sup>20</sup>

These details of various attacks serve the purpose to evaluate the critical security situation prevailing Afghanistan and to highlight the sufferings of the Afghan people. No strategy would lead to peace until and unless taking into account the ground realities. Moreover, reconstruction

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<sup>16</sup> Shaun Gregory, "Under the Drones: Modern Lives in the Afghanistan-Pakistan Borderlands," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 6, no. 2 (2017): 338-340.

<sup>17</sup> Daniel L. Byman, "The Case against Involvement in Afghanistan, Brookings," September 5, 2017, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2017/09/05/the-case-against-involvement-in-afghanistan/>.

<sup>18</sup> "The Afghan Morass: Three Brutal Attacks Underscore Futility of U.S. Role," *Post-Gazette*, January 30, 2018, <http://www.post-gazette.com/opinion/editorials/2018/01/30/The-Afghan-morass-Three-brutal-attacks-underscore-futility-of-U-S-role/stories/201801300009>.

<sup>19</sup> Pamela Constable, "A String of Deadly Attacks in Afghanistan Exposes Government Weakness, Limits of U.S. Training Effort," *The Washington Post*, January 29, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/>.

<sup>20</sup> Rahim Faiez, "IS Attack on Military Academy in Afghan Capital kills 11," January 29, 2018, *ABC News* <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/gunbattle-occurring-afghan-military-academy-52674189>.

and development of Afghanistan is important for sustainable economic growth and political stability.

## **Terrorist Groups in Afghanistan**

The presence of terrorist groups in Afghanistan is equally worrisome for the Afghan government, the US and coalition forces, other stakeholders and neighbouring countries like Pakistan, China, Central Asian States and the Russian Federation. The terrorist groups along with prominent criminal entities collectively are around 20; have a strong influence in Afghanistan. The criminal groups serve as a major source of funding for the terrorist groups and their vast resources, mostly generated through illicit drug trafficking and organized crime sustain the terrorist activities in the country.<sup>21</sup>

The last two years marked record high numbers of terrorist attacks, as well as criminal and conflict-related civilian casualties that testify to the struggles of the Afghans during 2016-17. In the meantime, the fall of the key Afghan province of Kunduz into the hands of the Taliban, along with unrelenting flux in the Northern provinces, the rise of the Islamic State (IS) in the East and the advance of the Taliban towards the center of Helmand province were major reasons for security concerns. Today the security dilemma of Afghanistan has further aggravated largely with the rise of ISIS, besides prevalent insurgent threats from terrorist groups operating in border region of Afghanistan and Pakistan.<sup>22</sup>

The following is a synopsis of different groups engaged in insurgency in Afghanistan:

### **Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in Afghanistan**

In January 2015, the terrorist group Islamic State (IS) announced the formation of the Islamic State of Khorasan (IS-K) and gradually started gaining momentum in the country. The IS emergence to dominance and replacing the Taliban and Al-Qaeda is yet an irresolute matter that may become obsolete in the near future. The emergence of IS-K is another factor for the anxiety in the chaotic security situation of Afghanistan. The US counterterrorism strategy and the increasing support of the masses for the Taliban as compared to ISIS will diminish the ISIS-Khorasan's influence in Afghanistan. During the peak time of its influence, it significantly appeared to be influencing and dominating six provinces of

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<sup>21</sup> Matthew P. Dearing, "Like Red Tulips at Springtime: Understanding the Absence of Female Martyrs in Afghanistan," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 33, no. 12 (2010): 1079-1103.

<sup>22</sup> Bogusław Pacek, "Military Police as an Important Actor of the New Security Environment. The Experiences of the Military's Gendarmerie from its ISAF Mission in Afghanistan," *Security and Defence* 2, no. 2 (2017): 61-71.

Afghanistan during 2015-16, however, the IS-K now confines to merely four districts of Nangarhar province.<sup>23</sup>

The IS-K mostly conducted its operations in the border region of Afghanistan and Pakistan and has been effectively conducting massive insurgent attacks particularly in the urban centers of the country as well as claiming responsibility for many attacks inside Pakistan. The rising insecurity in Afghanistan due to the Taliban's growing insurgent activities, coupled with the emergence of the Islamic State (IS), and its consequent effects, have created a sense of anxiety among neighbouring countries like Pakistan, China, Russia and other countries in the surrounding region.

