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CONTENTS

QUEST FOR PEACE IN AFGHANISTAN

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I still cannot understand how we, the international community, and the Afghan Government have managed to arrive at a situation in which everything is coming together in 2014 — elections, new President, economic transition, military transition and all this — whereas the negotiations for the peace process have not really started.

— Former French diplomat Bernard Bajolet, Kabul, April 2013.[1]

Introduction

After more than three decades of war, Afghanistan today remains a very complex society, struggling within an unstable political and security landscape. Several years of fighting and anarchy has left it fragmented and deeply factionalized. On the one hand there is the conflicting relationship between the Afghan Government and people with allied countries; and on the other, combating insurgents have paved the way for social and economic breakdown of the society. At each level various groups and factions are locked in deep-rooted, multifaceted conflicts, mostly striving for capturing a share of power or resources. The outcome is massive collateral damage and a high rate of warfare misconduct. Consequently, concrete and sustainable development, the most desired element of the Afghan peace process, seems lost, even within the much touted "2014 Withdrawal" policy. Certain ambiguities regarding the 2014 handing over, and the transitional phase with future security forces, pose formidable challenges. Most of the post-2014 projections are pessimistic, and raise serious concerns, such as insurgents recapturing power, societal breakdown and re-ignition of civil war. However, the unwavering determination and

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perseverance of the Afghan people, especially the youth, is seen as a glimmer of hope.

This study presents a chronology of various efforts made over the last decade in hopes of achieving peace, and analyses the efforts currently being made. It attempts to give insight into President Karzai's policy of Peace and Reconciliation, explores the dynamics of central and influential stakeholders, and identifies the role played by various members of the international community, especially Pakistan.

Peace

The terms "peace process" or "peacebuilding" have been used broadly since the early 90s. The concept of post-conflict peacebuilding is generally defined as "action to identify and support structures which tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid relapse into conflict."[2] Peacebuilding involves a wide range of approaches, processes and stages involved in transformation towards more sustainable and peaceful relationships, governance modes and structures.[3] The peace process can be seen as "the diplomatic and political efforts to negotiate a resolution to a conflict, especially a long-standing conflict." Harold Saunders described peace process as "a political process in which conflicts are resolved by peaceful means. They are a mixture of politics, diplomacy, changing relationships, negotiation, mediation, and dialogue in both official and unofficial arenas."[4] In this regard an effective peace mechanism and negotiations are desirable and worth pursuing despite the risks and fears of failure attached with the process.

An unfortunate reason for the stalling and slow-pace of the peace process was the mismanaged US policy that gave an opportunity to the ousted Taliban to regain a solid foothold in the country. Now, an important task for the policymakers is to identify a peace model or method of peaceful negotiations which focuses on greater peacebuilding in Afghanistan. This will shift the focus from individual to national level and from personal to the political sphere. The culture of war has to be replaced by a culture of peace. A consensus-oriented mechanism needs to be formed for this purpose, to help pave way for a form of "national reconciliation." A two-way peace and reconciliation approach is a must, at national and regional levels.

Reconciliation and reintegration

Kriesberg defines reconciliation as the "process of developing a mutual conciliatory accommodation between antagonistic or formerly antagonistic persons or groups. It often refers to a relatively amicable relationship, typically established after a rupture in the relationship involving one-sided or mutual infliction of extreme injury."[5] The concept of reintegration has been viewed narrowly by both practical and theoretical thinkers who traditionally focus on economic and social assimilation into civilian life as the goal of reintegration. Acknowledgement of the importance of political assimilation of ex-combatants was missing. Hence, it was proposed that reintegration should cover three

aspects. First, the target group should be ex-combatants and their families. Second, the aim of the reintegration process should be their economic, political and social assimilation into civil society. Finally, the method should be broad enough to include different forms of reintegration other than programmes and projects organized by international donors. Following this, reintegration is seen as "a societal process aiming at the economic, political, and social assimilation of ex-combatants and their families into civil society." [6]

The central negotiators

The two key actors central to Afghan peace negotiations are the Afghan Taliban and the Afghanistan Government.

The Afghan Taliban

Identity

For the past few years there has been talk of 'good' or 'moderate' Taliban with whom the international community and domestic opponents have been willing to reach an agreement. However, the question is, do moderate Taliban actually exist? And if yes, who are these Taliban? Are they the same old traditionalists remerging after defeat? Or, are they new resistance groups, operating under the banner of Taliban? Between 2001 and 2007, 'moderates' and 'extremists' were indistinguishable politically and legally. In American political discourse the term 'moderate' meant 'good' and applied to those who assented to American policies while those who did not, were termed 'bad' or 'radicals.'[7]

The 'moderate Taliban' category gave an identity to constituencies within Taliban who sought to build a state. Their ambition depended on foreign helpers who did not share their ideology. Such claims of moderation became the calling cards for hopeful intermediaries and they formed a framework for negotiations with the international community. [8]

The labels of Taliban and *neo-Taliban* have lately been used to define the movement. A new style of violence, more aggressive in nature, has emerged on the surface. The two groups, the original Taliban movement and the neo-Taliban, share one principle despite having several differences. Both base the legitimacy of their cause in the enforcement of *Sharia* as the divine law in Afghanistan.[9] The term neo-Taliban is recognized to encompass the former and current agendas, players, and engagement strategies.[10] The neo-Taliban can be divided ideologically into two groups. The first one aligns itself with Al-Qaeda and follows views adopted by Mullah Omar and radical Taliban. Whereas the other group seems to have opted for traditional Pashtun roots, trying to become a voice of not only the Pashtuns, but of all the traditionalist Muslims in Afghanistan. This category draws its support from a large number of alienated Pashtuns. It has gradually become more dominant by integrating foreign fighters into its ranks.[11]

Some within the neo-Taliban ranks are more moderate, seeking to become a voice in the political dialogue. [12] The neo-Taliban adopted a more

flexible and less traditional attitude towards imported techniques and technologies from their Arab jihadist allied guests as a result of their influence. The orthodox style was radically shifted with the use of broader ways of documenting, interviewing and broadcasting their propaganda through video technology. The Neo-Taliban got deeply assimilated in the international jihadist movement after 2001. The internationalization of Taliban ideology reveals their strategies as it enabled strong external support to them, in particular financial support for their mounting insurgency. [13] The resurgence of Taliban is believed to be multidimensional and based on an uncoordinated alliance of forces, such as crestfallen political personalities, factions based on centuries old rivalries, and foreign interests. Their financial support network, including drug lords and warlords, helps further their cause.[14]

Composition

Under the neo-Taliban banner, and in general, Taliban are not a cohesive entity. They are highly decentralized and disordered, horizontally and vertically at both the top and lower levels. Despite their loyalty to Mullah Omar's leadership and his *Shura*, Taliban are more of a factionalized movement, now further divided among the old and new bands. They have been able to become a challenging force due to the larger political and security vacuum created by the Karzai administration in the country, which allowed the Taliban to gain both strategic and operational leverage against their opponents.[15]

Insurgent groups

The Afghan Taliban ranks are primarily directed by the Quetta Shura Taliban, headed by Mullah Omar, who calls himself *Amir-ul-Momineen* (Leader of the Faithful). Mullah Omar and his group still continue to call themselves the legitimate government of Afghanistan, which they call the 'Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan'. The Shura's operations have systematically spread from Southern Afghanistan to the West and North of the country, and it is by far the most active volatile group in Afghanistan. Virtually, all enemy groups operating in the country have sworn allegiance to Mullah Omar.[16] Among the affiliated groups the most prominent and aggressive are the Haqqani and Mansur Networks. All these groups are being pursued by international and Afghan actors to join the peace accord.[17]

The Haqqani network headed by Sirajuddin Haqqani is one of Afghanistan's most experienced insurgent groups. Although the group also comes under the larger umbrella of the Quetta Shura, it maintains its own command and control and line of operations. The network has engaged in various violent attacks inside Afghanistan, and has been a straining factor in Pakistan-US relations. Lately the organization has been intensely targeted by US drones that have succeeded in wiping off some of the top commanders.[18]

The other influential group is operating under the command of Abdul Latif Mansur and is an Afghanistan-based network, leading insurgency in the East of the country. Mansur had served as agriculture minister under the Taliban regime. Closely connected with the Haqqani network, his group is actively

fighting the US forces, and is known to have thwarted the American hunt for Bin Laden and other Al-Qaeda leaders during Operation Anaconda in March 2002.[19]

A comeback

In 2007-09, the Taliban had regained the capacity to assassinate top government officials. By 2008 Taliban also altered their strategy of targeting people, and started targeting only those affiliated with the government, international forces and Afghan National Security forces. At the same time, the general public opinion also began to shift from favouring the government and foreigners' strategy, and they started to willingly or unwillingly support the insurgents and distanced themselves from the government, in order to keep their communities safe.[20]

Basic positions & demands of the insurgents

The insurgent groups have a long list of demands to be met prior to any peace accord. The Taliban do not recognize the Afghan Constitution; do not recognize the Afghan Government as a legitimate one; they view the US and NATO as their primary enemies.[21] Their preconditions for peace talks are:

- Removal and no further presence of foreign military forces in Afghanistan, apart from temporary peacekeeping forces[22]
- To discuss only isolated issues such as prisoner exchanges and liaison office issues with the US and NATO since they are enemies[23]
- Security for insurgents and their families particularly in the South and Southeast of Afghanistan, from all the operating military forces, International Security Assistance Force, Afghan National Security Forces, and the Afghan National Security Directorate
- Recognition of Taliban as legitimate political actors in Afghanistan by the international community
- Removal of their key leaders from the United Nation's terrorists' list
- Enforcement of Islamic law in the country
- Removal of corrupt Afghan officials, like local commanders and government officials, exiling some of the most violent warlords, as identified by the Taliban[24]

The initially reluctant Haqqani network later showed willingness to participate in peace talks with the US, if Mullah Omar approved. But, at the same time, they asserted that they would still continue to attack the coalition forces in Afghanistan with the aim of establishing an Islamic state.[25]

Another noteworthy opposition group, the Hizb-e-Islami is led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. The Hizb showed a shift towards participating in peace talks and unlike the Taliban recognized the current Afghan Government as a

legitimate negotiating party. However, it set its own preconditions for talks, including:

— Fundamental reforms in the electoral law
— Withdrawal of all foreign troops
— Constitutional reforms[26]

The Afghan Government

The Afghanistan Government headed by President Hamid Karzai is dominated by the former Northern Alliance. The group's supporters are also positioned in top bureaucratic set-ups, including the Foreign Office, Afghan Police and Afghan National Army. The Alliance and President Karzai have faced criticism for encouraging an over-representation of ethnic minorities, primarily Uzbeks and Tajiks. The majority Pasthuns believe that they are not adequately represented at higher institutional levels. In the beginning, the new administration had a positive standing with the people, who appreciated its efforts in framing the Constitution, holding elections and leading the government setup. However, the Karzai administration soon began to lose support due to its inefficiency and allegations of corruption. This further enabled the Taliban to stage a gradual comeback starting with the rural areas and small towns, where the US and Karzai Government not only struggled to extend its jurisdiction[27] but also failed to win the hearts and minds of the people.

Turning point in Afghan strategy

We are still not out of the darkness, not yet safe against threats; […] we have yet not achieved our best desire of full security and individual safety for our citizens. The war on terror has not been won as per the desire of the people. The international community could not deliver on the purpose it came to take Afghanistan to its destination."

— President Karzai, addressing Traditional Loya Jirga, 16 November 2011.[28]

With US resources and attention diverted to Iraq and the resurgence of defeated and discredited Taliban in Afghanistan by 2005-06, delaying reconciliation efforts was a mistake that gave insurgents a chance to influence Afghan affairs.[29] Realizing the missing element in resolution of the national crisis and collateral damage from military strategy, President Karzai opened up to the possibility of devising a strategy around political negotiations with the Taliban. In 2009, in his inaugural speech, he outlined his policy priorities where peace and reconciliation was presented as key focus areas. He publicly invited the insurgents to voluntarily return and accept the Constitution of the country.[30]

National Consultative Peace Jirga (NCPJ)

After setting the policy goal, Karzai began working on mobilizing public support for the peace and reconciliation programme. For this purpose a three-day National Consultative Peace Jirga (NCPJ) was convened, in Kabul in June 2010. The Jirga, a Pashtun tradition, is an assembly of influential leaders held to resolve disputes. The NCPJ was held to discuss prospects of peace

negotiations and reconciliation with the Taliban.[31] A former president of Afghanistan and head of Jamiat-e-Islami, Burhanuddin Rabbani, acted as the Jirga Chairman. Around 1,600 delegates from 34 provinces, representing both government and civil society, participated in the jirga. The delegates included parliamentarians, cabinet members, representatives of different tribal and ethnic groups, as well as members of refugee communities, religious councils, ulema, civil society activists, women groups and others. However, the main political opposition bloc, Northern Front leader Abdullah Abdullah remained critical of the extent of true representation of Afghan society, and chose not to attend the Jirga.[32]

The legitimacy of the Jirga was also questioned by many others, as the participants were mainly Karzai supporters and Taliban opponents. The most crucial parties to peace negotiations — the Afghan Taliban, the Haqqani network, and Hezb-i-Islami of Hekmatyar — were not invited by Karzai.[33] For this, Karzai cannot be held completely responsible as at that time the Western supporters, particularly the US, discouraged any negotiations with the Taliban leadership, as they were confident about reversing the situation by gaining leverage over Taliban in the battlefield.[34] Karzai was in a challenging situation; on the one hand he was being asked to reach out to insurgents, and on the other he had to keep the US and other Western allies satisfied that he was not appeasing the terrorist factions. The Afghan public was also visibly sceptical of the peace plan, probably due to the failure of past peace efforts. In 2005, the Afghan Government, in coordination with the US military, had launched a programme 'Proceay-e Takheem-e Solha' (Strengthening Peace Programme, known as PTS), that sought to reintegrate former insurgents. The programme suffered from weak management, lack of resources and political will.[35] Another outreach effort was launched in Wardak and Helmand provinces in 2008. The Afghanistan Social Outreach Programme (ASOP) was actually not part of governance framework.[36] Likewise, many local initiatives were taken with tribal backing also to reintegrate groups or individuals from militias other than Taliban forces but these efforts had been uncoordinated and unstructured.[37]

Resolution document

The Consultative Jirga did manage to achieve an agreement on the primary goal of the event — to build a domestic consensus on the conditions under which direct negotiations between the Afghan Government and insurgent groups should take place.[38] The gathering adopted a 16-point resolution, outlining steps for the reconciliation and reintegration process. The resolution, divided into three sections, was further sub-divided into individual articles: Understanding, Negotiation and Agreement for Sustainable Peace, Framework for Talks with the Disaffected, and Developing Mechanism for Negotiation with the Disaffected.[39]

The first section included seven articles that call on all parties for cooperating in the peace process by avoiding issues that can harm national unity and limit the reconciliation initiative. This section implied turning the outcomes of the Jirga into a national strategy. The second section appealed to the Afghan

Government and international troops to release people whose detention was allegedly based on inaccurate information, and called for removing their names from the blacklist. It also sought security and safety guarantees for those willing to quit insurgency and for speedy training of Afghan National Security Forces to enable them to lead military operations. The third section outlined steps for establishing a High Peace Council to oversee the implementations of the Jirga's resolutions at district and provincial levels. A special committee was proposed to deal with the issue of prisoners' release.[40]

Hence, the outlines of Karzai's two-level reconciliation and reintegration peace plan first offered an attractive proposal to Taliban to have their names removed from the international terrorist blacklist [41] with permission for some to become a part of mainstream politics whereas top Taliban leadership could live securely in exile outside Afghanistan, though only if the Taliban accepted the legitimacy of the Afghan Constitution, opted to end insurgency and snapped ties with Al-Qaeda. The second part of the plan, greatly supported by the international community, focused on the reintegration of lower-level Taliban foot soldiers that had joined insurgency for financial or non-ideological reasons and would be willing to quit in return for suitable compensation.[42]

Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP)

In response to the NCPJ resolution, the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP) was created. On 20 July 2010, at the Kabul Conference the international community endorsed the programme followed by issuing of a Joint Order to the federal ministries and provincial governors for the implementation of APRP.[43] This conference was hosted by the Afghan Government and co-chaired by the United Nations, as an attempt to renew commitment for an Afghan-led national agenda of emphasizing good governance and enhanced security prospects in addition to the implementation of Priority National Programmes.[44]

High Peace Council (HPC)

To lead and manage the implementation of APRP, the Afghanistan High Peace Council (HPC), a 70-member body, was formed in October 2011 through a presidential decree. The Council is composed of Jihadi, political and community leaders, religious scholars, tribal elders, civil society and nine women representatives with the directive to lead nation-wide support for reconciliation and reintegration under the peace process.[45] Some of the former Taliban were also made members of the High Peace Council.[46] The Council was initially chaired by former Afghan president and Northern Alliance figure Burhanuddin Rabbani, until his assassination. In April 2012, Burhanuddin's son Salahuddin Rabbani was named the Chief Negotiator and Chairman of the Council by President Karzai.[47] An important reason behind both the Rabbanis' appointment was to gain acceptance by political opposition for any future accords.

The HPC is not confined to national level alone and has reached out for support to neighbouring and regional powers. According to the Government's peace strategy, peace efforts will be made at two levels:

1) The strategic and political level; where reconciliation talks are held with senior insurgency members as well as mobilization of regional cooperation and international support to the Afghan-led peace process

2) The national and sub-national level; where the Afghan Government, HPC, civil society, and all stakeholders work to build a national support base and consensus in Afghanistan and manage reintegration of ex-combatants.

The HPC manages peace efforts at a national level and peace committees lead the efforts at provincial level with provincial governors, with assistance of Provincial Peace Committees.[48]

In the beginning, an important component of the Afghan Peace Programme directly helped about 25,000 people, reintegrating some and helping other community members through small grant and line ministry projects covering sectors like water, agriculture, infrastructural development and vocational training.[49] Operationally, APRP's goal for the first year was to initiate programme activities in eight provinces and enrol up to 1,000 reintegrating people,[50] for which a $94 million annual budget for the HPC was approved. By the end of December 2012, the APRP had officially reintegrated about 5,900 insurgents who left the battlefield and reconciled with their communities.[51] The challenging task then and now is the creation of meaningful employment opportunities for them, so that they are not tempted or forced to return to insurgent ranks. Another challenge for the government is to ensure security and safety for those who have left the ranks of combatants to join the peace process.[52]

Despite nation-wide support to the peace process, the HPC has been criticized since its formation. The reaction of the media, public, civil society and even parliamentarians has been critical of the Council. One of the major concerns of the Afghan critics was the composition of the HPC which appears to be dominated by warlords. A significant number of the Council members can be considered to have 'war expertise' rather than 'peace expertise', a fact that has had an adverse effect in building trust among Afghans and the international community. Not only that, most members also hold other governmental commissions, which can slow down the peace process, leading to its failure in the end.[53]

There was a negative reaction towards Rabbani being chosen as the head of the Council. As Muhammad Sa'id Niazi, a member of the HPC, said Rabbani's appointment was not a step forward in reintegrating the insurgents, rather it would strengthen Taliban's rejection of all attempts made by the government in initiating peace talks, because most HPC members were involved in the war against Taliban. In fact, ten organizational networks wrote a proposal to the government for replacing the HPC members accused of human rights

violations and suspected of war crimes with people having expertise in conflict resolution, mediation and reconciliation. These civil society networks emphasized the role of the civil society in decision making, and stressed the need to include national interest, justice and women's rights ideals in the decision making process.[54]

Karzai's fears of ownership & irrelevance backfire

Since the beginning of his first term in office President Hamid Karzai has been distrustful of American, British, European and even UN diplomats, when it came to conducting talks with the Taliban. Karzai expelled British adviser to the European Union mission, Michael Semple, and senior British UN official, Mervyn Patterson, for engaging in talks with the Taliban in Helmand province, without authorization from Helmand Governor.[55] The diplomats were also allegedly supplying cash and weapons to the Taliban. Both UN and British intelligence agency MI6 secretly held talks with the insurgents, believing it was possible to separate hardcore leadership from non-ideological commanders. This created a rift between the Afghan Government and the foreign powers involved.[56]

Similarly, Karzai's suspicions of US became a reality when US backchannel propositions to the Taliban became known. One noteworthy example of US-Karzai rift is the opening of Taliban's Doha office, also known as the Qatar process (to be discussed in detail later). The event was considered a diplomatic milestone finally aimed at pushing the peace process forward after twelve years of violence; However, the process was disrupted by President Karzai's boycott; he was afraid that if the initiative worked out well he would be ditched by the Americans besides being treated as irrelevant by the Taliban.[57]

Karzai has expressed the wish that Taliban are made to understand that the peace process would eventually shift to Afghanistan. He mentioned three principles in the context of HPC members' visit to Qatar for peace talks. He said that the Qatar talks must be moved to Afghanistan immediately, they should bring an end to violence, and must not become a tool for a 'third country' — by which he meant Pakistan — to exploit Afghanistan.[58]

The underlying fear behind these conditions appears to be that the Taliban would gain attention and increasing legitimacy through direct talks with the US and thus expose Karzai as being ineffective. Karzai reacted by blaming disruption of the peace process on the US and Pakistan. Karzai's sense of personal insecurity and the mistrust between him and the US added to the weakening bilateral relations. President Karzai, already disliked within the country, knew that he was not liked in the US and many Western capitals either. The trust level is very low on both sides. Karzai and his close associates don't trust the US as a reliable partner and suspect it is collaborating with both the Taliban and Pakistan, seeking to cut deals with them behind his back. Karzai complains that the West hijacked the Afghan peace process to strengthen his opponents and malign or undermine his government.[59]

He also accuses the Americans of secretly engineering his political downfall, especially since the 2009 elections in Afghanistan. The former US special envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, Richard Holbrooke, and the then US ambassador to Afghanistan, Karl Eikenberry were actively playing backchannel roles to politically depose Karzai. They held meetings with his opponents and supported them in presidential campaign rallies. Karzai was aware of the American scheming and retaliated by striking deals with various warlords to win their support in elections.[60] Hence, it was due to his distrust that the Obama Administration failed to win his support for ensuring cordial bilateral ties. And it was one of the reasons for the delay in signing the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA). Karzai keeps adding conditions to the deal, despite being aware of the significance of the agreement and country's dependence on US military and financial aid.

