

DEBATE

AFGHANISTAN POST 2014 : INDIA'S OPTIONS

India and Afghanistan have a relationship rooted in deep historical and cultural links. India believes that democracy and development are the key instruments to ensure that Afghanistan becomes a source of regional stability. India has played a significant role in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Afghanistan, reflecting an abiding commitment to peace, stability and prosperity in Afghanistan during this critical period of transition in security and governance.

Afghanistan has made considerable political and socio-economic strides since 2001. A democratic constitution is in place. Elections have been held regularly. Notable successes have been achieved in promoting women's participation in public affairs and imparting education to children, including the girl child. However, Afghanistan's achievements would not have been possible without the solid support of the international community, and the security presence of the ISAF. This might change post 2014. The US troop "withdrawal" is being accelerated. A hurried withdrawal could engender instability.

The two key factors that will determine the prospects of peace and stability in Afghanistan after 2014 are: the outcome of the Presidential elections next year, and the security guarantees that Afghanistan will be able to get from the international community, particularly from the USA.

On both these counts, there is considerable uncertainty. Although President Karzai has openly declared that he would not change the constitution to secure a third term as President, the political situation remains uncertain. Political stability will be the key to Afghanistan's future. Similarly, while the Afghan National Army (ANA) is becoming increasingly capable, the security situation in Afghanistan continues to show worrying trends, with the Taliban able to wreak violence at will. Afghan security forces, though strong and capable, will need equipment, training and leadership support to take on the Taliban, post 2014.

Both the US and the Karzai governments are relying on reconciliation with the Taliban, which, according to them, remains a critical element of political stability in Afghanistan. However, the reconciliation process is confusing - making no headway. It is not even clear who the Taliban are, and who should the state be engaged with. Wide ranging disagreements have emerged between the USA and the Afghans on how to deal with the Taliban. President Karzai has been extremely critical of the US approach on

reconciliation with the Taliban. His own reconciliation efforts within the framework of the Afghan constitution have not borne fruit. The agreement between Afghanistan and the US on residual US troop presence in Afghanistan after 2014 has not been reached yet.

Political changes have taken place in neighbouring Pakistan and Iran. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has come to power, and has promised resolution of Pakistan's myriad problems including repairing relations with India and with Afghanistan. However, he faces a number of challenges internally which would constrain his foreign policy. He needs to find a *modus vivandi* with the all powerful Pakistani Army, which has traditionally directed Pakistan's policies towards Afghanistan and India. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, given his past contacts and dealings with Islamic fundamentalists, will find it difficult to negate the influence of the hard-line fundamentalist pro-Taliban elements on Pakistan's policies towards Afghanistan. Pakistan continues to support the Afghan Taliban in their bid to regain power in Afghanistan. The entire Afghan-Taliban leadership remains ensconced in Pakistan. The Afghans remain highly sceptical of Pakistan's motivations, role and agenda in Afghanistan. Tensions between the Afghan government and Pakistan could escalate in the post 2014 scenario.

In Iran too, a new President has been elected. President Rohani has spoken of "moderation" in foreign policy; but this has been more in the context of Iran's nuclear policies. Iran will continue to wield sizeable influence on Afghanistan. Iran will oppose any residual US troop presence in Afghanistan after 2014. Its influence will increase as the American forces begin to withdraw.

Other regional factors which have a bearing on Afghanistan's political, economic and security trajectory are no less important. The role of China is still uncertain. The Afghans look forward to increased Chinese investment in Afghanistan, particularly in its mineral resources. Russia and Central Asia are also affected by the situation in Afghanistan, particularly in the context of terrorism and drug trafficking. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is interested in a stable Afghanistan; but it has so far been a secondary player. There is, as yet, no regional initiative with respect to Afghanistan due to divergences and the lack of consensus on the way ahead. Who will provide security and development assistance to Afghanistan on a long term basis remains a question mark.

The international community's role in Afghanistan post 2014 will remain important. Afghanistan will also need large doses of economic assistance for a sustained period, and will look towards the international community for the

same. How sustainable this assistance will be is a question mark. There is danger that the international community might lose interest in Afghanistan, once the ISAF forces leave the country.

It is against this backdrop of rapidly changing internal and external factors that India will have to craft its policies towards Afghanistan. India has signed a strategic partnership agreement with Afghanistan, thereby signalling that it will stand by the Afghan government. However, a deteriorating security situation and political uncertainty in Afghanistan could put practical constraints on what India can do. Pakistan, even under Nawaz Sharif, will not be reconciled to India's influence and role in Afghanistan. In view of the substantial Indian interests in the country, and the fact that India has already committed assistance worth US\$ 2 billion to Afghanistan, India will have to remain engaged with that country.

Thus, India will have to continue to deal with potential instability in Afghanistan. It will also need to find adequate resources, and put in place an institutional infrastructure, to sustain its ties with Afghanistan.

Two years ago, the Journal had examined the emerging scenario of the 2014 "draw-down" in the Debate section of its July–September 2011 issue.* Three experts had expressed their views in the debate, titled, "Afghanistan: Post-US 'Draw-Down' and India".

The Journal has now invited those three experts, and a few other eminent policy practitioners and scholars, for their comments on the unfolding situation that has far-reaching repercussions for India. Their views are as in the following pages.

(The views expressed by the authors are their own and do not reflect the views of the *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal*, or that of the Association of Indian Diplomats)

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*<http://www.associationdiplomats.org/Publications/ifaj/Vol6/6.3/6.3%20DEBATE.pdf>

Coping with Afghanistan's Uncertain Future

Satish Chandra*

India's options in post-2014 Afghanistan would naturally depend on the prevailing situation in the country at that time.

It is, however, difficult to arrive at any clear assessment of what post-2014 Afghanistan would look like given the country's fractious polity, where there is no consensus on how to take democracy forward, where both Pashtuns and non Pashtuns are divided, where terrorists outfits like the Taliban, Al Qaeda and the Haqqani group have considerable influence, and where the role of outside powers will be variable, ranging from declining Western involvement dictated by the desire not to once again get bogged down in the country, to increasing Pakistani interference arising from its determination to secure strategic depth.

In these circumstances, it may be productive to dwell upon the certainties and near certainties in order to tease out the various scenarios that could play out in a post-2014 Afghanistan and then consider India's options as a response thereto.

It is clear that a near complete US and western troop withdrawal would have been effected by the end of 2014. Nothing, not even a rapid turn for the worse for the Afghan forces, will induce the US to reverse its position in this regard. There has been talk of the US retaining up to about 20000 troops, along with bases, in a training, support, and counter terrorism role in Afghanistan post 2014. Retention of such a residuary US presence is unlikely as it would require the consent of the post-2014 Afghan government and this can be ruled out if the Taliban are a part of such a government. Furthermore, such a residuary presence will be highly susceptible to casualties, an eventuality, which the US itself will not be able to stomach.

The western troop pullout will decisively turn the balance of power in favour of the Taliban. Even when western forces were at a peak of 140000 in 2011, they failed to defeat the Taliban. The most they could achieve was an uneasy stalemate. With their near complete pull out, the Afghan National Army will be hard put to maintain a stalemate as it is ill equipped, ridden by defections, and poorly motivated as evident from numerous green on blue and green on

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green attacks. The Taliban, on the other hand, remain strong and have the capability to launch large-scale operations. Their capabilities would be further enhanced after the western troop withdrawal, as Pakistan will be encouraged to openly support them. The deterioration in the security situation is already visible with a 24 per cent enhancement in civilian casualties between the first half of 2013 and the same period last year. The Afghan government's efforts at reconciliation and reintegration have been singularly unsuccessful and the Taliban believe that their time is coming.

While Afghanistan has witnessed many socio-economic gains since 2001 due to generous external assistance, an economic crunch is round the corner due to the impending western troop pullout and donor fatigue. Gilles Dorransoro, in a paper titled "Waiting for the Taliban in Afghanistan" brought out in September 2012, under the aegis of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, has projected that annual western spending in Afghanistan is set to come down to \$ 5 billion following the withdrawal as against the \$100 billion spent by the US alone in 2011. It may further be noted that while President Karzai had, at the November 2011 Bonn Conference, called for annual economic assistance to the order of \$10 billion for Afghanistan, the July 2012 Tokyo Conference pledged only \$16 billion over a four-year period. It is evident, therefore, that in the coming months Afghanistan's developmental programmes will see a sharp slowdown and this will adversely impinge on the government's endeavours to win the hearts and minds of the people.

In addition to the security and economic crises that will beset Afghanistan in 2014, it is also likely to be gripped by an acute leadership crisis. Its presidential elections are set for April 2014, and given its fractured polity it is unclear as to who will succeed Karzai, whether he will be acceptable to the majority of the people, whether he will have the competence to deal with the country's immense problems and whether the elections will be free and fair. There is, of course, the possibility that Karzai may engineer a situation in which there is a prolongation of the current dispensation under him through, for instance, a call in this regard by the Loya Jirga. This could breed uncertainties of its own.

Foreign meddling, always the bane of Afghanistan, may be expected to continue particularly as the international community has shown no inclination to come out with sanctions against it. The major source of such intervention will come from Pakistan. The appetite for it has diminished in the West as well as in Russia, and the Central Asian states lack the wherewithal to engage in it. China is, of course, an emerging interventionist particularly in the context of its economic stakes in Afghanistan, but it will tend to hitch on to the bandwagon of Pakistani agenda. Iran is another potential interventionist in the

context of Afghanistan's Shia population and its history in this regard, but its confrontation with the West may inhibit it from playing as active a role as in the past.

Seeking extra territorial influence in Afghanistan, Pakistan will strive to achieve the same by installing a Taliban regime either directly or through subversion of Karzai's successor regime.

In the context of the foregoing, the following scenarios fall within the realm of possibility in post 2014 Afghanistan:

Scenario 1 : A civil war marked by conflict between the regime and the non Pashtuns on the one hand and the Taliban, supported by Pakistan, on the other hand, lasting several months or even a couple of years resulting ultimately in a Taliban takeover.

Scenario 2 : A relatively rapid Taliban takeover following armed conflict, or regime collapse triggered from within, particularly, if talks with the former have resulted in some power sharing agreement. Such a takeover will be marked by continuing conflict with the non-Pashtuns.

Scenario 3 : A break up of Afghanistan following a Taliban takeover under scenario 1 or 2 with much of the North and the West comprising non-Pashtun elements seceding.

India's Options

India has, over the last decade or so, been a bit player in Afghanistan, and its influence on political developments there has been marginal. Accordingly, it has been on the fringes of international consultations on Afghanistan. It is not surprising, therefore, that its bitter opposition to talks with the Taliban was ignored. In comparison, Pakistan has been a much more important player and exercised far more influence than India at regional and international fora in the evolution of policies pertaining to Afghanistan. This is partially explicable by Pakistan's extensive border with Afghanistan, age old tribal links, deep rooted linkages with the Taliban, the Haqqani group and Al Qaeda, and a long and tortured history of incessant interference in that country. India's comparative lack of influence is due to the fact that though it has been proactive in bilateral diplomacy vis-à-vis the government of Afghanistan, it has been relatively inactive in reaching out to all shades of opinion in that country, maintaining close contacts with all key external players, and devising innovative and workable strategies for restoring peace

and tranquillity in Afghanistan. It is time that India sheds its comparatively reticent posture on Afghanistan and becomes more involved on issues relating to developments there, as otherwise Pakistan will retain its dominant influence, which will obviously work to our detriment.