Notably, during 2015, the Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-K) a Wilayat Khorasan had territorial control over many districts of the Nangarhar and some other parts of the country. However, the conflict between the Taliban and the IS-K proved to be a major reason for not letting the IS-K's emergence to prominence in Afghanistan. The IS Wilayat Khorasan militants frequently operate alongside Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) militants in the border areas of Turkmenistan and Afghanistan. Many Taliban militants have also joined the organization; therefore, such developments became helpful for the IS-K to expand its control over areas in Warduj and Yamgan districts in northern Badakhshan Province that was previously under Taliban control. However, because of the fierce conflict between the Taliban and the IS-K fighters, the Taliban successfully pushed Islamic State out of many areas, including most of the districts of Nangarhar province. Many factors proved disruptive for the IS-K's growth and power, including its conflict with the Taliban, lack of support from the local population and the counterterrorism operations of the coalition forces against the group<sup>24</sup>. The group's efforts continue to induct disaffected militants from other groups including the Taliban and the TTP.

### **Afghan Taliban**

The Afghan Taliban remained most powerful from 1996 to 2001 until the US invasion of Afghanistan. The fight between Taliban and the coalition forces to claim dominance of Afghanistan is still an unresolved issue that has caused immense destruction and losses of men and material. The Taliban are still one of the most powerful militant groups in Afghanistan to have over 35,000 fighters and control approximately 25 percent of the Afghan territories including important areas of Kunduz, Baghlan, Badghis, Faryan, Sar-i-Pul, Takhar, Jawzjan, Kapisa, Badakhshan,

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<sup>23</sup> Thomas F. Lynch, "After ISIS: Fully Reappraising U.S. Policy in Afghanistan," *The Washington Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (2015): 119-144.

<sup>24</sup> Arkady Dubnov, "Dangerous Neighbors: is Russia Destined to Face ISIS in Afghanistan?", *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* 12, no. 69 (2017): 18-19.

Nuristan, Kunar, Paktia, Paktika, Wardak, Logar, Ghazni, Ghor, Farah and Herat.<sup>25</sup>

Since 2015, the Afghan Taliban have improved their position by diversifying their regional relations resulting in minimising their sole reliance on one particular country. Most of the regional countries such as Iran, Pakistan, Russia and China consider Taliban a potent force to neutralise the IS-K threat. This has increased their advantage and options. Further, in 2017, the Taliban transformed their fighting strategy by shifting their reliance from solely targeting civilian targets to hard targets—the National Unity Government (NUG), the Afghan national police and army. This has led to six per cent decrease in civilian casualties in 2017 compared to 2016.<sup>26</sup> According to a CNN report, 2018 the data, provided by the U.S. forces, has revealed that the Taliban control of Afghanistan was on the rise. According to this report the Afghan government control of Afghanistan was 72 percent of the country in 2015 which gradually decreased and in October 2017 the Afghan government controlled about 56 percent of Afghanistan while, 30 percent of Afghan districts were contested with the insurgency. This shows that the Afghan army is gradually losing its control on the country because of Taliban insurgency. The insurgents who were controlling just 7 percent districts of Afghanistan in November 2015 enhanced their control and in October 2017, they were controlling 14 percent of Afghan districts while contesting in 30 percent of other Afghan districts.<sup>27</sup>

### **The Haqqani Network**

The Haqqani network, headed by Sirajuddin Haqqani is an equally powerful militant group that has remained the greatest threat to Afghan government and the coalition forces. This group enjoys close connections with the Afghan Taliban and has assisted them in planning and logistics for an on-going effective insurgency in the country. The nexus between the Haqqani and the Taliban is so strong that both militant groups have assumed the character of a single entity, headed by two different leaders.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> "Post-Taliban Afghanistan," *Strategic Comments* 7, no. 10 (2013): 1-2. doi: [10.1080/1356788010701](https://doi.org/10.1080/1356788010701).

<sup>26</sup> Basit and Mahmood, "South Asia: Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 10, no.1, (January 2018): 34, <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/CTTA-Annual-Threat-2018.pdf>.

<sup>27</sup> Nick Paton Walsh, "Taliban Control of Afghanistan on the Rise, US Data Reveals," *CNN*, January 30, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/01/30/asia/afghanistan-taliban-us-control-intl/index.html>.