Conditions & demands of the Afghan Government

The most important demands of the Karzai government from US and the international community are,

a. Continuation of post-withdrawal financial aid, at least four to five billion dollars a year[61]

b. Starting of a practical peace process which would stop foreigners benefiting from the continuation of war in Afghanistan[62]

c. Peacekeeping forces provided by the international community and US until Afghan National Security Forces are capable of taking security control of their country. This demand is still pending under the BSA, that would assure presence of a certain number of international troops post withdrawal to train Afghan Security Forces in counterterrorism operations.[63]

Peace process: Karzai vs Taliban

Peace negotiations are imperative, yet the main parties to negotiations in Afghanistan have conflicting interests that none seems willing to compromise on. The Taliban leadership claims to be fighting a 'jihad', with the aim of re-imposing its government in Afghanistan, based on its religious and ideological beliefs. The Taliban have been completely unwilling to negotiate on anything other than the 'divine goal' of enforcing *Shariah*. This is not acceptable to the government or to the Afghan people.

In contrast, the Karzai administration is fighting for a democratic, representative government and for its own survival, for which it has even offered power-sharing deals to the insurgents, if they agree to lay down arms.[64]

Karzai began voicing his concerns and softened stance towards the Taliban, once he realized that he was just an option for the US and had become isolated internationally. Relations between his administration and the Taliban have always been complex. Karzai opted for mild diplomacy while pursuing reconciliation with them. It was reported that after Taliban's ouster in the beginning, he even held a meeting with the Taliban militants in Kandahar to

discuss possible conditions for their endorsement of the peace process. Kabul officials also explained to all militants that they could join the new government and could work on key administrative posts, without the fear of being persecuted. But seemingly, Taliban leaders, who refer to Karzai as West's puppet, refused to join and accept conditions of the foreign countries involved in Afghanistan.[65]

What the top Taliban leadership sees in Karzai's peace invitation is a call for surrender, rather than talks. Still, Karzai remained determined and tactically worked to transform the peace initiative from Western-led collaboration, to Afghanization of peace mission where he empowers the Afghans to lead not only national security tasks but the peace process as well. [66]

Karzai worked to negotiate a deal with top insurgent leaders or mid-level figures, even if senior heads were not willing. [67] The key objective of including the top leadership in the reconciliation talks was to ensure its implementation since it would be easier to convince low-level fighters to give up insurgency. Also, the foot soldiers or lower-level fighters were under strict instructions by the top commanders to refrain from engaging personally in peace talks.[68] Gradually, Karzai became daring in his outreach, and tried various tactics from publicly calling the Taliban 'brothers', to offering them power-sharing arrangements with amendment in the Constitution. Many experts believe that this reflects the government's willingness to compromise on those constitutional articles that are not in line with militant's ideology.[69]

On 10 March 2007, President Karzai signed a broader amnesty plan, the National Stability and Reconciliation Bill. Despite heavy criticism from all sides, this bill exempted all combatants and parties involved in armed conflict, from *jihad* to civil war, including the Taliban, from prosecution. Not just this, the Bill also provides them immunity from any criticism. Since the 2005 parliamentary elections, former Taliban under the label of moderates were appointed at key posts in ministries, both federal and provincial. From Afghan Government's perspective the Amnesty Bill was a step towards an inclusive vision of reconciliation.[70]

From reconciliation & reintegration to power-sharing

Theorists like Caroline Hatzell and Matthew Hoddie hold that negotiations, with a view to power-sharing, would be optimal means of resolving internal conflicts. Both stress the significance of creating power-sharing or power-dividing institutions. Groups must have a means, other than relying on the use of force, for resolving their disagreements.[71] The concept is being mentioned here to shed light on Karzai's attempts for bringing insurgent leaders to the negotiating table, by including power-sharing approach into the reconciliation and reintegration strategy.

The ambitious roadmap drafted by Karzai's HPC clearly penned down his approach of accommodating the Taliban and other armed groups into the political and social mainstream. Step three of the roadmap gives an insight into transforming the Taliban and other militant groups into political movements. Once it is done, these groups will be encouraged to participate in elections. The

Taliban and other groups would also be facilitated to enter into the power structure of the state through non-elected positions at different levels. This way they will become a part of Afghan society once again.[72]

However, analytically speaking, in Afghanistan it is difficult to envisage a functioning power-sharing institution, given the reality of intense animosity between the warring parties with their ambitious political designs. No matter whatever the political power-sharing settlement between the Government and the insurgents, it should be understood that safeguarding the people's interests against any oligarchic or extremist setup has to be a supreme objective.[73]

Karzai's dual play

Karzai's anti-US oratory to gain support of the Taliban by pressurizing Americans has not made him any more popular. His statements against the international community and the US were, in fact, criticised. At the same time, Karzai was perceived to be acting like a 'guest in his country', who has 'no power'. His criticism of airstrikes on Afghans was rejected by the public as being merely symbolic. These factors left the Taliban and the common Afghans considering Karzai and his government weak and ineffective. This impression has not only encouraged top Taliban leadership to step up their movement further but also shattered the hopes and confidence of the Afghans. They seem even more scared for their future in case the regime collapses.[74]

The tensions between Karzai and the Obama Administration have been exploited by Taliban. A paramount example is Karzai's backtracking over the signing of the BSA, despite the fact that the Loya Jirga had given its approval. The Taliban leadership, who "don't want any occupier in their country," [75] has appreciated Karzai's delay in signing the security deal. However, the HPC remains critical of this course of action, and Salahuddin Rabbani held that Karzai's decision had made the insurgents stronger than pro-peace elements.[76] Some among the Afghan leaders speculated that this might lead to a political breakthrough with the Taliban who are willing to join the peace process, whereas others believe that the prospects of a negotiated peace settlement after a decade of war have been further reduced.

The internal and external legitimization given to Taliban had made President Karzai so apprehensive that he was trying to grab negotiating reins, by holding secret talks with certain insurgent figures before the presidential elections in April. Simultaneously, he was seeking to install a trusted successor, so that the shaky political structure doesn't collapse, giving the Taliban an easy return to power — hence playing a gamble. [77]

However, Karzai's attempts to appease the Taliban seem ill-informed as the Taliban see him and his regime as puppets serving the interests of the 'Western Crusaders.' "Moreover, no matter how much Karzai keeps trying to cosy up with the Taliban, whatever criticism he keeps prompting against US that make him sound like Taliban, it won't put him in Taliban's good books. Since their removal Taliban have seen Karzai's face and he would be the first to be

thrown out if the Taliban returns to Kabul."[78] This might perhaps be the reason that Karzai wants to negotiate and come to an understanding with the top Taliban leadership, so that he and his family or close ones are fully protected, secure and well rewarded, as for the past decade despite being placed in the position of head of State, he, in fact, has remained rootless.[79]

The influential negotiators

The negotiators considered influential by the central parties to the peace process, the Afghan Government and the Taliban, are Pakistan and the US. President Karzai recently said that peace in his country directly depended upon and lay in the hands of America and Pakistan.[80]

While the Afghan Government would clearly make key decisions and lead the process, the role of the US and Pakistan in the Afghan peace process cannot be ignored. Their participation is imperative, as even though the US is preparing for an exit, it remains a tangible party to the Afghan conflict. The Taliban don't recognize the Karzai Government, call him a US puppet, and prefer negotiating directly with the US. Washington is also interested in discussing peace settlement with both the Afghan Government and Taliban, as any agreement will require the support of the international community, and the US would remain to play a significant role in mustering security and financial backing.

Pakistan is important because it has been instrumental in convincing Taliban to agree to engage in direct talks with the UN Security Council as well as the US. Furthermore, the Afghan Taliban are said to have sanctuaries in the country's volatile border areas. They are active in waging war and violence with the support of Pakistani insurgents on Afghans and foreign troops from their sanctuaries. So to confront the insurgency, Pakistan's support and assistance for peace settlement is highly significant. Therefore, an Afghan-led and -owned process needs to be strategized in a way that allows Pakistan and US to play a supporting role, to assist and help the Afghan administration manage issues like future governance, future US presence in the country and Pak-Afghan bilateral relations.

The United States

> *As we reassure our partners that our relationships and engagement in Afghanistan will continue after the military transition in 2014, we should underscore that we have long-term strategic interests in the broader region... As the United States enters a new phase of engagement in Afghanistan, we must lay the foundation for a long-term strategy that sustains our security gains and protects US interests...*

— US Secretary of State John Kerry, then Chair of Senate Foreign Relations Committee [81]

Afghanistan is geographically located at the crossroads of the Middle Eastern, the South Asian and the South East Asian fault lines. Strategically

speaking, Afghanistan sits at the strategic pivot where influential Russia, growing China, Iran and within South Asia Pakistan and India are easily reachable. This alone makes Afghanistan important for the US. The post-9/11 global war against terrorism brought US an opening towards its already buoyant national interests through Afghanistan in the region. To be precise, the Afghan war with US physical presence in the country generated new sets of opportunities for extending American strategic influence, ambitions of expanding its hegemonic hubris across the post-Soviet space usually referred to as "the Stans" by seeking to gain unlimited regional access, not to be lost easily in future. Although in pursuit of these interests the region has been sowed with inflammable conflicts and future instability. The US administration looks at Afghanistan from broader national interest perspective.[82]

Mindful of its broader interests in the region, America has multiple goals in Afghanistan, including:

— Preventing Afghanistan from becoming a sanctuary for al-Qaeda and/or an ally of al-Qaeda as the country was under the Taliban
— Creating a stable, autonomous and friendly state in Afghanistan
— Preventing Afghan violence from further destabilizing Pakistan
— Preserving NATO alliance's credibility
— Preservation of democratic and human rights values for Afghans[83]
— To safeguard the gains of all US past efforts by damage control and preserving on the ground situation[84]

The first goal was also one of the reasons that prompted the US under president Bush to invade Afghanistan and still is the primary objective under Obama Administration. Realising the primary objectives in Afghanistan might, however, compromise American ideals of democracy and human rights. The American and NATO demands from the Taliban prior to any peace deal have been;

• Acceptance of the Afghan Constitution
• Recognition of the Afghan Government
• Renunciation of their ties with Al-Qaeda
• End of terrorist and insurgent activities for a successful transition of control to Afghan forces[85]

The most challenging part for US administration in resolving the peace issue had been to bring the Karzai government and the Taliban together to initiate a negotiating process. The mistrust between the Karzai Government and the Taliban has created major hurdles for the peace initiative. The weak and corrupt government, expressing anti-US sentiment over the past few years, has also created difficulties for American interests in the country. On top of this, US decision of pursuing counterinsurgency policy along with NATO allies and the administration's reservations over Karzai's policies have worsened the situation.

Diverging interests & strategy

The reconciliation and reintegration policies, two basic planks of the Afghan peace process strategy, have been adequately understood according to US and Afghan Government's peculiar interests. The Obama Administration supported the peace Jirga after intensive discussions with the Afghan officials, yet they remained sceptical of the reconciliation strategy. Subsequently, the US agreed to explore peace negotiations or settlement with the Taliban, though differences persisted over with whom the talks would be held. While the US backed the reintegration of low-to-mid level Taliban fighters into mainstream society, it was hesitant to endorse inclusion of top Taliban leadership in the process. As for holding talks with Mullah Omar, Karzai officially expressed willingness to reach out to him, whereas the US considering him a "fugitive", wanted him to be excluded from peace talks and denied any future political leverage.[86]

Reintegration, as viewed by Karzai, is to make efforts to provide incentives to insurgents to tempt them into renouncing fighting. As for US, it is only recently that it opened up to engaging higher insurgent leadership into the reintegration process. Initially, the 'US Military Field Manual on Counterinsurgency Operations' described reintegration as a form of "golden surrender" and "a way out for insurgents who have lost the desire to continue the struggle."[87] Robert Gates views reintegration as getting the foot soldiers to decide that they don't want to be a part of the Taliban any more. General McChrystal said it addressed mid-to-low level insurgent fighters by offering eligible insurgents reasonable incentives to stop fighting and return to normalcy, possibly by including the employment or protection provisions. This approach was aimed at weakening and dividing the insurgents.[88] Hence, during the 2010 London Conference, the international community was clear on applying the reintegration programme to foot soldiers and local leaders once they renounced violence, but remained reluctant over reconciliation policy.

Washington's change of heart

Although reintegration and reconciliation are two distinct concepts yet they have the potential to be pursued together. The US strategy was to engage in peace talks with the insurgent leadership, while NATO commanders would successfully engage and co-opt local insurgent leaders in the field to an extent that local efforts effectively break away lower-level commanders from their forces, which would then put pressure on the top insurgent leadership to negotiate. There were various reasons for the swing.

First, shifting loyalties among Afghan insurgents was hard to achieve because Taliban insurgency is rooted not in ethnic minorities of the country but the Pashtun majority community. Second, al-Qaeda presence in Afghanistan is limited and poses no threat to Afghan insurgent leadership. Third, three decades of war has made Afghanistan, its society and tribal structure much weaker and immensely corrupt. Consequently, there is almost no possibility of finding viable Afghan elders who can influence their followers to switch sides.[89]

Fourth, the support initially accorded to America's chosen man Karzai has declined within US and the West, leading to an 'unsustainable' current setup. Fifth, the allied states refused to comply with continuous American persuasion to keep providing their troops for US strategic war. Sixth, the waning US and NATO military power in Afghanistan, and the troop withdrawal, set for 2014, created the need for negotiations from a relatively urgent and strengthened perspective. Seventh, domestic economic burden pressurized the US administration to restrict time and resources being spent on an open-ended war in Afghanistan.[90]

And last, Washington has realized that the Afghan insurgent sanctuaries in Pakistan would not be destroyed anytime soon. Hence, the regional scenario forced a change in the American perspective, leading to US giving consent to Karzai regarding talks with the insurgent leadership. Washington's acceptance of such negotiations was tinged with apprehension, though.[91]

Despite the projected 2014 'drawdown' of most of its troops, the US is not about to exit the strategically vital Afghanistan connected with the resource-rich region of Central Asia. It may be recalled that the US under Obama has changed the withdrawal timeline thrice, from 2011 to 2014 and now supposedly to 2024, once the BSA has been signed between the two governments. In any of the presidential speeches and in the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) signed between Kabul and Washington there is no mention of a complete withdrawal. President Obama has specifically called for a shift from combat to support mission after 2014. Although the expression 'support mission' sounds reassuringly hopeful, yet a closer look at US policy mission in post-2014 Afghanistan hints at America's inclination towards direct counterinsurgency tasks over logistical and training support. The precedent of American non-combat troops getting engaged in targeted counter operations is another reason for the delay in signing the BSA.[92]

Withdrawal timeframe

A precondition to peace talks from Taliban's side is the exit of American and other foreign forces from Afghanistan. But the US did the exact opposite, with Afghan Government's approval, by engaging in aggressive fighting. The high expectations and tight timeframe has given rise to various genuine concerns for the Americans. They are specifically alarmed about the influence that regional powers stand to exercise in post-2014 scenario. Almost all regional countries, including China lately, are keen to play a role in the post-2014 Afghanistan. So with a gradual decline in its leverage, the US finds it difficult to maintain its hard stance in terms of its prerequisites when talking to the Taliban. With the remaining influence, the US administration has been trying hard to reach a settlement with the Taliban, else further delay makes it impossible to pressurize Taliban to break ties with al-Qaeda.

Carrots and sticks approach

In the past few years, the Haqqani network has emerged as a high-profile American enemy and a strategic threat to its interests in the region. In September 2012, the Obama Government termed the Haqqani network a foreign terrorist organization and listed its suicide operations chief Qari Zakir as a "specially designated global terrorist." Following US actions, the UN Security Council's Taliban Sanctions Committee also placed the network on its blacklist.[93]

The US administration believes that Pakistani intelligence has been supporting the network. As Jeffrey Dressler reported, Pakistan has facilitated the network not just with sanctuaries, but also with strategic and operational guidance.[94] The accusations have always been strongly denied by Pakistan, though. The Haqqani network is not considered a purely Afghan network by the US. American officials believe that Pakistani Taliban operate in and around Afghanistan. From day one, Islamabad has been under US pressure to take action against the Haqqani network and the Quetta Shura. Pakistan has so far managed to resist this demand.[95]

When the stick approach failed, Washington finally offered carrots to provide momentum for peace talks. It was not just Karzai pressing for talks with top Taliban leadership, even the Haqqani group commander said that the Americans would not find a possible solution to the Afghan conflict if they approached only individuals or fighting groups, without engaging in talks with Mullah Omar and Taliban Shura.[96] Pakistan, from the start, has been asking the US to opt for peace talks, rather than engaging in a military strategy. Former secretary of state Hillary Clinton publicly acknowledged that with Pakistan's assistance the US Government took a chance and reached out to the Haqqani militants, simply to check whether they showed any interest in holding talks with them. But, both Pakistan and US remain at odds with each other over the order of peace talks with the Taliban and their allies.[97]

US-Taliban: Series of talks

In 2005, the US military launched a Taliban reconciliation specific effort called 'Allegiance Program'. The command began with Afghan Government's approval, with the release of 80 former Taliban detainees each month from US detention facilities. But it was marred by absence of monitoring and follow-up.[98] A change in the US approach began to emerge in March 2009, with the Obama Administration showing willingness to reach out to moderate elements within the Afghan Taliban. The US bypassed the Karzai administration and began having secret meetings with the Taliban. In November 2010, direct contact between US officials and the Taliban began with German officials and Qatari royals facilitating as negotiators between the two in Munich, Germany.[99]

In February 2011, preliminary talks between the Taliban and the US were held in Doha, Qatar, (as mentioned above). Talks were held with the Taliban Political Commission, a newly formed group fully authorized by Taliban leader Mullah Omar.[100] It was more of an agenda-based discussion

where Taliban presented a two-step approach. Their first demand to US was the release of five operatives detained in Guantanamo Bay, including three senior commanders, and in return they offered to release an American soldier, Sergeant Bowe Bergdahl, held prisoner since 2009. Once prisoner exchange demand was agreed, the second step of confidence-building measures were to be considered. In this second step Taliban were seeking to engage in talks with the US to sort out issues like withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan to stop continuation of war. Interestingly, Taliban were willing to tolerate presence of American trainers and advisers for Afghan troops. Once concerns with US were settled, they wanted all-inclusive talks with Afghan groups, exclusive of HPC representatives handpicked by Karzai.[101]

In May 2011 preliminary talks between the Taliban and the US were held in Germany. The reconciliation process and talks with the Taliban had just started after a long bumpy road, that began nearly two years ago, but was later scuttled by Karzai. Substantial changes began to emerge, although at a gradual and slow pace, when Qatar, a close US ally, offered itself as interlocutor to initiate proper preliminary talks between the US and Taliban. US Special Envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, Marc Grossman, met with Afghan Taliban representatives in Qatar in January 2012 where they explored the possibilities of opening a dialogue with the Taliban. The latter were represented by a high-ranking delegation comprising Tayyab Agha, a former secretary to Mullah Omar, former Taliban foreign minister Shir Muhammad Abbas Stanekzai and former Taliban ambassador to Saudi Arabia Shabuddin Delawar. The two sides agreed that the Taliban open a formal office in Doha.[102]

In March 2012 preliminary talks between the US and Taliban were terminated over the issue of prisoner release. Taliban accused the US of backtracking on their pledge of releasing Taliban commanders from Guantanamo as part of confidence-building package. The talks were abandoned over the order or sequence of steps to be taken, as Taliban expected prisoner exchange before talks. After a deadlock of about 18 months, Taliban agreed to restart the talks with US, though this was achieved through Pakistan's efforts with the Taliban.[103]

No sooner than the Taliban opened their office in Doha, which was praised by President Obama as an 'important first step' towards reconciliation, President Karzai protested and boycotted the Qatar process and suspended the security agreement. This time Karzai's outrage was over Taliban's using the "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan" emblem and flag at the office, which presented them as a legitimate Afghan government-in-exile. Although within days the emblem was removed, yet it had become a source of contention, leading to the eventual closing of the office and delaying of the first ever US-Taliban formal peace talks.[104]

Still, the shaky event remains highly significant in which Pakistan played a vital role behind the scenes. The Doha office was a representation of first signs of willingness on part of US and Taliban, who got an international recognition as a legitimate negotiating partner — a status they were actually

striving for. In order for peace talks to materialize, Obama in 2011 had expressed flexibility by inviting Taliban and the Haqqani network for formal talks in Qatar. US offered key concessions as an invitation to talks by dropping its three pre-conditions for talks, which were an immediate break with al-Qaeda, renunciation of violence, and acceptance of Afghan Constitution. But as expected, Taliban refused to stop using Afghan soil to threaten other countries and supporting the Afghan peace process.[105]

Pakistan

"I have absolutely no doubt that there will be complete chaos in Afghanistan if a settlement is not reached by 2014. Afghanistan will erupt. And when that happens, Pakistan will have to pay."

