

Overview of Pakistan's Afghan Policy and Future Perspectives

Riaz Mohammad Khan *

Abstract

Despite having geographic and demographic contiguity, bilateral relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan ever since their inception have been uneasy at best. This paper encompasses a historical review of AfPak relations over the last 60-odd years; taking into account the Afghan disdain for the Durand Line-viewed as a colonial legacy bequeathed unjustly upon Pakistan- and subsequent developments which have further problematised the border issue, foreign power play in the regional context, the wide-ranging ramifications of Soviet-Afghan war for the neighbouring states, and the larger trust deficit between Afghanistan and Pakistan that regimented itself in the wake of this sequence of events. This chronological exposition, coupled with an account of the current political climate in Afghanistan, paves the way for policy recommendations for Pakistan.

Introduction

Three decades of friction over loosely articulated border claims by Afghanistan, followed by over three decades of conflict that began with the 1979 Soviet military intervention, and gradually spread to Pakistan with the rise of extremism and domestic militancy accentuated by the post-9/11 US military intervention, have largely shaped Islamabad-Kabul relations. At the same time, relations between the two countries have a unique undercurrent of constant and powerful people-to-people interaction, sustained by a large demographic overlap, an intertwined history and culture, and the intractable terrain of their bordering regions stretched along 2640 kilometers of the Durand Line. Any study of bilateral relations or of Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan will have to assimilate these two dimensions of tension and conflict, and of complex affinities between the two countries.

* Riaz Mohammad Khan is a retired diplomat who was appointed to various assignments, with the last one being the Foreign Secretary of Pakistan. He was also Wilson Center's Pakistan Scholar in 2009, where his research focus was conflict in Afghanistan. His repertoire of posts involved dealing with Europe, Central Asia and Afghanistan under the thematic areas of arms control and disarmament. He has authored two books, *Untying the Afghan Knot: Negotiating Soviet Withdrawal and Afghanistan and Pakistan: Conflict, Extremism and Resistance to Modernity*.

The burden of history inherited from the days of British rule injected an underlying stress in Kabul's attitude towards the newly independent Pakistan, which was struggling to deal with enormous post-Partition challenges of an existential character from day one. The fact that Afghanistan was the sole dissenting vote at the time of Pakistan's admission to the United Nations rankled for years in Pakistani public opinion. The bitterness was exacerbated by Kabul's rhetoric about Pushtunistan and its non-recognition of the Durand Line, which it saw as the outcome of an unequal treaty imposed by the British imperial power. Historically, the Afghans viewed the Durand Line as a sequel to the 1879 Gandamak Treaty and the later agreement of 1893 pushed by the British to delineate the border¹.

Policy-makers in both capitals had, however, failed to grasp the qualitative change in the regional geo-political environment following the retreat of the British from South Asia. With the emergence of a much weaker mid-sized state on its southern periphery, Afghanistan no longer had the assurance of a buffer state explicitly agreed upon between two expanding empires. The altered balance of power in the region, which should have impelled the two countries to forge closer cooperation and understanding, was temporarily obscured by Pakistan becoming part of the US-sponsored alliance systems, which started loosening by the late 60's. Sardar Mohammad Daud Khan, the chief protagonist of Pushtunistan and an apparent irredentist policy towards Pakistan, was the first to realise the danger from the north² and the need to adjust policy, but soon he met his end with the unexpected 1978 Saur Revolution. In less than two years, Moscow was obliged to take the fateful decision of sending its military forces to save the Revolution, and in the process catapulted Afghanistan into the last front of the Cold War. This marked the end of the first three decades of an ill-defined, narrow parochial friction and tension that had kept the two countries at odds, and the beginning of a more sinister conflict, locking in global powers and giving rise to new unforeseen dangers and challenges that continue to afflict this region and beyond.

This paper will attempt to analyse three broad areas: first, the conclusions from sixty years of experience with relevance to policy; second, developments related to Afghanistan in the domestic, regional and international context; and third, impact on Pakistan and Pakistan's policy perspectives. In doing so, the discussion will examine some of the assumptions that have influenced Pakistan's policy over the years, which by itself had a fluid quality, and often suffered from drift and lack of focus.

Lessons from the Past

Relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan over the decades do not fit the description of traditional state-to-state relations, as they are governed by two distinct, almost autonomous impulses. Official and governmental concerns and interests set the tone at one level. In a parallel dimension, there exists centuries old people-to-people interaction- a two-way osmosis- dictated by shared history, culture and geography; this regulates the social and political rhythm of the bordering regions quite independently of the decisions made in Islamabad and Kabul. This overarching consideration circumscribes the discussion of the questions raised and conclusions drawn in the following paragraphs.

Anatomy of friction and hostility

Mutual recrimination, hostile statements and distrust have often characterised dealings between Islamabad and Kabul, encompassing a range of issues, from the questions of Pushtunistan and the Durand Line, to trade and smuggling and drugs, to non-state interference and safe havens for extremist militancy. To place in a context these multiple grievances and their potential to reach a point of conflict, we need to examine the Pakistani concern that often surfaced in policy considerations and public statements: that Pakistan cannot afford a two front situation. The question is whether Pakistan can possibly confront a conventional threat on its western borders, such as it experiences on the eastern front. If not, then what is the nature of the danger Pakistan faces on its western borders, and how does Kabul's role fit into the picture?

Historically, it is a matter of record that in 1965 and 1971, Zahir Shah conveyed a message saying that Pakistan should have no worries regarding its western borders. In the last year of his rule³, sensing pressure from Moscow, Sardar Daud reached out to Islamabad to turn a new page in the states' bilateral relations. Since 1979, with the exception of 1990's, it has been the government in Kabul that was constantly agitated about interference from Pakistan. On the other hand, Pakistan did not apprehend a conventional threat from Afghanistan until recent years, when US/NATO began to rebuild the Afghan National Army (ANA) in earnest, in anticipation of the draw-down of US/NATO forces. Concurrently, there was speculation that Kabul may seek assistance from India for training and arming its military.

The Afghan army has been reorganised several times since it was raised under the supervision of General Muhammad Qasim Fahim in 2002. Fahim ended up recruiting an army of nearly 70,000 non-Pushtuns, obliging NATO

allies to push for a more balanced ANA at the London Donors Conference in 2006. ANA still retains a heavy ethnic bias, and that also accounts for its relative dysfunction in the Pushtun-dominated south and south-eastern Afghanistan, notwithstanding the fact that in recent years, it has demonstrated the capability to counter Afghan Taliban-led assaults in cities. The US and NATO remain concerned over its viability, and to help keep the ANA together is one argument that the US officials make in support of maintaining a residual military presence. ANA has been trained to fight the Taliban insurgency. It has a long way to go before developing the tradition of carrying a conventional offensive against another regular armed force. If ANA suffers from problems of internal cohesion, training and resources, it is difficult to conceive whether it could pose a conventional threat to Pakistan on her western border.