In each of the three scenarios spelt out above, there would be several common elements to our policy and a few special features geared to each scenario. The former may be enumerated as follows:

1. In no case should India consider promoting its interests in Afghanistan with boots on the ground. This would be a grave mistake for a variety of reasons. First, our interests in that country, though considerable, are not so critical as to warrant such an exercise. Second, the success of such an endeavour would be highly uncertain in the absence of our not enjoying any real geographical contiguity with Afghanistan, as a result of Pakistan having annexed that portion of Jammu & Kashmir which provided us with a common border with that country. Third, we need to keep the bulk of our forces within India to meet the Sino-Pak threat. Finally, the sad historical experience of foreign military intervention in Afghanistan militates against any such enterprise.
2. No matter which dispensation is in control in Afghanistan, India should continue with its economic assistance programmes, provided these are solicited, the regime is not inimically disposed towards us, and the local environment does not place Indian lives at serious risk.
3. Contacts must be developed and deepened with all sections in Afghanistan. India has been guilty of neglecting many elements that formed a part of the Northern Alliance. This needs rectification, as some of these sections could be important players on the Afghan scene. Furthermore, our standing among the Pashtuns is not as good as it should be and it has been projected that we are anti Pashtun. Here too, remedial action is called for and we must reach out to influential Pashtun elements.
4. Coordination with regional players like Russia, the Central Asian States, and, particularly Iran on the issue of Afghanistan must be intensified. This has diminished over the years. It needs to be revived because they too are uneasy over a Taliban dispensation in Kabul. Our dialogue on Afghanistan with China is to be further worked upon and should be continued because though the latter will tend to bandwagon on the Pakistani agenda it would have latent anxieties about the Taliban, which if worked upon have the potential of inducing it to exercise a moderating influence on Pakistan.

5. India should not hesitate from discreetly developing contacts with the Taliban. Once in power, national interests will tend to lead them, over a period, to view us more favourably unless we treat them as untouchables. All Afghan regimes have historically, been very well disposed towards independent India barring the Taliban regime. It is quite possible that even a Taliban dispensation in Afghanistan may over time wish to have good relations with India as its ultimate falling out with Pakistan cannot be ruled out given the latter's immutable desire to call the shots in Afghanistan and the insurmountable differences between the two countries on the Durand Line. Another factor, which could tend to propel any nationalist dispensation in Afghanistan towards good ties with India is a realisation that such ties would greatly facilitate the country's economic development. Such a turnaround in the Taliban mindset could be induced if we play our cards right and do not gratuitously rub the Taliban the wrong way.
6. We should be pro-active in demolishing the myth promoted by Pakistan that we are using our presence in Afghanistan to undermine Pakistan and to promote terror within it. The fact is that India has had a history of close relations with Afghanistan and both have had quarrels with Pakistan but these have been pursued separately and not collusively.

Under Scenario 1, entailing a long drawn out conflict between the successor regime to Karzai and the Taliban, India should have no inhibitions in providing the former with all necessary financial and economic assistance as well as military support in order to resist the latter. There is after all a Strategic Partnership between the two countries and under its ambit we would be fully justified in providing it with such military training and equipment which it can successfully absorb. It is understood that we have been chary of supplying some military equipment sought by the Karzai government. This perhaps, stems from the anxiety that such equipment could fall into Taliban hands and could ultimately be used against us. Such fears are justified and we will have to continue to take a judicious approach on how best to upgrade the military capabilities of the Afghan regime while at the same time make sure that the weapons provided do not end up in the wrong hands.

Furthermore, as Pakistani support for the Taliban moves against the Afghan regime becomes more blatant we should mount an aggressive diplomatic campaign against Pakistan and call for Chapter VII UN sanctions against it as a threat to international peace and security.

In the event of a relatively rapid Taliban takeover as envisaged under Scenario 2, no additional moves need be taken by India over and above those enumerated at points one to six above.

Under Scenario 3 resulting in a break up of Afghanistan we should lose no time in recognising the non Pashtun breakaway state, establishing diplomatic relations with it, along with setting up of our missions there, and providing it with both economic and military help in terms of training and equipment. In respect of the Taliban controlled part of Afghanistan, India need do no more than that proposed under Scenario 2 as detailed above.

Afghanistan's Uncertainties

Arvind Gupta*

What happens in Afghanistan post 2014 is uncertain. The situation being highly dynamic, it is difficult to make accurate forecasts. Most forecasts are gloomy, and predict political instability, a worsening security situation, a weak economy and violence. However, this pessimistic scenario need not materialise if post 2014 security mechanisms, economic assistance, and a stable political system are put in place. The outcome of the presidential elections on 5th April 2014, the nature of security uncertainties after 2014, and the success or failure of Karzai's efforts at reconciliation with Taliban would influence the situation post 2014.

Previous Transition

One can look at the 1988 transition in Afghanistan for clues for the post 2014 situation, when Soviets troops left the country tired and defeated under internationally negotiated Geneva accords. The Najibullah regime survived until 1992 without any external help, though he was promised the same. He was left isolated after the Soviet troops left. Pakistan, the USA, and the Mujahideen put enormous pressure on his regime. Holding on for four years without any help, the regime eventually fell to the Mujahideen. He did not succeed in his reconciliation efforts.

After Najibullah, the Mujahideen came to power. The security situation in the country went from bad to worse. First Sibghatullah Mojaddedi and then Burhanuddin Rabbani took charge. Gulbiddin Hekmatyar could not get along with Rabbani. Kabul came under repeated rocket attacks launched by Hekmatyar's Hizb-e-Islami forces. The period 1992–1996 saw more violence and more casualties than under the Njaibullah regime during 1988–1992. Factionalism amongst the numerous groups was rampant in Afghanistan at that time.

The Mujahideen regime succumbed to the Taliban who were supported by Pakistan and its ISI. The Taliban regime lasted till 2001 when it was forcibly removed by the US forces. For the last twelve years, US and international forces are in Afghanistan trying to promote a democratic government headed by President Karzai under a political settlement that was

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brokered in Bonn by the international community. The Taliban were not a part of that settlement. They made a comeback in 2004, and have been challenging the Afghan government since then.

The key lessons that can be drawn from the previous transitions are: the failure of reconciliation, and the inability of the international community to fulfil its promises. The disunity among the Afghans, and interference by the neighbours were the key reasons behind the failure of Najibullah and the Mujahideen regimes.

The Present Security Situation in Afghanistan

It was natural that when President Obama unilaterally announced in June 2011 that American forces would withdraw by 2014, the Taliban would feel victorious. Although the US has declared victory in that Osama bin Laden is dead and the Al Qaeda has been defeated in Afghanistan, the fact remains that the country is unstable, and Al Qaeda remnants still exist. Given these challenges, the Afghan government would possibly like some US troops to stay on in Afghanistan even after 2014. That is the imperative of the Afghanistan situation. However, the Afghan situation has been complicated by many new factors.

The Afghan national forces are 350,000 strong and have several successes to their credit. They are now in charge of ninety percent of security in the country. But, there is always the question about their training, motivation and capacity to hang together when the politics is so uncertain. Will they retain their cohesion if ethnic fault lines remerge in Afghanistan? The Afghan air force does not have the equipment of the kind NATO has. Afghanistan needs helicopters badly. The army also needs artillery. Even if the equipment is somehow procured, there will always be the requirement for continuous training and maintenance. Afghan forces will consume a lot of resources to sustain themselves. There is even talk of reducing the size of the forces so that they can be sustained.

US-Afghanistan Negotiations

Against this backdrop, US–Afghan negotiations on a possible Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) have been held up. Karzai says a *loya jirgah* will decide on the terms and conditions of any such agreement. The USA says that its troops will withdraw completely if a satisfactory solution to the immunity issue is not found in these negotiations. The USA is unlikely to agree to its

troops being subjected to Afghan laws. Both sides will have to find a face saving formula, if a residual presence of American troops is considered essential for sustaining the process of transition in Afghanistan. In the recent months, Karzai has been publicly critical of NATO for the killing of innocent civilians in their strikes. This has created friction between him and the USA. He is trying to project himself as an Afghan nationalist who liberated Afghanistan from foreigners, and ended a civil war.

Yet, Afghanistan's dependence on NATO forces continues even though ninety percent of security duties have been transferred by ISAF to the Afghan security forces. Several provinces like Kandahar are now under the control of Afghan security forces. However, the Taliban seem to have a strong presence in Helmand, Kandahar, Wardak, Logar, Paktia, Paktika, Nangarhar, Loghman, Kunar and Badakhshan provinces. There has been a general spike in insurgent attacks since July 2010. For instance, between April 2012 and March 2013, there have been about 2250 insurgent attacks per month on an average.

Reconciliation Efforts

The USA is trying to do a deal with the Taliban, which remains elusive. In June 2013, the Taliban opened an office in Doha where negotiations with the USA were to start. But, the attempt was aborted right at the start when the Taliban displayed an "Islamic Emirates of Afghanistan" flag which infuriated President Karzai who saw in this an attempt to undermine the legitimate government of Afghanistan. The talks between the USA and the Taliban have yet to resume. However, important questions remain unanswered. Who among Taliban is the USA talking with? What would be the sanctity of such a deal? Karzai wants an Afghan-led, and Afghan-owned process; but he has himself not succeeded in reconciling with any of the Taliban factions.

Even if a deal between the USA and the Taliban, or between the Afghan government and the Taliban is reached, who will ensure that it would not be broken? The history of Afghanistan is littered with broken promises, and resultant bloody fighting.

The Pakistan Factor

On many occasions, Karzai has blamed Pakistan for hampering the reconciliation process. Mullah Omar and Haqqani factions reside in Pakistan.

Karzai's August 2013 trip to Pakistan to meet Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif may have resulted in the release of some Taliban elements by Pakistan, and there are signs of the number two Taliban leader Mullah Barader being let out soon. Despite this, the prospects of reconciliation with the Taliban remain uncertain. Pakistan will like to ensure that the regime which comes to power as a result of reconciliation is to its own liking.

The Pakistani military has its own calculations to make. There is widespread concern in Pakistan that India's growing influence in Afghanistan would be detrimental to Pakistan's strategic interests. Karzai is deeply distrusted in Pakistan. The outcome of the presidential elections in Afghanistan next year will be watched with great interest in Pakistan. An unhelpful Pakistan can perpetuate instability in Afghanistan. The growing strength of the Afghanistan army is also seen with suspicion in Pakistan. The Durand line issue continues to cause distrust in Afghan-Pakistan relations.

Presidential Elections

While reconciliation and negotiations with the Taliban takes its own tortuous course, the Afghan politics has moved into top gear with the announcements of presidential and provincial elections on 5 April 2014. The long election campaign that will soon ensue may polarise the Afghan political spectrum. The signs are already visible. Several coalitions have been announced, the most recent being the Afghan Electoral Alliance (AEA). This is mostly an alliance of about a dozen political groupings from the minority communities like the Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks, mostly consisting of the former Northern Alliance leaders.

Another coalition called National Understanding Forum has also been set up. This is an alliance of about 10 political parties, which promises to bring together prominent technocrats, former warlords mainly from the Pashtun community, and westernised politicians. A third coalition of regional groupings, named Afghanistan Eastern People's Alliance, has also been formed, consisting of law makers and tribal elders in eastern Afghanistan. The registration of the candidates will take place shortly. There is also a Pashtun candidate: the former Mujahideen leader, Abdul Rab Rasool Sayyaf whom Karzai may be supporting. Many new alliances may be formed in the coming months. Whether the elections will be held in a peaceful atmosphere, or be marred by violence, is also a question that will affect their legitimacy. Perhaps the key issue of US troop presence in Afghanistan will be resolved only after the next presidential elections.