Pakistan Foreign Ministry official, 26 March 2013[106]

Pakistan's challenges & interests

Homegrown insurgency

Pakistan's national interests require a stable Afghanistan. Afghanistan's destabilization will have seriously damaging consequences in Pakistan, as it will bring a spillover of insurgency and an influx of refugee in the country. The real challenge confronted by Pakistan for the last decade is from the western border. The insurgency in Afghanistan has become an existential threat to Pakistan. Pakistan has suffered more casualties in the last decade from the Afghan conflict than it had suffered in the three wars with India. Pakistan is already fighting its own war with Taliban insurgents. Its military forces have been battling homegrown insurgency being waged under the banner of the TTP. The TTP attempted to replicate Afghan Taliban on the Pakistani soil. It has formed alliances with the Afghan Taliban and other extremist groups in the country. Both give each other support and sanctuaries across the borders in areas under their control.[107]

Pakistani Taliban aim to destabilise Pakistan, for which they have frequently carried out suicide bombings in various parts of the country.[108] The civilian and military leadership in Pakistan are united on countering the threats. The State aims at separating the Pakistani and Afghan Taliban. Pakistan is willing to exercise whatever residual influence it can over the top leadership of Afghan Taliban so that they are accommodated in the Afghan system, as also desired by the Karzai Government, although not in a dominant position otherwise they will strongly support the insurgents in Pakistan. Once the two Talibans are split, Pakistan can take effective counterinsurgency measures against the local Taliban.[109]

Therefore, Pakistan's commitment to ending insurgent threat to its already vulnerable security situation has been a top priority. In the context of this challenge, Pakistan is obligated to play a positive role in Afghanistan. Both nations have a common enemy to tackle, and it can only be done if there is mutual understanding and coordination.

A triangular nexus

India's presence and role in Afghanistan has raised suspicions in Islamabad, creating yet another challenge in an already complex situation. In the past decade, a triangular nexus of US-Afghanistan-India had been established that threatens Pakistan. Pakistan's foreign policy has always been India-centric and revolves around India-Pakistan security paradigm. Afghanistan was also viewed from an India-centric perspective. With the war against terrorism raging Pakistan had initially relaxed its concentration towards its eastern border. However, with Karzai calling Pakistan "a twin brother and India a great friend,"[110] following it up with an invitation to India to extend its influence in his country, Pakistan got wary of Indian intentions. While Pakistan was already struggling with insecurity over India's influence in Afghanistan, the US formed a nexus with India, to encourage wider Indian role in Afghanistan.

Previously US had discouraged Indian military involvement in Afghanistan due to Pakistan's fears of being encircled by India. New Delhi also moved cautiously in Afghanistan keeping economic and infrastructure development in the limelight. But once the Indo-US relations took a turn for the better, US encouraged an enhanced Indian role there. Both US and India acknowledge Pakistan's role to make Afghan peace viable, for which Pakistan's legitimate security interests need to be accommodated. But the trilateral diplomatic context of Kabul-New Delhi-Washington is inclined towards encouraging Indian role in Afghanistan.[111]

Besides American encouragement, Indian ambitions of power projection in South Asia and beyond raises questions within Pakistan. By playing a critical role in the security and economic development of Afghanistan, New Delhi hopes to be able to shape regional and global developments. Former Indian foreign secretary Nirupama Rao asserted that for India to emerge as a world power "a peaceful and stable neighbourhood and external environment" is required, that suggests that India looks for stability in Afghanistan as a key requisite to achieve its fundamental strategic goals. Therefore lately, India's assertive approach towards additional security policy deployment and military cooperation in Afghanistan has become significant.[112]

Following the Indo-Afghan Strategic Partnership Agreement signed in 2011, India provided light weapons and counterinsurgency (Coin) training to Afghan security forces. The bilateral security partnership with Indian troops presence in Afghanistan has not been taken lightly in Pakistan. Karzai has also responded positively to Indian interest in the country, knowing that it would further deepen mistrust between the two countries.[113]

On top of this, Karzai's 14 official visits to India are seen as a clear sign of his tilt towards India, especially during his last visit the wish list he presented appeared to be a clear invitation for India to exercise all of its strategic options including boosting of Afghanistan's security apparatus.[114] In case India expands its role in Afghanistan in terms of security after the drawdown of international forces, it will set off alarm bells in already suspicious Pakistan. Moreover, discussions about Indian foreign policy under Narendra Modi as

prime minister show the extent of Pakistan's concerns. India under Manmohan Singh had been aware of the Pakistani sensitivities towards Indian military role in Afghanistan and remained reluctant to follow Kabul's wish list, but this might not be the case under Modi. Modi had been critical of Singh for being too soft on Pakistan.[115] Hence, Pakistan's concerns regarding Indian threat coming from Afghan soil cannot be ignored.

Karzai's diplomatic swing

After Karzai administration's realization of Pakistan's role in the peace process and subsequent shift in policy, Pakistan committed to assist the Afghan Government. Since Afghanistan came under the US patronage in the post-Taliban period, Pakistan was initially cornered and isolated by both the Bush administration and Karzai, until Karzai himself came under US criticism. Therefore, President Karzai, after getting re-elected in 2009, widened the circle of peace process with inclusion of Pakistan and regionalizing of the Afghan peace process.

The Afghan Government reached out to other neighbouring countries through a roadmap devised by Karzai or rather the High Peace Council in 2012. The document envisioned that the Taliban and other armed groups would have given up arms by 2015 and would be incorporated into Afghan politics and society. The idea behind the peace roadmap was to make the political system inclusive, democratic and equitable with all political parties and actors co-existing to pursue their political goals constitutionally. The document guides a five-step process to achieve peace with regional cooperation.[116]

Following the roadmap, securing Pakistan's support in strengthening the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process was crucial, for which the Council outlined a set of prerequisites to test Pakistan's commitment to peace, including;

a)   Release of Taliban detainees from Pakistani prisons or any other third country with Pakistan's assistance for confidence-building measures between the two countries

b)   Pakistan using of its influence to encourage Taliban to break ties with al-Qaeda

c)   Facilitation of direct contacts between the HPC/Afghanistan Government and leaders of Taliban and other armed opposition groups

d)   Afghanistan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and US to explore and agree on terms for initiating direct peace talks between the HPC/Afghanistan Government and leaders of Taliban and other Afghan armed groups with Saudi Arabia as the venue.

Karzai attached a practical commitment condition for Pakistan to fulfil Afghan demands. Afghanistan demanded and followed as being drafted the bilateral and trilateral meetings where countries like Turkey, Saudi Arabia, US (in Core Group format) and UK (FM trilateral format) were involved.[117] Islamabad and Kabul established a Joint Afghan-Pakistan Peace Commission in March 2011, with its first official meeting held in Islamabad in June 2011 to

promote confidence-building measures for furthering political discussions. Similarly, a Core Group of Pakistan, Afghanistan and US was created to assess progress and priority recommendations. The Istanbul Conference, Bonn II, Chicago Conference, and Tokyo Conference were important opportunities for the Afghan Government to reflect upon its past policies and setbacks in the peace efforts.[118]

On closer look, it appears the roadmap was outlined by Karzai to attain a consistent and coherent channel to launch formal, direct negotiations with the mentioned parties.

Prisoner release pressures

President Karzai and Afghan Peace Council kept pressurizing the Pakistan Government to release the Afghan Taliban detained in Pakistani prisons. Afghan officials handed a list of prisoners to Pakistan. Karzai believed that their release would be an incentive for Taliban insurgents to participate in the peace process. Pakistan initially showed reluctance in releasing the prisoners, as there had been no guarantees and no mechanism to follow the releases through which their enrolment into the reconciliatory programme would be made possible. But, with increasing pressure from the Afghan side, Pakistan was left with no choice but to comply with the demand. As expected, most of the freed Afghan Taliban rejoined the insurgency instead of joining the peace process. The blame for this once again fell upon Pakistan, and Karzai opined that Pakistan had mishandled the matter. Karzai asked Pakistan to set up a mechanism to track freed prisoners all of whom were Afghan nationals. Pakistan established the system.[119]

Getting nowhere with the peace plan, Karzai began to pressurize Pakistan for the release of No. 2 Taliban commander, Mullah Ghani Baradar. Pakistan released Baradar, but due to inefficiency in the past, Islamabad only allowed Afghan delegates to hold meeting with him regarding the talks where he delivered Shura's message to the Council.[120] However, Karzai Government's accusations of Pakistan's lack of sincerity for peace, annoyed Pakistan as it had released the prisoners and facilitated the talks, but no effort had been made by the Karzai administration to bring insurgents to the table for talks.[121] Karzai's plan of wooing the Taliban by releasing them from prison thus failed.

Effective diplomacy

In the context of Afghan Government's demands or expectations from Pakistan, Pakistan used diplomatic channels with both the US and Taliban, to soften their rigid positions towards each other. The opening of Taliban's Doha office and US-Taliban direct talks that captured lot of media hype, was indeed an outcome of months long secret negotiations by Pakistan. There had been behind-the-scenes direct talks between the Obama Administration and Pakistani policymakers with US Secretary of State John Kerry and Pakistan's then chief of army staff General Kayani.[122]

The talks between the two parties revolved around grappling with Taliban's top leadership Mullah Omar and the Haqqani network. The US

realizing the vitality of the Haqqani network, started considering the possibility of talks with them. From here, Pakistan began persuading Washington to change its rigid stance towards Taliban. The US had been insisting on certain preconditions as mentioned earlier. Pakistan persuaded the US to initiate the reconciliatory phase, before moving on to the preconditions.[123]

On the other hand Pakistan also engaged the Taliban to convince them to be flexible in their stance. Taliban were persuaded to understand that by participating in the peace dialogue process, they can gain international acceptance, and their primary demand of international forces exiting Afghanistan could be met. They were also made to understand that continuance of the armed conflict would prolong the stay of the foreign forces. Hence, despite Washington's doubts, the Taliban agreed to come to the negotiating table. The circumstances on both sides prior to talks were such that Taliban hardliners, especially those from the operational ranks, were not ready to give any space to the US. While the US was so exhausted with its stand-alone efforts, that it could have settled for a Taliban powersharing model in Afghanistan.[124]

Beside the US-Taliban engagement, Pakistan also facilitated an effective dialogue process between Afghan Taliban and the non-Pashtun opposition group, the Northern Alliance of Afghanistan. The senior leadership of both the groups agreed to work together in stabilizing the country. This effort helped make the Afghan peace process inclusive and helped in curtailing disruptive trends among groups.[125]

Af-Pak liaison: A pendulum of need and disbelief

The peace roadmap seems to be drafted by Afghan policymakers, to secure Pakistan's assistance in resolving Afghan problems. Karzai turned to Pakistan for to attaining peace by skilfully manipulating Pakistan.

Even Pakistan's help in bringing the negotiating parties together was not received positively. Karzai has expressed his anger over direct contacts between US and Taliban and stalled the development from going further by creating a negative impression of Pakistan. However, what Karzai constantly overlooked was the Taliban reluctance to accept him as a legitimate actor. Pakistan had tried to facilitate dialogue process between the Afghan Government and Taliban. In January 2014, Pakistan along with US asked the Afghan Taliban to start peace talks with the Karzai Government but the Taliban make their own decisions.[126] This resistance from Taliban has compelled US and Pakistan to stop counting on Karzai to initiate dialogue, even with the exit deadline approaching. Lately the HPC members have also distanced themselves from Karzai, after the meeting between Taliban and non-Pashtuns.[127]

An overview of key interests

Key interests of Pakistan in Afghanistan can be briefly outlined as follows;
—   A stable and somewhat neutral government in Afghanistan

—   Afghan Taliban becoming a part of Afghan political affairs through a power-sharing deal, but preferably not in a dominant position
—   A gradual withdrawal of American and international/NATO forces from Afghanistan with a favourable security and financial arrangement in place
—   A check on Indian role in Afghanistan, especially in the context of Pakistan's fear of Afghan soil being used to advance strategic designs against Pakistan
—   Continuation of American economic and military support to Pakistan for counterinsurgency operations in the country

Peace initiatives to date with different facilitators

Saudi initiatives

Saudi relations with the Taliban deteriorated after Mullah Omar refused to comply with his pledge made with Riyadh on handing over Osama bin Laden to the Saudi authorities. Finally, contacts were severed after the 9/11 attacks. Riyadh punished the Taliban by supporting the Karzai Government with reconstruction assistance and direct foreign aid but followed a low-profile approach in Afghanistan until the revival of some interest through two rounds of mediation.

The Karzai Government has twice requested the Saudi Government to mediate with the insurgents. The first time to help counter intensified insurgency since 2006 and the second time after the US announced its troops withdrawal date. In September 2008 and February 2009, the Saudi Government arranged first high-level direct contacts between the Karzai Government, Taliban and Hizb-e-Islami (Gulbuddin Hekmatyar — HIG). Prior to engaging with the Taliban for peace process, Saudi Arabia had asked them to break ties with al-Qaeda. The first round of talks couldn't yield any results because there was no official representation from HIG and Taliban leadership and participants were just former functionaries. The Afghan Government too was indirectly represented through Karzai's elder brother Qayyum Karzai.[128]

The second round, chaired by Saudi Intelligence head, Prince Muqrin bin Abdul Aziz, had high-ranking participation. It included Mullah Ahmad Wakil Mutawakil, former foreign minister in the Taliban government; former Taliban ambassador to Pakistan Mullah Abdus Salam Zaeef; Ghairat Bahir, son-in-law of Hekmatyar; Mullah Agha Jan Mutassim, son-in-law of Mullah Omar and former chair of the political committee of the Taliban leadership council from Taliban side. British diplomats were also engaged in this round. During both rounds the Saudi Government offered Mullah Omar and Hekmatyar permanent or temporary sanctuary in Saudi Arabia in case a political resolution of the conflict along with the power-sharing possibility with the Taliban in Afghanistan was achieved.[129] However, it was made clear by the Saudis that the Taliban needed to openly distance itself from al-Qaeda, a precondition for any future engagement in peace talks.[130]

The Saudi initiatives were appreciated by the international community but were not well received by the Iranian Government who view Saudi role in Afghanistan with Taliban as contentious. The Shia population in Afghanistan and certain Northern Alliance leaders also rejected the meetings.[131] The non-Pashtun and Shia groups of Northern Alliance are always suspicious of Saudi involvement and some even reject its involvement in the political settlement of the conflict. Saudi Arabia is seen as an interfering actor rather than a mediator. Even senior leadership of Taliban does not wish Saudis to act as brokers, as they accuse Riyadh of betraying them by aligning with the West. This suggests that Saudi role as a peace broker or facilitator might not bring about much success.

Objectives

Saudi Arabia's objectives in post-2014 Afghanistan are:
— To establish a unified national government in Kabul so that another civil war can be avoided, even if some elements of Taliban need to be accommodated,
— To keep Iranian influence out of Kabul,
— To isolate al-Qaeda, which is regarded as an arch enemy of the Kingdom,
— Stability of Pakistan[132]

Saudi Arabia's policy in post-2014 scenario

So far the Saudis have kept a very discreet status in Afghanistan, despite their generous backing to Karzai. The Saudi regime expects to continue keeping a low profile, even in case of a Taliban comeback. They would not prefer to play a leading role in the country. But even from the sidelines they would support Pakistan and certain Taliban elements. Saudi interests lie in splitting of Taliban from al-Qaeda and a stable government in Kabul. More importantly, containing Iranian influence is currently more vital for the Saudi Kingdom than fighting al-Qaeda.

Saudi Arabia though remains an important party to political solution, yet its former and present involvement in Afghanistan limits its role. It would most probably support a settlement behind the scenes, rather than getting openly involved in mediations. Riyadh also has no time pressures and little to risk. Despite Karzai's repeated suggestions of opening a Taliban office in Saudi Arabia, there has been no encouragement by the Saudi Kingdom, at least not openly. A more active role could be assumed by Qatar, which is viewed as a neutral party with no historical baggage of active involvement in Afghanistan. Qatar has already proved to be a more acceptable mediator and facilitator to the negotiating parties.[133]

Turkey's mediation

Mediation has become an imperative constituent of Turkish foreign policy. The policymakers in Turkey are ambitiously pursuing mediation between the conflicting parties throughout the world and contributing in building

understanding through effective mediation as a means of peace making. One such mediating example is Afghanistan and Pakistan.[134]

While Turkey is not geographically connected to either Afghanistan or Pakistan, it is trusted in both the countries. Other than historical, religious and cultural linkages, it shares close bilateral relations with both. Despite being a member of NATO, Turkey restrained from participating in combat operations and chose to remain involved in ensuring security, provided logistical assistance to other foreign forces and trained Afghan security personnel. The noncombat role of Turkey made inroads into the hearts and minds of Afghans. Turkey views its presence in Afghanistan not only in terms of NATO-led security mission but also as a 'brotherhood duty' to assist Afghanistan in restoring peace.[135]

Diplomatic initiatives: Afghanistan-Turkey-Pakistan

Turkey's approach to peace in Afghanistan relied on proposals like reconciliation and restructuring in Afghan society, bridging the gap between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and enhancing regional cooperation between Afghanistan and countries in its neighbourhood. In pursuit of supporting a regional framework, the first step Turkey undertook was to try building trust between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The series of trilateral dialogues between the three countries began to create a political platform for resolving bilateral conflicts between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The first trilateral summit was held in 2007, followed by six more in 2008, 2009, and twice in 2010, 2011, and 2012, at the presidential level.[136] The summits concentrated on three areas: high-level political dialogue, security cooperation and development partnership.[137]

Another significant event was the "Istanbul for Afghanistan" Summit, also known as Istanbul Summit for Friendship and Cooperation in the Heart of Asia. This initiative was launched in November 2011 and brought together all the bordering countries of Afghanistan, with the aim of finding sustainable solutions for Afghanistan's security and stability. The presidential dignitaries of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkey and Iran, special representative of the President and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of China, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan met in Istanbul for the summit, while representatives of the US, UK, Kyrgyzstan, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Russia, France, Italy, Germany, Japan, the UN, EU, and NATO attended as observers.[138]

The much appreciated Istanbul Process was significant as it took place shortly after the assassination of HPC head Burhanuddin Rabbani. Turkey established a cooperative mechanism for investigating Rabbani's death, a step welcomed by both Pakistan and Afghanistan along with the wider international community.[139]

In December 2011, while visiting Turkey, President Karzai expressed his preference for Turkey to host a liaison office for the Afghan Taliban to facilitate reconciliation. Although Qatar had been chosen as the location for Taliban's office, the possibility of Turkey playing the mediating role between the Taliban and Afghan Government was not ignored.[140] Turkey is one country

that has maintained very good relations with all the potential parties of Afghan peace process. Interestingly, Turkey has good relations with the Kabul Government, Northern Alliance and even the Taliban when they were in power.

Interests/objectives

Turkey's approach towards Afghanistan is also based on its own strategic interests that cannot be secured as long as Afghanistan and the region is unstable. Turkey's key interests can be outlined as,

1.   Fighting terrorism in Afghanistan to bring stability to the region

2.   Achieve economic gains through expanding trade and commerce [141]

Turkey in post-2014 Afghanistan

The question of prolonged Turkish presence in Afghanistan after withdrawal date is yet to be tackled. As it stands, Turkey has not made any long-term commitments in a noncombat role in Afghanistan. The decision of pursuing mediation and committing to security cooperation depends on US commitment in Afghanistan beyond 2014. Despite these uncertainties, plus the closure of the Doha office, there might be a chance of a Taliban office opening in Turkey, as it is seen as neutral by the conflicting and negotiating parties in Afghanistan.

Maldives talks

The representatives of Afghan Government, the non-militant opposition, the Taliban and the HIG also unofficially engaged three times in Maldives. The meetings were held in January, May and November of 2010. The initiative was proposed by Homayoun Jarir, Hekmatyar's son-in-law and his son Feroz represented Hekmatyar as a personal envoy. President Karzai, despite an initial rejection of the initiative, sent personal advisers and observes to all the three rounds of talks. The Taliban were represented through associated parliamentarians and provincial governors. It was reported that a representative of the Haqqani network also attended the third meeting. The talks, privately funded by Afghan business community, were of little significance, but they were seen as a contribution to confidence-building and establishing contacts. The meetings concluded with a declaration to establish a "High National Security Council" which would serve until a ceasefire is reached. The Council would confirm government decisions by two-third majority prior to implementation. It asked the foreign forces to withdraw and end all external intrusion in the peace process as a precondition to the ceasefire. The results of the meetings were to be discussed with the Pakistani and Iranian representatives.[142]

Qatar — Taliban's choice

Prior to all the talk initiatives undertaken by the Afghan Government, High Peace Council, and the regional and international parties, the Qatar process was seen as a comparative success. It was for the first time that both the US and Taliban held substantial talks and exchanged their perspectives.