The most formidable hurdle to the movement of regular armies and warfare is the region's terrain and demographics. Both Pakistani and Afghan armies have not succeeded in gaining firm control of the tribal areas that straddle the bordering regions. For these armies, using regular troops to launch operations against one another will be a nightmarish enterprise, which no army planners in Kabul or Islamabad would recommend. In today's circumstances, the danger that both Pakistan and Afghanistan face arises from the unstable conflict situation that has allowed the bordering regions to become an ungoverned breeding ground for extremist militancy.

To counter the extremist challenge holistically and to neutralise the activities of non-state militants/actors, the two governments and armies need to cooperate. Since these elements thrive in an environment of tension, conflict and an absence of governance, the situation is bound to get worse if either of the two sides allows safe havens for rebellious elements. If Pakistan overlooks the use of its territory for operations by the Afghan Taliban inside Afghanistan, it should expect mischief from across the border- whether in the shape of safe havens and weapons for Pakistani Taliban, or collusion between the Afghan intelligence and RAW to undermine Pakistani interests.

Pakistan has expressed concern over India's role in training and assisting the ANA, following the exit of US/NATO troops. The possibility has receded since the US is set to maintain a residual military presence in Afghanistan. Given the history of distrust and hostility between Pakistan and India, Pakistani anxiety is understandable. However, the argument that Indian training would induce an anti-Pakistan mindset among ANA is somewhat a stretch. The hostile mindset attributed to the Afghan intelligence and ANA organised immediately after the US intervention, respectively under Amrullah Saleh and General Fahim, owed to

the adversarial experience of the Northern Alliance and its negative view of Pakistan. The situation has changed considerably since then. At present, the ANA is more balanced ethnically, even though Tajiks are over-represented in the forces. Generally speaking, the ANA mindset would largely reflect the tenor of Islamabad-Kabul relations. If these relations move towards normalcy, Kabul will not find it political to involve India with its military in any significant manner, nor should its Western allies encourage Kabul to do so.

Afghan Tenacity and Pride

Afghanistan has served as a buffer, but never as a pliant state, becoming part of the sphere of influence of an outside power. Conflicts have subjected it to intervention and occupation, which mostly ended in the exasperation of the occupying power. For Afghan leaders and regimes, compromise is often temporary and tactical in a point of time. The Afghan tribes of the south and south-eastern belt in particular are known to be fiercely independent. There are many examples that demonstrate the Afghan rejection of entreaties and suggestions made in good faith by their supporters, and Afghan defiance to protect their interests and pride. It is relevant to cite a few instances since the Saur Revolution.

At a time when Kabul was entirely dependent on Moscow, Hafizullah Amin did not accept Soviet advice to go slow on his reform programmes. Najibullah rejected Shevardnadze's plea to accept the last remaining issue, a reference to international boundaries in the almost completed text of Geneva Accords, which the Soviets desperately wanted as a cover for their exit from Afghanistan. On April 4, 1988, sitting in Kabul, Eduard Shevardnadze approached Islamabad to agree to a fuzzy substitute for the phrase in the final Accords⁴. Similarly, in late 1987, the Mujahedin leaders dismissed suggestions for a government of reconciliation put forward by Zia ul Haq. In 1991, they did not oblige Pakistan by releasing a few Russian POWs requested by the visiting Russian Vice President Alexander Rutskoy. In fact, Pakistan can be blamed for coddling the hard-line Afghan Mujahedin leaders, to the extent that they paid little attention to Pakistani interests or advice. The Taliban leader Mullah Omar snubbed Saudi Prince Turki al Faisal over the handing over of Osama bin Ladin, and post-9/11, demurred on several high-level Pakistani entreaties on the same count to avert US invasion. Mullah Omar had earlier decided to ignore the Pakistani request to spare the Bamian Buddhas. Recent bitterness between Karzai and the Americans further illustrates the point.

Afghans play the puppets for no one. On critical issues, despite their dependence on Pakistani assistance and support, Mujahedin leaders would invariably be guided by their own individual perception of interests, and never had the slightest hesitation in rejecting outside advice. In contrast, most mid-level ISI officials would become converts to the point of view of their clients, while the senior levels would often react with resignation to the Mujahedin or later Taliban 'intransigence'. Any thinking premised on bringing Afghanistan into Pakistan's 'sphere of influence', because of Afghanistan's apparent vulnerabilities and weaknesses would be unrealistic, if not delusional.

Pushtunistan and Durand Line

The 1979 Soviet intervention killed the idea of Pushtunistan - an idea that was never articulated with any precision by any Afghan government. During his last visit to Pakistan in 1978, Sardar Daud indicated that he was convinced of the need to forge close relations with Pakistan, and he would, in due course of time, find resolution to the "difference" between the two countries. He was hinting at Pushtunistan and the more tangible issue of the Durand Line. The Durand Line rankles in the Afghan psyche as an unjust inheritance from the past. Even when the situation was propitious from Pakistan's point of view, the Mujahedin and then the Taliban governments in the 1990's, adroitly parried any suggestion for de jure recognition, saying that between two brotherly Islamic states there ought to be no artificial borders.

Afghan governments have, however, accepted the Durand Line as the de facto functional border, which by every measure is recognised as the legal boundary internationally. This international status has been reinforced by the successive Soviet and US/NATO military interventions in Afghanistan. The Soviets rejected Pakistan's protest and denied bombing Pakistani territory across the Durand Line. The United States had to express regret over Jala Khel and Salala incidents as the American recognised the red line of crossing the international border.

In practical terms, Kabul acquiesces to the reality of the Durand Line and cooperates with most arrangements that are the attributes of a legal boundary, in particular, matters of trade. There is also implicit recognition of this border in Kabul's repeated accusations against Pakistan for allowing safe havens to Afghan insurgents, in particular the Afghan Mujahedin in the 1980's and the Afghan Taliban and affiliated groups in the post-9/11 scenario. Nevertheless, to push Kabul for de jure recognition of the Durand Line will not help.

Ethnic Divide

Ethnic divisions, especially rivalry between Pushtun and non-Pushtun populations of the country, are a powerful undercurrent of Afghan politics. Under the monarchy, the problem subsisted but was controlled with a firm hand by the ruling Pushtun (Durrani) dynasty. It afflicted the Communist regime under Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), with its Khalq and Parcham wings. This deep emotive impulse fuelled the struggle among the Mujahedin, largely divided along ethnic lines. Later, the Taliban were seen as Pushtun, and their nemesis the Northern Alliance as essentially a non-Pushtun grouping.

Post-US/NATO military intervention, the problem persisted despite Hamid Karzai, a Popalzai Pushtun, heading the government. Kabul was in the hands of Northern Alliance elements, which practically comprised the army and the intelligence, and other security apparatus in the capital. The occupying powers tried to rectify the situation with modest improvements, but by then the Taliban, taking advantage of the ruffled Pushtun sentiment and more importantly the US distraction in Iraq, succeeded in reviving and regrouping themselves. Superficially, for political correctness, the Karzai government strongly contested any suggestion of ethnic friction⁵. However, Karzai also deserves credit for managing and keeping the ethnic rift in check.