<sup>28</sup> Husain Haqqani, "Islamists and Democracy: Cautions from Pakistan," *Journal of Democracy* 24, no. 2 (2013): 5-14; "An Enemy We Created: The Myth of the

Pakistan is trying its best to ensure that militant groups such as Tehreek-e-Taliban Afghanistan (TTA) and the Haqqani Network (HN) do not use its territory for any terrorist attacks in Afghanistan. Pakistan's Foreign Office announced on January 30, 2018, that 27 suspects were apprehended who belonged to the TTA and their affiliated Haqqani network and later expatriated to Afghanistan. The purpose of this announcement was to dispel the impression that Pakistan was not doing enough against the TTA/HN.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)**

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan is a separatist militant group that has been actively involved in targeting the authoritarian government of Uzbekistan; however, the group has a strong affiliation with other militant groups of Afghanistan such as the Taliban and the Al-Qaeda. Qari Bilal leads the IMU's operations in Afghanistan who had also supported the Taliban by providing 300 fighters in capturing the province Kunduz in September 2015. In recent years, the fighters of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan are approximately 500, have realigned themselves with the IS in Afghanistan and are actively involved in the northern areas of the Afghanistan. The Jamaat Ansarullah is another insurgent group active in Central Asia is a splinter group of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.<sup>30</sup>

### **Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)**

The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) also known as the Pakistani Taliban is an insurgent militant group comprises various Taliban groups who escaped Afghanistan following US invasion of the country in 2001. The group undertook most violent activities in Pakistan after the Lal Masjid Operation and the consequent arrest and killing of many leading clerics of the mosque in July 2007.<sup>31</sup> In the later part of the year, the TTP formally announced its formation as a *jihadi* group under the leadership of Baitullah Mehsud in the South Waziristan Agency of the erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). The terrorist group appeared with its self-proclaimed agenda of  *jihad*  for imposing Sharia and reforming the Pakistani society through violent means. Moreover, the TTP declared

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Taliban-Al Qaeda Merger in Afghanistan," *Choice Reviews Online* 50, no. 08 (2013): 50-61.

<sup>29</sup> Kamran Yousaf, "Pakistan Hands over 27 Taliban, Haqqani Network Suspects to Kabul," *The Express Tribune*, January 30, 2018.

<sup>30</sup> Svante E. Cornell, "Narcotics, Radicalism, and Armed Conflict in Central Asia: The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 17, no. 4 (2005): 619-639.

<sup>31</sup> Khuram Iqbal and Sara De Silva, "Terrorist Life cycles: A Case Study of Tehrik-E-Taliban Pakistan," *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* 8, no. 1 (2013): 72-86.

the aims of conducting operations as defensive *jihad* and strengthening Taliban fighters of Afghanistan against NATO troops.<sup>32</sup> However, the terrorist attack on Army Public School of Peshawar on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2014 and the military operation of Zarb-e-Azb proved drastic for the TTP killing most fighters of the group and forcing the remaining to escape to Afghanistan.<sup>33</sup>

### **Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS)**

Aymenn al-Zawahiri, the Head of Al-Qaeda, announced the formation of Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) on September 3, 2014. Al-Zawahiri declared the aims of AQIS, Al-Qaeda's designated group, as overseeing and carrying out operations in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Myanmar and Bangladesh.<sup>34</sup> The operation Zarb-e-Azab proved drastic for the AQIS since most of the militants of the group either captured or killed during the military operation; however, a few of the militants still survive in Afghanistan.<sup>35</sup> In recent years, the threat from Al-Qaeda has significantly decreased since the group is primarily struggling for its survival and organizational restructuring. This organization remains confined to the Eastern and the Northern parts of Afghanistan with the support of the Taliban.<sup>36</sup>

### **Contours of Trump's New Afghan Strategy**

President Trump announced its Afghanistan/South Asia Policy on August 21, 2017, is currently a condition - based counter-terrorism approach instead of a timeline-driven. With fresh deployment of 4,000 soldiers, the Trump Administration gave the U.S. military a greater autonomy in handling matters in Afghanistan. Instead of recognising Pakistan's sacrifices in the War on Terror, the new policy seemingly takes a tough stance on Pakistan.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> "The Taliban Revival: Violence and Extremism on the Pakistan-Afghanistan Frontier," *Choice Reviews Online* 52, no. 09 (2015): 50-54.

<sup>33</sup> Tara Kartha, "Pakistan And The Taliban: Flux In An Old Relationship?" *Strategic Analysis* 24, no. 7 (2000): 1307-1331.

<sup>34</sup> J. Michael Barrett and Robert L. Hutchings, "Containing Al Qaeda," *Foreign Policy*, no. 144 (2004): 4.

<sup>35</sup> Alastair Reed, "Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent: a New Frontline in the Global Jihadist Movement?" *Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism Studies* 7, no. 11 (2016): 39-48.