Doha office

After more than a decade of bloodshed in Afghanistan, long-awaited peace talks were held in Doha, Qatar. But how Qatar came to be the choice for talks by Taliban even though it never recognized the Taliban regime in Afghanistan is an interesting subject. Doha, not a big city, usually hosts about 6,000 Afghan labourers and businessmen. When the Taliban regime was toppled by the US, Taliban leaders looked for refuge in Qatar which was denied as their names came under the sanctions lists of the US and UN. However, some low-ranking Taliban managed to get labour or business visa to travel to Qatar. This led to a gradual increase in numbers and activities of Afghan Taliban figures in Qatar.[143]

Taliban representatives arrived secretly in Qatar to hold talks with Western officials, especially with the US which was eager to reach a deal with Taliban in order to secure an honourable exit from Afghanistan. As a confidence-building measure when the Afghan Government and US offered protection to those ready to participate in peace talks these Taliban figures took the chance. Therefore, over the past few years, Taliban representatives from Qatar have begun to hold conferences on Afghanistan in Japan, France, Germany, Iran, to name a few. They represented only Afghan Taliban, the insurgent group led by Mullah Omar.[144]

With this background, Qatar was an obvious Taliban choice. Establishing the Doha office was a result of secret talks held between Taliban and US representatives and facilitated by Germany in 2010. During the first contacts between Germany and Taliban, Taliban asked for Qatar to be pulled into talks as they trusted Qatar. Taliban's choice of including Qatar in the talks was a well-thought out decision that fitted their strategy. The reason behind Taliban's choosing of Qatar as a venue was explained on their official website in 2012. First, it's an Islamic country with no border with Afghanistan. This was to ensure that Karzai doesn't use this as a pretext to accuse that Taliban were directed by a neighbouring state like in case of Pakistan. Second, it is a country with no military presence in Afghanistan, unlike Turkey, that has a military presence as a member of NATO. Third, it carries no historical baggage of interference in Afghan affairs and is seen as a neutral state. If an office was to open in Saudi Arabia, its close ties with Pakistan and support would have raised doubts among Afghan officials. So to create a balance on all sides, the Taliban had selected Qatar.[145]

The US was happy with the choice, but Karzai was not. Karzai had wanted the talks to be based in Turkey or Saudi Arabia as they were seen influential and have closer ties with the Afghan Government. Karzai was eventually convinced to give his approval for the office in Qatar, but only on the condition that it would be used only for peace talks with Afghan officials and not for activities like the expansion of Taliban ties with the rest of the world, nor for recruitment and fundraising.[146]

Interests

All the parties involved in supporting or hoping to get something from the talks in Qatar had individual interests as outlined below,

- **US**: release of its soldier, Sgt. Bergdahl; and a safe exit as part of some sort of deal with the Taliban
- **Taliban**: release of their members from the US prison, reducing their dependence on Pakistan; and international recognition
- **Afghan Government**: to create distance between the Taliban and Pakistan, and Taliban members to participate in talks with Afghan Peace Council
- **Pakistani Government**: to show that it does not control the Taliban and that they are based in Qatar rather than Pakistan
- **Qatar Government**: for its part, insists on helping, seeking to project itself as the main mediator in a prolonged conflict [147]

Talks

The US and Taliban initiated the talks by placing a set of demands and expectations from each other. Taliban wanted the release of five Taliban heads held by US at Guantanamo Bay in exchange for US Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl held by Taliban since 2009. However, even before talks began they collapsed, first in 2012 when pledges made by both sides couldn't work out. Taliban suspended talks, blaming the US of changing policies when it refused to release prisoners. But it doesn't mean that Taliban were not interested in holding talks again. As far as talks with the US, Taliban's commitment had credibility because sending a Taliban delegation for talks led by Tayyab Agha to Qatar meant Mullah Omar and Taliban Shura were personally involved. [148]

In 2013, the US and Taliban met again. Both sides were more cautious and made efforts to understand each other's position. This time, the talks were suspended by the Karzai Government, on the issue of Taliban's using 'Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan' flag and emblem symbol. Karzai immediately demanded the closure of the office and postponed Peace Council members' visit to meet Taliban. Karzai accused the US of conspiring to divide Afghanistan by undermining his authority and projecting the Taliban as an alternative Afghan government. Karzai insisted that the office should only be used for peace talks with Afghan Peace Council to establish contacts, and later the venue should be moved to Afghanistan. On American demand the Taliban removed the flag, but the Doha office remained closed. No prospects of any new rounds of talks are evident. The matter of holding talks has now become an issue of honour.[149] This is frustrating for the international community as the next talks would not be a resumption of the process where it was left but a new process altogether.

Peace process at present

At present peace in Afghanistan remains a dream to be realised. The need to have a consensus peace deal is imperative, to avoid a return to the civil

war. In the context of Afghanistan-Taliban talks, President Karzai has invited the Taliban to the negotiating table and asked them to stop using foreign guns against their own people. He expressed his government's willingness to have contact with Taliban through a political office in Turkey or Saudi Arabia, to kick-start negotiations, but with no compromise on the Constitution of the country and public interest.[150] Hence several months after dismissing the Doha process of 2013, Taliban expressed willingness to have indirect mediation, brokered by intermediaries shuttling the between the parties, modelled on the 1989 process of Soviet troops withdrawal. With December 2014 approaching, the Taliban are also prepared for a scenario where no settlement is reached in Afghanistan. But the prospects of talks still haven't been dismissed. The Afghan Taliban leadership is still willing to talk, but the new generation of battlefield commanders opposes the measures and they are getting ready to capture power by shifting the military balance.[151]

In January 2014, through reviving secrets contacts, a delegation from Afghanistan's HPC headed by Council head Masoom Stanekzai met in Dubai, UAE, with 16 high ranking Taliban figures led by Agha Jan Mutassim, ex-Taliban finance minister, to lay grounds for peace talks.[152]Although where these talks would lead the peace process is yet to be seen.

The Afghan Government submitted a plan to the Pakistani Government, asking for "supporting peace negotiations process, paving the road for talks between the High Peace Council (HPC) and the Taliban, releasing of key Taliban commanders and ensuring the participation of Pakistani religious scholars in the grand meeting of Islamic scholars from the Muslim world". At present, the Afghan Government is taking the peace matter cautiously, not even talking of its pre-conditions with Afghan Taliban. The reason behind this is to promote an inter-Afghan dialogue and with Pakistan's help it wants to make it an Afghan-led process.[153]

Pakistan, on its part, released a dozen more Taliban prisoners. The release so far hasn't led to any concessions from Taliban. [154] Karzai's visit to Pakistan did not curb apprehensions in Pakistan because as Rahimullah Yousufzai said, no one in Pakistan expects anything substantial from Karzai, as he keeps changing policy on daily basis.[155]

Nevertheless, the Pakistani Government appreciated the Dubai talks even though it was an informal contact held between a few groups. It might set a precedent for other groups to join in. Prime Minister's Adviser on National Security and Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz hinted at the possibility of Taliban relocating their office in another country. The country will be chosen by the Afghan Government's approval, because for Pakistan, Afghan reconciliation process is more important than the location. Pakistan's commitment is to facilitate the process whether talks are held in Dubai or Istanbul. Although time is running out, and the peace process has to resume sooner than later.[156]

All the actors in Afghanistan whether the government, the Taliban, opposition groups, US and Pakistan, appear to be jumbled up with policy options and not clear about the right direction. Karzai wants to have peace, but

on his own conditions. He also worries that US might cut a quick deal with Taliban. Pakistan is worried that Karzai's stubbornness is prolonging the peace process and his indecision about the security pact with US might further destabilise the region. For this reason, Pakistan has currently been trying to engage with the Afghan Taliban and the US while maintaining contacts with Karzai. Pakistan holds that "there is no other option but reconciliation, with or without Karzai. If he continues to be this stubborn, he and his High Peace Council will naturally be sidelined."**(157)**

In this situation, one cannot say for sure how long Afghanistan's harmonious mode with Pakistan will last. After a long troubled relationship full of ups and downs, another rift between the two countries will not be surprising. Just a few months back, Afghan officials had thrown various accusations at Pakistan, from aligning with the US, to promoting a power-sharing plan favourable for Taliban, to controlling the Taliban war in Afghanistan. As recently as March 2013, Karzai's spokesman said that "if we signed a strategic agreement with Pakistan, the Afghan public would stone us to death because they know that the suicide bombers that kill civilians and our armed forces come across from Pakistan."**(158)**

In terms of US-Taliban engagement, there seems to be no contacts between the two after the collapse of the Doha process in 2013. The US has exhausted its resources and forces along with those of its allies in Afghanistan. White House had worked out three possible solutions for resolving the insurgency problem. First, the Alpha solution was to exhaust insurgent Taliban's capacity permanently. This didn't work. The second, the Bravo solution, was to fight back hard through troop surge policy and force them to accept the Afghan Constitution and Government. This also did not work. The third, the Charlie solution, has been a 'no other choice' kind of a compromise, basically for the US to follow. At this stage the US had to accept Taliban as a legitimate entity in Afghanistan that was to be accommodated by accepting their demands and holding talks with them. Hence, it is the third solution that the US has been working on.**(159)**

At this time Americans are disappointed with Karzai. After a lot of persuasion and Karzai's reluctance to sign the security agreement about post-2014 Afghanistan's security, Karzai has become irrelevant to the United States. Subsequently, Karzai's decision has caused frustration at the White House and Pentagon. Washington has adopted a position of its own, to engage with the new Afghan president after April elections this year. A senior US official remarked: "If he's (Karzai) not going to be part of the solution, we have to have a way to get past him." It's a pragmatic recognition that clearly Karzai may not sign (the deal) and that he doesn't represent the voice of the Afghan people.**(160)**

But outfoxing Karzai does not resolve US concerns. It has created further complications for Washington. Washington will have to wait for the elections, if the transfer of power occurs peacefully, it will be a very big development. But this might be too optimistic since the Taliban refuse to accept the Afghan Constitution and the electoral process. There are already too many questions regarding the elections, one of which is Karzai's willingness to let go

of power as planned. Moreover, if the new successor takes power, deciding new terms for relations between US-Afghanistan would be too exhausting. This would mean the talks about peace and security deal might start some time in the second half of 2014. Nevertheless, whatever the situation is, if the new president agrees on signing the pact, the US will retain its presence and assist in peace talks, otherwise there is already talk of a complete withdrawal by the end of 2014.[161]

Conclusion

Afghanistan's struggle for peace seems to predate history. Despite the peace efforts, the year 2014 doesn't seem to offer much hope for the Afghan people. Reconciliation talks with the Afghan Taliban continue, but the question that remains is, whether these talks have the potential to bring all factions on the same page or would they remain merely symbolic. Each actor involved in the peace process holds diverging interests and has conflicting understanding of the peace strategy. The related countries are committed to play their roles, to assist the peace process; yet, their individual national interests often overlap and are prioritised. One thing that all actors involved in the peace process share, is the realization that the insurgency cannot be tackled and wiped off militarily. But Afghanistan is unlikely to have peace unless they all, including the Afghan Government, agree on one common interest.

The peace process has been held hostage to individual gains of the stakeholders. Karzai seems to be more concerned about the chief position he aspires to have and to own the process than the actual success of the process. Moreover, the policies Karzai wants to pursue place the onus on Pakistan's efforts, rather than on his own diplomatic skills. The truth is, Pakistan's previous policy of having 'strategic depth' to get an edge in Afghanistan over India is a lost cause.

No country other than Pakistan has more at stake, and Pakistan stands to be affected adversely from escalation in militancy, refugee influx and other perils of rising insecurity in Afghanistan. Pakistan is perceived to have influence on the Afghan Taliban and this perception leads to official pressure on Pakistan from the Afghan side. However, the extent of Pakistan's influence on Afghan Taliban may be overly exaggerated. Even though Pakistan managed to persuade the US and convince the Taliban into softening their policies towards each other on the matter of peace initiative. It was Pakistan's diplomatic skill that worked, in addition to the fact that both the US and Taliban were already ready to hold talks with each other.

On the other side, in Pakistan there seems to be an understanding that the Afghan Taliban are fighting against foreign occupation. Other than this, in their actions they are independent of Pakistan's influence,[162] Pakistan may be in a position to exert some influence at times, but definitely cannot control them at all times. As their track record shows, the Taliban are not a group that easily accepts dictation from anyone. There also have been instances of the Afghan

Taliban being caught and imprisoned in Pakistan, leading to a high level of mistrust.

So far, there haven't been any serious talks between Karzai and Taliban, despite claims made by the Karzai administration. The talks initiated by Karzai, have been low-level ones. Taliban still haven't accepted the legitimacy of the Karzai regime and have expressed no intention to do so. All channels utilized by Karzai, ranging from Afghan Peace Council to commanders from Taliban's tribe, from Pakistan to Saudi Arabia, have only exposed Karzai as a powerless figure.[163]

The powersharing deal offered to Taliban by Karzai, even if acceptable to a certain degree for Washington and Islamabad, seems unmanageable. It is not in the nature of Taliban to share power and authority.[164] Although they might welcome a constitutionally cemented power arrangement, if it guarantees them a significant role in the Afghan administration.[165]

Currently, the US seems to be pursuing a policy of urgent dignified exit. However, despite a decade-long presence in Afghanistan, the US has not been able to transform it from a failed state to a stable one. The best time for engaging the Taliban was not in the past few years after setting the withdrawal date, but from day one. The security agreement being pushed by the United States has so far been rejected by the Karzai administration. Perhaps one reason for his refusal is that the US at present doesn't consult or inform him of its moves in Afghanistan. Signing the pact would accord it freedom and legitimise the actions it takes on its own without taking the Afghan administration in confidence.[166] Beyond this, Americans don't have a grand strategy of turning Afghan fate, but they are simply poised to safeguard their past efforts and strategic interests.

There have been lot of apprehensions about Karzai and US over their way of dealing with the Afghan crisis and the peace prospects among Afghans. Even the Peace Council officials felt disappointed by Karzai's refusal to sign the security pact with the US, because when the new regime will eventually sign it, that will be quick and without a reasonable perspective of the overall ground realities for future security. However, most apprehensions are kept private. No one dares say in public that the Afghan Government might collapse. No one voices the fact that the rights of Afghan women might be sacrificed in any future settlement with the Taliban, in the name of bringing peace and stability to the country.

Accommodating the Taliban through a legitimate process is only possible through constitutional amendment, making the system less Kabul-centric. A multi-tiered process of an inclusive, comprehensive nature where all Afghan factions are represented in some key roles or positions is mainly looked upon. The role of regional and international interested parties is made obligatory in brokering the deal but through working from outside, from Afghan government perspective. Pakistan's window of opportunity with the incoming Afghan regime should be to avoid falling back into India-centric policy and play

a more constructive role through socio-economic cooperation for ensuring a peaceful, stable and prosperous Afghanistan.

The Afghan Government needs to prepare for both best- and worst-case scenarios post 2014, i.e. a peace settlement or at least some understanding regarding the peace agreement among the negotiating parties or no agreement at all. After transition, Afghanistan may either struggle with a weak political setup and a divided state or at worst could fall back into another episode of civil war. Due to some domestic and international interests, more than a decade of Western assistance has proved to be unsuccessful in producing a stable, strong and viable central government. In any situation, Afghanistan has to be prevented from falling into the hands of rogue, terrorist elements like al-Qaeda. Moving towards sustainable peace requires patience and a more comprehensive and inclusive approach. Consultations have to be held among all stakeholders, including the administration, civil society and key opponents. An effective consensus among the regional countries is essential when engaging with the Afghan government.

Hence, the importance of signing the security agreement with US, followed by with NATO, has repeatedly been highlighted by various domestic and international actors. Although the Afghan security forces over time have been growing in numbers and capabilities, yet they are committed to prove to their people to be a responsible force by gradually taking over and carrying out a series of security operations independently. The Afghan forces are even maintaining security in areas where they gained lead. Still it would be a mistake to underestimate the striking muscles of insurgent Taliban.[167] There are still too many challenges which they are not yet ready to tackle on their own without foreign support. The International Security Assistance force continues to help develop the capabilities of the Afghan security forces to enable them to fill the critical gaps that would remain even after the ISAF mission ends by the end of 2014. These key capability developing areas include; air support; intelligence enterprise; special operations; and Afghan security ministry capacity.[168]

Of all the above mentioned skills, one critical need is the continuous flow of international funding and coalition force assistance to sustain the Afghan forces beyond 2014. However, challenging uncertainties remain because of delay in finalizing any future security agreement with the international partners. Taliban have already capitalized on the absence of any such agreement and that makes Afghans apprehensive. Another critical necessity still lacking after so many years of coalition assistance is an effective and sustainable system for Afghan forces along with the lack of accountability mechanism and weak rule of law that hitches efforts of Afghan forces in building a secure environment.[169] The Afghan forces have proved they can fight, yet that is the result of twelve years of training and foreign assistance at the institutional level, from advise to training is still very much needed so that whatever capabilities they have accomplished becomes maintainable over time. Hence, the BSA remains crucial to the post-2014 scenario.[170]

Hence, despite the measures taken to accelerate the peace process, the completion of the process is not possible in 2014. Three significant issues will dominate the year 2014, including, the presidential elections, Bilateral Security Agreement between the new Afghan government and the US, and the international forces' withdrawal. No matter what the circumstances hold for Afghanistan post-2014, one thing is clear, the Taliban do not enjoy popular support to the extent generally suspected. Furthermore, even if the current peace efforts fail to bring respite to the Afghan people, these efforts will be pursued resolutely, likely with international and regional support. Failure of the Afghan peace process has not been an option considered by any country involved, as peace is the only saviour.

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Postcript — 15 May 2014 Update:
The enthusiastic way Afghan people participated in the 5 April Presidential election [I] (overall turnout 58 per cent,[II] women's turnout 35 per cent,[III]) was a show of defiance of the Taliban. They thronged polling stations despite threats to their lives.[IV] Another hopeful signal came in the fact that they transcended the ethnic divides by voting Dr. Abdullah Abdullah — a Tajik from maternal and Pashtun from paternal side and candidate of the National Coalition of Afghanistan, an entity that stands for the transformed (2011) Northern Alliance — into the lead.[V] No doubt the Afghans have surprised the whole world with their determination and maturity.

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AFGHANISTAN AS A FACTOR IN INDO-PAKISTAN RELATIONS

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In contemporary South Asian security environment, Afghanistan provides a challenging opportunity for the Indo-Pakistan relations as a make-or-break avenue for peace and stability, both at the bilateral as well as on the regional front. In view of the Afghan ethnic, political, military, economic and religious fault lines, the Indo-Pakistan competition, fuelled by mutual traditional rivalry and checquered history, has led to the re-emergence of proxy warfare inside Afghanistan. Pakistan's "security dilemma" and India's great-power status pursuit further interact with the regional cross-purposes of other states as well. The resultant effect with each state having its own end-game has led to the regional clash of red lines inside Afghanistan.

The competing Indo-Pakistan interests inside Afghanistan range from their respective spheres of influences in Kabul; Afghan transit trade routes to Central Asia, and combating Talibanization endangering the future of regional peace and stability. It also involves the role of other state players with Iran from West Asia and China from South-East Asia in particular. The US role in Afghanistan as a global power has circumstantial influence and impact over the dynamics of Afghan political spheres of India and Pakistan and vice versa.

This research study hypothesizes the continuation of Indo-Pakistan conflict inside Afghanistan in the future ahead with the regional peace, stability and progress at stake. It addresses this deduction on the basis of narrowing and broadening of cross-purposes of India and Pakistan inside Afghanistan and beyond; the Afghan inability to balance out its relationship with both these countries; how the South Asian security complex is affected by the Central

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Asian security dynamics, and above all, the implications of US withdrawal strategy from Afghanistan on the competition of two South Asian nuclear powers inside the Afghan quagmire.

Theoretical framework

The broadening in international relations discourse has led to the emergence of non-traditional approaches of security studies in addition to the traditional security approach. The addition of Copenhagen School to the study of international relations was one such attempt to broaden the horizon and scope of security studies and world politics. Barry Buzan is considered the father of this school of thought. Other important exponents of this approach are Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde. The three important contributions of Copenhagen School to the International Relations discourse are: Securitization, Sectoral approach to security and Security Complex Theory.[1]

Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) provides a synthesis of neo-realism and globalism as it assimilates global and state levels of analysis, adds the regional level of analysis and considers both state as well as non-state actors in the conceptualization of a security complex. Buzan defines a security complex as "a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot reasonably be considered apart from one another."[2] Buzan and Weaver define a regional security complex as "a set of units whose major processes of securitization, de-securitization, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another."[3] One of the fundamental variables in order to access the interexchange of security interdependence between different states is the range of distance; threats are more permissible to carry through over short distances as compared to long ones.[4] According to RSCT, four levels of analysis are:[5]

- State level of analysis
- Regional level of analysis
- Inter-regional level of analysis
- Global level of analysis

Buzan and Weaver have laid down a comprehensive elaboration of their argument that why in the presence of state and global level of analysis of world politics, regional level of analysis is preferable to gauge relations between states based upon the patterns of amity and enmity. It is so due to two fundamental reasons; first, state security is relational in character in view of its interaction with other states, securitizing their vested interests. Second, the concept of relative security creates security interdependence which is more visible at the regional level as compared to the global or national level. Afghanistan is a case where the US has to deal with the Afghan quagmire in view of regional clash of red lines. Indo-Pakistan rivalry in South Asia is a prime example where the conflict does not only translate itself on the bilateral front but also on the regional front.

In the case of Afghanistan as a factor in Indo-Pakistan relations, Afghanistan can be defined as an insulator state. Buzan and Weaver associate an insulator state particularly with RSCT and define it as a "location occupied by one or more units where larger regional security dynamics stand back to back."[6] Afghanistan is at the crossroads of three regions, i.e. South Asia, Central Asia and West Asia. Afghanistan being a landlocked state has to depend on the administrative infrastructure and political relations based upon the patterns of amity and enmity among its neighbouring countries. The clashing interests of different states in the Afghan proximity with the already ensuing Afghan ethnic, political, religious and militant fault lines from inside have led to "the clash of red lines" in Afghanistan which makes it an insulator state, making it unable to benefit from its capacity and capabilities on its own to generate peace and stability at national, regional, inter-regional and on international level as well.[7]

Pakistan is the most important neighbour of Afghanistan since it shares historical, cultural, ethnic and religious affinities with it. Pakistan sees Afghanistan as the doorway opening to Central Asian resources that could meet its dire energy demands. Pakistan also had its share of problems with Afghanistan, namely the Durand Line issue, cross-insurgency of militants across the border, arms and drugs smuggling and the presence of Afghan refugees inside Pakistan. India, on the other hand, does not share border with Afghanistan but its geographic proximity, great-power potential, huge market attraction for foreign resource influx, interest in Central Asian resources and historical bilateral rivalry with Pakistan makes it an important South Asian regional player to have interest in the developments in Afghan affairs.