Economic Situation

The Afghan economy remains heavily dependent on external aid. Today, almost 77.5 percent of the Afghan development budget is dependent on external aid. Foreign aid for the security sector constitutes 44 percent of Afghanistan's operating budget. It is true that the Afghan economy has grown at an average rate of 9 percent per year during 2002–2012. However, much of it is fed by foreign assistance. The growth rate may fall after 2014, as external help is likely to recede. There has been a rise in revenue collection during the last two years; but this is still insufficient to sustain the pace of development required for the stabilisation process. For example, last year, the taxes, customs and mining revenue together amounted to US\$ 2.5 billion, whereas the estimated budget for this year is about US\$ 7 billion. The budget deficit amounts to about 18 percent of the GDP (US\$ 20 billion). Afghanistan needs external assistance, projected by the government at about US\$ 10 billion per annum, for the next ten years. At Tokyo, in July 2012, the international community pledged about US\$ 16 billion through 2015. The UN Security Council, welcoming the outcome of the Tokyo conference, noted the “generous pledges” made by the donors, as well as their commitment to “sustain support through 2017 at or near levels of the past decade.” However, as public opinion in some of the developing countries indicates, there is a declining interest in committing resources abroad. Hence, long-term international support for bridging the fiscal gap and strengthening the Afghan security machinery, which are key to sustaining the process of stabilisation in Afghanistan, may be difficult to attain.

It is true that Afghanistan is rich in minerals like copper. China is investing in copper mines. Indian firms are also looking to invest in iron ore mining. If Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India (TAPI) gas pipeline materialises, Afghanistan can also benefit from transit facilities. But all this will come about if there is peace, stability and governance. Whether the interest of the international community will continue to stay focused on the Afghan transition process remains to be seen.

In the meanwhile, a flourishing war economy has developed, which has fuelled growth amidst the allegations of corruption against the Afghan government. The government says it is trying its best to contain corruption. But it blames the Western countries for bringing corruption to Afghanistan in the first place. When the war ends, thousands of contractors, aid workers, service providers, etc. will withdraw. The economy will have to be developed on a different basis.

Regional Initiative

There is not much to show on the regional front as no credible initiative is on the table. Some past efforts at regional cooperation include the SCO Special Conference on Afghanistan (2009), the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA) (2012), the Istanbul Initiative (Turkey 2011), Delhi's Investment Summit (2012), etc. The results of these conferences have been meagre, although the need to invest in Afghanistan has been accepted by all. In fact, neighbouring countries openly interfere in Afghanistan, and have their own agendas. These tend to affect the prospects of stabilisation.

Conclusion

So, where does this leave Afghanistan? There are more questions than answers. Afghanistan has been at war for the last thirty years. It has survived foreign occupation and external interference. In the current transition, there are chances that Afghanistan will not be abandoned, as was Najibullah. Hopefully, the presidential elections next year will be free and fair, and a legitimate government will preside over the transitions. The international community, it is expected, will provide help and assistance on a long term basis. Hopefully, Pakistan will not destabilise Afghanistan, and will help the process of peace and reconciliation. Only then can Afghanistan survive the transition. As of now, Afghanistan is delicately poised between hope and despair.

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India Must Provide Maximum Assistance including Military Aid

Gurmeet Kanwal*

Security Environment in Afghanistan

The establishment of an office by the Taliban at Doha, Qatar, in June 2013 for reconciliation talks with the Afghan government and the US, and its prompt rejection by President Karzai, show how tenuous the situation in Afghanistan has rapidly become since the commencement of withdrawal by the US and NATO led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). In 2011, President Barack Obama had approved plans to draw down 10,000 US troops from Afghanistan during that year and another 23,000 in 2012. The present number of troops stands at approximately 63,000 and will decline to 34,000 by February 2014. The withdrawal of the remaining combat troops is to be completed by December 2014. A small number of troops is likely to be left behind at Kabul, Bagram and Kandahar to provide training, logistics support, and to continue the drone war against hardcore terrorists inimical to US interests.

The NATO-ISAF withdrawal is likely to leave a security deficit in Afghanistan. There is no evidence at present that Washington and its allies are planning to help the Afghan government to maintain security by supplementing Afghan efforts through the deployment of a viable international peacekeeping force under a UN flag after the NATO-ISAF military withdrawal is completed in 2014. The willingness of regional actors to play a positive role in stabilising Afghanistan, rather than pursuing divergent national interests and disparate agendas, is also uncertain. Unless the Central Asian states- China, India, Iran, Pakistan and Russia, jointly contribute towards ensuring stability, the security environment in Afghanistan is likely to deteriorate into a civil war.

The present security situation in Afghanistan can be described as a stalemate at both, the strategic and tactical levels. The fledgling Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Afghan National Police (ANP), which have now assumed full responsibility for security from ISAF, are not yet equal to the task. Their numbers are small (352,000); they lack experience; standards of junior leadership are low; and, they are inadequately trained and equipped. They

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lack heavy weapons, artillery, air support and helicopters for logistics support. They are poorly trained, badly led and lack the motivation necessary to sustain complex counter-insurgency operations on a prolonged basis. Fratricide and desertions with weapons are commonplace. Hence, the ANSF are not yet capable of undertaking counterinsurgency operations autonomously and need more time to settle down as cohesive infantry battalions.

While the ISAF forces control most of the large towns, the Taliban— together with the al-Qaeda—controls large swathes of the countryside. Governance is virtually non-existent outside Kabul. Though significant funds are being expended on socio-economic development by the Afghan government as well as by donors like India (the US alone has pumped in 56 billion dollars), the results have consistently fallen short of the country's requirement. This is partly due to inadequate supervision and partly due to rampant corruption.

The present situation is best described as a stalemate at the tactical level as the US-led forces are not exactly losing and the Taliban are not winning. A stalemate between a superpower and a motley array of rag-tag militiamen of a non-state actor will be seen as a moral victory for the Taliban. The US strategy to clear-hold-build-transfer-exit has succeeded only partially as the Al Qaeda have not been completely eliminated. Hence, it does not matter whether the Afghan government agrees to limit US presence to 10,000 to 12,000 soldiers or a lesser number, Special Forces and drone strikes against the remnants of the Al Qaeda and the leaders of other organisations considered inimical to US national interest will continue, including on Pakistani soil, with or without the concurrence of the Pakistan government and the army.

According to Ahmed Rashid, a perceptive observer of the developments in the Af-Pak region, it is necessary “to ensure that Pakistan, which gives sanctuary to the Taliban leadership, cooperates rather than sabotages the transition and the peace process, and allows the Taliban to hold talks with Kabul on their own terms rather than on terms that Pakistan may impose. Farther down the road is the need to ensure the promised international funding to keep the Afghan army paid and fed, and to allow economic-development work to continue”.

However, not all hope is lost – not yet anyway. Rashid has written, “Despite continuing points of tension between the two countries, Kabul and Islamabad are finally cooperating rather than abusing each other. The military is now fully behind allowing the Taliban to open an office in Doha and will back Karzai in any initiative he takes”.

Pakistan still seeks “strategic depth” in Afghanistan and would prefer to have a pliable regime in Kabul when the NATO-ISAF mission ends in 2014. Pakistan seeks to limit India’s influence in Afghanistan and opposes the induction of Indian troops as well as in-situ training.

While the Taliban have opened an “office” in Doha, Qatar, and reconciliation negotiations may begin soon, it would be premature at present to expect too much headway to be made. Unless reconciliation talks are Afghan-led and Afghan-owned, any agreement that might be reached will not last long. In addition, the Taliban could be playing for time and the talks could be a ploy to rest, recoup and refit. It is difficult to see them being serious about negotiations when they are on the verge of achieving a moral victory with the impending withdrawal of US forces.

Peace and stability in Afghanistan are critical for stability in the fragile South Asian region. It is essential for the international community to organise a “responsible withdrawal” from Afghanistan and not leave the country in the lurch, particularly in the field of security. Otherwise, the fallout from the planned NATO-ISAF drawdown will be extremely negative for the whole region. The Afghanistan-Pakistan face-off could lead to an ugly civil war if it does not end soon. Under the circumstances, Afghanistan’s regional neighbours need to step in to fill the void. The Taliban and its affiliates like the Al Qaeda must not be allowed ever again to launch international terrorist strikes from safe havens and sanctuaries within Afghanistan. Regional interests lie in a peaceful and stable Afghanistan that is governed by a broad-based government, free of foreign interference in policy making.

India’s Policy Options

India’s policy objectives flow out of the strategic partnership agreement signed with Afghanistan in October 2011. These are naturally tempered by various constraining factors, including the prevailing security situation and Pakistan’s continuing interference in Afghan affairs through proxies such as the Haqqani Network, which has been declared a terrorist organisation by the US State Department. In fact, it is the considered Indian view that Afghanistan’s problems cannot be resolved unless the linkages with Pakistan are also addressed simultaneously. In addition, India’s efforts to provide assistance to Afghanistan are hampered considerably by the lack of geographical contiguity and its limited access. India is making serious efforts to remove Pakistan’s misapprehensions about India’s role in Afghanistan, but Pakistan has steadfastly refrained from discussing this issue with India because of mutual suspicions.

It is crucial for India and Pakistan to discuss their suspicions at the official level to allay each other's apprehensions and work together for peace and stability.

India seeks a peaceful and stable Afghanistan with a broad-based government that is genuinely independent in formulating its foreign and national security policies, as well as in governing the country in consonance with Afghan customs and traditions. India believes that the imposition of the Western model of democracy will not be appropriate, as it will not work in Afghanistan's socio-political milieu. India would like to see the elimination of terrorism from Afghanistan and the destruction of all sanctuaries of the Taliban and international terrorist groups like the Al Qaeda so that there is no export of terrorism from the country. India supports the integration and strengthening of military and police forces at the national level, rather than their domination by one or more ethnic communities. India would like to encourage Afghanistan's regional neighbours and the international community to further enhance their efforts towards reconstruction and economic development.

India's political, national security and economic policy objectives are enumerated below. These objectives are dynamic and must be constantly reviewed and modified based on emerging developments.

Political Objectives

- orderly transition to installation of independent Afghan government that is free of foreign influence
- ensure Afghanistan does not again become a base and safe haven for terrorists and infrastructure
- counter Pakistan's agenda seeking strategic depth in Afghanistan through diplomatic means
- acquire access to Afghanistan and through it to the Central Asian Republics (CARs)
- establish broad-based engagement with all political groups
- support Afghan-led broad-based reconciliation efforts, as visualised by the Afghan High Peace Council
- assist Afghanistan to train its administrative and judicial staff to improve governance and ensure delivery of justice
- enhance people-to-people contact.

National Security Objectives

- support capacity building efforts of ANSF by ensuring implementation of the Strategic Partnership Agreement, including the supply of war-like stores
- ensure the safety and protection of Indian assets and infrastructure in Afghanistan
- intelligence cooperation and sharing

Economic Objectives

- increase trade with Afghanistan and through it with the CARs
- increase Indian business investment in Afghanistan
- assist Afghanistan to develop its natural resources
- further increase India's reconstruction and capacity building programme
- enhance India's energy security; for example, through the commissioning of the Turkmanistan – Afghanistan – Pakistan – India (TAPI) pipeline
- assist Afghanistan to replace narcotics-based agriculture with regular agriculture
- work towards implementation of the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA).
- promote India-China cooperation on Afghanistan

Should India send Troops to Afghanistan?

While India must continue to support development and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan, provide training support and war-like stores that the Afghan government has asked for, India must not hesitate to provide a post-2014 stabilisation force if requested by Karzai's successor government. There is an urgent need to supplement the capabilities of the Afghan security forces. Unless the key regional neighbours, including India, Iran and Pakistan, contribute meaningfully to the efforts to stabilise the country, rather than pursuing narrow national agendas, Afghanistan is bound to be plunged into civil war.

Ensuring that there is peace and stability in Afghanistan is of vital national interest for India. It is a country with which India has traditionally enjoyed

warm and friendly relations. Since the overthrow of the Taliban regime in 2001-02, India has contributed immensely to the international reconstruction effort in Afghanistan. It has spent over US \$2.0 billion in constructing the Delaram-Zaranj highway, building and running schools and hospitals, and in training the fledgling Afghan administration.