The recent Afghan elections have brought forth a refreshing trend, where all major candidates made a deliberate effort to reach across the ethnic divide and chose their running mates from the other ethnicity. Both camps headed by Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani respectively have a mix of ethnic leaders who are power-brokers in their own right, and can be expected to stave off a clash along ethnic lines⁶.

The controversy over the run-off election results with charges of corruption and vote rigging carries an unmistakable ethnic resonance. But it is a political crisis essentially centred on a winner-takes-all system, and there is realisation of the need to fix it⁷. At the same time, it is noteworthy that Afghanistan has remained free of any separatist tendencies, even when it was in the grip of a protracted civil strife. Despite its loose and tenuous authority, Kabul holds attraction, and provides the unquestionable centre of gravity that binds the disparate tribes and ethnicities of Afghanistan.

The Bonn process suffered from its early insensitivity to the need for ethnic balance in the organisation of the Afghan army and security apparatus. Also, reconstruction efforts did not focus on south and south-eastern Afghanistan. This

provided space to the Taliban to exploit the aggrieved Pushtun sentiment, regain support and become active in their former base areas in the south. Afghan demographics pose a complex challenge to Pakistan, which is home to three times as many Pushtuns as Afghanistan, where they are close to half if not more of the entire population. For example, the early empathy for the Afghan Taliban in Pakistan's north-west is rooted in the widely shared perception among Pakistani Pushtuns that the US intervention wrested control of Kabul from Pushtun hands, and passed it on to Tajiks.

Earlier in the 1980's, the Pakistani establishment's dealing with the Mujahedin, in particular that of the ISI, had a bias in favour of the Pushtun elements of the Jihad. This was understandable, given the fact that most of the refugees and Tanzeemat leadership was Pushtun. Nonetheless, Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani's Jamiat e Islami was one of the three major recipients⁸ of assistance channelled through the ISI. Subsequently, especially during the days of the Taliban, Pakistani policy fatefully slipped into favouring the Afghan ethnic divide. The resultant damage continues to haunt the policy, despite efforts to repair relations with non-Pushtun leaders who dominated the early stages of the Bonn political process in the country. While Pakistani policy is bound to be affected by the sentiment of its own Pushtun population, it cannot afford to repeat its past mistakes and ignore diverse ethnicities of the Afghan persona.

The Issues of Narrative

Policy narratives, formal or informal, often contribute to grievances and distrust. Kabul can be accused of carrying on with a rhetoric which showed little sensitivity to the Pakistani psyche of a besieged state. The same can be said of ill-advised notions that appeared in Pakistani thinking on Afghanistan, following the Soviet withdrawal. The most widespread was the quasi-official doctrine of 'strategic depth'. There had also been a popular notion current, especially among the military, that Pakistan's sacrifices during the Soviet intervention- as it bore the burden of nearly four million Afghan refugees- earned it the right to expect a friendly government in Kabul. Similarly, the Afghan Taliban and groups affiliated to them such as the Haqqanis were viewed in some quarters as assets, without examining the validity or viability of such an assumption. Some believed that these elements could be used as a counter-measure to the Indian influence in Afghanistan, without scrutinising the pernicious consequences of such an approach. On another plane, Pakistan arrogated to itself the role of a spokesman for the interests of Afghan Pushtuns, and considered the Northern Alliance to be "pro-India" and "anti-Pakistan"⁹.

'Strategic depth' never figured in Pakistani official statements and positions. Yet, it was seductive enough to appear in the writings of analysts and commentators of military affairs, especially in the thinking of many senior retired military officials. They attributed to it various novel interpretations, because to apply the concept on Afghanistan in the classical geographical sense would place the concept on its head. From the impractical notion that a friendly Afghanistan could serve as a safe site to move Pakistan's strategic assets in times of hostility, the concept was whittled down to suggest that it meant that Pakistan desired a peaceful and friendly border with Afghanistan. The latter intent can better be expressed in so many words rather than in a fraught notion of 'strategic depth', that offended Kabul and Afghan intellectuals and analysts. The same was true about the assertion that Pakistan had earned the right to have a 'friendly government', which from Kabul's perspective appeared to be Pakistan's desire for a pliant government in Afghanistan.

Many analysts, especially in the West, persistently accuse the Pakistani military of treating the Afghan Taliban as assets. They appear to pick up the idea from loose talk rather than serious discussion with top-level Pakistani interlocutors. Pakistan's experience of Taliban rule in the late 1990's had little to show as a silver lining, except for the dubious satisfaction that all foreigners, including the Indians, had withdrawn from Kabul during that period. On the other hand, in its support for the Taliban, Pakistan was internationally isolated and received part of the international opprobrium. Internally, the Taliban rule in Kabul provided succour to religious extremism within Pakistan, which later threatened to destabilise the country. Post-9/11, the Afghan Taliban presence in Pakistan has accentuated the extremist threat, and has attracted the charge from Kabul and NATO allies that Pakistan is providing safe haven and acquiescing in- if not permitting- use of its territory for Taliban militancy and disruptive activities inside Afghanistan.

Pakistan's decision to allow shelter to the fleeing Taliban was understandable on account of ground realities and the sentiment of the population in the bordering regions. But the Pakistani government cannot entirely absolve itself of the responsibility to contain and control Taliban activities. It also remained oblivious to the nexus between the Afghan Taliban, Al Qaeda and the Pakistani Taliban and various extremist elements. Since the emergence of the Tehrik e Taliban Pakistan (TTP), each of its leaders declared allegiance to Mullah Omar, who reportedly at times tried to patch up differences within the TTP¹⁰. But he never spoke out to admonish the TTP for its anti-state agenda and activities. Until the latest Zarb e Azb operation in North Waziristan, the Pakistani approach

appeared to have been mostly tactical, relying on local peace deals that ignored the strategic requirement of ensuring some respect for the writ of the state, and responsibility for cross-border activities by the Taliban and their allies.

For a variety of reasons- including the rise of the religious right in Pakistan¹¹- there is confusion in the public mind about the Taliban phenomenon. The Taliban outlook and ideology is anti-progress. They offer no viable system of governance and thrive in an environment of poverty and ignorance, which they in turn perpetuate. They inflict the most damage on the host society.

Barring Pakistan, almost every country in the region opposes the Taliban creed and their revival. Within Afghanistan, non-Pushtun coalitions, the literate and urban Pushtuns, and the Afghan diaspora and intellectuals are united in their rejection of the Taliban, whom they see as sustained by Pakistan. These are powerful forces that would block any Taliban ambition to return to Kabul. Furthermore, hypothetically, if Taliban were to control Afghanistan, such a development would be a strong boost to extremist elements within Pakistan. Judging from this analysis, today, the Afghan Taliban and affiliated groups are more of an albatross around its neck rather than an asset for Pakistan.