In view of RSCT's application on Afghanistan as a factor in Indo-Pakistan relations, the paper elucidates the local/domestic security complex of Afghanistan; elaborates the South Asian regional security complex in view of Indo-Pakistan rivalry affecting the Afghan quagmire and vice versa. Moreover, how super-regional security complexes of China and Iran make them an intriguing party in Indo-Pakistan rivalry inside Afghanistan, and how the US global security complex in view of its Afghan exit strategy and the post-withdrawal scenario will have implications for Indo-Pakistan competitions inside Afghanistan. The paper analyzes the interplay of political, military, economic and societal sectors only as the environmental sector does not play a major role in the interaction of the security complexes of India, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Historical context

The historical connections between Afghanistan and the pre-partition sub-continent date back to its invasions by the Ghauris, Ghaznavids and the Mughals from Afghanistan. Ahmed Shah Abdali, who was a commander in Nadir Shah's army which invaded India, founded the state of Afghanistan in 1747 after Nadir Shah's death. During the British rule in the sub-continent, Afghanistan faced three Anglo-Afghan wars (1839-42; 1878-80; 1919) due to its buffer location status between the British Empire and the Tsarist Russia.[8] The

second Anglo-Afghan war led to the political rapprochement on border dispute between the colonial Indian government and Afghanistan. The resultant political agreement on border demarcation led to the naming of frontier border line between the two territories as the Durand Line.[9]

As a result of decolonization, the partition of the sub-continent in 1947 led to revival of conflict on the status of the Durand Line between the newly created state of Pakistan and Afghanistan. To make this conflict official in character, Afghanistan refused to recognize the independent status of Pakistan in the United Nations during 1947, giving support to India's stance of opposing partition. Afghanistan was thus implicitly declaring the creation of Pakistan as illegitimate.

A culmination of alliance between Afghanistan and India against the existence of Pakistan from both the western and eastern borders respectively, with certain inside factions supporting the breakdown of a fragile nascent state, Pakistan could not have imagined a worse security scenario than this after its inception. Ian Stephens, a British Journalist and historian, has described this threat perception with the help of "pincer movement" wherein India and Afghanistan will crush Pakistan from both sides by simultaneously attacking it at once.[10] William Fraser Tytler, a British historian, said "history suggests that fusion [of Afghanistan and Pakistan] will take place, if not peacefully, then by force."[11] A Pak-Afghan confederative proposal, based upon the principle of a Muslim/Islamic bloc and given by Ayub Khan, the then military ruler of Pakistan, during the 1960s,[12] failed to materialize due to lack of interest from Afghanistan.

India, on the other hand, was unable to capitalize on this opportunity to harm Pakistan via Afghanistan due to the Delhi Pact, also known as the Nehru-Liaquat Pact, signed on 8 April 1950.[13] Although the pact was about the protection of rights of minorities on both sides of the border, its Section C, clause 7 and 8 called to curb efforts inciting "communal passions" and respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of each other while discouraging any propaganda in this regard, respectively.[14] Even, though India signed a friendship pact with Afghanistan on 4 January 1950, it could not officially support the Pakhtoonistan cause whipped up by Afghanistan due to its obligations under the Delhi Pact.[15] Since Delhi did not meet Kabul expectations over Pakhtoonistan, Kabul too showed neutral reciprocity in Indian wars with Pakistan in 1948, 1965, 1971 and 1999. The pincer movement threat was counter-checked by the Delhi Pact in view of Afghanistan as a factor in the initial years of Indo-Pakistan relations.

In view of comparative capacities and capabilities, logically Pakistan could never match the great-power potential of India without any outside help. In the context of Cold War bipolarity, the bilateral rivalry with India led Pakistan to evolve its foreign policy from multilateralism to bilateralism during the 1950s. Pakistan did so by becoming a member of the South-East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) in 1954 and the Baghdad Pact (later re-named Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) in 1955.[16] India, on the other hand, decided to

remain neutral in the global bipolar confrontation. It was at the very end of the 1970s that Pakistan became a key force in the US-Soviet global confrontation with Afghanistan as its closure battleground. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 was a game changing event not only for the regional politics between India and Pakistan but for the world politics as well.

India during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan remained on the sidelines while Pakistan actively participated in this war. Although India did not support the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan officially, yet it did not show any signs or presence to support the Afghan freedom fighters either. With the US backing and its geographic proximity with Afghanistan, Pakistan flourished to have an upper hand in the Afghan competition with India during the 1980s. Pakistan countered the Soviet-Afghan intervention by backing and supporting the militant Muslim movements inside Afghanistan. The seven most powerful militant factions had their camp stations in Peshawar.[17] That situation served two fundamental purposes; firstly, securing Pakistan's role in steering the future developments in Afghanistan and, secondly, countering Pashtun nationalism on the local front inside Pakistan with the propagation of political Islam on the regional front inside Afghanistan. This policy had its repercussions in the form of Afghan diaspora, smuggling of drugs and arms, and above all, the introduction of extremist militant religiosity inside Pakistan.

Zbigniew Brzezinski was right in proclaiming Afghanistan as the Vietnam of the Soviet Union.[18] The Cold War ended with the dissolution of the Soviet Union making Afghanistan the "graveyard of empires."[19] Both India and Pakistan had reached the unofficial nuclear state status by the end of Cold War creating a nuclear parity between both which favoured Pakistan as compared to its traditional arch-rival. The Afghan situation left India in turmoil from a regional strategic point of view. India was not even called to attend the Geneva talks of 1988 to discuss the future of Afghanistan and peaceful withdrawal of Soviet forces.

In the post-Cold War scenario, India changed its strategic policy in view of Pakistan's overarching influence inside Afghanistan. Pakistan with the support of Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates ensured the rise of Taliban whereas India alongside Iran and the newly born Central Asian Republics supported the other main opposing Afghan militant-political faction, the Northern Alliance. This confrontation along Pashtun (Taliban) and non-Pashtun (Northern Alliance) ethnic and religious lines led to the proxy involvement of regional players inside Afghanistan. Taliban emerged as the successful party out of this confrontation inside Afghanistan whereas Pakistan emerged as the leading party ahead of India in their regional bilateral Afghan competition.

The 9/11 tragedy not only led to the beginning of another foreign intervention in Afghanistan but led to the re-entry of regional proxy warfare as well. Pakistan again became a frontline ally of the US in its Afghan war against terror after being deserted during the 1990s in the aftermath of Soviet withdrawal. India, on the other hand, at present has a much better position in the

Afghan affairs as compared to its position during the Soviet presence in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan's domestic security complex

The politicization/securitization of militancy along religious and ethnic lines during the 1980s and 1990s define the very fragmentation of the Afghan society at present. It led to the introduction of weaponization culture along radical ethnic, religious and military lines inside Afghanistan.[20] The said culture enunciated environment for its own economy which led to a vicious cycle of violent confrontation among the societal groups in the country. The vicious cycle of violence based on the economy of weapons required ideological impetus as well. Afghans found that ideological impetus in two ideologies during the Soviet intervention, i.e. political identity issues within the Afghan society based on 'ethnic nationalism', and 'political Islam' in view of its Jihadist interpretation and militant application with reference to nationalist as well as radical religious agenda.

Ethnic nationalism in view of political alienation led to the division of Afghan society along two fault lines i.e. Pashtuns versus Non-Pashtuns.[21] Officially, there are 14 ethnic groups inside Afghanistan with Pashtuns (42%) constituting the majority of the population.[22] The other three major ethnic groups comprising the majority of the population are Tajiks (27%), Hazaras (4%) and Uzbeks (4%), respectively.[23] The history of the Afghan ruling class demonstrates the fact that Pashtuns have been the rulers predominantly except in 1929 when Habibullah Kalkani, a Tajik, ruled the country for a period of just nine months; and from 1992-1996 when Burhanuddin Rabbani, another notable Tajik, remained the President of Afghanistan for approximately four years. The long absence of other Afghan nationalities as the ruling authority has created a visible divide between the Pashtuns and non-Pashtuns. The 1990s civil war between Gulbudin Hekmatyar and Ahmed Shah Masoud; between the Taliban (Pashtuns, although Taliban are much more than merely a Pashtun militant group) and the Northern Alliance (Non-Pashtuns) is reminiscent of this fact. The divergence of ethnic nationalist views is not only restricted to the battlefield but it can be observed in the political arena as well. The present presidential form of government supports the ascendency of Pashtuns to the executive ruling seat in Kabul keeping in view the relative Afghan demographic proportions of its social groups. Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, a presidential candidate and foreign minister of Afghanistan in the transitional government formed after the Bonn Agreement of 2001, is of the view that presidential form of government should be replaced with a parliamentary form of government as it would provide a better power-sharing political system to all the societal groups, creating an appropriate environment for national cohesion, both in spirit and practice.[24]

Political Islam added another complex layer to the societal fault lines in Afghanistan. Political Islam in its theory and interpretation is not a monolithic idea. It has been pluralist in its practical manifestation inside Afghanistan. The Soviet invasion was opposed both on nationalistic as well as on religious

grounds. The 'holy warriors' also known as Mujahedeen came from all around the world to aid their Muslim brothers and sisters by waging Jihad in order to establish a 'true' Islamic political system. Most Afghan jihadists had a nationalist agenda while the foreign jihadists who came from other countries had a globalist jihadi agenda. Tactically, these forces provided a successful amalgam against the Soviets. Strategically, it became a major existential threat not only for the Afghans themselves but for most of the powerful nation-states all around the globe. This neo-existential threat of militant Islam without bounding itself in the limits of territoriality led to the events of the 1990s civil war, Talibans' rise to power in 1996 and the launching of war against terrorism in Afghanistan. The radical Islamists became a source of threat for national cohesion leading to the perpetuation of sectarianism inside Afghan society. The massacre of Hazarites (Shiite by sect) at Mazar-e-Sharif in 1998 is one such example of sectarian strife inside Afghanistan in its recent history.[25] This amalgam of sectarian-cum-ethnic militancy is still prevalent in Afghanistan's main political framework with top ten political parties in the Afghan Loya Jirga coming from ex-militant groups formed along ethnic or secatarian lines.[26] Almost all political groups are marked by the culture of warlord fiefdoms in the contemporary Afghan political system.

The warlord fiefdoms are also one of the major reasons for the sustenance of war. Their presence is not only restricted to the war economy but they also exploit the political honours in the Afghan political system. The militant factions in Afghanistan can be divided into three main groups i.e. pro-government, anti-government and foreign militants. The pro-government warlords have been appointed as governors in Afghanistan, e.g. Governor Atta of Balkh, Governor Sherazi of Nangahar province are both commanders of their respective militant groups.[27] The anti-government Afghan militants primarily belong to the Taliban (Taliban are headed by Mullah Omer but due to the asymmetrical nature of the warfare, they have divided into many factions. Still all the Taliban factions consider Mullah Omer their spiritual head), the Haqqani Network and the Hizb-e-Islami of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. Taliban are considered as the leading militant organization in anti-government resistance movement against the presence of foreign troops in Afghanistan. They have their strongholds in Kandahar and Helmand with a strong penetrating capacity in the government power centres. The assassination of Burhanuddin Rabbani and the Kabul attacks on government installations as well as on foreign embassies and consulates prove their penetrating prowess. They have their tactical alliance with the Haqqani network but do not share any such bond with the Hizb-e-Islami of Hekmatyar. The main anti-government foreign militant groups are Al-Qaeda, Tehriek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). Al-Qaeda has a global agenda of jihad against the US and its allies but due to extensive losses in Afghanistan, it keeps a bare minimum presence inside Afghanistan.[28]

The number of Afghan National Army (ANA) to combat local, regional and international terrorists is 187,000.[29] The number of International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) inside Afghanistan is 86,834 with the US having

60,000 troops.[30] Some analysts and experts have questioned ANA's capacity to combat, loyalty to government and commitment to the cause of eradicating militancy and terrorism from Afghanistan. The loyalty of ANA personnel is doubted by many experts.[31] The "Green on Blue attacks" provides one major context for the security concerns over the loyalty of ANA.[32] The presence of ethnic fault lines makes the composition of ANA as one monolithic disciplined unit, a complex proposition, keeping in view the history of disintegration in ANA during the 1990s civil war. Furthermore, "Pentagon's December 2012 semi-annual 1230 report submitted to the US Congress" declares that only one Afghan brigade has shown the standard capacity and skill to fight the terrorists without any foreign assistance until now.[33] This position puts a huge question mark on the combating potential of ANA against the Taliban onslaught in the post-withdrawal scenario, particularly in the absence of foreign forces.

The Government of Afghanistan, being responsible for the law and order situation, does not show promising signs for maintaining peace and stability in the future. President Hamid Karzai, who has often been dubbed as the "mayor of Kabul", has shown administrative inefficiency in dealing with the domestic problems.[34] He has been accused of nepotism for favouring his family relatives.[35] The members of his administration have also been charged with embezzlement allegations, as M. Faheem, the First Vice President, hit headlines for being in the business of narcotics trafficking.[36] The woes of the government do not end here. The economic dependency on foreign investment has led to its being labelling as a "rent-based economy."[37] The dependency syndrome can be judged by the fact that from 2006-10, 90 per cent expenditures of the economy was being aided by foreign sources.[38] Furthermore, the competitive nature of foreign investment from regional countries in view of the Silk Route and their varying Afghan strategic interests has led to the "regionalization of conflict" leading to the proclamation of a "new great game" inside Afghanistan.[39]

The Afghan domestic security complex is characterized with volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguous (VUCA) patterns and trends due to war and other added factors such as societal fault lines, weaponization of society, presence of militant fiefdoms, ineffective government, weak economy, corruption, question marks on the capability of Afghan security forces, presence of foreign troops, competition of regional powers, the Taliban and other militant groups opposing the presence of foreign troops.[40] In the words of Kofi Anan, former secretary general of United Nations, "The Afghan leaders refuse to rise above their factional interests and start working together for national reconciliation. Too many groups in Afghanistan, warlords, terrorists, drug dealers and others, appear to have too much to gain from war and too much to lose from peace."[41]

Afghan factor in the Indo-Pak relations: South Asian regional security complex

India and Pakistan are the two main regional powers of South Asia. Their geography, population, natural resources and the nuclear status cements

this fact. Both states have their own share of internal security problems. The two countries are also responsible for the South Asian instability when it comes to the conflicts that they do share at core, having an overarching effect over the peace, stability and progress of the whole South Asian periphery.[42]

The historic rivalry between the two states started on the very day of their inception. The seeds of conflict were laid in the colonial setting of the Indian Subcontinent's partition.[43] It led to the germination of a plethora of internal as well as external problems for both arch-rival nation-states ranging from ideological/identity conflicts to the sacrifice of economic development against the benefits of the arms race perceived in view of growing insecurities in both the countries. The disputed status of the Kashmir Valley has been one of the biggest irritants in the normalization of bilateral relations since independence. It has affected all areas of mutual cooperation. The very first war that was fought between India and Pakistan was over the issue of Kashmir in 1947 and the last war in Kargil in 1999 was also fought over the control of the disputed territory. India claims Kashmir as its *attutang* (inseperatable part) whereas Pakistan claims it as its *shahragh* (jugular) making Kashmir an integral part of any future war between the two archrivals.

The nature of conflict between India and Pakistan has evolved from direct state confrontation to proxy warfare. India has been accusing Pakistan of sponsoring militant religious groups to infiltrate the Indian-occupied Kashmir since the indigenous uprising of 1989.[44] The Kashmiri uprising of 1989 was contextualized by the rigging in the local elections held in Kashmir.[45] Incidentally, the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan was also completed the same year. New Delhi saw the cross-insurgency of non-state militants inside Kashmir with reference to Pakistan's Afghan 'strategic depth' doctrine leading to the mushrooming of its strategic assets, i.e. non-state religious militant outfits.[46] Pakistan's support to the non-state militants inside Afghanistan and their consistent to-and-fro movement across the Durand Line in the post-Soviet Afghanistan was seen as a proxy instrument which India deemed to be used against it in the future. India viewed the insurgency of militants inside Kashmir in connection to the presence of militants in the tribal areas of Pakistan. Pakistan, on the other hand, termed the militant resistance movement inside Kashmir a local resistance movement against the Indian aggression to suppress the Kashmiris' right of self-determination.

India, in view of Pakistan's strategic depth doctrine, changed its policy towards Afghanistan by transitioning it from soft power diplomacy to militarization of its strategic make-up inside Afghanistan. During the 1990s, India supported the Northern Alliance against the Pakistani sponsorship of Taliban inside Afghanistan. After the Taliban victory, India suspended its relations with Afghanistan the same way as Afghanistan did with Pakistan from 1961-1963.[47]

In the aftermath of Taliban fall from Kabul due to the US invasion of 2001, India again resumed its relations with Afghanistan. This time around, India was in a better position to place itself in Afghanistan as compared to the

1980s and 90s. Since India does not share border with Afghanistan, it has to depend on a regional or a powerful extra-regional actor for entry into Afghanistan. Pakistan's strong strategic presence and influence inside Afghanistan has been the major irritant for India to play a dominant role in Afghanistan. In the aftermath of 9/11, the Indian entry into Afghanistan was made possible by the US. India was made part of the Bonn Conference (2010) to deliberate on the future of Afghanistan with other stakeholders in the aftermath of the fall of the Taliban.[48] The transitional Afghan government formed as a result of the Bonn Accord provided a major share of power for Northern Alliance members who had good share of relations with India.[49] Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, M. Haneef, Younas Qanooni and M. Faheem were considered as pro-Indian in the Afghan transitional government.[50] Hamid Karzai, the Afghan President, received his bachelor's degree from Himachel Pradesh University.[51]

Furthermore, India resumed its soft diplomacy initiatives inside Afghanistan through economic means with the added support of the US and backing from the Afghan government. India is the largest regional donor and overall 5th largest donor to Afghanistan.[52] India has given an estimated (US) $2 billion in aid to Afghanistan.[53] It has also assured $120 million for 2013-14 in continued support towards reconstruction and development of the country.[54] Other important reconstruction and development programmes initiated by India include the Afghan Parliament, Salma Dam in Heart and the Zeranj-Delaram road.[55] Additionally, India also provides 500 annual scholarships each for both the Afghan students and the civil servants.[56]

Pakistan's $330 million assistance to Afghanistan is far lower than the Indian aid figures since 9/11.[57] In spite of this fact, Pakistan leads India in trade with Afghanistan and is its largest trading partner.[58] This is due to the fact that Afghanistan is a landlocked country and has to rely for its foreign trade on the ports and road network of its neighbouring countries, particularly Pakistan. "Afghanistan also provides the third largest export market for the Pakistani goods."[59] Compared to Pakistan, India is at disadvantage as it does not share any border with Afghanistan and has to depend on the land-routes and ports of its neighbouring countries. Furthermore, Pakistan has revisited the outdated Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) of 1965 through a series of lengthy, complex negotiations with Afghanistan which began in 2006 and led to the signing of a new APTTA on 18 July 2010, coming into effect on 12 June 2011.[60] It led to better means of transport for Afghan exports and imports through Pakistan. APTTA also helped both neighbours to market their goods in South Asia and Central Asia. Pakistan, in a goodwill gesture, offered 2,000 annual scholarships for the Afghan students.[61] Afghanistan reciprocated by allowing around 70,000 Pakistanis to wage employment inside Afghanistan.[62]

The bilateral transit trade agreement does not allow India to export its goods through Pakistan's Wagah border although it does allow Afghanistan to send its exports to the Indian market through that border.[63] However, in 2012, Pakistan made an exception by allowing Indian wheat to be exported to Afghanistan through its territory.[64]

India claims that its presence in Afghanistan is not Pakistan-centric; rather it is Afghan-centric and will not only result in the development and progress of Afghanistan alone but also the whole region.[65] Pakistan sees India's overt economic presence as aimed at strategically encircling Pakistan both from the eastern and western borders. The pincer movement insecurity syndrome in the context of India's partnership with Afghanistan is not a new one. Pakistan has its doubts over India's peaceful interests in Afghanistan as it has repeatedly alleged the involvement of Indian consulates in Afghanistan in sponsoring covert support to the insurgency in Baluchistan.[66] Pakistan's foreign secretary Jaleel Abbas Jillani in October 2013 alleged India's proxy intrusion in that province.[67] Since 2003, Pakistan has been claiming that the Indian consulates are more focused on subversion in Pakistan through its Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) than assisting in Afghanistan's development.[68] Pakistani Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed stated in 2006 that "RAW [is] training 600 Baluchs in Afghanistan."[69] In the light of recent evidence coming from the Indian DGMO, Lt. Gen Vinod Bhatia, that certain sections of the Indian army were involved in forming a special secret unit under the supervision of the recently retired Army Chief General Vijay Kumar Singh which carried out terrorist activities in the form of bomb blasts in Pakistan in the aftermath of Mumbai attacks and also supported the secessionist insurgent movements in Baluchistan.[70] Afghanistan-India Strategic Partnership Agreement signed on 4 October 2011 for the training of Afghan troops adds further woes to the regional insecurities of Pakistan.[71]

India, on the other hand, alleges that Pakistan has been sponsoring terrorist activities on its installations in Afghanistan. After the July 2008 attack on the Indian embassy in Kabul, India openly blamed it on Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). It said the ISI masterminded it and operationalized it through the Haqqani network.[72]

In the backdrop of these conflicting narratives the Afghan administration sees Pakistan's role as an integral part of any future peace settlement in the turbulent country. At the same time it views India as a major regional as well as a rising global power which would help it build state infrastructures and strengthen its weak economy and also provide it a balancing option against Pakistan. Afghanistan, in view of this balancing narrative, has itself become part of the alleged proxy warfare in the region. The recent arrest of senior TTP member Latif Mahsud by the US forces in Afghanistan while he was on his way for negotiations with the Afghan government[73] is a case in point. Since Latif Mahsud was member of Pakistani Taliban, Kabul's negotiations with him arouses suspicions about its being part of the regional proxy warfare. The US was also surprised to know that Latif Mahsud was already in contact with the Afghan intelligence.[74] Aimal Faizi, an official spokesperson for the Afghan president, has confirmed that the Afghan government was in contact with Latif Mahsud.[75] Latif Mahsud's secret negotiations with Kabul strengthen Pakistan's suspicion that TTP leader Fazlullah was given sanctuary by the government in Afghanistan.