As an aspiring though reluctant regional power, India must overcome its fear of overseas military interventions, occasioned by the ill-advised and unsuccessful foray into Sri Lanka in the 1980s, and stand up and be counted as a genuine rising power that is willing to discharge legitimate regional responsibilities. Under the right conditions, which includes the Afghan government's concurrence, the UN flag, and viable logistics support, it should be possible to persuade India. This will present formidable challenges for logistics, but none that cannot be overcome with methodical planning. At the very least, due to the Indian army's immense experience in counter-insurgency operations and cultural affinities that make it easier to train new recruits, India could be invited to train ANA personnel in Afghanistan itself.

India Should be Prepared for an Enhanced Engagement

Gulshan Sachdeva*

Irrespective of what happens between Afghanistan and the US on bilateral security agreement as well as on the Afghan peace process, it is clear that a new phase in the Afghanistan project is going to begin from 2015. Within this context, most analysts and international reports indicate that, in the post-2014 phase, the country is going to face major challenges in three major areas: security, political and economic. Enhanced Indian engagement in Afghanistan could help the country meet the difficult challenges in all these areas during its decade of transformation (2015–2024).

With a broad understanding that a peaceful and stable Afghanistan is crucial for regional stability, India is trying to play an active role in Afghanistan since 2002. So far, it has pledged assistance worth US\$ 2 billion. Indian projects cover areas like road construction (218 km Zaranj-Delaram road), power (transmission line from Pul-e-Khumri to Kabul), the Salma dam project, the construction of a building for parliament, and many projects in the areas of agriculture, telecommunication, education, health and capacity building. More than 1500 young Afghans also come to India every year on short and long term fellowships. In the coming years, these young Afghans will play a significant role in all government and non-governmental organizations in their own country. This might become one of the biggest contributions by India to Afghan reconstruction.

Enlarged Indian engagement in Afghanistan can easily be built on the Strategic Partnership Agreement already signed by both in October 2011. This was the first ever strategic partnership Agreement signed by Afghanistan with any foreign country. Apart from capacity building support to various departments in the three branches of government, the Executive, Judiciary and the Parliament, the Agreement points towards help in two other major areas. First, India has agreed ‘as mutually determined’ to assist in the training, equipping and capacity building programmes for Afghan national security forces. Secondly, it recognizes that regional economic cooperation is vital for the long term economic prosperity of Afghanistan and the region. In addition, the agreement creates a bilateral institutional mechanism consisting of annual

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summit meetings, regular political consultations led by the foreign ministries of both countries, and the establishment of a strategic dialogue on national security, led by the national security advisors of both countries. Although many of these things were already happening, the Agreement, nevertheless, provides a concrete institutional mechanism and a clear support for Afghan institutions for the years and decades to come.

At the Bonn and Istanbul conferences last year, both the international community as well as regional players re-affirmed their long-term commitment to the future of Afghanistan, which goes much beyond 2014. At the Bonn conference, all participants dedicated themselves to “deepening and broadening their historic partnership from Transition to the Transformation Decade of 2015–2024.” Earlier, in November 2011, at the Istanbul Conference which was attended by the so-called “Heart of Asia” countries consisting of Afghanistan, China, India, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, UAE and all Central Asian republics, participants reaffirmed their strong commitment to a “secure, stable and prosperous Afghanistan in a secure and stable region”. At the Tokyo conference in July 2012, donors agreed to provide US\$16 bn. over the next four years.

The international community has also reached an agreement to increase the Afghan National Police Force from 134,000 to 157,000, and the Afghan National Army from 171,000 to 195,000. Although these numbers have already increased significantly, the security forces will need much more mentoring than provided so far. Due to higher rates of desertion, many more also need to be trained on a regular basis. So far, the Americans have provided a major share of resources for training. In fact, about 50 per cent of their committed and disbursed resources for the reconstruction and development in Afghanistan have gone only to train security forces. The Europeans have also contributed for police training. Apart from the lack of socio-cultural understanding of new Afghan soldiers, western training has also been very expensive. If India is able to share some of this burden, a significant amount of resources can be freed for other development programmes. This will also provide a major role for India in any future security scenario.

Although there is lot of media focus on the security situation and on the issues concerning a ‘negotiated settlement’, the economic challenge facing Afghanistan is equally serious. With declining western interest, the amount of resources available for development projects in the next decade is likely to be significantly lower than the past one decade. Experience suggests that withdrawals of international troops in other parts of the world have been accompanied by reduced civilian aid, with implications for economic growth

and fiscal sustainability. Therefore, potential financing gaps in the budget could threaten security, and the recent progress made on the developmental front. According to the World Bank, the actual aid to Afghanistan in 2010–11 was about US\$ 16 billion, about the size of the nominal GDP. According to the *Asian Development Bank Outlook 2011*, the planned foreign troop pullout by 2014 may lower growth by at least 2–3 percentage points. Any rapid decline in aid will severely affect growth performance and the employment scenario in the country.

To offset these trends, Afghanistan has to concentrate on two things. First, it has to attract private foreign investment, particularly in sectors like mining, hydrocarbons, infrastructure, telecommunications, agriculture, education, health services etc. Secondly, for long term sustainability, it ultimately also has to play its traditional role of facilitating trade and commerce through its territories. In both these areas, India could play a very significant role. The Delhi Investment Summit on Afghanistan (which was perhaps the first major summit organized by a regional country on its own initiative) emphasized precisely these points. The choice of India for the Investment Summit was also important, as many Indian companies have already decided on big investments in Afghanistan. A consortium of seven Indian companies, led by the state-owned Steel Authority of India (SAIL), have won a US\$ 10.3bn deal to mine three iron ore blocks in central Afghanistan. Some Indian companies are also planning to bid for copper and gold projects. There are also reports that India is planning to build a 900 km railway line between Iran's Chabahar port and Bamiyan province where Indian companies are planning large investments.

The strategic location of Afghanistan will always be important for India, particularly in the context of difficult India–Pakistan relations. However, the importance of Afghanistan for India is much bigger than normally perceived in this narrow context. Once Afghanistan becomes stable, trade through Pakistan and Afghanistan could also alter India's continental trade. Within a few years, India's trade with Europe, CIS plus Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan would be about US\$ 400–500 billion annually. Even if 20 per cent of this trade is conducted by road, US\$ 100–120 billion of Indian trade would be passing through Afghanistan and Central Asia. With improvement in India–Pakistan relations, an important portion of Indian trade (particularly from the landlocked northern states, including Jammu & Kashmir) will be moving through Pakistan and Afghanistan. With the possibility of this trade passing through Afghanistan and Central Asia, most of the infrastructural projects in the region will become economically viable. These linkages will also transform small and medium

industries and agriculture in Central Asia and Afghanistan. A major impediment in realizing this potential is the existing difficult relationship between India and Pakistan. While looking at the economic dynamics of the region, it is clear that both India and Pakistan would be paying huge economic costs for not cooperating in the Afghanistan. If trade stops in Pakistan, many road and other infrastructural projects will never become viable because of low volumes. Direct linkages between Central Asia and India will also give a huge boost to all the economies in the region, particularly to Afghanistan.

For many of these things to happen, various big and small projects discussed at different meetings in the last few years need clear prioritization. A few studies have indicated the immediate and long term measures which can soften the economic impact of the military drawdown, and create conditions for self sustained growth. Some Indian institutions, like the Planning Commission, could help the Afghan government in preparing immediate and long term plans for the Afghan economy. This could be built on the already existing Afghanistan National Development Strategy. Earlier, it was thought that Afghanistan has very limited resources. However, in 2010, the Afghanistan government claimed that the country has huge, untapped mineral resources worth at least 3 trillion US dollars. Afghan and American officials have now repeatedly talked about the New Silk Road Strategy. Since 2005, the idea has been discussed at many academic and policy forums. This strategy is a long term vision of an international trade, transit and energy network that links Central and South Asian economies through Afghanistan. This was a good blueprint for Afghanistan; but unfortunately, it has been mixed with regional geopolitics and exit strategies from Afghanistan. Still, Afghanistan has no other option but to continuously work for this strategy.

It is true that it seems difficult to imagine the implementation of this policy in the present tense political environment in the region. However, some positive developments have taken place. The Afghan–Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) has been reached after years of negotiations and active US encouragement. Under the agreement, both Afghanistan and Pakistan have agreed to facilitate the movement of goods between and through their respective territories. Pakistan has allowed Afghan exports to India through Wagah, and to China through Sost/Tashkurgan. Similarly, Afghanistan has allowed Pakistani trucks to reach Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Iran through its territories. Afghan trucks can carry Afghan transit export cargo on designated routes up to the Pakistani sea ports of Karachi, Qasim, Gwadar, as well as the Wagah border. At the moment, this is only a partial agreement, as Afghan cargo is offloaded on to Indian trucks back to back at Wagah, and on return,

the trucks are not allowed to carry Indian exports back to Afghanistan. Despite its limited nature and serious initial problems in implementation, the agreement can be seen as a major development in regional economic cooperation. It has also generated interest beyond Afghanistan and Pakistan. Recently, both Pakistan and Afghanistan have decided, in principle, to include Tajikistan also into APTTA. To make this initial small project into a serious regional economic force, it is imperative to include Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan (and perhaps Iran) into the broader agreement. However, the project will be of very limited interest to Central Asian countries if traffic to India is not allowed in both the directions. Once Central Asians and India are included in the expanded APTTA, the region will be ready to take advantage of the emerging Eurasian Economic Union space within a few years. Therefore, India needs to raise issue of APPTA implementation, and its extension to India, at every international forum.

Despite tensions at the political level, there are positive developments between India and Pakistan on trade matters. Recently, both countries have agreed on three agreements: the redressal of trade grievances, mutual recognition, and custom cooperation. Pakistan will allow bilateral trade through Wagah for all goods (presently restricted to 137 items). India has agreed to reduce number of items under the restricted list by 30 per cent. There are some signs that Pakistan may provide MFN status to India soon. While India had given Pakistan MFN in 1996, Pakistan has been refusing to do so. Once that happens, India will bring the SAFTA sensitive list to just 100. Pakistan will do so in the next five years. By 2020, the peak tariff rate will not be more than 5 per cent. Both countries have also agreed to cooperate in investment, banking, electricity and gas trade, railways and better air connectivity. In addition, they have signed a new, liberalized visa regime.

Within the broad context of increasing regional economic cooperation, India continues to support both the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA) as well as and the “Heart of Asia” processes. In the Istanbul process, India also leads in two Confidence Building Measures: the Commercial Opportunities CBM and the Chambers of Commerce CBM. Uncertainty concerning post-2014 Afghanistan has also added a new dimension to India’s relations with Central Asian republics. While the failure of the Afghanistan project poses common security challenges, any positive outcome will open tremendous economic opportunities to both India and Central Asia. These two factors have increased the strategic significance of the region considerably, and are perhaps the reasons for announcing a twelve point new ‘Connect Central Asia’ policy. Apart from other things, the new policy initiative emphasizes stepping up multilateral engagement (SCO, Eurasian Economic

Union); reactivating the International North South Trade Corridor, and strengthening strategic and security cooperation (military training, joint research, counter terrorism cooperation, close consultations on Afghanistan). Immediately after the announcement of this new policy, the Tajik president Emomali Rahmon visited India in September 2012, and signed six agreements. India is also helping to build the Ayni air base in the country. Both the countries have now agreed to deepen counter terrorism cooperation, and elevate the relations to a “strategic partnership”. India already has strategic partnerships with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. As SCO may play a bigger role in Afghanistan in any post-2014 situation, India is also hoping to get its full membership soon.

Overall, these developments indicate that, compared to other western nations which are planning to reduce their engagement after 2014, India is preparing for an enhanced engagement in the country. This enhanced role is based on the assessment that international support to Afghanistan will continue much beyond 2014, and there is little scope for any ‘negotiated settlement’ in the near future.