<sup>36</sup> Avery Plaw, "Is Turn about Fair Play With Al Qaeda?" *International Studies Review* 12, no. 4 (2010): 622-624.

<sup>37</sup> Abdul Basit and Sara Mahmood, "South Asia: Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India", *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 10, no. 1 (January 2018), 36. [https://www.jstor.org/stable/26349854?seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/26349854?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents).

The main contours of Trump's new Afghan strategy include:

- a) Granting the U.S. forces more autonomy to deal with ground situation in Afghanistan.
- b) Sending out a message to the Taliban that the U.S. is not to withdraw in haste, and to support the idea of incorporating Taliban into the government in Kabul through dialogue.
- c) Urging the Afghan government to show "determination and progress", and share "military, political and economic burden".
- d) Emphasising counter terrorism rather than nation building.
- e) Putting pressure on Pakistan to eliminate terrorist sanctuaries along its border.<sup>38</sup>
- f) Inviting India to play a larger role in Afghanistan in the realm of economic and development assistance.<sup>39</sup>

Some experts believe that the U.S. condition-based approach would be useful in terms of confidence and capacity building of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANFS) for a long term. The new strategy is focusing more on war fighting with little emphasis on political and economic reforms. Here the important question is for how long would the ANSF remain dependent on foreign troops? The Afghans should show a strong and sustained commitment without which there would be no success in any strategy prepared by the US or any other international organization.<sup>40</sup>

It is interesting to note that the US strategy on one hand is de-emphasising the Afghan nation-building but at the same time urging India to help Afghanistan in the area of economic assistance and development. India's importance for the U.S. is not only for Afghanistan but the country also enjoys the status of a net security provider in the region as a key security and economic partner of the U.S.<sup>41</sup>

While highlighting Pakistan's concerns, Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed questioned the Trump strategy by stating that if more than 100,000 U.S. and NATO forces could not stabilise Afghanistan then how could an

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<sup>38</sup> Shahid Javed Burki, "Trump's Doomed Afghan Strategy," *Project Syndicate*, August 28, 2017, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/trump-afghanistan-speech-policy-flaws-by-shahid-javed-burki-2017-08>.

<sup>39</sup> Ashok K. Behuria, "Trump's Afghan Policy Upsets Pakistan," *IDSA Weekly E-Bulletin*, August 21-27, 2017, <https://idsa.in/system/files/page/2015/PEW-Aug-4-2017.pdf>.

<sup>40</sup> Dr. Roger Kangas Academic Dean, John Wood, Jack Gill, Antoine Levesques, "The New US Strategy on Afghanistan and South Asia: Challenges and Prospects," *International Institute of Strategic Studies*, October 18, 2017.

<sup>41</sup> Nihar Ranjan Das, "President Trump's Afghanistan Policy: An Assessment," *Issue Brief, Indian Council of World Affairs*, September 25, 2017, [www.icwa.in/pdfs/IB/2014/PresidentTrumpAfghanPolicyIB25092017.pdf](http://www.icwa.in/pdfs/IB/2014/PresidentTrumpAfghanPolicyIB25092017.pdf).

increase of 4000 troops would serve this purpose. He argues that giving more space to India in Afghanistan would lead to instability in Afghanistan and would surely be a recipe for a proxy war between the two arch rivals- Pakistan and India- are already witnessing tense relations. The Trump strategy is mainly focusing on military means whereas the resolution of the Afghan conflict lies in political reconciliation and negotiations by involving regional countries -Pakistan, Iran, China and Russia. Although one cannot totally ignore Indian interests in Afghanistan and Central Asia but as far as peace in Afghanistan is concerned, Pakistan remains the key country.<sup>42</sup> While highlighting the same point, Senator Mushahid notes: Very soon, the realization will dawn on President Trump that the road to peace in Kabul lies through Islamabad, and Islamabad will be ready for the call that will come from Washington seeking a helping hand to extricate the United States from the Afghan quagmire.<sup>43</sup>