Pakistani narratives, portraying Pakistan as a defender of the interests of the Afghan Pushtuns and holding animus towards the Northern Alliance, were unnecessary and hurtful to Pakistan. Afghan Pushtuns never endorsed such a role by Pakistan, and are quite capable of protecting their interests. On the other hand, hostility towards the Northern Alliance was short-sighted, insensitive to the demographic realities of Afghanistan, and pushed non-Pushtun leaders to look for a counter-balance to Pakistan.

Developments Relating to Afghanistan in the Domestic, Regional and International Context

This section will focus on developments since 9/11, especially how the Afghan environment has changed internally and externally and what it portends for the country's future.

Domestic Context

The US/NATO military intervention and the subsequent Bonn process and international political and economic engagement for over a decade have brought about substantive changes in Afghanistan, which despite uncertainties are likely to have a lasting impact. The change is all-encompassing in that it touches

political, economic and social sectors of life in Afghanistan, even though the society retains much of its traditional features. Afghanistan is still vulnerable and its progress can suffer setbacks. But, by any measure, it is no longer the isolated, broken and medieval country of the late 1990's.

The Bonn process has bequeathed Afghanistan with a constitution and political structures which are weak and likely to evolve, yet they now enjoy a broad consensus and acceptance of the various power centres, with the exception of the Taliban and allied insurgent groups. The hopes of the sponsors of the process for a strong central government did not materialise, and the country soon reverted to regional fiefdoms with familiar warlords. There is one difference. Today, the warlords are largely content with local influence and control, and respect constitutional processes and a modicum central authority. The fact that elections, however flawed, have been held twice when Afghanistan had no tradition of an electoral process, underscores the extent and reality of the change, notwithstanding the simmering insurgency in the southern parts of Afghanistan.

Afghanistan faces a test in the transition it will undergo in 2014. The bulk of US/NATO forces will withdraw and their active combat mission will come to an end. The recently completed election process is set to bring about a political change of guard. In view of the recent developments in Iraq and Ukraine, the Obama administration cannot make a complete military exit from Afghanistan. The two contenders in the Afghan presidential race, who are now part of the national government, have publicly committed to signing the Bilateral Security Agreement. The Afghans generally favour a residual US military presence as insurance against a large scale Taliban activity or civil war. Such a presence would also guarantee the continuation of the Western military and economic assistance that Afghanistan needs. The Americans argue that such presence would cushion the transition and help the newly organised Afghan army to remain together.

The controversy over the run-off elections has been ominous. But the two principal contestants came under enormous pressure to avoid a disastrous confrontation. The US interceded to work out an arrangement for a UN-supervised recount of vote, with hints that there will be constitutional adjustment to a winner-take-all political system. Finally, with active engagement of US Secretary of State John Kerry, the two contenders have agreed to a power-sharing arrangement in a national unity government, with the runner up accepting a newly created position of Chief Executive Officer (CEO). This is an unprecedented political experiment in Afghanistan based on a polity of coalition, and a role for all stake holders in governance. It is yet to be seen whether this

power-sharing arrangement and diarchy at the top between the President and CEO will be workable. Principally, it is a challenge for the Afghan leadership. International engagement will also be critical. Any breakdown would threaten to unravel the fledgling political system shaped by the Bonn process, encourage the Taliban, and lead to intensified violence which remained contained during the election process.

The failure of the Taliban to disrupt the electoral process suggests both the limitations of Taliban capacity, and the improved ability of the Afghan army to protect major cities. By its very nature, the Taliban insurgency wields localised control in areas which were traditionally under the Taliban influence, mainly for reasons of tribal affinity. For example, the Haqqanis enjoy support among the Zadran tribe that inhabits Khost, Paktia and Paktika. Helmand, Uruzgan and Qandahar are home provinces of a large part of the Afghan Taliban leadership. The Taliban are also capable of intensified activity in rural areas of southern and eastern Afghanistan and targeted attacks outside these areas¹². More importantly, partly because of the improved capacity of ANA and partly on account of the expected residual US/NATO military presence, the Taliban can no longer launch military operations and manoeuvres at a significant scale, which were reminiscent of the Afghan traditional warfare in bygone centuries and the hallmark of Taliban military strategies in the mid-1990's. A surge in small-scale Taliban operations and suicide attacks are disruptive, but do not add to overthrowing the government or re-establishing Taliban control over the country.

Since 2002 when the early experiment to organise the Afghan army went awry¹³, the Afghan army has undergone quite a few formative phases under US/NATO oversight. The US/NATO objective is to build a strength of nearly 228,500 by 2014 which is considered to be sufficient for counter-insurgency purposes. The big question is about the sustainability of its size and financial support, which at present is entirely dependent on US/NATO funding. The Chicago NATO Summit in May 2012 pledged an annual assistance of US \$4.1 billion for financing and training of the ANA after 2014. This is not an open-ended promise. By 2015, Kabul is supposed to contribute US \$500 million, and then to gradually increase its allocation and to self-finance the army by 2025. The aid is bound to shrink if the conflict starts tapering off, and at that point ANA may correspondingly undergo down-sizing, either as a calculated measure or simply by attrition on account of the drying up of funding. The Afghan economy is not expected to grow sufficiently any time soon to be able to support a large Afghan army, which has a history of dissipating under changed circumstances.

The Afghan economy has thus far been dependent on US/NATO engagement and the war effort. Urban centres show economic vibrancy and a good deal of construction activity, especially in areas of relative calm. Rural Afghanistan, especially in the south, continues to live as always at subsistence levels. Afghan exports remain less than \$0.5 billion dollars, while remittances account for close to \$2.5 billion. Imports, on the other hand, are in the range of \$7 billion. The economy suffers from acute systemic problems of revenue generation which was barely 11 per cent of the GDP, estimated at US \$19 billion according to 2012 official figures. The allies were committed to reconstruction, as evident from successive donor conferences¹⁴. On the whole, reconstruction has been tentative and largely a consequence of the resources that the allies brought into the country for maintaining their military presence. The reconstruction effort lacked focus and planning and suffered from corruption.

For the resources committed in pledges, progress on development projects especially for job creation and in the critical agricultural sector has been modest at best. Much of the focus had been on education and human resource development through training programmes, which has made a difference¹⁵. Ashraf Ghani, a former World Bank senior official and the front runner in the presidential elections, when asked, pointed to the potential for development by exploiting some of the known mineral resources, rather than energising any of the existing sectors of economy. In any event, development of mineral resources will take time, and requires stability to attract foreign capital for investment. Besides reconstruction, hope for stabilisation of Afghanistan rested on another pillar- reconciliation.

The much publicised emphasis on the need for reconciliation was paradoxically based on an unclear, if not flawed, premise. By definition, reconciliation is meant to be achieved between hostile parties in a conflict situation. In Afghanistan, despite Pakistan's plea that reconcilable Afghan Taliban be brought into the fold of the Bonn process, the United States proceeded to lump the Afghan Taliban together with Al Qaeda and declared them all as terrorists. This overlooked the fact that the Afghan Taliban had no direct role in 9/11 and that they were part of the Afghan political landscape. The reconciliation effort largely focused on creating an institutional structure to wean away Taliban fighters, and disarm and reintegrate them into Afghan society. Washington hesitantly started reviewing its policy by late 2009, but by then the Taliban had regrouped and become active. The incipient US interest in reconciliation visible in 2010-11 was marked by ambivalence towards the Taliban¹⁶, and it soon faded.