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India Must Bolster the National Forces of Afghanistan

R. K. Sawhney*

All stakeholders, including India, Central Asia, Iran, and USA have palpable concerns, worries, and anxieties regarding the trajectory Afghanistan could take in the post-withdrawal phase. There is need for due diligence to work for peace and stability of this nation. It must be ensured that political processes, security structures, and mechanisms for transition to reconciliation and economic development are Afghan-owned and Afghan-led, and are duly supported and encouraged by both regional and global players.

Afghanistan Today

Despite continued terror attacks by Taliban,

- a) Afghanistan is seeing an era of progress, low level prosperity, and relative stability largely due to efforts of the USA and, to an extent, NATO forces and US led global funding. This includes the Indian contribution.
- b) Afghanistan cannot be seen as a model of development or of governance. Nevertheless, it has made substantial progress from a very low level base.
- c) Unlike the malevolent and destructive influence of medieval Islamists who brought about utter lawlessness, insecurity, and the anarchy of civil war for almost three decades, Afghanistan's exposure to the West has, to an extent, planted the seeds of modernity in the country as also initiated the process of state and nation building.
- d) Businesses (both legitimate and not so legitimate) are struggling to establish themselves. There is a major shift to urban centres where employment is getting generated. Education has spread. Rudimentary health services are functioning even in remote areas. While things are not at all ideal, at least they are moving in the right direction. We must give credit for this to the growing aspirational levels amongst urbanized Afghans who are striving to emulate the successful models of modern societies.

All the above gains have come about because the USA and its allies have provided adequate troops to keep the Taliban - supported, financed, and

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sheltered by Pakistan - at bay. If these gains are to be maintained and enhanced, competent, well disciplined, well trained, and well equipped security forces are a must. To operate effectively, these security forces must receive direction from political authorities who have legitimacy, credibility, and the necessary mandate from the people. This would ensure that Afghanistan gradually moves towards becoming an independent, sovereign, and viable country.

Political Process

It is, therefore, a must that presidential elections (scheduled in April 2014) are held before the draw down of US troops commences. To make the elections credible, all the political players in Afghanistan have forced President Karzai to initiate measures which will remove those lacunae which made the last presidential elections less than credible. There are many steps to be institutionalized so as to clarify the precise roles of an Independent Election Commission, and the exact jurisdiction of the Supreme Court in this process. As of today, this process is being undertaken in real earnest. Pre-election lobbying, the selection of candidates, etc. is at feverish pitch. All these are good signs.

Threats to Afghanistan

Before deciding on the structure of the security forces, the equipment, the organization and deployment possibilities, etc., it is important that the possible threats to the country be determined. The USA and allies would have the world believe that the threat to Afghanistan is internal³/₄through Taliban or Al Qaeda. I would disagree. These two are just tools; the actual threat to Afghanistan emanates from Pakistan.

Except for the dozen odd years between the Russian retreat and 9/11, when the Taliban ruled Kabul, Pakistan for the most part has had a rocky relationship with Afghanistan. The Afghans never recognized the Durand line as the real border. Many leading and ordinary Afghans think that this border should be based on the river Indus which flows far to the South and the East, dividing the Pashtun North West from the fertile lands of Punjab. Pashtun nationalists have always claimed NW province and FATA as parts of Afghanistan. Some 40 per cent of Afghans, and 10 to 12 per cent of Pakistanis, are Pashtuns. Together, they can form a critical mass for the creation of Pashtunistan. It is clearly better for Pakistan to have them thinking of radical

Islam, carry the flag of Jihad, and fight the northern ethnic tribes of Afghanistan (like the Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras) or be transported to Jammu & Kashmir for fighting *kafirs* - than to have them dreaming of a homeland crafted out of a large part of Pakistan, which would then set off the process of its disintegration. Pakistan has therefore, created and nurtured radical young men, forged deep ties with Taliban - since 1994, and created a sort of Frankenstein's monster. This, in turn, has become part of the national interest as projected by the irrepressible generals of Pakistan who have fantasies of creating a Greater Pakistan, stretching between the Indo-Pak border and Central Asia in order to get the strategic depth to confront India. It is another matter that this dream is turning into a nightmare for them.

Structure of the Afghan National Army (ANA)

The Structure of ANA as decided by the USA is entirely based on meeting internal insurgencies, with no deterrent capacity against threats across the border. Presently, the ANSF totals about 352,000 (195,000 ANA and 151,000 ANP). The ANA is predominately an infantry force—or a sort of upgraded constabulary. It has no supporting Arms, like Artillery, Armour or Engineers. It has also been raised as an image of the US Army and hence, there are problems of expectations as the soldiers and officers tend to assume availability of resources at the same scale as the Americans, which is just not affordable by a poor country like Afghanistan.

Security Policy Planning

There is an immediate need to create/strengthen and institutionalize a cohesive 'Security Planning Body' which should evolve policies regarding ultimate size, budgetary allocations, and equipment as well as infrastructure requirements. At present, decisions are being taken on an ad hoc basis. There is a requirement to further strengthen the Afghan Government Office of National Security Council (ONSC)

Problem Areas of the ANA

- a) **Shape and Composition of ANA:** The regional dimensions as well as the lack of resources impose serious limitations on the ANA's ability to respond to threats on its own presently, and in the foreseeable future. It

is unlikely, for example, that the ANA would be able to confront the threat from terrorist safe havens in Pakistan's border areas without significant assistance from US Intelligence, and its surveillance and reconnaissance assets in the region. In addition, the ANA just cannot afford a modern Air Force. US and NATO forces will be required to provide air cover for quite some time to come.

- b) Manpower Policies:** Recruitment and retention policies as well as attracting quality people who are suitable, committed, and educated both for the ranks and for the officer cadres will continue to pose difficulties. Given the low levels of education facilities in Afghanistan, it is not surprising to find that approximately 70 per cent of the ANA is functionally illiterate. To mould them into an effective Army would be a daunting task. There is also an essential imperative of having an ethnically diverse army. A rough estimate indicates that while the presence of Pashtuns at all levels corresponds to their general proportion in the population, the Tajiks continue to dominate the officer cadres and NCO ranks. In contrast, the Hazaras, Uzbeks, and other minorities are significantly under-represented. These discrepancies fuel factionalism and deepen patronage politics.
- c) Logistics and Administration:** The existing logistic systems are ineffective, under developed, and less than efficient. Insufficient logistics and supply chains hinder operational effectiveness. This serious lacuna must be immediately addressed. In their quest to have a modern Army, the Afghan legislature and executive must be assisted in adopting a comprehensive body of law or decrees to define the Army's role as well as its administrative structure.
- d) Funding Requirements:** The medium-term viability of the ANSF depends critically on funding being available beyond 2014. Undoubtedly, the Afghan Government will not be in a position to fund the ANSF. Rough estimates come to US\$ 3 to 4 billions a year. The US Government already stands committed to granting US\$ 3.6 Billion per year. This amount would be insignificant compared to the savings that would accrue to the US after the drawdown of their forces. NATO would also have significant savings with the withdrawal of their combatants from Afghanistan in 2014. There should, therefore, be a formal agreement drawn for an annual grant for the ANA of the above amount for at least 10 years, with a clause of it being reviewed at the end of this period. India is expected to contribute in a major way by training and equipping the ANSF, as outlined in its agreement with Afghanistan.

Performance of the ANA

Despite the above problems, the ANA—which has been given the operational responsibility of the whole of Afghanistan—is performing rather well. This is because of their professionalism, and the fact that the enabling intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance assets of the US Army are still available to it. The presence of the US and ISAF troops restrains the Pakistan Army or/and the ISI from actively supporting the Taliban. Both of these may resort to doing this, once the draw down is completed.

Uncertainty over US/ISAF Troops Post Drawdown

A left over US/ISAF force post 2014 would be a sort of guarantee which would not allow Pakistani troops to get actively involved in operations against Afghan forces in conjunction with the Taliban. Many statements have been made by the US leadership that US and coalition troops are going to stay behind in Afghanistan, though no quantum has been agreed upon as yet. The most important pre-requisite is the signing of the Bilateral Forces Agreement (BFA) which gives legal safeguards to their troops. This has become a contentious issue between Presidents Obama and Karzai. Figures regarding the number of troops being left behind vary between 10,000 and 12,000 by the USA, supplemented by up to 6000 by NATO. President Obama has not revealed his hand in this aspect as Karzai refuses to sign the BFA, wanting more concessions. The frustrated US administration is now talking about a zero option, which would have its own adverse consequences.

India and its Policy Options

While the USA will do what it thinks is in its best interests and, perhaps, live with the consequences, the Indian Government seems to be totally at sea regarding its options in the entire “Great Game” which is unfolding on its borders. What is being touted as policy is actually no more than a rehash of US policy. From the time when India had deep reservations about talking to the Taliban, its position has now regressed to a point when it is ready to open a dialogue with them. Clearly, there is a lack of understanding of the organic links between Pakistan and the Taliban. This standpoint also ignores India’s fundamental problems with the Taliban which are: (i) the Taliban epitomizes a barbaric, medieval, and radical version of Islam which is antithetical to the very idea of India; and (ii) the Taliban are not independent, and as long as they

are clients and proxies of Pakistan, there is practically no way India can engage with them.

If India has to stay relevant in Afghanistan, it must do all to bolster the national forces of Afghanistan. This can be done by combining India's considerable soft power with that of other regional countries, and pool together diplomatic, political, and military resources with other countries to support Afghanistan's war against disruptive forces. Banking only on things like an UN-mandated international security force or a regional treaty which forswears interference in Afghanistan, is a futile game because it will have no worthwhile mechanism for enforcement.

Unfortunately, whether out of naiveté, or out of an ignorance of forces at play in Afghanistan, or due to a self cultivated image of being the perpetual 'nice guy' (an image our adversaries do not take seriously anyway, and which our friends find frustrating), India has proclaimed to limit its assistance to non-lethal military operations. In other words, India is willing to build hospital, roads, power plants, schools, etc., but is not open to supplying the much needed military support and assistance (short of putting boots on the ground) that will strengthen Afghan National Security Force. One can only hope that all this is just posturing, and not national policy.

Best Option for India is to Bank on the ANA

Alok Bansal*

As the American drawdown from Afghanistan begins, the prophets of doom are predicting the collapse of the current Afghan regime. Pakistan is trying to convince the Western world that a lasting peace in Afghanistan is unlikely without co-opting the Taliban; and a weary American administration, which desperately needs a face saver, is buying it. Numerous attempts are being made to negotiate with the Taliban, which are in no way contributing towards peace, but are weakening the foundations of the current Karzai administration in Kabul. Many of those occupying positions of power in Islamabad and Rawalpindi have for long cherished dreams of controlling Afghanistan after the US withdrawal. They perceive that, as soon as the last US soldier departs from Afghanistan, the Taliban will hoist its flag on Kabul; and, as far as Pakistan's interests are concerned, Mullah Omar will continue to be as accommodative as he has been during his stay in Pakistan.

Even though this premise is highly flawed, the very idea threatens India. From India's point of view, any presence of an obscurantist radical outfit like Taliban within the power structures of Kabul, threatens India's security. It is therefore essential that India must have a proactive policy to ensure that an independent and strong Afghanistan which is capable of keeping the Taliban at bay, emerges after the withdrawal of the troops from the US and its allies.