Lutfullah Lutf, a senior researcher and fiscal policy analyst at the Ministry of Finance, Afghanistan, recommends that for establishing long term peace in Afghanistan, there is a need to follow multiple tracks rather than just focusing on military-led development. He believes that in the past most of the strategies in Afghanistan failed since those focused on benefitting the Afghan government and political elites while ignoring the common Afghans. Any strategy based on reconstruction and economic opportunities would help in winning the hearts and minds of the masses. While discussing India's economic assistance to Afghanistan, he notes that during the last decade, India has supported the Afghan government with almost \$2 billion for infrastructure development, human development and training programs for the national security forces of Afghanistan. However, he recommends that instead of just relying on India, the Afghan government should develop diversified economic relations with regional countries to pave the way for their peaceful engagement in Afghanistan. <sup>44</sup> The Afghan situation can witness improvement through economic development and political settlement with the Taliban that would require a regional consensus on Afghanistan's future.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Mushahid Hussain, "Trump's Afghanistan Policy: The View from Islamabad, *CNN*," August 23, 2017, <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/08/22/opinions/pakistan-view-on-trump-afghan-hussain-opinion/index.html>.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Lutfullah Lutf, "Economic Imperatives and the New U.S. Strategy for Afghanistan and South Asia," November 14, 2017, <http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/reports/2017/11/economic-imperatives-strategy-afghanistan-south-asia-171114081449652.html>.

<sup>45</sup> Vanda Felbab-Brown, "President Trump's Afghanistan Policy: Hopes and Pitfalls," *The Brookings Institution*, September 2017, [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/afghanistan\\_hopes\\_pitfalls.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/afghanistan_hopes_pitfalls.pdf).

An important question is whether Trump's Afghan strategy would enable Afghanistan to run its affairs without the U.S. and other Western countries' support. Some senators such as Senator Bob Corker has questioned whether President Donald Trump's strategy in Afghanistan would bring end to the nation's longest war, which the U.S. officials estimated would cost taxpayers more than \$45 billion.<sup>46</sup>

### **India's Involvement in Afghanistan**

Growing Indian influence in Afghanistan and the continuous U.S. efforts to assist India for its ambitions to become a regional power is bound to polarize the regional environment. Traditional rivalry between Pakistan and India will always be a factor to influence any peace effort in Afghanistan. Presently, Afghanistan considers India as one of its most reliable regional partners that has largely been engaged in contributing in terms of development and assistance projects including Afghanistan-India Friendship Dam and construction of the Afghan parliament. Moreover, besides providing such material support to the Afghan government, India keenly trains over 130 Afghan military personnel in its academies and commissioning programs. In May 2016, Iran, India and Afghanistan signed an agreement for opening trade routes into Central Asia through Chabahar Port, bypassing Pakistan. Besides, all these developments, the Indian policy vis-à-vis Afghanistan has always been roaming around objectives of creating a counterweight against Pakistan. Except Taliban, the Indians have always supported every regime in Afghanistan.<sup>47</sup>

The prevailing Indo-Afghan nexus causes a certain level of apprehension with the belief that Indian active involvement through investment and development projects in Afghanistan is actually an attempt to encircle Pakistan from the eastern and western sides. The Taliban can by no means become viable option for India; therefore, India is donating billions of dollars for establishing an anti-Pakistan government in Afghanistan for broader strategic objectives of destabilizing and pressurizing Pakistan. Moreover, India has actively been supporting militancy inside Pakistan, as do the enormous Indian consulates inside Afghanistan attempt at preventing Pakistan's influence in the region through strategic encirclement.

The U.S. President Trump's strategy of giving larger role to India in Afghanistan would further complicate the existing strategic situation in Afghanistan. On one hand, it will enhance the mistrust between Pakistan

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<sup>46</sup> Jonathan Landay, "U.S. Senators Concerned Trump's Afghanistan Strategy will Not Succeed," *Reuters*, February 7, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-afghanistan/u-s-senators-concerned-trumps-afghanistan-strategy-will-not-succeed-idUSKBN1FQ30Y>.

<sup>47</sup> Wolfgang-Peter Zingel, "The Economics of Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations: Implications for the Region," *India Quarterly* 70, no. 1 (2014): 1-14.

and the U.S. and on the other hand, it will create more complications in Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan.

## Policy Options for Pakistan

Many experts believe that Trump's strategy on Afghanistan has many flaws. Firstly, by using the same tools as have already been used by the U.S. in the past would not give different results. Secondly, the strategy is devoid of any diplomatic effort. Thirdly, Trump's undue pressure on Pakistan and enhancement of the role to India in Afghanistan is a sure recipe to complicate the issue. In this critical situation, what policy options are available to Pakistan?