The securitization of state insecurities of Pakistan, Afghanistan and India via covert support for the non-state militant groups decreases the dividends

of trilateral economic cooperation and increases the chances of strategic instability in South Asia.

Afghan factor in Indo-Pak relations:
Inter-Regional Security Complexes

Central Asia as a region has one of the world's largest deposits of rich minerals, oil and gas making it a hot spot keeping in view the political economy of energy.[76] Zbigniew Brzezinski once said that "control of the Eurasian land mass is the key to global domination and control of Central Asia is the key to control of the Eurasian land mass."[77] Brzezinski here highlights the significance of Central Asia to world politics. In view of the rising energy demand all around the globe, the oil and gas supply lines from Central Asia have become a major zone of economic competition, especially for its neighbouring regions[78] including South Asia. The only convenient path connecting South Asia with Central Asia passes through Afghanistan. This pathway is traditionally termed the Silk Route.

The CARs view Afghanistan's significance with reference to military security and economic security. The first major external threat that the Central Asian states faced after independence in the early 1990s was the spillover effect of the Afghan civil war. The intensification of Indo-Pakistan rivalry in Afghanistan was based on the question who would have an upper hand in capitalizing the rich resources of Central Asia in the future. Pakistan gained the upper hand in the Afghan competition against India during the 1990s but failed to attract the CARs due to its Afghan policy of sponsoring the Taliban movement. In the 1990s Afghan civil war, CARs supported the Northern Alliance for two fundamental reasons. Firstly, due to Northern Alliance's ethnic composition: it comprises the Afghan Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras who have their historical ethnic affinities with Central Asia. Secondly, they feared that in future a nexus might develop between the Islamist insurgent movements of Central Asia and Taliban in Afghanistan.[79] The partnership between the Afghan Taliban and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) both in Afghanistan and Central Asia is a practical manifestation of this threat perceived by the Central Asian regimes.[80]

Pakistan's support to Taliban during the later years of the 90s became a major irritant in developing cordial relations with the CARs. Pakistani efforts to establish relations with Central Asia on the basis of 'Political Islamism' were also not well received by the CARs regimes. Since India was already against Taliban rule in Afghanistan, a natural alliance between India and CARs emerged to support the Northern Alliance against the Pakistani-sponsored Taliban in Afghanistan. Resultantly, India was allowed to establish a military base at Farkhor, Tajikistan, in May 2002 due to the security understanding achieved between India and CARs during the 90s Afghan civil war with reference to the threat of a Talibanized Afghanistan.[81] India's military presence in Central Asia adds to Pakistan's apprehension of encirclement by India, reinforcing perception of its strategic footprint inside Afghanistan.

In the contemporary scenario, the two South Asian rivals and the Central Asian states are trying to meet their economic ends via the Silk Route strategy despite the fact that Afghanistan is still being ravaged by war. The Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India (TAPI) gas pipeline proposed in 2008 is one such project. It provides a probable convergence of economic interests between India and Pakistan considering their bilateral competition for Central Asian reserves while they are still at odds inside Afghanistan.[82] Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA)'s anti-Indian posture with the added factor of insecurity along the trade routes between Pakistan and Afghanistan due to cross-insurgency of terrorists has led to the emergence of doubts on the durability of such economic projects of mutual interest. For this very reason, India is looking for alternative transit trade routes to Central Asia which reduces its reliance on the traditional transit trade route passing through Pakistan into Central Asia via southern Afghanistan.

The future of regional trade between South Asia and Central Asia depends on the security of transit trade routes passing through Afghanistan. Due to the regional proxy engagement inside Afghanistan, India and Pakistan have been unable to maximize the economic benefits that they could have secured from the Central Asian markets. Pakistan, India and Afghanistan having observer status in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) can utilize this platform for converging their regional interests.

Afghan factor in the Indo-Pak relations:
Global security complex

The 9/11 tragedy and the subsequent US invasion of Afghanistan to fight the war against terrorism resulted into a war that has been raging for 12 years, still with no end in sight. Faced with domestic economic compulsions and rise in the cost of war both in human and financial terms, the US has opted for an exit strategy from Afghanistan with a timeline given for the withdrawal of troops from 2011 to 2014.[83] This policy is supplemented by President Obama's AfPak strategy declaring Pakistan and Afghanistan part of a single theatre of war in the global war against terrorism.[84] Drone strikes in Pakistani tribal areas are an offshoot of the AfPak strategy. Moreover, the US wants to reach a regional consensus on the Afghan quagmire to arrive at a political settlement among the stakeholders necessary for the solution of this problem.[85] Some fear that "the area will be in for a difficult time if the United States pulls its military forces out of a politically and economically weak Afghanistan in 2014 without strong regional consensus."[86]

The US sees the Indo-Pakistan rivalry as one of the biggest obstacles in achieving stability in South Asia generally and in Afghanistan particularly, with reference to achieving a regional consensus on the solution to the Afghan quagmire. The US offered its support to resolve the Kashmir dispute considered as the main hurdle in the normalization of relations between India and Pakistan.[87] India has refused any US role in the resolution of the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan.

Although the US values Pakistan's role in view of its sacrifices for giving support in the American-led war against terror, yet it considers Pakistan as a part of the Afghanistan problem as has been exhibited by the content of its AfPak policy. The level of mistrust and tensions created between the US and Pakistan due to Raymond Davis case, Salala incident, Osama bin Laden operation in Abbottabad, drone strikes, US blaming links between ISI and the Haqqani network, presence of the Quetta Shura (Taliban) members in Pakistan and passing of NATO supply lines from Pakistan, do not present a friendly picture of their relations.

The US considers India's role in infrastructure building in Afghanistan as a positive one. The great-power potential of India and the rise of China in the world politics makes India an important US strategic partner in South Asia in general and Afghanistan in particular. The deal on Iran's nuclear programme backed by the US strengthens the Indo-Iran partnership in Afghanistan particularly in the context of Indian investment for the Chahbahar port.[88] The US recognizes India as an emerging global power but when it comes to the apprehensions of Pakistan in view of Indian proxy engagement in the insurgency in Baluchistan, the US has maintained its silence.

The US has kept its tactical approach towards Pakistan as it did during the 1980s after which it left Pakistan on its own regarding the Afghan share of its problems in the post-Cold War era. Any significant progress towards the solution to the Afghan problem would require a strategic balancing mechanism by the US to regulate Indo-Pakistan Afghan competition getting out of control. Some fear that "leaving Afghanistan in this situation without a regional or international understanding means more war, more violence; at least it means continued instability."[89]

Conclusion

India and Pakistan are historical rivals who have been unable to overcome their mutual enmity for the stability and progress of their respective states in particular and for the whole region in general. Their conflict over the disputed Kashmir territory has become the main hurdle in the convergence of their interests not only on the bilateral front but also inside Afghanistan and beyond. India's covert proxy warfare in Baluchistan via its consulates, the Haqqani network's attacks on India's Afghan installations with their safe havens inside Pakistan and the recently revealed Afghan government connections with the TTP adds a further complex layer to the already strained relationship between the two South Asian rivals both inside and beyond Afghanistan.

Pakistan's Afghan strategic depth doctrine, which has been India-centric, has failed with the non-state militants using this doctrine to establish safe havens both in Pakistan and Afghanistan; using their geography against their own governments. The random and diffused nature of these militant groups is not only a threat to the future of Afghanistan and Pakistan alone, it also threatens the security of India. If Pakistan and Afghanistan fail to combat and counter the terrorist activities of these militant groups, India will be their next

target which already is facing difficulty in countering the Naxalite insurgency movement. Indo-Pakistan proxy war would only enlarge the window of opportunity to escape for these non-state terrorist organizations to expand their strategic depth, which would prove detrimental to the security and stability of the whole South Asia. The only way forward is regional cooperation which India, Pakistan and Afghanistan have been unable to achieve in view of the securitization of non-state militant groups in their external state security frameworks.

The insecurities of India and Pakistan in Afghanistan are not limited to the military realm alone as the bilateral competition extends to the economic sphere as well with Central Asia as its cornerstone. APTTA's anti-Indian posture has led to the establishment of Indo-Iran partnership on Chahbahar port which would provide a major challenge to the Sino-Pakistan partnership on Gwadar port; both ports vying for dominance over the regional transit trade routes while targeting the Central Asian market for its rich resources. There are some who believe that solution to the Indo-Pakistan rivalry lies in cooperation over South Asian transit trade of goods passing through Afghanistan into Central Asia and vice versa. In view of the economic rivalry of Chahbahar versus the Gwadar port, the chances of economic cooperation between India and Pakistan in Afghanistan have become minimal.

The withdrawal of US forces with no end to the war in sight will fuel the fierce Indo-Pakistan competition in Afghanistan as the US is the only global player there capable of stopping both countries crossing the threshold of a state-versus-state conflict inside Afghanistan in particular and in the South Asian region in general. It was due to the US intervening role that India and Pakistan recollected calmness in the aftermath of the Mumbai attacks (2008). The US presence in Afghanistan is also a guarantee that both these countries do not cross the threshold of overt bilateral state conflict.

United States-Afghanistan-based interests also require cooperation from both India and Pakistan. The US desires cooperation from India in Afghanistan in view of its great-power potential, China containment policy, Indian role in Afghan reconstruction and as a balancing equation to Pakistan's alleged double game in Afghanistan. The US partnership with Pakistan is necessary in view of the strategic significance of the tribal areas in the war against terror inside Afghanistan and Pakistan's influence over the militant groups dating back to the days of the anti-Soviet war, which could play a pivotal role in the negotiations with Afghan Taliban for reaching any political settlement.

Pakistan has a lot more stakes as compared to India in Afghanistan as has been exemplified with its sacrifices and costs of war both in human and financial terms. The US 'do more' mantra and the blame game will only increase the trust deficit between the two states. Any covert foul play by the US or the desertion of Afghanistan like it did in the 1990s will only lead to the emergence of a political vacuum that which Afghanistan does not have the potential to tackle on its own. The political power vacuum left by the US in

Afghanistan if it opts for a zero option will only lead to a regionalization of the conflict in Afghanistan with Pakistan and India not only clashing inside Afghanistan but also in the South Asia region as well.

Indo-Pakistan enmity is not a mystery anymore. The future of South Asian stability lies in the manner how they deal with non-state militant groups and their respective energy demands. Afghanistan is crucial in this regard. Divided, India, Pakistan and Afghanistan would stand on the issue of regional insecurities and united would they be able to face and counter the repercussions. Therefore, it is in the interests of all three states to cooperate rather than compete to secure their objectives in the region as a zero-sum game.

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THE SPARK OF 'NIRBHAYA': INDIAN FEMINIST INTERVENTIONS, COMMON CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

HEBA AL-ADAWY

Writing during the peak of first-wave feminism in the West, Katherine Mayo, an American writer, painted a pitiful picture of the 'Indian woman' caught in the whirlpool of indigenous patriarchy and violence. Her book *Mother India,* published in 1927, soon became a template for many Western women writers as they — often unwittingly — participated in the imperial project through a regular diet of articles on the 'Oriental woman' in need of salvation.[1] Indeed such writings, portraying a universal image of women's subjugation in the East, not only served as a strong indictment of the Indian subcontinent and the nationalist movements therein, but also undermined the agency of the Indian women who were struggling to create a space for themselves in social reformist movements.

It is no surprise, then, that the recovery from colonial epistemologies has been a major preoccupation of feminist thought in South Asia — namely in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. To this date, post-colonial feminism continues to be mired in the effort of reconciling the unity of feminist struggle against imbalanced power structures, with the idea of *difference*, both cultural and religious. But even as the universalizing tendency of 'liberal feminism' has come under criticism — not only on a global scale with regard to East-West encounters but also domestically across class divides — the rise of nationalism and the associated menace of communalism and religious fundamentalism have posed new challenges for feminist movements in South Asia. While scholars such as Kumari Jayawardena have shown how feminism in Asia and the Middle East emerged organically as part of anti-imperial struggles,[2] there is also no denying the fact that, in effect, both colonialist as well as nationalist ventures were largely male-driven enterprises, centred on the notion of women as the

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'bastions of culture.' Consequently, the female body often served as a contested terrain for the enactment of both cultural imperialism as well as anti-colonialism. In a similar vein today, one can observe how the gendered space in South Asia frequently finds itself hostage to secular-national as well as religious politics.

This phenomenon has been particularly evident in multi-ethnic India, where the agenda of gender equality has been hijacked, alternately, by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as well as the secular Congress in a bid to score greater electoral success across Hindu and Muslim constituencies. As a country with the longest history of gender-based activism, and where state secularism intersects with multiculturalism (through the endorsement of personal laws), India serves as a predominant case study in the paper, with occasional comparative glances on neighbouring Pakistan and Bangladesh. Adding to the complexity of secular/religious politics in India is the caste-based structure of its society. As a result, India serves as a useful case study of the way in which class and caste-based inequalities can both intersect with and challenge the struggle of feminism against imbalanced power structures.

On the latest front in India, the bestial gang rape and murder of a 23-year-old girl in New Delhi on 16 December 2012 has reopened a vigorous debate on gender-based violence and the broader issue of women's status in society. The incident, occurring in a relatively affluent district of India's capital, got extensive coverage in national as well as international media, and was known referred to as Nirbhaya (the "Fearless One"), a reference to the young girl who eventually died in a hospital in Singapore. Nirbhaya soon became a symbol around which the rights of women could be rallied. Subsequently, large-scale public protests broke out in India's urban centres, blaming the Indian government and the local authorities for inadequate security for women. At the international arena, this incident was taken up by One Billion Rising, a global campaign to end violence against women, where the number 'billion' refers to the UN figure that approximately one billion, or one in every three women will be raped or beaten in their lifetime. On 14 February 2013, a one-day rally was organized in 190 different countries to commemorate survivors of domestic and sexual violence, and tributes were also paid, among others, to the Delhi victim.[3] Although the western media coverage was not completely devoid of certain essentialist portrayals that depicted an inherently 'misogynistic' Indian culture,[4] the global spotlight on Nirbhaya, nevertheless, created an environment of greater scrutiny and cross-border dialogue as a local struggle raged for greater women's security. In India, this home-grown activism kick-started legislative activity that focused not only on Criminal Law Amendments but also addressed, for the first time, the thornier issue of gender violence condoned by the state under the khappanchayat system (village/caste councils) and the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA).

This paper examines contemporary feminist interventions in India with an eye towards common regional challenges and prospects. After providing the history of women's movements in the subcontinent, the first section examines the ways politicized religion, communalism and militarism have affected

feminist interventions in the legal and social realms. The second section narrows down on the recent upsurge of feminist activity against gender-based violence in the aftermath of *Nirbhaya*. It examines how the agenda of countering sexual violence towards women has given a fresh impetus to the feminist movement in India, with the potential of transcending religious and caste barriers. In conclusion, the paper explores some potential prospects by examining the implications of the feminist activity in India post-*Nirbhaya* on the neighbouring region.

Women's movement in the Subcontinent: A historical glance

Despite the diverging trajectories of India, Pakistan, and ultimately Bangladesh, after partition in 1947, women's movements across borders have shared many commonalities and have experienced new catalysts for activity during similar time periods. One obvious period of convergence was the time of pre-partition nationalism during which a notion of 'gendered citizenship' gradually emerged. Prior to this, social reform movements in the Indian subcontinent served as a platform for opposing patriarchal social practices, such as *sati*, child marriage and ascetic widowhood, but they lacked a gendered perspective. During this time, education was articulated as a social right for men and women in order to ameliorate their status. The movement was confined to the elite class, and education for a woman was propagated only to fulfil her ultimate role in the household.

It was not until the upsurge in nationalist movements that the notion of 'political rights' began to be afforded to women. Women's involvement in political campaigns led to the formation of women's political associations. These associations provided a fertile ground for training women in the arena of politics, and eventually paved the way for the emergence of organizations such as the Women's Indian Association in 1917 and the National Council for Indian Women in 1925. For their part, Muslim women from the elite classes also began to take a greater role in politics notwithstanding pressures from the more conservative sections of the community. In 1918 both all-India Muslim League and Indian National Congress announced their support for women's franchise. Although such involvement had increased the visibility of women as political actors, feminist activity still suffered from an incomplete conceptualization of its aims and goals. Khawar Mumtaz and Farida Shaheed argue that "women fought for their rights less on an exclusively 'feminist' platform and more in the general political arena as an integral part of the nationalist movement."[5] In that sense, nationalist movements had added a 'feminine' dimension more than a 'feminist' one per se.

Finally, the eighties marked a 'watershed' decade for feminist activity in South Asia. It was during this time that women's movements began to actively conceptualize their rights by articulating the ways in which structural inequalities operated in society at the expense of caste, class *and* gender. In the backdrop of this newfound agenda in India was the publication of *Towards Equality Report* in 1974, which highlighted gender disparities in health,

employment, education and political participation. Heavy industrialization and agricultural capitalization in the sixties and the seventies had failed to fulfil the promise of development, creating a host of contradictions and greater inequality in both urban and rural areas. Amidst rising unemployment, students channelled their frustrations through protests and the Indian government, in turn, responded with draconian laws. This context provided the backdrop for movements challenging the authority of the state, and for women's organizations to consciously engage with the law in order to demand their rights and seek redressal. Henceforth in the campaigns against rape, dowry and *sati*, the primary target of women's movements was the state. The state was held accountable for failing to protect the rights of women, and as Anurekha Chari points out, "in addressing the state, women's groups were making an important assertion of women's rights as citizens."[6]

Meanwhile, in neighbouring Pakistan and Bangladesh, women's movements also mobilized against the state during the eighties, each responding to their respective political contexts. According to Amrita Basu, many feminist groups during the time were in contact with one another through regional networks and conferences.[7] Owing to Pakistan's chequered road to democracy, interspersed with military coups, women's movements were not able to utilize their potential until the era of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (1971-77). Whereas military regimes in Pakistan by and large sidelined civil bureaucracies and women from policy-making positions, the Bhutto era included several measures to increase gender equality, such as the provision of affirmative action in the Constitution and the reservation of seats for women in the National Assembly and provincial assemblies. The government also appointed a women's rights committee to recommend measures to improve women's legal, political and economic situation, and subsequently approved the formation of a Women's Division as a separate ministry under the federal government. As a consequence of this pre-conditioning, women's organizations, led by the Women's Action Forum, became most active during the time of Zia ul Haq's Islamization in the eighties, responding to the state's repressive measures. As a result, the government substantially modified the Law of Evidence (1984) and delayed its enactment for two years. The Law of Qiasas and Diyat, tabled in 1984, was also delayed until 1992, under the 12th amendment to the constitution, without the clauses discriminating against women.[8]

The eighties also represented an important decade for the Bangladeshi women's movement. International organizations encouraging development initiatives for women also led to greater cross-border linkages and dialogues. The domestic impetus in Bangladesh came from the political dissatisfaction with military dictator Hussain Muhammad Ershad's regime for its politicization of Islam and centralization of powers. As some of the most organized groups within civil society, women's organizations played a key role in the protests that removed Ershad from office and also accounted for the large voter turnout for the 1996 election. In areas where NGOs had been active, the turnout of women voters was extremely high. The women's movement in Bangladesh not only took up issues of female exploitation, such as rape, dowry, fatwa deaths, and

trafficking, but it simultaneously challenged the military's abrogation of democracy with the belief that women's rights could only be realized in a democratic environment.[9]

In tandem, the eighties signified a period during which women's movements across the South Asian subcontinent began to increasingly focus their attention on the state and on the efficacy of law as a means of redressal. Comparatively in the legal realm, the campaigns carried out in India were most successful, with many of them resulting in tangible legislations. For instance in 1984, the Dowry Prohibition (Amendment) Act was passed which sought to tighten the loopholes of the previous law passed in 1961 and to prevent the continuing incidents of 'dowry deaths.' Another significant piece of legislation introduced in the eighties was the Criminal Law (Second Amendment) Act (1983), which specified a new offence of cruelty by husband or relatives in the following words, "wilful conduct of such a nature as is likely to drive a woman to commit suicide or cause physical or mental injury to herself." Finally, the Marriage Amendment Bill passed in 1981 sought to ease divorce procedures and provide important safeguards for the rights of women to maintenance and alimony.[10]

Much of this success can be attributed to the history of uninterrupted democratic politics and the existence of a stronger civil society in India as compared to Pakistan and Bangladesh. But with every two steps forwards, there was also one step back for Indian women's movements. Notwithstanding the overt progress of the legislative activity characterizing this period, there still remained challenges in the form of procedural loopholes, lack of political will for the enforcement of law, and pressure from conservative elements. Flavia Agnes, a notable Indian feminist and legal scholar, writes:

> If oppression could be tackled by passing laws, then the decade of the 1980s would be adjudged a golden period for Indian women, when protective laws were offered on a platter. Almost every single campaign against violence on women resulted in new legislation. The successive enactments would seem to provide a positive picture of achievements but the crime statistics reveal a different story. The deterrent value of the enactment was apparently nil. Some of the enactments in effect remained only on paper.[11]

These challenges provided a fertile ground for Indian feminists to begin theorizing bottom-up approaches to gender equality alongside top-down legal implementations. Another overwhelming question to emerge from efforts of Indian feminists during the eighties was that of representation: after all, *who* could represent *whom* in the campaigns for women's rights? For instance, could the upper-class women articulate the concerns of the poor, the working class or the lower-caste *dalits*? Could the Hindu majority speak for Muslims and vice versa? Could organizations for women's empowerment set up by the government or the women's wing of political parties represent Indian feminism without being tainted by their respective political agendas? In the ensuing years, these questions were to be further problematized in India, particularly with the rise of communalism, militarism and politicized religion.