In order to formulate an objective policy, certain prevalent myths need to be dispelled. As the former colonial masters of South Asia, the British, have succeeded in selling to the Americans a highly flawed narrative of Afghan History. Consequently, terms like the 'graveyards of Empires' have come to symbolise Afghanistan. The truth is that Afghanistan as an independent state is a recent entity, and for centuries under Mughal rule, Kabul was ruled from Delhi. More significantly, even though Afghanistan was not colonised, it has never been free from foreign influence or interference, and this state of affairs has persisted to this day. Secondly, it must be remembered that the last communist regime under President Najibullah held on to power for three years after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 and collapsed only because its vital supplies of ammunition and POL were disrupted, after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Besides, both Pakistan and the United States did not fulfil their

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treaty obligations, and continued to arm the *Mujahideen*. After the withdrawal in 2014, one does not visualise the Americans pulling out to the last man à la the Soviets; despite all hitches, it is reasonable to presume that they will continue to maintain their toe hold and retain the capacity to build up forces expeditiously. This factor alone will boost the confidence level of the regime, and play a major role in strengthening it.

It is often forgotten that today's Taliban is closely aligned with the Global Islamic Movement and, notwithstanding the recent postulations from Mullah Omar, it is still being manipulated by the Al Qaeda. Its aims and objectives are no longer confined to the geographical frontiers of Afghanistan, and its eventual aim is the creation of a global Islamic Emirate. Its presence at the helm of affairs in Kabul will not only divert the plethora of global Islamic militants fighting there to other countries in the region, but the Taliban regime could also provide material support to these radical organisations. It is, therefore, in India's interest to fight these radical organisations, which are striving to establish a transnational Islamic entity in Afghanistan rather than on Indian Territory. Consequently, the war against Taliban is not only Afghanistan's battle, but also a key ingredient of India's quest for security.

The future stability in Afghanistan depends on the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), which primarily include the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Afghan police. Of these, the ANA is the key to Afghanistan's survival as a modern state, and its success or failure will shape the state's destiny. Many in the West perceive it to be a rag-tag militia, incapable of sticking together, much less fight the Taliban. It may well have been the case in the initial years after the fall of Taliban, when the various components of the ANA were trained by different western countries. However, the ANA has come of age and, although it may not be comparable to other armies of the region, it is now fairly cohesive, notwithstanding the occasional desertions. It has already taken over the security responsibility for most of the country. Most of its constituents have a pathological hatred for the Taliban. It is, therefore, not likely to crumble as many in Pakistan and the West believe. Many believe that the 352,000 strong ANSF are too large, and will require US\$6.5 billion annually to keep them intact, whereas only US\$3.6 billion was pledged during the Chicago conference in May 2012. It must, however, be appreciated that US\$ 6.5 billion is the Western estimate, and roughly equals Pakistan defence budget, which caters for 1.4 million personnel, including 500,000 reserves and 300,000 paramilitary personnel, and possesses a much larger and sophisticated inventory of arms and ammunition including ships and aircraft. Although the annual budgetary estimates of ANSF have been reduced to US\$

4 million, it should be possible to maintain the ANSF at a much lesser cost, if the pay and perks are based on South Asian norms.

According to the latest reports, funding support for transitional period of five years from 2014 has been committed by the USA and its allies for the ANSF. However, there is a world of a difference between the commitment and the payment, and many in the West are calling the force levels to be unsustainable and asking for it to be pruned down. Western propensity to route its aid to the Afghanistan through Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) could further aggravate the financial problems of the Afghan government. It must, however, be clearly appreciated that the ANSF have to be manpower intensive to fight the insurgency, and any demobilisation at this juncture will be counterproductive. However, the ANSF – and especially the ANA – needs to be trained and equipped well. Under sustained pressure from Pakistan, the ANA has not been equipped well. It has neither been provided with multi-role combat aircraft to create a credible Air Force, nor with heavy artillery. While it is not intended that they be used against the insurgents, they would provide the crucial psychological edge against non-state actors in a civil war. More significantly, they would work as insurance against cross-border interventions. As regards the training of the ANA, it has definitely improved; but its desertion rates indicate that it still has to cover a lot of ground before it can evolve as a stable and cohesive army. The biggest problem has been that western trainers have not understood the cultural ethos of the East and that is precisely the reason behind most of the Green on Blue attacks in Afghanistan.

It is widely believed in Afghanistan that the country best suited to train its forces is India, which not only has a highly professional army and good military infrastructure, but also understands the cultural sensitivities of the Orient. According to various opinion polls in Afghanistan, India continues to be the most popular country in the entire region. Consequently, Afghanistan's first Strategic Partnership Agreement was signed with India on 4 October 2011, which allows India to train and equip ANA. However, the current practice of bringing Afghan personnel for training to India not only increases the cost, but also restricts the number and the duration for which they can be trained. Ideally, India needs to set up training facilities in Afghanistan, with teams of Indian trainers imparting the necessary skills to the ANA personnel. In the past, India's reluctance to put boots on the ground in Afghanistan has reduced Indian leverage with the West. While it may not be necessary to get involved in a conflict with Taliban on Afghan territory, it would be extremely desirable to set up training establishments in Afghanistan, preferably in Hazarjat,

which does not border any other country and has a population which is extremely hostile to the Taliban. These facilities will help the ANA to emerge as a force to reckon with, which can not only expel the Taliban from Afghanistan, but can also keep the Pakistan Army tied up on its Western borders, should the need arise. These training establishments will also enable India to retain its influence on the ANA for a long time.

India has been amongst the largest aid givers to Afghanistan, and Indian aid has been considered to be the most effective, both by the Afghan government and the population; yet India has not been able to derive proportional influence from its aid. This has primarily been on account of the fact that security in Afghanistan was being looked after by foreign troops, and India had no security presence in the country. This is likely to change with Afghans looking after their own security. India also needs to provide military hardware to ANA to bolster its capabilities. Many of our older guns, armoured vehicles and aircraft, which are serviceable but do not meet the growing aspirations of India's military, could be gifted to Afghanistan, along with their maintenance facilities. First and Second Line maintenance facilities for such equipment could also be set up on Afghan soil by India. In addition, the provision of indigenous military hardware – like Advanced Light Helicopter Dhruv or Light Combat Aircraft Tejas – to Afghanistan could be considered. Afghan pilots can continue to train in India as before. All these would create long term relationships between the two countries.

In the non-military field, India should strive to takeover some Provincial Reconstruction Team(s) (PRT) in North or Central Afghanistan. Paramilitary forces like ITBP could be deployed for the protection of Indian nationals involved as part of PRT, as PRT work will be geographically limited. This should be relatively easier than protecting them across the entire length and breadth of Afghanistan. By and large the Afghans cherish Indian contributions in the field of education and health of the past, and want more Indian education and healthcare facilities to be set up. They could, therefore, be set up initially in the secure North and Central Afghanistan, and subsequently, in other parts of the country. These would allow India to influence a large part of the population, gain goodwill, as well as contribute to the process of de-radicalisation of the youth. Colleges in Afghanistan could be affiliated to Indian Universities, allowing Afghan students to imbibe their secular curriculum.

Many analysts perceive that India should evolve a joint strategy with the Central Asian States to counter both the Taliban and Pakistani influence in Kabul. However, this has the grave disadvantage of being perceived as anti-Pakhtoon in Afghanistan's fractured ethnic mosaic. Similarly, any coalition

with Iran is likely to be perceived as anti-Sunni by the dominant sect in Afghanistan. In addition, considering the current state of US-Iran relations, any relationship with Iran has a risk of running afoul of the USA. The best option for India is to bank on the ANA and pro-India politicians in Afghanistan. India must not allow it to be side-lined on Afghanistan as was done in the Turkey and London Conferences. There are many Afghan politicians who are willing to do India's bidding.

Indian business and industries, both Public Sector as well as Private sector, must be encouraged to invest in Afghanistan, and to exploit the vast mineral resources of the country. There is, however, a problem of access as the minerals extracted have to traverse through a long route via Iran to reach India. It may be worthwhile to consider the option of transporting them through Xinjiang in China. Like India, China faces a grave threat from the Taliban and its global Islamic affiliates. It is, therefore, keen to collaborate with India to prevent the Taliban, which has close relations with the Uighur militants, from coming to power. India needs to understand that failure in Afghanistan is not an option, and the Taliban in Kabul is akin to the Taliban at Waghah, and poses an extremely grave threat to India's existence as a thriving secular democracy.

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India Should Work with Like-Minded Countries

Savita Pande*

As the time for US withdrawal from Afghanistan (end 2014) approaches, many analyses are being put forward, each with different conjectures and scenarios. While some stipulations are obvious, the development throws up a range of possible combinations and permutations. That the USA will not abandon the region (as in 1990) is certain. While its level of presence in the region may be reduced, its military presence (howsoever reduced) in Afghanistan, and military contact with Pakistan, will certainly remain. A surge in Taliban activity in Afghanistan and the frontier areas of Pakistan is another certainty. For this and other reasons, relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan may see a further downslide after 2014, as Pakistan is given to interfering in Afghanistan's political scenarios as was most evident in the period 1995–2001. No doubt, the government of Afghanistan will even more aggressively talk of the militant hideouts in Pakistan's tribal areas as being the main threats inside Afghanistan. In turn, Pakistan will point to Kabul's inability to deal with the threat, and hence accuse it of making Pakistan a "scapegoat" at the same time as it will blame threats to Pakistan on militants using Afghan territory.

The internal situation in Afghanistan itself may not be stable because of a bitterly contested presidential election between Karzai's protégé candidate (as the President cannot seek another term constitutionally), loyalists, and the opposition parties. The bitterness of the rivalry can be a serious source of instability if it spills over, post the elections. It also means an enhanced security challenge for Pakistan, as the resultant surge of the Afghan Taliban after 2014 will bolster the Pakistani Taliban in the tribal areas, as well as its links with militant and sectarian organizations, and madrassas inside the provinces of Pakistan.

There is no doubt that Pakistan has been an important factor in India's Afghanistan policy, as have also the relations with the erstwhile Soviet Union in the Cold war period, and the traditional Pushtun pro-India feelings dating back to pre-Independence times. It is also a fact that, barring the Taliban period, Indo-Afghan relations have generally been smooth. However, it is equally true that, post 2001, India's Afghanistan policy focus has been to strengthen its economy generally, and build its human capital and physical infrastructure more particularly. It is because of these policy moves that

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roads, medical facilities, etc. have been built, and several educational programmes launched. Also included are the building of electricity transmission lines, the Salma Dam power project in the Herat province, the construction of the Afghan parliament building, the expansion of the Afghan national television network, and the construction of the 218 kilometre-long Zaranj-Delaram highway. India and Afghanistan signed a preferential Afghan-Indian trade agreement in which each gives concessions to the other on items like dry fruit to India, and tea/sugar, etc. to Afghanistan. In 2011, a Strategic Partnership agreement between the two was signed whereby India agreed to assist in the training and equipping of Afghan security forces.

There is also no doubt India's influence has grown considerably in Afghanistan, and covers not just the Pashtuns but other ethnic groups as well. India's advantage is that, apart from its entrenchment in the Afghan economic fabric, it enjoys popular goodwill in Afghanistan (which Pakistan does not, probably because of it being increasingly embroiled in its own serious internal problems in Karachi, Baluchistan and the tribal areas). That notwithstanding, Pakistan has exploited its geographical advantage in its own favour, as for example in the conclusion of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Trade and Transit Agreement. This explicitly prohibits goods exported from India to Afghanistan to pass through its territory, although Afghan exports to India are permitted to travel through its territory. As per Wiki Leaks, the Pakistan Intelligence agency was behind the attacks on Indian Embassy, and got the Haqqani terror network to attack Indian workers in our Consulates there.

The basis for Pakistan's Afghan policy was spelt out in a *Dawn* editorial on 9 September 2013: 'Better to talk of Indian influence and the space for Pakhtuns in Afghanistan—the real drivers of policy towards Afghanistan—than to mislead, a game which fools no one, here or in Afghanistan'. Indian interests, including its missions, NGOs, and contract workers, have been repeatedly attacked by Pakistan-based terrorists. The seriousness of this issue for India is self-evident. Some questions that arise immediately are: Will the Afghan forces be able to manage the problems that will arise in the aftermath of the US withdrawal? How far will the "reconciliation" process be successful? Will there be a Taliban resurgence? In such a scenario, what will the role of Pakistan be? Will the Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) remain a coherent force, or split along ethnic fault lines? How united would the Taliban themselves be, seeing that sub groups exist, and the rivalry between them is growing by the day? What will the role of external factors be in a post-2014 Afghanistan, and how will they impact India? This leads us to the question: In this context,

what are the possible options that exist for India?