The most important policy option for Pakistan is to improve relations with its neighbours, especially according priority to its relations with Afghanistan. The Senate of Pakistan on August 28, 2017, 'unanimously passed a motion recommending that the government launch a regional diplomatic initiative to coordinate responses to the U.S. President Donald Trump's new Afghan policy, which takes a dim view of Pakistan's anti-terrorism efforts.'<sup>48</sup> To avoid any negative fallout of Trump's Afghan strategy, Pakistan should enhance cooperation with Afghanistan. Pakistan should take all the measures to address the trust deficit it has with Afghanistan. The relationship between the two countries has principally remained critical since any development in Afghanistan has spill over effects for Pakistan. Particularly, the last three decades of instability in Afghanistan also have had consequences for Pakistan, ranging from issues of cross-border militancy, illicit drug trafficking, arms smuggling and Afghan refugees in Pakistan. The two sides have frequently been blaming each other for terrorist safe havens, cross-border infiltration and the movement of militants.<sup>49</sup> In a meeting of the UN Security Council in January 2018, accusations were hurled at Pakistan by the US, Afghanistan and India for 'giving sanctuary to terrorist organisations'. Pakistan's Ambassador to the UN, Dr. Maleeha Lodhi, urged Afghanistan and its partners to address 'the challenges inside Afghanistan rather than shift the onus for ending the conflict onto others'.<sup>50</sup>

For smooth materialization of border management mechanisms, there is a need for both Pakistan and Afghanistan to maintain open

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<sup>48</sup> Nadir Guraman, "Senate Recommendations to Counter US's Afghan Policy Receive Unanimous Approval," *Dawn*, August 30, 2017.

<sup>49</sup> Tushar Ranjan Mohanty, "Afghanistan-Pakistan: Border Disorder - Analysis," *Eurasia Review*, May 23, 2017, <http://www.eurasiareview.com/23052017-afghanistan-pakistan-border-disorder-analysis/>.

<sup>50</sup> Shabana Mahfooz, "Pak-Afghan Blame Game doesn't Bode Well for Regional Peace, Experts Say," January 31, 2018, <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2018/01/31/pak-afghan-blame-game-doesnt-bode-well-for-regional-peace-experts-say/>.

communications, share of intelligence and facilitate inter-military cooperation in the border region.<sup>51</sup> The establishments of telephone hotlines between the Afghan and Pakistani authorities has been effective in initiating calls between the corps headquarters of the two sides which prospectively facilitates meetings of corps commanders to de-escalate the tension arising due to cross-border militancy.<sup>52</sup>

Pakistan has expressed solidarity with Afghanistan on the series of terrorist attacks in the last week of January 2018. In its meeting on February 2, 2018, the National Security Committee (NSC), strongly condemned the spate of terrorist attacks in Kabul and expressed the resolve to forge a close co-operation by enhancing engagement with Afghanistan.<sup>53</sup>

A Pakistani delegation, consisting of civil and military officials led by the Foreign Secretary Tehmina Janjua, visited Afghanistan on February 3, 2018 and held discussions with her Afghan counterparts led by Deputy Foreign Minister Hekmat Khalil Karza on Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS). This joint action plan consists of five working groups focusing on comprehensive engagement for countering terrorism; intelligence sharing, military, economic, trade and transit interaction; refugee repatriation and connectivity.<sup>54</sup> Tehmina Janjua emphasised that both countries should work with close cooperation rather than engage in a meaningless blame game. Pakistan offered a joint investigation into the deadly terrorist attacks in Kabul. While urging the Afghan government to destroy the hideouts of anti-Pakistan militants, Pakistan also stressed the need for effective border management.<sup>55</sup>

The militant insurgency on both sides is primarily an obstacle that never lets the other issues settled between the two countries. For instance, any positive move towards cooperation and reciprocation often faces sabotage through a series of terrorist attacks.<sup>56</sup> Following the January 10,

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<sup>51</sup> United States Department of Defence Report to Congress, "Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan," December 2017, <https://media.defense.gov/2017/Dec/15/2001856979/-1/-1/1/1225-REPORT-DEC-2017-FINAL-UNCLASS-BASE.PDF>.

<sup>52</sup> Naveed Siddiqui, "Pakistan Army, Afghan Officials Establish Hotline Contact," *Dawn*, April 4, 2017.

<sup>53</sup> "High-level Security Huddle Condemns Afghan Attacks," *The Nation*, February 2, 2018.

<sup>54</sup> "Pak-Afghanistan Joint Working Group Meeting in Kabul on Feb 3," *The Nation*, February 2, 2018.

<sup>55</sup> "Pak-Afghan Joint Working Group Agree to Continue Talk Process," *Pakistan Today*, February 3, 2018.