It is moot whether the reconciliation effort had a chance of success. In the early days of the Bonn process, an earnest effort to reach out to the Taliban could have caused important defections, and weakened and isolated the hard-line leadership that has an ideological mindset. This leadership would not have accepted the Bonn process or the system and the constitution it produced. Consensus and compromise is not part of their vocabulary. Following Obama administration's review in 2009, the Taliban leadership spurned overtures from the Karzai government and the High Peace Council, and instead wanted to hold direct talks with the occupying power. The Qatar initiative¹⁷ to arrange such a dialogue proved abortive when the Americans balked on account of Karzai's publicly expressed opposition. Karzai objected to any direct contact between the US and the Taliban. The Americans appear to have settled for letting the Afghans themselves manage and lead the process¹⁸.

Karzai's successor is expected to renew efforts for reconciliation by accommodating Taliban influence at local levels, but within the parameters of the system and the constitution. On this count, he may have better success with groups allied to the Taliban, in particular the Haqqanis and Hakmatyar¹⁹. Kabul and the Americans will, however, largely bank on gradual erosion of the influence and hold of the hard-line leadership. They believe this can be achieved with cooperation from Pakistan.

Regional and International Context

9/11 has altered the regional and international context of Afghanistan in the sense that world powers are now keenly aware of the danger of allowing Afghanistan, or for that matter any other region around the world, to slip into isolation and to become a safe haven for radicalised non-state actors with a global agenda. The level of attention that Afghanistan will attract can vary, but it will not disappear from international sight as it did following the Soviet exit. Today, the most visible aspect of international engagement is the US/NATO military, economic and political presence in Afghanistan. At another level, international and regional activity pivoted on Afghanistan relates to economic assistance and initiatives for peace and to the stabilisation of Afghanistan. Pakistan is a critical part of the Afghanistan theatre, as it is itself sucked into the conflict. Its role and policies are often viewed as integral to regional rivalries with major impact on the Afghan situation.

Washington explains the need for its residual military presence for counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism, and to help keep ANA together. There is broad acceptance of this argument, yet speculation also abounds about a hidden and

undeclared agenda. Firstly, if they can, armies are in the habit of keeping a foothold in areas they once occupy as proverbial listening posts or operation bases, to deal with unforeseen developments. Some analysts link this presence to the need to keep a watchful eye on the incipient insurgency in China's western regions, and, secondly, on any possible contingency arising from Pakistan's nuclear weapons²⁰. Both these possibilities have been the subject of press commentary, but essentially they amount to a stretched argument. The United States has a strong presence in Central Asian states which provides it a far better vantage point to observe developments in Xinjiang. Such surveillance in this information age depends more on communications rather than physical presence. As to Pakistan's nuclear assets, it is difficult to envisage realistic scenarios where bases in Afghanistan could add to the capacity of the United States to meet a conceivable contingency.

Most regional states will be comfortable as long as the US military presence is limited in scale and purpose to counter-terrorism, which represents a shared concern for all major powers, including China and Russia. Iran will view this presence from the eyes of its Afghan allies, principally Tajiks and Hazaras, as a bulwark against a return of the Taliban. Also, the ANA capabilities are largely untested and it needs vast funds for maintenance which only the United States can provide. Yet, Russia and China will keep a wary eye if the US military presence turns permanent and expands in scope and activities. Officially, Pakistan has adopted a neutral stance that veers towards looking at it as a benign factor for stability in Afghanistan. It may discourage other regional players, in particular India, from seeking an overt military role. Many in Pakistan, however, also view the US military presence negatively and as a provocation to the Taliban, who use it as a justification to persist in militancy.

Themes of peace, security and reconstruction have been the constant staples at the series of international conferences set off as part of the Bonn process. Periodic donors' conferences have been held, starting with Tokyo in 2002. However, the London Donors Conference in 2006 was different in that it also reviewed and reset the Bonn process. The latest Donors Conference in Tokyo in 2012 pledged US \$16 billion, but there has been considerable discrepancy between the pledges and the amounts disbursed. The NATO sponsored Bonn Conference in December 2011, marking a decade of NATO intervention, and the subsequent May 2012 NATO Summit Conference in Chicago, addressed the issues of transition. Each occasion strongly reaffirmed support for peace and stability in Afghanistan, and for the territorial unity and integrity of the country. The November 2011 declaration of the regional conference held in Istanbul and

described as the “Heart of Asia” initiative was a compendium of all the declared international positions to assist Afghanistan in various sectors.

The Istanbul declaration affirmed a commitment to stability and peace in Afghanistan also, rooted in support for its “sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity”, and to reconstruction and an “inclusive Afghan-led process of reconciliation” under the constitution. The declaration placed considerable emphasis on “eliminating terrorism in all its forms”, “preventing safe havens for terrorists from the entire region” and dismantling “terrorist sanctuaries.” In deference to Pakistani sensitivities, it did not refer to overland transit trade along the north-south axis in the section describing Afghanistan as a “land bridge.” The other, more significant omission was any reference to the Taliban. The declaration also avoided mention of “Afghanistan neutrality” which sometimes echoed in UN corridors and was once favoured by academicians, but never attracted the Afghans, nor did it fit Afghanistan’s internal or external conditions.

The high sounding declaration by no means spelt out an end to the deep distrust and rivalry among the regional players who had gathered in Istanbul, and included Pakistan and India as well as Iran and Saudi Arabia, in addition to China, Russia and all Central Asian states. NATO and the United States attended as observers. Indian influence in Afghanistan rankles with those in Pakistan whose threat perception has been India-centric and rooted in the history of conflict between the two South Asian neighbours. There are genuine worries over a possible Indian role, discussed earlier, to assist and train the ANA, and over the documented collusion between the Afghan and Indian intelligence agencies to the detriment of Pakistani interests, specially their support to dissident elements in Baluchistan.

There can be no denial of longstanding and close relations that Delhi enjoyed with Kabul, with the exception of the Taliban interlude, when Kabul had no diplomatic representation with the sole exception of Pakistan. That anomaly is unlikely to be repeated. Association of Pakistani policies with the Taliban has earned India the goodwill of an array of anti-Taliban elements, in particular those affiliated with the Northern Alliance who were catapulted into power by the US military intervention. India also provides significant economic assistance to Afghanistan. Yet the most inveterate critics of Pakistan in Kabul would admit Afghanistan’s dependence on Pakistan and the need for cooperative relations between these “conjoint twins”²¹. Also, Pakistan-India rivalry must remain contained, otherwise it will add to the instability in Afghanistan.