India's declared policy is that the peace and reconciliation process should be "Afghan-led" and "Afghan-owned", and the fight against terrorism should not be diluted in the process of peace making. If the so called Good Taliban has to be part of the post 2014 set-up, they should sever links with the Al Qaeda, give up arms, and respect the Afghan constitution. The international community, including the USA, should remain engaged in Afghanistan militarily and economically for security and development

India's objectives post 2014 Afghanistan are clear:

- Deny / pre-empt Pakistan return into Afghanistan's strategic and political space;
- Protect India's investments in Afghanistan, and its access to resources there;
- Increase trade opportunities and transit access to Central Asia through Afghanistan. The latter is a vital potential conduit of Central Asian energy for India;
- Balance China; and,
- Build ties with Iran.

The jihadists released in the infamous jailbreaks in Libya, Iraq, and Pakistan with the help of Al Qaeda are obviously a matter for worry to India. Even if some return to their own home lands, there is high possibility of others sneaking into Afghanistan, Pakistan's tribal frontiers, and Pakistani-occupied Kashmir. There is also the danger that the easy availability of abandoned surplus US weaponry (too expensive to take back home) in a land known for heavily armed militias could be dangerous for India. The fears of a big Taliban resurgence are not totally unfounded, keeping in mind a June development in which the Taliban opened an office in Qatar under the name "The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan".

Moreover, if US brokered negotiations allow the Taliban to enter the political quagmire in the garb of a political party, Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan will undoubtedly rise enormously, considering that the latter already has a head start in the region with Pakistan's Taliban allies controlling most of Afghanistan's southern countryside. Besides this, the US policy to agree to negotiate with the Taliban may further fuel Pakistan's territorial ambitions in the war-torn country. It is an open secret that, since the 2001 invasion, the Bush administration has, on the one hand, pressured India to limit its role Afghanistan, and on the other, been reluctant to counter Pakistan's machinations

against India. This has been done essentially to sustain Pakistan's support for the war, and prevent hindrance to US supply lines.

Pakistan's security considerations are rooted in having India to its east, and an Indian presence in Afghanistan to its west. This could become the reason for it to cultivate and push for a bigger role for the Afghan Taliban in post withdrawal Afghanistan. The real implications of both Nawaz Sharif being the head of government at the federal level, and Imran Khan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa projecting an image of being anti-USA and pro-Taliban, remain to be seen. It is one thing to raise slogans at the hustings, and completely another to act from the citadel of power, be it federal or provincial. Thus, how big a boost the Taliban would receive remains to be seen. Of significance in this context is the release of 7 senior Afghan Taliban by Pakistan on 9 September, making the total number of Taliban released in the last nine months to 32. This was supposedly done in order to further facilitate the Afghan reconciliation process.

A range of options have been suggested for India. One of these is to reduce Indian presence in Afghanistan so that it reduces its exposure to the Taliban. While this option may please Americans (who have been advocating it since 2001), and reduces the intensity of attacks by Taliban, in the long run it would be self-defeating. Indian investments in Afghanistan, particularly in infrastructure (US\$2 billion), would be subjected to heavy risks. A second defensive option could be to heavily fortify the Indian Consulates and the Embassy, as well as to lean on the Afghan government to provide extra security in areas where Indians live and work. This would restrict the Indians to Indian residential areas, and would expose them to risks if they were to go outside their residential or work areas. Business and diplomatic activity would be highly restricted in the short term; and, in the long term, this would severely impact India's influence in the region, apart from driving a wedge between Indian and Afghan civil societies.

Supplying Arms could be yet another option. In June 2013, after meeting with Manmohan Singh, Karzai confirmed that he had given a "wish list" of military equipment to India. As he sought his wish list, Karzai obviously pointed to Clause 5 of the section on political and security cooperation whereby "India agrees to assist as mutually determined, in the training, equipping and capacity building programmes for the ANSF." Refusing to be drawn into a proxy war with Pakistan on Afghan territory, the Indian government refused to consider the request. Indian Foreign Minister, Salman Khurshid explained: "It is a fragile area, there are stakeholders, there are other people. We don't want to become part of the problem." While Karzai did not disclose what was on his wish list,

media reports had their own understanding of it. Thus, Praveen Swami (*The Hindu*, 5 December 2012) quoted Afghan sources in saying that India should supply medium trucks that can carry 2.5–7 tonne cargos, bridge-laying equipment, and engineering facilities. India was also asked to consider the possibility of supplying light mountain artillery, along with ordnance. As the time for the withdrawal comes closer, and in the light of growing threats to Indian interests, how far the Manmohan Singh Government would be able to go in satisfying the requests, remains to be seen.

As for deploying the army, it is neither possible nor advisable for India to get into the boots left in Afghanistan by the ISAF. Apart from it alienating the Afghans, the costs for this would be astronomical. Besides, India's IPKF experience is hardly inspiration for it to make any military intervention in Afghanistan. Yet, it cannot be denied that Indian installations already under attack will become more vulnerable when USA and NATO forces withdraw completely. It is also true that though India has trained Afghan security force personnel in its military academies, it has not supplied the Afghans with arms. A practical middle path would be for India to respond positively to the Kabul's requests for greater material assistance for building military infrastructure for the Afghan National Security Forces as well as continue and increase Indian training of the Afghan National Police and the National Army. Although this is highly debatable, India could also work out logistics for maintaining an army in Afghanistan for the protection of the infrastructure owned as well as built by it, notwithstanding it having been handed over to the Afghans. This not likely to meet with the Afghan Government's resistance either.

Besides Pakistani hostility, one of India's major challenges in post 2014 Afghanistan would be China, which will become a major economic beneficiary of the withdrawal: Afghanistan is the route for a commercial corridor for Central Asia through Pakistan to the sea. By the end of 2011, China's direct investment in Afghanistan exceeded US\$ 200 million, with a further US\$ 600 million worth of projects under contract. China took care of the Islamist threat (a la Uyghur's in Xingjian) by building an equation with the Afghan Taliban by assuring them it had no intention of interfering in Afghanistan militarily – not even in retaliation. At the same time, it invested economically, obtaining the licence to mine copper in Aynak. This Sino-Afghan project has the potential of being largest copper exporter. While Aynak faces problems of terror attacks from rebels, the Chinese National Petroleum Corporation's investments in Afghanistan's northern area have proceeded smoothly, where China's largest energy SOE nabbed three lucrative, if relatively small, oil blocks. Thus, Kashkari, Bazarkhami and Zamarudsa, all part of the oil and gas-rich

Amu Darya basin in northern Afghanistan, have the potential of becoming a part of China's growing pipeline network which includes post-Soviet Central Asia. CNPC is now expanding its initial plans for a natural gas pipeline that would connect Turkmenistan's fields to China's western province of Xinjiang via northern Afghanistan and Tajikistan – a connection that would have the potential for connections to Iran and the Gulf along the same route in the future. An agreement to train 300 police officers was signed in 2012, during the visit of former Politburo Standing Committee member and security chief Zhou Yongkang who, last year, became the senior-most official to visit the country in close to 50 years.

Like China, Russia will be happy to see US troops leave Afghanistan, traditionally the zone of Soviet and Russian interests. The return of the latter can be symbolically seen in the opening of a new Russian Cultural Centre slated for 2014. Again, like China, Russia – both through the SCO and bilaterally – is willing to improve the Salang Tunnel highway, the link road between Kabul and the north (which the Soviets built in the 1970s), and are also considering proposals to build a metro in Kabul. No doubt Russian worries also exist: such as those about the existence of the Taliban and other extremist groups, or such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan penetrating the Central Asian republics. Highlighting its non-military engagement mode post-2011, Russia has talked about maintaining bases, repairing and supplying outposts, “service weapon systems” (bought by NATO for the Afghan forces for reasons of familiarity), and plans to set up forward posts in Afghanistan. The latter is in direct response to worries about a possible resurgence of cross-border militant Islamist incursions, similar to those in the post-Soviet republics of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in the 1990s, and the flowing in of narcotics via criminal pipelines through the former Soviet Central Asia, and Russia. The first meeting of the Russian-Afghan intergovernmental commission on trade and economic cooperation took place in March 2011—the year the trade turnover between the two countries totalled US\$ 984.96 million, a 12 times increase since 2004. Russian companies are actively involved in the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline, and in CASA-1000—the construction of an electric power line from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to Pakistan via Afghanistan.

After years of bad blood, some movements can be seen in Russia – Pakistan relations as well. Russia's economic help – such as refurbishing Pakistan's one and only steel mill built with Russian help in the 1970s – and the exchange of visits by the army chiefs. General Ashfaq Kayani visited Moscow last year, and the Russian Air chief visited Pakistan in August 2013 (although President

Putin's visit was cancelled in 2012). The Russians may be upset because of closeness in Indo-US ties, but the convergence of their interests with Pakistan (trade between them is US\$ 542 million tilted in favour of Russia) in Afghanistan, seems to be a remote possibility. This is so, notwithstanding Russian support for Pakistani membership of SCO, or media reports of cooperation in energy and transportation. The potential rise of the Taliban and, thus, of militancy and its spill-over is something the Russians can ill afford.

Iran, with its geographical location (a long border with Afghanistan) and its relation with the Taliban, make it an important factor for India, particularly to counteract Pakistan's influence. Power games in Afghanistan affect Iran directly, as Iran's strategic stakes include the protection of the Hazaras, having an economic sphere of influence, creating a buffer zone in Herat as well as controlling the flow of narcotics into Iran. Its Chahbahar port, located 73 km from Pakistan's Gwadar port (built by China) will give India direct access to Afghanistan and Central Asia, and thus, there would be no need to negotiate with Pakistan for access to Afghanistan. The Zarang-Delaram road in Afghanistan, when joined with the Chahbahaar-Milak road (passing through Iran's Sistan-o-Baluchistan and Khorasan-e-Jonubi provinces) would also help India and Iran not only bypass Pakistan, but also provide better outlets for Afghanistan, impacting positively on its regional influence. In April 2012, India used Chahbahar to ship 100,000 tons of wheat and food aid to Afghanistan, and may import minerals from Hajigak in the same way.

For now, the practical course of action would be a combination of factors. India could reconsider its refusal of arms to the Afghan Army. The caveat here could be that these would be meant for the defence of Afghans only. This could be in the same vein as the assurance Americans have been giving India whenever they supply arms to Pakistan. Extending this logic, India can also station Indian troops around Indian and Indian-built institutions. Just as the USA has said that it would be maintaining a residual force in Afghanistan post-2014, India also can explore similar options in tandem with the USA, while supporting the "gradual, managed force reduction" of US-NATO forces as proposed at the 2012 Chicago summit.

In the near term, India should support the peaceful conduct of Afghanistan's upcoming presidential elections in 2014, push for the creation of an independent Election Commission that would conduct free and fair elections based on stipulated rules, and help institute a formal electoral complaints mechanism. It should help develop political consensus building among Afghan elites and civil society. Following this, India can also render

assistance for strengthening Afghan government institutions, impart training to Afghan officials, and foster political reforms.

The India-Afghanistan economic relationship must go beyond aid-assistance, and continue in an upward trajectory, perhaps with an FTA with Afghanistan. At the bilateral level, it should continue to focus on building infrastructure – railroads, highways, processing plants, etc. – as also help in revitalizing agriculture. At the multilateral level, it should work towards an investment summit. Independent revenue generation and job creation is a must-must for post 2014 Afghanistan.