<sup>56</sup> Isaac Kfir, "The Question of Afghanistan and Its Impact on U.S. Relations with Pakistan: The Need for Pragmatic Engagement," *SSRN Electronic Journal* 7, no. 6 (2014): 51-56.

2017, terrorist attacks in Kabul, Pakistan's Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa reiterated Pakistan's rock solid stance of cooperation for working with the Afghan authorities for peace and stability in the country. Moreover, the Pakistani President Mamnoon Hussain also asserted Pakistan's resolve for security and stability in Afghanistan by urging the Afghan leadership to reject all nefarious moves by elements trying to sabotage the relationship of the two countries. However, the trust deficit is one of the major impediments in developing a sustainable cooperation between the two countries.<sup>57</sup>

The prolonged issue of the Afghan refugees is also a matter that affects the relationship of two countries since Pakistan hosts a huge number of Afghan refugees who have allegedly been involved in the deteriorating security and law and order situation inside Pakistan. Though a sizeable number of refugees have returned to Afghanistan, the return of the remaining refugees requires international cooperation and assistance to the Pakistani authorities. Pakistan firmly supports regional and international efforts for setting up of an actual Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process for resolution of the Afghan conflict, because only peaceful political settlement ensure an enduringly stable Afghanistan. Currently, Pakistan is hosting about 2.38 million Afghan refugees out of which 1.38 million are registered refugees and about one million refugees are non-registered.<sup>58</sup>

Pakistan's role vis-a-vis Afghanistan is marked with suspicion over the decades partly due to the repeated allegations by the Afghan government, besides the prevalence of trust deficit between Pakistan and the U.S. This trust deficit between Pakistan and the U.S. is a point of concern for the Pakistani authorities as it affects their role in brokering peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban. Moreover, in the same context, the previous peace efforts also failed because of the unilateral U.S. action of killing the Taliban leader Mullah Mansoor in a drone strike on May 21, 2016. Without taking into confidence other members of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) on Afghanistan – i.e. China, Pakistan and Afghanistan on board, the U.S. took this action. This unilateral action of the U.S. ultimately hampered the peace initiative and seriously spoiled the reliability of the group amidst its negotiations with

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<sup>57</sup> "Pakistan's Army Chief Concludes 'Constructive' Afghan Talks," *VOA*, last modified 2017, <https://www.voanews.com/a/pakistan-army-chief-in-afghanistan-for-talks/4051550.html>.

<sup>58</sup> Asad Hashim, "Deadline Looms for Afghan Refugees in Pakistan," *Dawn*, January 31, 2018.

the Taliban. Despite such developments, Pakistan still views political settlement as the only viable choice for enduring peace in Afghanistan.<sup>59</sup>

In 2017, the security situation in Afghanistan remained turbulent as Afghanistan ranked the second most volatile country in the world after Syria, according to the Global Peace Index, 2017. While the Afghan Taliban further expanded their territorial control, the failure of Afghanistan's National Unity Government (NUG) to govern and provide security to the masses added to public anger and frustration. In an interview to CBS News on January 15, 2018, Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani said that the Afghan army would not last six months without the U.S. support. He added that Afghanistan was under siege by about 21 international terrorist groups and dozens of suicide bombers.<sup>60</sup> The overall deadlock over the Afghan conflict has continued to date, despite the U.S. President Donald Trump's Afghanistan Policy of staying the course that has preserved the existing status quo. The stalled Afghan peace process reinitiated in October 2017 under the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG), comprised Afghanistan, United States, Pakistan and China, but did not make much headway. Parallel to the QCG process, Russia launched its own Afghan peace initiative and held three meetings between late 2016 and early 2017. This has not only complicated the on-off Afghan peace process but also ended the regional and international consensus of reaching a joint settlement to end the war.<sup>61</sup> Pakistan should continue its efforts for political reconciliation in Afghanistan by using tribal elders and religious leaders to put pressure on the Taliban to sit at the negotiation table.

The U.S. India-driven South Asian policy has bias against Pakistan and become an issue of concern for the country. The Pakistan Defence Minister Engr Khurram Dastgir Khan, while commenting on US's new strategy in Afghanistan has rightly opposed India's involvement in Afghanistan by arguing that:

The US new policy on South Asia underscores a greater role for India in Afghanistan and the region, while not acknowledging the exponential contribution, counterterrorism success, and sacrifices of Pakistan for peace and regional stability. There are strategic contradictions in the US approach, and most key regional and global players have not supported this declared U.S. policy since it envisages India to be a net security

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<sup>59</sup> Mona Kanwal Sheikh, "Islamic State Enters Al-Qaeda's Old Hotbed: Afghanistan and Pakistan," *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 16, no. 1 (2017): 37-49.