Iran has long maintained close ties with the Shia minority Hazaras and Persian-speaking Tajiks. Once relieved of the burden of its war with Iraq in the 1980's, Tehran started paying attention to Afghanistan and pushed for an assured share for these groups in any eventual settlement post-Soviet withdrawal. It supported the Tajiks and Shia Hazara leaders during the Mujahedin infighting, and the Northern Alliance against the Taliban advance in the north. Iran also ingratiated important warlords, including Ishmael Khan of Herat and Gulbadin Hekmatyar, who had to flee Afghanistan with the rise of the Taliban. Ironically, even though it came about as a result of the US intervention, the Bonn dispensation worked out well for pro-Iran elements in Afghanistan, which suited Iran. Iranian and Indian interests also appear to coincide. However, Iran does not provoke the same anxiety as Pakistan shows vis-à-vis India. Pakistan and Iran have maintained dialogue over Afghanistan, regardless of the history of failures of their sporadic efforts to mediate for peace among Afghan factions.

The Saudis had supported the Taliban until Mullah Omar refused to hand over Osama bin Laden and caused offense to Prince Turki al Faisal in 1997. Their interest in Afghan affairs has since remained depleted. Indirectly, however, the Taliban are beneficiaries of private Saudi largess available to Sunni Islamist networks with Wahabi inclinations. The acute Saudi-Iran antipathy which fuels Shia-Sunni hostility in Syria and Iraq does not appear to play out in Afghanistan, where the sectarian divide is not fundamental to the conflict.

The other regional powers, the Central Asian states, Russia and China, have a common interest in keeping at bay and blocking the Taliban or similar Jihadist movements from taking control of Afghanistan. They cannot overlook the fact that Taliban provided shelter to dissident elements and insurgents of Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) and Chechens. The Central Asians have interest in transit trade through Afghanistan right up to India, while China has already invested in the development of Aynak iron and copper resources. These possibilities demand conditions of normalcy and peace in Afghanistan. These northern neighbours show no latent rivalry aimed at seeking influence in Afghanistan or scrambling for its resources. They have little to gain from escalation in Afghanistan, and would like to see a functioning and stable government in Kabul. They will act to protect their respective interests in case Kabul collapses or if there is resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan.

This discussion raises the question of Afghanistan's potential as a resource rich country and as a "land bridge" figuratively described by the Istanbul initiative. Afghanistan does not possess any large scale proven mineral resources,

but potential exists as evident from the discovery of iron and copper ore deposits at Aynak in Logar Province. China Metallurgical Group (MCC) signed a \$3 billion contract with the Afghan government in 2007 for extraction and plans to develop a rail link with Pakistan railway system for its transportation to China. Despite their fairly protracted military presence and reasonably stable conditions in large parts of northern and central Afghanistan, European and American companies have shown little interest in surveys for mineral resources for future exploitation. There has been long-standing interest in gas from Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan reaching Pakistan and India. However, besides security and feasibility issues, there are question marks about Turkmen-guaranteed availability of gas reserves for the project. At one time, the Russian conglomerate Gazprom claimed to have control over most of the reserves. Pakistan is also interested in the transmission of excess hydro-power from Central Asia, especially Tajikistan, through Afghanistan.

Afghanistan's importance as a "land bridge" largely applies to possible communication, commerce and energy corridors linking Central Asia with South Asia, where the largest economy is India. This is encapsulated in the North-South Silk Road idea supported by the United States. The idea could not generate a reference in the Istanbul declaration. Central Asia itself has active road and rail links with China and Russia and onwards to Europe. Central Asian proposals for the revival of the ancient Silk Road bypass Afghanistan, and instead speak of trans-Euro-Asian road and rail links from China across Central Asian states to Europe²². The Caspian Basin and Kazakhstan are particularly rich in energy resources, minerals and rare earth metals, which do not need southern corridors to reach Europe or the US in the West or China and Japan in the East.

Unless unexpected discoveries are made in the future, Afghanistan's economy itself is modest and offers little attraction to major economies of the world. Its significance as a transit country is for India, but activation of such a north-south land corridor depends on Pakistan. At present, most of the Indian trade with Central Asia passes through Iran's Chahbahar port. There are no precise surveys, but the potential of commerce generated by overland transit of Indian goods through Afghanistan (and Pakistan) may turn out to be modest, even if all political and security issues are resolved. This does not imply that activation of these corridors will not benefit the region, including Pakistan. It also stands to reason that development of overland transit trade will create a stronger stake for India in the stability of Afghanistan, and it will be less prone to use its presence in Afghanistan to do mischief to undermine Pakistan's interests.

Impact on Pakistan and Policy Perspectives

The impact of the three decades of conflict has been deep, and permeates every dimension of Pakistani society: political, economic and social. On the whole, Pakistan has paid a heavy price for getting involved and then sucked into the three decades of Afghan conflict. Except for the fact that Afghanistan turning into the last front of the Cold War allowed Pakistan space to pursue its nuclear programme, Pakistan bore the brunt of the injurious fall-out of the conflict.

Pakistan missed out on the globalisation that swept across many regions of the world beginning in the early 1980's, and economically transformed and lifted them out of poverty and social backwardness. The conflict and attendant extremist religious militancy and violence have fractured the society and induced confusion, which has debilitated its capacity to comprehend and address the contemporary challenges of development and modernisation. Besides circumstances beyond its control, Pakistan's policies and predicament suffered from a drift in its internal politics, induced by opportunism and expediency, and an inability to understand and influence the dynamics of events and forces which Pakistan itself had partly helped to unfold and unleash. The multiple aspects of these deleterious developments have already been mentioned and analysed. The focus of the following discussion will be on recommendations for a way forward.

The basic premise is that the continuation of the conflict hurts Pakistan more than any other country, with the exception of Afghanistan itself. Secondly, to play favourites in Afghanistan or seek influence under any guise will provoke regional rivalries and prolong the conflict. Pakistan should proceed with confidence in the soundness of a relationship that has strong cultural and historical underpinnings, and powerful affinities and constant people-to-people interaction. Nothing can offset this strength. Also, Afghanistan has changed for the better following the US/NATO intervention. As this intervention has entered an end phase, it is in Pakistan's interest that Afghanistan stays the course, and gradually stabilises with reconciliation and economic development. A clear narrative that assimilates these lessons based on past experience is needed for a forward looking policy to be embraced institutionally, by political and military leaders in Pakistan.

Operation Zarb e Azb has been unavoidable in order to ensure a necessary degree of respect for the writ of the government, and needs to be carried through to its logical end like the 2009 operation in Swat. No normal country where systems have a reasonable chance to function can allow private militias and regions in a state of endemic insurgency to operate unchecked. For success, the

operation requires cooperation and coordination with the Afghan government at the political and military levels, as well as with US/NATO military command, regardless of the current process of draw-down. This is an opportunity for re-engaging Kabul and establishing a new, positive policy orientation. Broad policy parameters in this context are suggested below:

- Islamabad and Kabul should manage their affairs as between two states on the basis of the established norms of inter-state relations, and the confidence that neither state has designs against the other state. This will principally mean that we deal with the government in Kabul and give up backing any other Afghan groups at its expense. Pakistan cannot act as guarantor for the interests of the Afghan Pushtuns, a role that they do not expect Pakistan to play. Such a “Pushtunistan policy in reverse” will not help. Similarly, temptations and thinking underlying precepts such as ‘strategic depth’, ‘Taliban option’ or ‘Taliban as an asset’, or the ‘Pushtun card’ will have to be discouraged and abandoned.