India has to keep in mind the protection of its interests in line with the convergence of interests with like-minded countries such as Russia and Iran (notwithstanding differences regarding the length of the stay of US forces post 2014). Iran stands to be India's best option, particularly in the context of connectivity and transportation. At the same time, India will need to build further relations with Russia to check the growth of Chinese influence in Afghanistan. While not banking upon it, India should also be a part of the multilateral efforts of the SCO, CSTO, NATO, etc. so that it is in the know of things, as well as prevent anyone else from taking advantage should it be absent from any of these fora.

India Should Stay the Course

Vishal Chandra*

“Give them (Afghan Taliban) just one year and they will make the whole of Afghanistan happy. The whole of Afghanistan will be with them ... Once the Americans leave, all of this will happen within a year.”

-Maulana Sami-ul Haq, the ‘Father of the Taliban’,
September 2013

The hype over perceived uncertainties in post-2014 Afghanistan reached a new crescendo with James Dobbins, the American special envoy to Afghanistan-Pakistan (Af-Pak), recently stating that the country is “already in a civil war.” It was an admission of the fact that not much has fundamentally changed as the country remains polarised, and prone to factional conflicts. Inadvertently though, Dobbins has recognised the continuum in the decades old Afghan conflict even after more than a decade of Western intervention, investment and engagement. How Afghan politics would unravel, or in which direction the conflict is headed, has emerged as a subject of varied debate, both within and outside Afghanistan. The several ‘ifs’ and ‘buts’ in any likely future scenario suggest multi-layered complexities and challenges as various forces compete to give shape to the supposedly first post-Karzai and post-ISAF government in Kabul.

The Afghan Maze

Afghanistan is poised for a major transition, and parallels are being drawn with earlier transitions by all sides either to rationalise their respective positions or to help comprehend the likely future of Afghanistan. As Western forces hand over security responsibilities to a struggling Afghan army, and prepare to end their combat mission by 2014, one wonders about the legacy of the America-led war, and what it means for Afghanistan: Will it be the same as or any different from post-Soviet withdrawal? Will there be another round of civil war? Or, will the political matrix be different this time? Though there may be several parallels with past transitions, it is still difficult to predict how

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various stakeholders will approach or respond to post-transition challenges.

The Western mission thus far has been a saga of battles won in a lost war; of confusion and perplexity; of scepticism and differences among allies and partners; and of deliberate trivialisation of the various key dimensions of the Afghan war. The contradictions in the American approach have been phenomenal, be it near simultaneity of military surge and withdrawal, or security transitions being ‘conditions-based’ as well as ‘irreversible.’ The changing nuances of the American Af-Pak policy in terms of the lowering of priorities and objectives might appear rational in view of several constraints to it, but not so when it comes to its likely implications for Afghanistan.

The Cold War era may have formally ended, but the political mindset of the military in Pakistan remains largely the same, irrespective of its adverse implications for Pakistan itself. Interestingly, the West too does not appear to have drawn enough lessons from its earlier experiences in what it now calls Af-Pak. This raises doubts about the efficacy of the Western role and presence in the region after 2014.

Lack of Viable Political Alternatives

Of key concern today is the limited capability and resources of nascent Afghan institutions to cope with the various challenges of transition as well as post-transition uncertainties. Another issue of major concern could be the shrinking political space for an inclusive and a representational political order in times to come. As old political and social divides intensify in anticipation of the re-ordering of political structures by 2014–15, various competing fronts and coalitions are re-emerging to fill in the likely security and political vacuum in parts of the country.

Though the West-sponsored process could be faulted for having failed in consolidating and institutionalising the achievements of the last one decade, it did succeed in civilianising the role of various militia commanders within a relatively inclusive and broad-based political order. Also, a vast and diverse section of the Afghan population has benefited in several ways—socially, economically and, in some cases, in terms of political empowerment as well—from over a decade of international engagement. Diluting the present political framework without any consensus among warring groups on an alternative framework is bound to lead to a violent contestation along predictable socio-political fault lines.

Varying perceptions about a political system that could cater to new

aspirations and contemporary realities, coupled with the absence of a strong unifying political leadership, have long been a major factor in the Afghan conflict. All political transitions since the overthrow of the monarchy have failed to establish a sustainable internal balance of power, resulting in the fragmentation of authority and the strengthening of informal parallel power structures across the country.

Tactical Deals, not Reconciliation

In recent years, a highly competitive multi-track process has evolved to directly negotiate 'peace' with the Pakistan-based Taliban leadership. Various Afghan and foreign entities with diverse agendas have developed stakes in the politics of reconciliation. However, despite several setbacks to both the Kabul-led and the US-led efforts, the idea of reaching out to the Taliban has retained its appeal, and would continue to do so even after 2014.

The ambiguity over the whole process remains as the terms and conditions of some of the recent exploratory talks are not fully known. Though limited or temporary deals with some sections of Taliban cannot be ruled out, it would be difficult to sustain them unless strong enforcement mechanisms are put in place. A vast section of the Afghan population also remains sceptical about the ultimate political intent and long-term strategy of the Taliban leadership. To what extent Taliban are willing to reconcile with the social and political diversity of the country remains a core issue of concern. Also, Kabul does not have the necessary institutional and political strength to survive the challenges of sharing power with its much stronger opponent.

What one is seeing at the moment are efforts being made for 'tactical deals' with short-term objectives; and not a 'structured broad-based intra-Afghan national reconciliation' process. Some sections of the Taliban might be willing to negotiate with the West to gain international legitimacy; but they may not be in a position to prevail upon the dominant pro-al Qaeda hardcore elements among them. Interestingly, it would not be all that easy this time for the Haqqani-Taliban network to make a full comeback to power.

The differences over power-sharing and the nature of federal relations indicate changed social and political realities which cannot be wished away. The Pashtuns in general, and the Taliban in particular, favour a strong centralised system, whereas the non-Pashtun minorities demand greater decentralisation or devolution of state power. The politics beyond 2014 would be very much about who gets to dominate whom; the key issue is, whether this will be decided through ballot or bullet.

Should India Stay the Course?

As the Afghan war is far from over, India must take a long-term view of developments in its turbulent north-western neighbourhood. Based on certain assumptions about the likely course of the Afghan war, it is often argued that India may soon have to revisit its policies and priorities in Afghanistan. However, given the constraints and prevailing uncertainty, India may not be in a position to bring about any radical shift in its Afghan policy, at least not in the short-term. The Afghan situation is extremely fragile at the moment in view of the fragmented nature of its polity, overlapping transitions, and strong external dimensions to the conflict, all of which do have a direct impact on India's security and, at the same time, restrict its options.

A big challenge for India could be how to sustain the momentum of its engagement in post-ISAF Afghanistan. India's continued involvement in Afghan reconstruction depends largely on local security conditions. The following factors could be considered as critical here: (i) sustenance of the current political system; (ii) composition and orientation of the next government; (iii) nature and level of Western engagement in the post-transition period; and (iv) the strength of India's ties with various Afghan factions. Among these, Afghan perceptions about India's role, and the presence and the sensitivity of the next political set up in Kabul to India's concerns are of critical importance. Depending on developments both within Afghanistan and Pakistan, either new opportunities could open up for India to strengthen and further widen its engagement or it might have to contend with a more restricted role in the future.

Since the overthrow of the Taliban regime, India has emerged as a major 'development partner' of the Afghan people, cutting across social and political divides. Assuming that building Afghanistan's institutional capacities is in India's long-term interest, and is apparently the only viable way forward, India must continue with its capacity-building and training programmes even in the worst case scenario. As a neighbouring country, India cannot afford to either abandon Afghanistan or rush into mad action.

It is important to understand why and how India, unlike other regional or Western countries with far greater leverages and resources at their disposal, has done relatively well in implementing its aid and assistance programmes and, more importantly, in managing people's perceptions. India has been extremely innovative in diversifying its assistance programmes as per the changing situation and the specific requirements of the Afghan people. India today is seen as a relatively neutral neighbour and a positive force by

the Afghan people. This is, perhaps, where the strength of India's Afghan policy lies.

While India is expected to 'do more' or 'play a greater role', at the same time, its presence and role in Afghanistan is often viewed with scepticism, and even criticised by the West. Despite Pakistan's known complicity and duplicity in sponsoring and nurturing militant Islamists of various kinds, Western perceptions about India's role is mostly influenced by Pakistan's imaginary constructs of perceived threats from India. The continuing paradox in the American approach has often left India doubtful about America's future commitment and objectives in the region.

The ongoing debate within the Indian strategic community on what should be India's approach and policy towards post-ISAF Afghanistan varies between pursuing a more balanced approach in terms of engaging diverse Afghan groups and factions, including Taliban elements, and working towards an internationally-guaranteed neutral Afghanistan. Few analysts even argue in favour of India exercising the military option to pre-empt or directly counter the growing threat to both Kabul and New Delhi's common interests in the region. However, there is a general consensus within India on the need to remain actively engaged, and help Afghanistan evolve into a relatively moderate and an independent Islamic state.

Way Forward

As prospects of greater chaos and anarchy in Afghanistan increase, the following could be suggested as ways forward for India:

- a) As a politically non-interfering regional economic power, India holds a better chance of exercising influence within Afghanistan and beyond in the long-run. Any adventurous forward policy would prove counter-productive. India is more likely to be exploited and trapped, given the highly factionalised and externalized nature of the Afghan conflict; and over-identification with one centre of power or group could lead to alienation and deep suspicion among others. Such a scenario could further limit India's presence and work to the advantage of forces opposed to its engagement within Afghanistan. Thus, it would be in the long-term interest of India to develop its relations with all major ethnic groups and factions in Afghanistan. However, this would require varying approaches as relations with different Afghan groups have their own dynamics.

- b) Given the several constraints, India will have to make do with its current policy of mainly assisting in rebuilding Afghan capacities through direct aid and extensive training programmes. India is not in a position to bring about drastic policy alterations involving massive resource commitments, re-prioritisation of objectives, and building leverages or exercising options hitherto considered unthinkable or counter-productive. However, to secure its personnel, India may have to deploy additional security at its missions and projects in the coming years.
- c) India must engage the next generation of Afghan leaders, and should remain a key development partner of the Afghan people. India must find innovative ways to further engage and connect with the Afghan youth. Training Afghan youths and professionals in Indian institutions will keep India connected with diverse sections of the Afghan population even in the worst of times.
- d) India must support indigenous Afghan initiatives for national unity. India's support for a Kabul-led and owned reconciliation process is very much part of its continuing support for an inclusive political order in Afghanistan.
- e) While reinforcing its ties with various constituents of the former Northern Alliance, India must continue to leverage its engagement with the Pashtun people, and with various factions in the south. A conscious effort must be made to reconnect with the Pashtun communities at the intellectual and cultural levels. The Afghan war is also a battle of minds and a war of ideas.
- f) India constantly needs to better its understanding of the historical, political, ethnic, tribal and religious dynamics of Afghanistan and north-western Pakistan. Perhaps, an Afghan Cultural Centre in India can go a long way in this regard.
- g) Though regional groupings/mechanisms are not likely to play any effective or a direct military role in the stabilisation of Afghanistan, India must continue to try and engage other regional countries, both bilaterally and in multilateral forums. Meanwhile, India must keep track of the thinking on the Afghan issue among countries of the region, including China, and also their perception about India's presence and role in Afghanistan.

As India wades through the complex maze of Afghan politics, remarks by India's former permanent representative to the UN, Kamlesh Sharma, made in the Security Council back in March 2002, should remain a guiding

principle for India's Afghan engagement:

It is important to listen carefully to what the Afghans need and respect their priorities and preferences, as no one knows better than the Afghans what is good for them and how best to do it. ...In determining what will work, sustainability should be the touchstone.

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