<sup>60</sup> "Afghan Army Can't Last Six Months Without US Support," *NUNN*, January 15, 2018, <https://nunn.asia/english/2481/afghan-army-cant-last-six-months-without-u-s-support-ghani-2/>. (accessed January 16, 2017).

<sup>61</sup> Abdul Basit and Sara Mahmood, "South Asia: Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India."

provider in the region. In South Asia's security matrix, there is no room for self-proclaimed and artificially boosted states. Regional security in the 21st Century can only be ensured through relationships and collaborations based on mutual trust and equality.<sup>62</sup>

In this scenario, Pakistan needs to create a regional consensus on Afghanistan, which will help improve relations with the regional countries. Similarly, it should continue to engage the U.S. to find a sustainable solution to the Afghan quagmire. Important is to keep in mind that any deterioration of relations with the U.S. would be detrimental to Pakistan's long-term interests in the region. One of the main challenges that Pakistan's foreign policy faces today is that the West, especially the U.S., sees Pakistan through India's lens, thereby creating a complex situation for Pakistan since Pakistan has multiple disputes with India. In this context, the U.S.' critical role in managing Pakistan's relations with India and Afghanistan cannot be relegated. Pakistan should continue its efforts to convince the U.S. that political reconciliation in Afghanistan is the most viable option for lasting peace in Afghanistan. In case the U.S. agrees to such a proposal, Pakistan in consultation with other regional countries should be ready to play a positive role for Afghan led and Afghan own political settlement in Afghanistan.

## Conclusion

The failure of the U.S. and the Afghan security forces in controlling militant insurgency in the country has created unstable environment for Pakistan, the concerns in the political circles are that if the situation worsens in Afghanistan, this will have a direct impact on security and economic conditions in Pakistan. The resurgence of the Taliban with more formidable tactics and manoeuvring skills is posing a serious challenge for the Afghan and Allied Forces. Thus, the challenges of radicalization and terrorism will continue to affect regional stability. On its part, Pakistan has nearly eliminated terrorism by launching decisive military operations by tackling all sorts of criminal, terrorist and militant elements indiscriminately, but it should remain cautious of other sources of instability, especially the situation in erstwhile FATA.

The situation in Afghanistan demands more engagement between Pakistan, Afghanistan as the U.S. President Trump's undue pressure on Pakistan on the issue of counter-terrorism would not work as Pakistan has already been committed to countering terrorism. There is a need to address mutual concerns through diplomatic channels. Both countries

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<sup>62</sup> Parvez Jabri, "No Room for Self-proclaimed, Artificially Boosted States in South Asian Security Matrix," *Business Recorder*, September 20, 2017, <https://www.brecorder.com/2017/09/20/370376/no-room-for-self-proclaimed-artificially-boosted-states-in-south-asia-security-matrix/>.

should enhance cooperation in trade and investment and use public diplomacy in removing misunderstandings.

Pakistan should use all options to minimise the negative fallout of the U.S. new Afghan Policy and the U.S.' new National Security Strategy respectively. Pakistan must prioritize its own national interests while dealing with the U.S. The regional states such as Russia, China and Iran have openly criticized President Trump's remarks on Pakistan's role in the War on Terror. Contrary to the U.S, these regional countries appreciate Pakistan's contributions against terrorism since the 9/11.<sup>63</sup> While tactfully maintaining its relations with the U.S. and Afghanistan, Pakistan should also continue its efforts to consolidate its relations with China, Russia and Iran. There is a consensus among the most of the regional countries that one of the most suitable options for durable peace in Afghanistan is political reconciliation between Afghan government and the Afghan Taliban. It is a strong hope that the U.S. would also realise the importance of political reconciliation for Afghanistan as the experiences of settling the Afghan problem through military operations/strategies have failed and could not yield the desired results for bringing peace and prosperity in Afghanistan. Pakistan should continue its efforts in bringing peace and security in Afghanistan by highlighting the need to resolve Afghan conflict through Afghan led and Afghan owned political reconciliation.

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<sup>63</sup> Abdul Rahim, "How should Pakistan Respond to Trump's Afghan Policy?," *Global Village*, August 30, 2017, <https://www.globalvillagespace.com/how-should-pakistan-respond-to;6-trumps-afghan-policy/>.