Pakistan’s neutral stance and generally recognised “non-interference” during the Afghan elections has earned international appreciation. As the Afghan political transition remains in an uncertain phase, Pakistan must not allow its policy to fall into any possible political or ethnic schisms, or get into the crosshairs of Kabul politics.

Pakistani political and military leaders have a special responsibility. They will have to restrain within the country those Pakistani elements who misinterpret Islam to defy the concept of nation-state, and reject contemporary norms of inter-state relations to carry out a self-defined Jihadi agenda. Another challenge is the presence of safe havens for the Afghan Taliban and their cross-border insurgent activity. The peculiar ground realities, especially the demographic overlap, make it impossible for Pakistan to deny refuge to Afghans entering Pakistan. However, the government cannot acquiesce in their military operations using Pakistan’s territory. We must be seen as making credible efforts to discourage such operations and coordinate border control with Afghan authorities. To overlook cross-border activities by the Afghan Taliban or the Haqqanis or other Afghan insurgent elements would not only fuel conflict in Afghanistan²³, it will in retaliation draw a backlash in the form of Kabul supporting insurgent activity inside Pakistan, in which Kabul would be helped by other regional players, particularly by India.

Treating the Afghan Taliban and other insurgent elements as potential assets does not serve any conceivable strategic objective of Pakistan. The improbability of their gaining control of Kabul and the negative repercussions of this unlikely scenario have been discussed earlier. Pakistan's reliance on them to neutralise Indian influence will be counter-productive, and will push the Kabul government and other anti-Taliban political forces closer to India. Instead, Pakistan can balance Indian influence by working with Kabul and NATO members, and persuading the Taliban to become part of the Afghan political process.

- Pakistan can play a constructive role in promoting reconciliation, but such a role can only be played in tandem with the Kabul government, not even with the United States, which in any event is wary of taking any lead following the moribund Qatari initiative. Pakistani interlocutors need to be candid as to the limits of their influence with the Taliban, nor can Pakistan oblige Kabul or Washington by hounding out Afghan Taliban leaders. However, Pakistan will be expected to restrain any Taliban militancy based in Pakistani territory. To carry out such activities, the Afghan Taliban leaders and their allied groups should move to their strongholds in Afghanistan. An important prerequisite for confidence building and credibility is that all sides must be candid with one other in setting parameters for cooperation and spelling out concerns about each other's positions.
- Pakistan needs to give a fresh look to managing the Durand Line and the status of FATA, which are inextricably linked to the Afghan policy. It will be futile, if not counter-productive, to push any Afghan government for de jure recognition of the Durand Line. However, operatively, Durand Line remains a functional border and as such it should be better managed. The well-established easement rights do not preclude setting up designated crossing points and the introduction of identity cards for the movement of members of divided tribes. Pakistan's efforts for this purpose were opposed by Kabul in 2006-07, but there is no reason to not revive proposals that require Afghan cooperation, and to introduce well thought-out measures unilaterally.

FATA cannot remain an ungovernable, lawless territory. Pakistan's claim of sovereignty imposes certain responsibility, and it is time to consider how the territory can be integrated with the rest of Pakistan. The current Operation Zarb e Azb is aimed at pacifying and neutralising domestic and outside militant elements. This phase will require follow-

up with political, administrative and economic measures aimed at initiating the overdue integration.

- Afghanistan's landlocked status and the concomitant issue of transit trade are important dimensions of relations with Pakistan, which underscores interdependence as well as a source of friction. In the 2010 revised transit trade agreement, Pakistan has more or less accommodated all Afghan demands, except those relating to overland transit of Indian goods to Afghanistan. Like other countries, India can send goods through the Karachi port. Pakistan authorities need to ensure that the facilities already accorded under the 2010 agreement are kept in place, and the red tape and corruption is minimised. The Afghans control a large part of the transportation business in this sector.
- Overland transit for Indian goods is essentially part of Pakistan-India trade relations. While Pakistan no longer links bilateral trade to progress on resolution of political issues with India, the issue of MFN treatment, market access and non-tariff barriers are proving complex and provoke protectionist resistance in both countries. There is significant opposition to permitting overland transit to India, on account of fears that such facility will undermine the advantage that proximity confers on Pakistani goods at present. This point is debatable²⁴. However, the argument cuts both ways. By blocking the transit, Pakistan denies to itself the benefits of becoming a hub of commerce at the cross roads of South Asia, Central Asia and West Asia. Much of the idea may prove to be rhetorical, but without opening routes to India it will simply not fly. Also, if India develops a significant stake in overland transit, as already explained, it may even yield political dividend. Much of the discussion about overland transit is academic, when the two countries have yet to succeed in maintaining a regular uninterrupted dialogue. Pakistan should, however, continue to make exceptions in emergency circumstances such as expeditious transit of disaster relief assistance.

Energy corridors through Afghanistan have an important potential, especially if the situation stabilises and projects such as TAPI or UTAPI materialise, which are becoming doubtful with the passage of time and the continued instability in Afghanistan. Limited projects such as CASA 1000, based on energy transmission from Central Asia through Afghanistan to supply energy needs in Pakistan, can build interdependence and economic muscle for a stronger relationship. At another level, Pakistan and Afghanistan will need an agreement for the

sharing of water resources, in view of the fact that Kabul River forms part of the Indus Basin.

- International conferences, whether under the auspices of the Bonn process, NATO, donor countries or the United Nations, or regional initiatives such as the Istanbul “Heart of Asia” initiative are helpful and need to be viewed as vehicles to contain, rather than to play out regional and international rivalries. In the past, Pakistan has been wary of Indian participation in such conferences, suspecting that these help India gain influence in Afghanistan. Pakistani objections to the Indian participation only deepened distrust and served little useful purpose, since such conferences mostly end up reiterating unexceptionable principles and norms, and commitment to reconstruction in Afghanistan.
- For its part, once regular dialogue is resumed at an appropriate level, Pakistan should consider developing an informal conversation with India on Afghanistan, which can possibly help to clear the air of mutual suspicions about each other’s policies. The multiple contacts between the two countries provide opportunity for them to do so.
- When the situation in Afghanistan starts improving, Pakistan should gradually push Kabul and the international community to resettle Afghan refugees in areas where there is calm and peace. The UN and donor countries should help with resources. Meanwhile, there is need to document the refugees, and for some monitoring. Many refugee camps and settlements have become “no-go” areas for Pakistani law enforcement personnel, and breeding grounds for extremist militancy and violence. As the operation in North Waziristan proceeds, militants in such enclaves should get a message that the government is now serious about the enforcement of its writ.
- Finally, the people-to-people interaction between Pakistan and Afghanistan is unique, historically rooted in a constant broad two-way osmosis, but it is informal and limited mostly to members of divided tribes in the bordering regions. An official government level and inter-institutional interaction is largely missing. There is need to build this dimension of relations through increased exchanges at the political, cultural and commercial levels. Regular and increased visits of parliamentary, business, media, cultural, educational and scientific/technical delegations, and large scale programmes for scholarships and training in diverse fields can build and strengthen a pro-

Pakistan constituency among the Afghans. It is a pity that most literate Afghans are critical of Pakistan and view it as a sponsor of the Taliban and retrogression. The Afghan diaspora and Afghan intellectuals are particularly alienated from Pakistan. The trend is growing because ever since 9/11, the bulk of Afghan students in the West are non-Pushtuns with an understandably prejudiced view of Pakistan. The situation will take long to redress, and will require sustained and steady effort.