Confronting post-colonial challenges
to feminist interventions in India

Communalism & politicized religion

The relationship between gender and politicized religion in South Asia is nuanced and complex. While religious activism has undermined women's autonomy in some contexts, it has provided a space for women's activism in others. Amrita Basu writes on this paradoxical relationship:

> Contrary to the hopes of most feminists, women have not always opposed religious nationalist appeals; [and] contrary to the hopes of religious nationalists, religious identities have not always negated women's gender, class and regional identities.[12]

Setting aside the dominant perception that religion and gender equality are always inversely related, many scholars have highlighted the privileged place of religion and piety in social life, as well as the ways in which women have appropriated the concept of equality within religion to achieve social change. But since religion is not just a matter of faith but also a mark of self-identity for many people, the question of religious patriarchy cannot be divorced from considerations of identity politics inherent in communalism or nationalism. In the Indian context, religious fundamentalism and communal tensions not only reinforce each other, but also effectively bank on the other for survival. Meghana V Nayak explains the interdependency of communalism and religious fundamentalism: "Hindu nationalism needs Muslims and other extremes and chauvinism (such as Sikh and Tamil) to exist in order to justify the need for a Hindu nation for Indian Hindu citizens afraid of terrorism."[13]

The same applies vice versa, where minority cultures endorse authoritarian religious tendencies in order to get protection from the encroachment of the majoritarian culture. For Hindu nationalists advocating a culturally Hindu nation, it is a clever tactic to sensationalize the selective 'vices' of minority cultures so that they may be located outside the domain of 'Indian values.' For their part, minority religious communities respond by conflating religion and culture, and identifying the private sphere as the essence of their cultural identity. In what then becomes a defensive reaction to perceived majoritarian assimilation, it is the rights of women that are often compromised upon; family law becomes linked with the community's overall status and begins to serve as a means of 'shoring up one' cultural capital.'[14] Consequently, any alterations to family law or the status quo through an alternative reading of religious scripture is taken as an assault on the integrity of one's cultural or religious identity.[15]

An apt manifestation of the above is the controversy that erupted over the reform of Muslim personal law in India, after a divorced elderly lady, Shah Bano Begum, was denied alimony from the Supreme Court in 1985. The incident also indicated how the agenda of women's rights is held hostage by both religious as well as secular politics. Following the divorce of 73-year-old Shah Bano Begum in 1985 and her subsequent pledge for maintenance, the Supreme Court ruled in her favour, stating that criminal laws override personal

laws and are applicable to Muslim and non-Muslim women alike. The judgment caused an outcry among the leaders of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB), who perceived in this gesture an attempt to invade upon the private sphere of their community. In response, the Congress government of the time, led by Rajiv Gandhi, enacted a legislation, the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill, 1986, to explicitly exclude Muslim women from the purview of the Criminal Procedure Code, to which all citizens otherwise have recourse. In so doing, the Muslim Women Bill not only strengthened the authority of the Muslim clerical class in the interpretation of personal law, but also removed the Muslim personal law from the purview of internal reform.

The issue was further exacerbated by the communal politics of the Hindu Right, namely the BJP, who took upon themselves a 'civilizing mission' to sensationalize the 'backward' Muslim laws and to subsequently reform them. In their mission to endorse the notion of a culturally superior Hindu nation, a pseudo-feminist agenda of defending the 'pitiable Muslim woman' featured prominently. While the Congress party converted women's rights into an issue of minority rights, making pragmatic compromises with communalism in order to maintain its vote bank with the Muslim community, the Hindu Right seized the opportunity to not only criticize 'Muslim backwardness' but also the failings of the Congress and their 'pseudo-secularism.'[16]

The subsequent Muslim Women Bill that was passed, however, did not just evoke a response from the Hindu Right or from liberal feminists. In the protests that ensued in Kerala, West Bengal, Bombay and Delhi, Indian Muslim women from urban, middle-class background also participated fervently, questioning the interpretations of their male-ulema. Nevertheless, BJP's bandwagoning of the Uniform Civil Code in order to save the 'oppressed' Muslim woman only delegitimized, in the eyes of the Muslim community, state-sanctioned gestures towards gender-equality. It simultaneously provoked the notion of 'liberal feminism' as being a form of cultural imperialism. But if there was any silver lining that emerged from this controversy, it was that women's organizations committed to the principles of genuine equality, as opposed to mere politicking, began to pay greater attention to bottom-up approaches to gender-based reform. They also began to emphasize internal democracy within minority communities, where Muslim women could represent themselves — instead of *being* represented by the male clergy of their communities.

Subsequently in 2005, an All Indian Muslim Women's Personal Law Board (AIMWPLB) was formed to discuss and adopt strategies for the implementation of the Muslim Personal Law in India. The purpose of this board was to include the voices of Muslim women in the interpretation of personal law so that their legal rights in marriage, divorce and inheritance could be protected. In March 2008, the AIMWPLB released a 12-page *Sharai' Nikahnama* which sought to offer India's Muslim women a religiously-sanctioned alternative to conventional Islamic marriage contract, and challenged the authority of religious male clerics by including (mutually negotiable) clauses for women's protection.[17] Working within the domain of choice granted to women in Islam, the concept behind the model *nikahnama* was that it could be framed by the

bride in question according to her needs and conditions. In so doing, it allowed for choice and consensus between both parties before the marriage commitment. The initiative was praised by the All India Democratic Women's Association for educating Muslim women of the rights that were denied them due to ignorance.[18] AIMWPLB President Shaista Ambar also explained the deterrent value of such an initiative: "Women have to deal with broken homes and unhappy lives because of unfair laws. We hope that this will not happen any more."[19]

State-sanctioned gender violence

While tackling the oppression of women by religious or nationalist ideologues has been one struggle for feminist organizations, an equally challenging concern to emerge in contemporary times is the active participation and co-opting of women in ideologies that promote violence. Militarism in the subcontinent has manifested itself both in the form of ethnic or communal conflicts as well as in the precedence of military concerns (such as that of centralization, obedience and hierarchy) over social ones. The adverse impact of militarism on feminist campaigns against imbalanced power structures is acknowledged worldwide. Madhu Malhotra, from Amnesty International, writes:

> Wars, internal conflicts and violent repression of political and social justice movements can have a particular and often disproportionate impact on women and the types of abuses they experience, despite the continued efforts of women's rights defenders to prevent such abuse. It is a sad reality that sexual and gender-based violence in the context of militarism happens in all regions of the world.[20]

But what happens when women themselves become active instigators of violence against their own gender, albeit from a different community? Take the issue of gender-based violence in India, for instance, a central concern for Indian women's movements since their inception. Amidst the prevalence of communal politics and militarism, however, even a seemingly universal agenda of combating gender-based violence becomes politicized. The rhetoric is either hijacked to prove the superiority of one religious/ethnic community over another, or the violence itself is overlooked in the name of national security or collateral damage.

When in late 1992, the urban centre of Bombay became engulfed in communal riots after the destruction of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya (Uttar Pradesh), Hindu women readily supported violence against Muslims rather than protesting gender-violence within their own community and beyond. Some of the most powerful images that stand out from the UP communal riots of the nineties are that of Hindu nationalist women leading processions through Muslim neighbourhoods, shouting inflammatory slogans with tridents in their hands. This is because Hindu right-wing groups have repeatedly evoked gendered imagery (of Hindu women as victims of Muslim lust) to foment (communal) violence.[21] In the same vein, Hindu women are portrayed to be empowered vis-à-vis their 'oppressed' Muslim counterparts. Bachetta and

Power write:

> The problem with Hindu nationalist security is not that it belies the so-called natural pacifism of women, but rather it inscribes right wing ideology as the only authoritative source of security. Right wing women around the world participate in and draw upon this ideology to feel safe and to benefit from the suppression of minorities.[22]

Such instances have not only challenged feminist interventions in the practical domain, but have also problematized the idea of 'female agency' on a theoretical level. It is this dilemma that has thrown off contemporary feminists in the region, compelling them to disengage from notions that associate empowerment or agency with militarism on the one hand, and 'meek timidity' with pacifism on the other hand. Meanwhile, on the state level, responses to gender-based violations during caste or communal violence have also been disappointing. A glaring example is the response of the National Commission for Women (NCW) after the Gujarat massacre of 2002 during which there were many instances of blatant sexual violence against women. The NCW, despite its autonomous status in India, is criticized for being influenced by its governmental appointees.[23] With regard to the Gujarat massacre, the Commission, much to the criticism of feminist organizations, altogether evaded the issue of state or administrative complicity in the violence, ignoring the reports of civil rights groups and other bodies like the National Human Rights Commission. Among other criticisms levelled against the NCW was that they had referred to sexual violence in the conflict only as an aberration, as opposed to a systematic campaign. Moreover, they had merely focused on compensation and relief without delving into the 'minority angle' of the violence.[24]

Similarly, in the conflict-prone areas of Jammu and Kashmir, the North-East India and along the 'Red Corridor,' where the army is known for its heavy-handedness, women are often caught in the crossfire between insurgency and counter-insurgency, and suffer from sexual violence at the hands of both parties. Both regions have experienced large-scale violations where women have been targeted, but governmental bodies have remained silent owing to political sensitivities surrounding the nature of the conflict. Such zones are particularly prone to state complicity or sanction of violence against women. This is carried out either through direct complicity under Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA); or conversely, through the crime of omission by empowering communities or *khap panchayats* (village councils) to use violence with immunity.

As far as the disputed State of Jammu and Kashmir is concerned, many violations against women are altogether censored from the press. A glaring example is the infamous Shopian incident in which two young Kashmiri girls were found dead near the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) camp in May 2009. An initial, dubious press release rejected the possibility of sexual assault, only to be cancelled without comment. No FIR was lodged either. The tragedy was then labelled as a 'case of drowning,' but an inquiry soon revealed that the stream nearby was too shallow. Despite repeated attempts to cover up the incident, a number of contradictory statements indicated the existence of behind-

the-curtain dealings between the police and the local authorities. The incident, sparking widespread anger across the State, soon came to be known as a "monumental fraud on the people of Kashmir" after which an FIR was finally lodged for rape and murder.[25] Much in the same way, political authorities also have history of remaining silent in the face of violations in other conflict-prone-areas. In 2004, a Manipuri woman, Thanjam Manorama Devi was picked up by the Indian paramilitary unit, 17th Assam Rifles, on the pretext of being involved with the People's Liberation Army of Manipur, sexually assaulted and later found dead in a field. The failure to hold the culprit accountable by the state led to widespread protests in Delhi and Manipur. Such was also the case of Soni Sori, a tribal teacher in Chattisgarh, who was framed on charges of acting as an intermediary for the Maoists in 2011 and was brutally assaulted in police custody. For its part, the Chattisgarh government denied charges of sexual assault under police custody, insisting that the allegation was designed to malign the local police by "vested interests." Her case was taken up by local as well as international organizations, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, but to little avail.[26]

Legal immunity granted to security personnel also complicates prosecution when caste hierarchies merge with the rhetoric of public security. In the case of Mathura, a young dalit girl who was assaulted under police custody in 1983, the government was provoked enough to incorporate the term 'custodial rape' (i.e. by superintendents of remand homes, hospitals and prisons) in Criminal Law (Second Amendment Act, 1983), where the burden of proof lay with the accused. Despite this substantial inclusion, the government still managed to steer clear of the wider practice of 'landlord rape', which is a direct result of entrenched caste and class hierarchies in rural settings. Women's organizations have criticized the tendency of armed forces or community leaders for raising the spectre of threat from the 'Other' in such occasions and for treating themselves as above the law. However, state patronage of such acts has created a culture of impunity and made the question of redress difficult.[27] The *khap panchayat* system, in which village councils comprise of the same caste, has dominated the rural Indian landscape for centuries. *khap panchayats* are known for their conservative hold over the community, particularly on matters relating to women, and often serve as de facto courts for the settlement of disputes ranging from land or cattle to murder. But notwithstanding their controversial judgments, they often receive patronage from political parties and act as vote banks during elections.[28]

Legislations on the issue of sexual violence in India, therefore, have largely been peripheral or selective, skirting past the actual 'elephant in the room.' Where the law does exist, prosecution is often made difficult owing to the social taboo surrounding the discussion of sexual violence. In 1997, for instance, the Supreme Court of India passed a landmark judgment known as the *Vishaka Guidelines,* which incorporated recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Prior to this, Indian civil and penal laws did not contain adequate provisions that addressed the issue of sexual violence and the judgment sought to remedy the gap.

Although the core issue prompting the judgment was the violence faced by working women in rural India, the Supreme Court judgment, as it came to be applied, became beneficial only for women in organized urban centres where certain channels were provided for the registration of complaints and redressal. In the ensuing years in response to growing pressure from women's organizations, another draft legislation was framed to protect women against sexual harassment. But this legislation soon gathered dust and was replaced by "The Protection of Women Against Sexual Harassment at Workplace" in 2007 on the premise that the earlier bill was too broad and difficult to implement. Barring certain organized and professional sectors, the significance of the bill was largely moot. The category of minors who could be employed, for instance, was excluded from the wording of the 2007 bill. But above all, the issue of 'harassment' by third-party actors, or outside the workplace and working hours remained largely unaddressed, leaving a significant population of women vulnerable to such practices.[29]

Amidst this backdrop, it is useful to examine feminist interventions in the aftermath of *Nirbhaya,* i.e. the infamous gang rape in New Delhi on 16 December 2012. For the first time in India's history, the incident sparked a national conversation on the status of women in India. In the case of *Nirbhaya*, the brutality of the crime committed was non-political to begin with. But the ripple effects of *Nirbhaya's* social agitation, nevertheless, managed to also confront the thornier issues of militarism as well as class and caste inequalities that have challenged feminist interventions. From the margins of a social debate, the issue of women's security had now taken to the center stage of a political debate.

The spark of Nirbhaya

What was novel about *Nirbhaya* was the nation-wide as well as international attention it received in the new age of social media, compelling politicians and civil society alike to deliberate over a previously underreported issue. As protests from the civil society gained momentum after the incident, a number of controversial and derogatory remarks made by high-ranking officials and politicians convinced the public that a deeper interrogation of social norms was required. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's *theekhai* (it's okay) elicited deep criticism from the public for trivializing the issue. Andhra Pradesh Congress president Botsa Satyanarayana earned the wrath of the people after describing the Delhi gang rape as a "small incident" and saying that women shouldn't go out during late hours. Meanwhile, Congress MP Abhijit Mukherjee also caused an outrage with his derogatory reference to female protestors in Delhi. "They are dented and painted women chasing two minutes on fame, giving interviews on TV," Abhijit told a news channel in Kolkata.[30] Another politician to earn intense criticism from the public was Banwari Lal Singhal, a BJP legislator from Alwar city constituency in Rajasthan, who asserted that women's clothes led to sexual harassment. While on the one hand these remarks galvanized the protest movement by betraying an inherent chauvinist mindset, they also helped turn a social issue into an intrinsically political one.

The incident shifted public attention to the existing legal framework vis-à-vis sexual violence and set into motion a call for wide-ranging reform and implementation. Justice Verma was appointed chairperson of a three-member commission tasked with reforming the anti-rape law. A 630-page report submitted by the Justice Verma Committee contained suggestions about existing legal provisions and encapsulated the spirit of comprehensive and thorough reform.[31] The report provided a blueprint for radical transformation of gender relations to stop the unfair treatment of women from within the framework of constitutional guarantees on gender equality. Among the suggestions were faster and higher punishment for the crime of sexual assault, albeit death penalty was not listed as a recommendation. Apart from an emphasis on stronger laws, the report equally stressed the need to transform structures, processes and attitudes by making them more gender-sensitive. By extension, it applied the concept of mainstreaming gender in public amenities and services as well. The crime of sexual violence was, thus, located in a wider context of imbalanced power structures, and addressed in a multi-dimensional fashion, ranging from offences of stalking and voyeurism to the more aggravated cases of assault and trafficking.

Perhaps the most prominent feature of the report was the urgency with which it called for police reforms in order to reflect a "cooperative relationship between civil society and the police service."[32] In so doing, it placed greater accountability on the police as well as public servants for the environment of increasing insecurity for women in India. Another unprecedented feature of the report was the suggestion that the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) is reviewed in order to prevent the exploitation of women. It also included a clause for trying members of the armed forces accused of sexual assault without undergoing complicated procedures of permission, and for reining in of *khap panchayats*. Indeed in the aftermath of Nirbhaya, Justice Verma criticized the nexus between the police and the politicians: "I was shocked to see the Home Secretary patting on the back of the Police Commissioner. The least that could have been done was to seek an apology from the people for the city being unsafe."[33] The report, thus, contributed in raising awareness of the power structures that enabled the social status quo, and placed the onus of responsibility on them. Kuldip Nayar, for instance, wrote an incisive article in *The Tribune*, echoing this criticism: "both [police and politicians] indulge in homilies but seldom criticize one another. Both are part of the establishment that wants more and more power with less and less accountability. Both are really responsible for the mis-governance or non-governance."[34] Commenting on the AFSPA clause, he added:

> I have always believed that the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) has outlived its utility, if it had any. To allow the forces to get away with killings even on suspicion — many incidents have come to light in Kashmir and the Northeast — is unpardonable. […] The Army is deadly against any change in the AFSPA and has denied any rape case. [But] the rape case in Kunom Poshpara in Kashmir in 1991

requires full investigation, since the army's personnel were found as much guilty as some in the civil administration.[35]

In response to mounting pressure from the media and the civil society at large, the Indian government passed an ordinance on sexual assault on 3 February 2013, less than three weeks ahead of the budget session. The ordinance was subsequently approved by the Lokh Sabha and the Rajya Sabha in March 2013, and provided amendments to Indian Penal Code, Indian Evidence Act and Code of Criminal Procedure (1973) on laws relating to sexual offence. Although the new Criminal Amendment Act (2013) was welcomed by women's rights activists for including the many sub-categories of sexual violence such as stalking, voyeurism, sexual harassment and acid attack (gender-neutral), it was criticized for not pushing forward with some of the most substantive features of the Verma report. Recommendations relating to marital rape, police reform, and prosecution of security personnel charged with sexual assault under ordinary criminal law, were all excluded from legislative purview. Instead the government focused on enhanced punishment, such as death penalty in the more aggravated cases and the creation of fast-track courts, as a means of deterrence.[36]

Needles to say, the ordinance came under fire by civil rights activists for being selective in the face of unprecedented protests against gender-based violence and women's insecurity. In the words of a columnist for *The Hindu:*

> The cabinet seems to have taken up the least controversial recommendations, and packed them into an ordinance to avoid any extended debate on the wider issues and sidestep criticism that it was slow to act.[37]

But while it may seem that the government's approach in sidestepping the more substantive recommendations of the report represented a failure of feminist activity in India, such intransigence only reinforced the notion that change was unlikely, without sustained pressure from civil society and people's movements. It equally highlighted the importance of political will in ensuring any substantive — rather than cosmetic — gestures towards gender equality and women's security in the country. For academic and women's rights activist, Zoya Hasan from Jawaharlal Nehru University, this particular juncture represented a good opportunity to raise questions about women's political participation as well as the attitude of political parties towards women in legislature and decision-making. Instead of merely relegating women to the task of political campaigning and mobilization of constituencies during elections, she called for an increased legislative representation of women alongside a system of internal democracy and transparency. The latter was deemed necessary so as to ensure that political patronage and power politics do not take precedence over the actual goals of gender-equality. In the aftermath of the Criminal Amendment Act (2013), Zoya Hasan highlighted the importance of persistent campaigning for the Women's Reservation Bill:

> In a major step forward, the Rajya Sabha passed the Women's Reservation Bill on March 9, 2010, which is the furthest the Bill has ever got. But its fate in the Lok Sabha is unsure. If political parties are

serious about the rights of women they should pass the Bill without further delay. A critical mass of 33% women in legislatures can demand and push gender-just policies and laws. It will catalyze change in state and society, challenge patriarchy and unleash a broader process of social change. What is more, it can change the character of Indian politics with a greater focus on common interests.[38]

Indeed the significance of feminist activity post-Nirbhaya lies precisely in its community mobilization around gender-based issues as well as in the inculcation of gender-sensitive approaches to policy-making. The political impetus sparked by *Nirbhaya*, in the age of social media, went much beyond raising awareness on the issue of sexual violence. The incident helped open a Pandora's box of social, legal and political obstacles that hinder adequate rights and protection to women in Indian society. According to India's prominent social scientist, Amartya Sen, the politicization of women's security that occurred in the aftermath of *Nirbhaya* has been a positive step in the right direction. Sen further commented: "Public anger at gender inequality in India must be seen as an important — and long-overdue — social development, and it can certainly help in remedying the persistent inequalities from which Indian women suffer."[39]

Among other endemic issues highlighted as a result of this incident was the prevalent social attitude that gave greater preference to boys and men, leading to sex-selection practices or female infanticide in India. For many civil rights activists, violence against women could not be eliminated unless discrimination within the basic family unit could be tackled. Zoya Hasan, for instance, elaborates on the way girls are automatically treated as less deserving of care and health:

> Studies on discrimination towards girls in India have shown that the higher ratio of deaths can be attributed to the continuing discrimination towards girls in healthcare, food and nutrition, and emotional support. These figures also reflect the consequence of poverty that is forcing parents to choose who to treat for illness, where the girl features as the second choice.[40]

Back in 1990, economist Amartya Sen had characterized this same problem as "missing women," a reference to the shortfall of female-male ratio in Asia. In the aftermath of *Nirbhaya*, Sen published another essay in the *New York Review of Books*, highlighting the various forms of female disadvantage in India:

> There is strong evidence that the economic and social options open to women are significantly fewer than those available to men; and going beyond women's well-being, we have reason to ask also about women's limited role in society and their ability to act independently, and how their initiatives and actions influence the lives of men as well as women, and boys as well as girls.[41]

Equally important for Sen was the oft-neglected dimension of class and caste inequalities.[42] Sen wrote: "Dalit women have been violated and subjected to violence day in and day out without any group taking up their cause. The whole issue of death and neglect is far greater than we assume. It has an

immediate effect on human life because half the people in the world are women." Other articles in the Chandigarh-based *Tribune* recounted incidents in which the courts failed to prosecute the culprits and the entire family of the victim suffered as a result. "The high caste sense of entitlement of the males in rural areas, compounded by tacit support of the police, and a sense of shame attached to the victims of crime of rape multiplies such unfortunate incidents,' explained one such article.[43] Criticisms levelled against the coverage of Nirbhaya alleged that the attention received was primarily because the incident had occurred in an urban as opposed to a rural district. Indeed the spotlight on Nirbhaya allowed for questions to be raised about the inconsistencies of social protest as well as the everyday sufferings of Dalit women at the hands of high-caste men.