On 25 June 2014, the advisor to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on national security and foreign affairs, Sartaj Aziz, made a statement²⁵ in the Pakistan Senate on foreign policy which affirmed that “our Afghan policy is aimed at building a friendly and good-neighbourly relationship, in which flawed concepts of the past like ‘strategic depth’ have no place. The key principles ...include mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-interference and no favourites....Our efforts are focused on intensified political dialogue, measures to prevent use of territory against each other, support for Afghan peace and reconciliation process, streamlining transit trade issues, up-scaling bilateral assistance, enhanced border management, refugee return, counter-narcotics, and intensified dialogue at regional and international level.” Visits during the preceding months by Afghan Senior Advisor Rangin Dadfar Spanta and eminent Pakistani politician Mahmud Khan Achakzai sent to Kabul as special envoy expressed similar sentiments, and pointed to a new upturn in bilateral relations. These public statements set the tone for the right policy narrative. Much will depend on how the two sides translate, observe and implement these precepts into practical policy.

Notes & References

- ¹ In 1873, the British reached an agreement with Russia (Clarendon-Gorchakov agreement) in which Russia accepted Afghanistan as being outside its zone of influence and agreed to Amu Darya as the limit of its future expansion in Central Asia. In this “Great Game” the British needed to establish the southern borders of Afghanistan. This came after the 1878 British campaign which ended with King Mohammad Yaqub Khan signing the treaty of Gandamak and ceding to the British the Khyber Pass and districts of Kurram, Pishin and Sibi. Later, under pressure from the British and with British promise of support in case the Russians crossed the Amu Darya, Amir Abdur Rahman Khan signed the 1993 Durand agreement to delineate the boundary.
- ² Abdus Samad Ghaus, former Deputy Foreign Minister, mentions about instances of Moscow’s meddling in domestic Afghan matters that upset Sardar Daoud in his book.

- Abdus Samad Ghaus, *The Fall of Afghanistan: An Insider's Account*, (Washington: Pergamon-Brassey's International Defence Publishers, 1988), 127-46.
- 3 Just one month before his overthrow, Sardar Daoud visited Pakistan in March 1978 and made a strong statement at a Shalimar public reception in Lahore in support of close relations with Pakistan.
- 4 Riaz M. Khan, *Untying the Afghan knot: Negotiating Soviet Withdrawal*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 280.
- 5 Riaz Mohammad Khan, *Afghanistan and Pakistan: Conflict, Extremism and Resistance to Modernity*, (Washington: John Hopkins University Press, Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2011), 126.
- 6 Saleem Safi, "Taqqseem Afghanistan ka Khadsha: Haqiqat ya Afsana," *Jang*, (July16, 2014).
- 7 "Afghans to Alter the Government," *NYT*, July14, 2014.
- 8 Rabbani was a Tajik. The other two major recipients were Yunus Khalis and Gulbadin Hekmatyar.
- 9 Pervaiz Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire*, (New York: Free Press, 2006), 209.
- 10 Amir Mir, "Mulla Omar Gets a Rude Shock," *The News*, (May30, 2014)
- 11 Factors that had generated empathy for the Taliban range from the rise of the religious right and ethnic feelings to anti-Americanism in Pakistan. But a discussion of these factors is beyond the purview of this analysis.
- 12 *NYT*, July 27, 2014. Taliban Making Military Gains in Afghanistan- reported Taliban activities in Logar, Wardak, Kapisa and Nangarhar.
- 13 General Fahim was asked to raise a 70,000 strong Afghan army which he did by recruiting an almost exclusively non-Pushtun force. The ANA is now better balanced and organized.
- 14 Donors Conferences included Tokyo (2002), Berlin (2004), London (2006), Rome (2007), Paris (2008), the Hague (2009), London (2010 and Tokyo (2012). The 2012 Tokyo Conference put total international pledges in economic assistance for Afghanistan at US dollar 35 billion.
- 15 According to Afghan Ministry of Education data the total enrolment in 2012 had reached over 7.8 million of which over 3 million were female students.
- 16 Vali Nasr, *The Dispensable Nation*, (New York: Doubleday, 2013)
- The work highlights confusion in the US approach and differences at the top level between Richard Holbrooke and White House officials over reaching out to the Taliban for reconciliation.
- 17 ISI also reportedly arranged a meeting between US officials and a leading member of the Haqqani group.
- 18 Rahimullah Yusufzai, writing in *Jang*, Rawalpindi, on 2 July 2011 and 5 July 2011, also suggested that US interest in reaching out to the Taliban was also meant to seek the release of Bowe Bergdahl.
- 19 Mohammad Khan belonging to Hekmatyar's party is one of the two vice-presidential nominees with Abdullah who had also reportedly reached out the Taliban leadership in 2013. Similarly, Hekmatyar reportedly had contacts with the Kabul government.

- ²⁰ NYT commentary by David Sanger and Eric Schmitt, January 26, 2014. The subject is also touched upon in Sanger's 2009 publication.
David Sanger, *Confront and Conceal: Obama's Secret Wars*, (New York: Crown Publishers, 2012), 46.
- ²¹ In a couple of formal banquet speeches, President Karzai described Pakistan and Afghanistan as "joined at the hip."
- ²² Riaz Mohammad Khan, *Afghanistan and Pakistan: Conflict, Extremism and Resistance to Modernity* (Washington: John Hopkins University Press and Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2011), 202-203.
- ²³ Director General ISPR stated on 27 June 2014 that operation Zarb e Azb is against all militant groups "including the Haqqani group." The US accused the Pakistan army and the ISI of supporting the Haqqani group. On 22 September 2011, former Chairman US Joint Chiefs Committee, Admiral Mike Mullen described the Haqqani group as "veritable arm" of the ISI. The skepticism persists, see comment in the Diplomat by Michael Klugeman "Haqqani Threat to US-Pakistan Détente" posted on 31 July 2014.
- ²⁴ In many sectors where bulk supply is involved, it is difficult to off-set Pakistan's proximity advantage. For example, much of the cement requirement for construction in Afghanistan is supplied by cement factories built for the purpose in FATA rather than the factories located further inland.
- ²⁵ Pakistan Foreign Office Press Release, (June 25, 2014).