The significance of Nirbhaya must be viewed in the light of the political consciousness that was generated in the aftermath. The incident served to catalyze the discussion on sexual violence on a wider level, and soon became a symbol around which the rights of women could be rallied. In this sense, the significance stretches beyond the solitary incident itself in that it opened up the discussion of similar incidents that had preceded it, as well as those that followed.[44] Journalists and social activists made it a point to address the oft-neglected victims of sexual violence in rural areas, or those targeted in the 2013 communal riots of Muzzafarnagar, as the 'unknown Nirbhayas.'[45]

A number of projects were also set up under the name in order to provide greater security to women. Upon public demand, the government launched the Nirbhaya Fund of Rs 1,405 crore under which a project was designed to ensure the safety of women and girls in public transportation. The project involves the installation of emergency buttons in public transportation, the setting up of closed-circuit television (CCTVs) and the use of global positioning system (GPS) to ensure safety and security of women and girls in distress. It has been cleared for implementation in 53 cities with more than a million in population.[46] On 15 February 2014, another project by the name of "Nirbhaya Keralam; Surikshita Keralam" was launched. The project includes the formation of women volunteer groups, the strengthening of existing mechanisms to counter human trafficking and abduction alongside awareness programmes against law violations. It also provides the rehabilitation of women and children, and strengthens police intervention in crimes against women by making public places as well as security personnel more gender-sensitive.[47]

Conclusion

'Think locally; act globally'

Feminist thought in South Asia, notwithstanding the challenges posed by militarism, communalism and religious fundamentalism in the post-colonial era, has continued to evolve, and to some extent, has remained self-critical. Ratna Kapur and Mrinalini Sinha, for instance, call for a renewed engagement with local 'pasts' and contextual 'differences,' whilst steering away from the notion of an essentialist or nativist culture. Stepping past the East-West binaries,

many scholars today also urge for greater dialogue with feminisms elsewhere in the region, particularly in the Global South or the East.[48] Instead of the previous mantra of "thinking globally, and acting locally," they urge for the contrary: i.e. to "think locally and act globally" as Amrita Basu puts it. The existence of transnational networks has also, in some ways, dislodged earlier connotations of imperial hegemony, where the 'local' was once identified as the South and the 'global' as the North or the West. Instead, the agenda of connecting 'local' feminisms with the 'global' arena now refers to the development of cross-border linkages and the flow of resources, without compromising the specificity of voice and struggle in a given context.[49]

But moving past theory, to what extent is there an exchange of resources on gender-related issues and between women's networks across South Asia? Although the consciousness of common challenges and prospects exists among academics and developmentalists, we have yet to see a greater trickle-down effect at the grass-roots level so that successful models of gender mainstreaming are shared and applied transnationally. Owing to political tensions characterizing inter-state relations in South Asia, the avenues for cross-border experiential learning for women's organizations have been limited. According to a recent survey that the author conducted, a large number of activists and organizations working on gender-related issues in Pakistan are cognizant of the recent legislative strides and feminist activity in neighbouring India. But little has been done to translate that transnational awareness into meaningful action.[50] This is partly because women's organizations tend to take their cues from local specificities. But another important reason behind this is that there are limited channels for cross-border communication and relationship building. Meanwhile in India, there has been similar discussion on the need for knowledge and resource exchange across borders particularly in the aftermath of *Nirbhaya*. Speaking at length in his lecture at IIT University in Mumbai, Sen emphasized the need to learn and implement lessons from successful development models elsewhere in South Asia, and in the global south. Most prominently, he cited the example of Bangladesh, which stands ahead of India in the domain of human development, owing largely to its efforts at gender equality:

> In Bangladesh's politics, gender equality became increasingly important. Not too long ago Bangladesh was behind India on all indices. Today Bangladesh is the only country with more girls in schools than boys. It has a higher life expectancy, lower mortality rates and women in the labour force.[51]

Indeed in the past decades, Bangladesh has launched a series of innovative development models designed to address gender inequities in education and health. A recent project launched by BRAC is the 'tent-schooling' system, whereby tent schools are established in neighbourhoods to assess the educational needs of children and remedy the gaps in learning in order to integrate them in regular schools.[52] The project has been designed with a gender-sensitive approach, since young girls in marginalized districts face greater hurdles in commuting to schools located away from their homes.

While such development models geared towards poverty-alleviation, education and health can be effectively utilized as a resource-tool transnationally, there are also a number of other historical, cultural and political commonalities that can allow for South Asian feminism(s) to be considered for comparative analysis, notwithstanding the breadth of their diversity. For instance, Ania Loomba and Ritty Lukose argue that in South Asia: "Women, their bodies, their honor have been crucial to creating national borders, physical and conceptual. During […] partitions, Hindu, Sikh and Muslim women were kidnapped as badges of honour. Often it was not women who moved – the boundaries of nation did, making women 'alien' in their own homes."[53] Adding to this is the role served by religion in the region, not just in terms of its utility in politics but, more importantly, in the immense significance that it occupies in social life. As a consequence of the latter, religion in the public sphere has not merely constrained feminist movements in South Asia, as some scholars would argue, but has equally allowed for several positive forms of women's agency to exist through the reinterpretation of religious doctrines.

One aspect of such a development can be glimpsed from the efforts of the All India Muslim Women's Personal Law Board (AIMWPLB) to release a gender-sensitive *Sharai Nikahnama*. Although the model *nikahnama* has encountered some resistance from clerics and hardliners within AIMWPLB, it is gradually seeking its place within the Indian Muslim community and has generated a much-needed debate on the topic. In 2008, Tahir Mahmood, an Islamic Law expert and a member of the Law Commission of India approved of the *nikahnama* as being commensurable with the spirit of *Shar'iah* and rejected the objections raised by the clerics. He said:

> Even if somebody finds it at variance with the traditional law, parties to a Muslim marriage indubitably have full contractual freedom under Islamic law and can stipulate, at the time of marriage, conditions of their choice not violating any mandatory provision of Shariat. The new 'nikahnama' does not contravene any such provision and is fully valid under the legal rule of contracting parties' freedom of stipulation.[54]

Indeed in the aftermath of the Shah Bano debacle in 1982, many feminists called for greater representation of Muslim women in the affairs of their community, and for a bottom-up approach to reform in the community as opposed to a top-down implementation of the Uniform Civil Code. The formation of AIMWPLB represents a step towards that direction. It also stands out as a model for Pakistani and Bangladeshi civil society in that it allows women to have an active role in the interpretation of religion and in policy-making. Amidst the prevalent ire against 'liberal feminism' for failing to accommodate cultural or religious values in post-colonial South Asia, such a development also stands out as an affirmation of feminism that is commensurate with local values.

On the issue of sexual violence, the community mobilization in the aftermath of *Nirbhaya* stands out, yet again, as a learning point for neighbouring countries. From India to Pakistan and Bangladesh, a number of laws are available for the protection of women as well as constitutional guarantees

towards this end. Dr. Fouzia Saeed in Pakistan, for instance, has been at the forefront of the Alliance Against Sexual Harassment (AASHA), an organization aimed at raising greater legal awareness on the issue and developing policy frameworks for the government. She also spearheaded the legislation (Protection Against Sexual Harassment Act), which was eventually passed in 2010. Similarly, in the recent years, a number of legislations in Pakistan have focused on the protection of women against gender-based violence. In 2011, the National Assembly passed the Prevention of Anti-Women Practices (Criminal Law Amendment) Act that addressed social practices like *wanni, swara* or budla-i-sulh, wherein women are traded to settle personal, family or tribal disputes.[55] Another landmark bill was passed in the same year geared towards the prevention of acid crimes. But notwithstanding procedural loopholes, the problem in South Asia — across the board — lies not in the absence of legal provision, but in their lack of implementation. Notions of shame and honour associated with the female body often enable a culture of impunity because the perpetrators are not held accountable for their actions. For this reason, there is a need for full-scale community mobilization regarding not only gender-based crimes but also the existence of legal rights that are available. Only sustained pressure from civil society can ensure that the gap between policy and action is bridged.

Although Pakistan was the first country in South Asia to introduce a national law on the right to information (Freedom of Information Ordinance 2002), the law was largely ineffective due to low civic input as well as inadequate legal provisions. The enactment of the Indian Right to Information Act in 2005 in federal and provincial tiers of the government, however, provided tremendous momentum to the movement in Pakistan, with readily available examples of how ordinary citizens could use RTI for personal benefit and public good. Although the movement in Pakistan finally culminated in the enactment of RTI in Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhawa, there still remains work to be done in terms of raising awareness among the common public and making the laws accessible to them.[56] As far as women's rights are concerned, access to information, and facilitating that access, could play a key role in the capacity-building of civil society and in the implementation of relevant laws. Communities and women in particular, need to be aware of their legal rights as enshrined in the Constitution.

In that sense, Pakistan and Bangladesh can take a leaf out of India's civic mobilization on women's rights and security in the aftermath of *Nirbhaya*. In India, the call for change has not just been limited to agitation in the streets or the courts, but has also manifested in a number of public service announcements and advertisements in the media that seek to remove the social taboo surrounding the discussion of gender-based crimes. Gender as a political category has the potential of transcending class, caste, religious and national boundaries in a common struggle for parity and equality. And only through a greater exchange of knowledge and resources across borders, i.e. by "thinking locally and acting globally," can this goal become possible.

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SINO-US RELATIONS (1980-2002): AN ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE

QURATUL AIN & RAZIA MUSARRAT

Introduction

It was in the 1980s that economic ties were forged among China and the US. The relations have also led to the rise of contentious issues over the years, due partly to the fact that the Chinese economy is undergoing a transformation, and partly due to the fact that the growth of economic ties has been phenomenal though erratic. China was upset by US protectionism and slow rate of transfer of technology as well as investment. There were also problems with the most-favoured nation (MFN) status and US opposition to China's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO). The US for its part was concerned over the balance of trade which was tilting heavily in China's favour as well as the failure of the Chinese to protect intellectual property rights and the trade barriers in China. These issues were complicated by the alleged export of prison-produced goods to the United States. Sino-US economic relations were thus confronted with a host of questions with no easy answers in sight.

The linkages established on bilateral trade increase their mutual dependency. US and China became more dependent on the investors and managers in each other's country and suppliers of raw material throughout East Asia. For the products which are exported from China to US have their origin of raw material in East Asia and almost 80 per cent value is added to these products in China. Most exporting firms in China have non-Chinese partners. The economic conditions in the US directly affect China and its regional and global suppliers of raw material and vice versa. This situation of interdependence was never observed between the US and USSR. Sino-US interdependence in the present era affects the other regional countries. Chinese

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capital investments have been a factor in low interest rates in the United States and a source of capital for Western institutions.

Economic facts, including economic interdependence, play little role in whether a country goes to war or not. Economic myths, however, surely do play a role, and they generally affect strategic stability quite negatively. This is another cause why domestic perceptions matter; they define which myths are believed.[1]

It is worth noting that whereas economic interdependence does not guarantee strategic stability, the break in bilateral trade and resulting setbacks definitely produce destabilization; both at regional as well as global levels.

In the post-9/11 period, the US and China both seized the opportunity to promote mutual cooperation. In the economic and trade area, Sino-US trade volume continues to grow rapidly. The consultative mechanism of the joint committee on commerce and trade has played a progressive role in preventing trade friction between the two nations from escalating into a "trade war". The United States has more common interests than differences in various areas.

The United States is a leading export economy. Its domestic growth depends largely on its world trade in goods, services and technology. The growing China market has been a major attraction for the US for sustaining growth of its own domestic economy. China with its low cost of land and labour has proved to be an attractive production site for American firms. This would reduce the cost of their products and help them remain competitive in international market. Moreover, China has served as a source of cheap labour intensive goods and low-tech machinery for American consumers.

Significance of the study

The significance of this study is that both China and the US are important powers of the contemporary world. The nature of relationship between them carries potential for shaping major developments in the 21st century. The study of economic relations in this context is of critical international concern. It is believed that "China still is vastly misunderstood in the US."

The study is likely to bring out the nature and scale of spillover effects of Sino-US relationship in Chinese society and state. It will give insight into the most important economic issues in Sino-US relationship.

This topic is very significant in the sense that relations between the US, a superpower, and China, a rising power, will play an important role in determining the economic dynamics of the international arena.

Objectives of the study

In the Post-Cold War era both the US and China experienced ups and downs in their relations. After that the two states have come so close that they opted to keep the points of differences aside and focused on all possible areas of collaboration. After 9/11 the economic interests of both countries compelled them to have better mutual relations. The purpose of the research is to analyse

how relations between the two states evolved during the period under study. The study also discusses emerging trends and issues between the two states in the Cold War and Post-Cold War eras and after 9/11.

The hypothesis of the study is

Economic considerations are shaping Sino-US bilateral relations.

Research methodology

Given the complexity of the problem, an eclectic approach has been used which largely draws upon historical, descriptive and analytical approaches and tools. This eclectic approach seems more useful as the present study takes the empirical evidence and theoretical inputs side by side. Moreover, the study benefits from the hypothetical deductive model in order to substantiate the hypothesis advanced. An effort has been made to look into the debates within the US and Chinese policy-making circles, through available published material and other sources.

Discussion and findings

Opening of new economic relations

The volume of trade between China and US rose in the 1980s. Besides, thousands of Chinese students, specialists and engineers continued their training in the United States. Many Americans were studying in China. American universities established close ties with their counterparts in China. To contribute to economic modernization of China, American agencies signed agreements of cooperation with Chinese institutions on different issues like health, environmental protection, agriculture and energy.

US Defence secretary Casper Weinberger visited China in September 1983. He announced that his country would export many categories of advanced weapons to China along with certain dual use technologies. In this way the Reagan administration surpassed all its predecessors in taking daring steps for bilateral relationship. But the major issue was that China wanted to purchase up-to-date defence technology from the United States to establish its own arms industry. The United States was not ready to provide military technology to a Communist country even having the status of a non-allied friendly power.

A number of high-level visits were exchanged including those by secretary of State Alexander Haig and president Reagan himself. From the Chinese side, foreign minister Woo Xuishang, premier Zhao Ziyang and Huang Hua visited the United States. In these visits, though political motives remained unsatisfied, yet considerable progress was made on economic and commercial issues. An agreement was initiated on collaboration in the application of nuclear technology under which American companies got business in China's projects of peaceful use of atomic power. China was accorded the status of non-allied friendly power. It permitted the sale of American computers, machinery, semiconductors and communication equipment.[2]

Efforts to establish military links however met with little success. Many Americans were also arguing for the need to examine "the global and

regional implications of a militarily stronger China, before feeding the dragon too much."[3] And apart from their reservations on military relations, the Chinese had by the mid-1980s come to realize that while Russia still posed the principal menace to Chinese security, it was too involved with its own domestic and international problems to take on China. This realization coincided with the appointment of George Shultz as American secretary of State. Shultz argued that the true worth of China for the United States lay not in a short-term military alliance but in a long-term economic alliance which would be possible only through the economic modernization of China [4]

The growth of economic relations however did not proceed smoothly. The agreement for nuclear technological cooperation was signed in April 1984 but not approved by the US Congress until December 1984 and that too in an atmosphere of great distrust. Protectionism over restrictions on importing textiles and clothing was also a source of tension.

The growing economic ties were reflected in the trade figures which grew from US $1.2 billion in 1978 to $7.2 billion in 1985. By 1988, bilateral trade had grown to $13 billion, with a growing diversification of products on both sides. There was also a change in the content of trade which saw the export of "computers and office machinery" from the US to China grow to $101 million, as opposed to mainly agricultural exports. Many American multinational corporations (MNCs) also got involved in joint ventures and investment projects, and by 1985 American investment in China stood at $700 million.[5]

Growing economic relations also saw them making headway in military ties. The chiefs of staff of the two militaries exchanged visits, followed by visits from American military experts to identify the precise Chinese requirements. In November 1984, the US delivered 24 Sikorsky helicopters to China, followed in September 1985 by the sale of military equipment and technology worth $98 million, the first government-to-government deal. In early 1986 it was announced that a $500 million "avionics package" would be sold to China to upgrade its F-8 interceptor.[6]

But in a major shift from past policy, efforts were made to reassure the USSR that the purpose of these sales was not anti-Soviet but broadening the base of Sino-US cooperation. Indeed even as China was expanding its economic and military ties with the United States, it was also attempting a rapprochement with the Soviet Union.

Most-favoured nation status

A milestone in bilateral trade relations has been the American decision to grant "Most-Favoured Nation" (MFN) trading status to China. As the normalization of relations took place, economic ties between the two were forged under an Agreement on Trade Relations signed in July 1979. It was decided both states would accord each other MFN treatment "with respect to products originating in or destined for the other contracting party, i.e. any advantage favour, privilege or immunity" granted to others in customs duties and charges, rules and procedures concerning storage, shipping, taxes on

imported goods, and the sale, purchase and transportation of goods.[7] The most important implication of MFN status for China was its exports to US enjoyed low tariffs which keeping in mind the balance of trade in China's favour was a favourable arrangement.

These improved trade relations opened the potential China market for the US companies. It also provided China the opportunities to purchase high-technology American products. The high-level scientific and cultural exchanges played an important role in developing the Sino-US relations both at governmental as well as at the people's level. China was granted MFN status on 1st of February 1980. It was automatically renewed every year till the end of the decade. The diplomatic recognition and grant of MFN to each other was the opening of new political and economic partnership.[8] MFN treatment essentially means that the exports of a country having this status will not be subjected to discriminatory tariffs or exclusionary rules different from those of any other country, or in other words, treatment will be equal to that provided to the most-favoured nation. The MFN treatment for a nonmarket economy can continue in force if the trade agreement is renewed under satisfactory conditions every three years and if the US president recommends by midyear that the waiver authority be maintained. Extension is automatic unless US Congress enacts a joint resolution of disapproval.

In 1989, however, economic ties suffered a severe setback due to the events of Tiananmen Square, and the US imposed sanctions and suspended economic ties with China.

After the incident, members of Congress interested in punishing China for Tiananmen and its aftermath met Chinese students and human rights groups to consider other legislative means to offset the Bush administration approach. From meetings held in early January 1990 between congressional members and Chinese student representatives, the idea gradually took shape that the most effective way to pressure China was to move against its MFN status. Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi initiated an informal congressional "working group" in March, that began considering the possibilities for changing China's MFN status.

At first, activists recommended outright revocation. Subsequently, however, a "compromise" position, involving the establishment of conditions under which MFN would be renewed in the future, gained support. Several bills calling for each approach were introduced in the House of Representatives and the Senate in 1990. One introduced by Representative Donald Pease, of Ohio, was actually passed by the House in October, but was not taken up by the Senate and so expired. But as James Mann[9] points out, the problem with a conditional approach to MFN was that there were many different ideas of what conditions should be applied. Some representatives favoured conditions pertaining to the treatment of Tibet, some wanted amnesty for Tiananmen demonstrators, some a cessation of prison labour exports, some wanted a reduction in religious persecution, others stressed curbs on abortion and relaxation in China's one-child policy, while still others wanted conditions added that would stop China's sale of nuclear materials or missile technology to other nations or force it to cut

off its support for Khmer Rouge guerrillas in Cambodia. The Pease bill, which the House passed 384-30, proposed that MFN not be extended unless the president submitted a report to Congress stating that China had released all Tiananmen prisoners and had made "progress in reversing gross violations of human rights; terminating martial law (including in Tibet)"; lifting limitations on freedom of the press and on broadcasts by Voice of America; terminating harassment of Chinese citizens in the US; removing obstacles to study and travel abroad for students and other citizens; "taking appropriate action to observe internationally recognized human rights, including an end to religious persecution there and in Tibet."

Baker and others at the State Department were probably animated by the realization that Congress was gearing up to pass major legislation on China's MFN status in 1991.

Foreign direct investment

Foreign direct investment (FDI) is a unique form of global capital flow. It involves the financing for the construction of plant and equipment. It is also linked with the transfer of managerial skills and knowledge from one country to another.[10] China offered joint ventures involving FDI to establish manufacturing facilities on its land and even outside the country.

In 1980 China joined the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB). That made borrowing easier for it. The IMF approved a $550 million loan to China in March 1980. China had drawn $550 million already against its reserves at IMF. Despite these loans, large purchases led to apparently unbearable burden on China's foreign exchange reserves in 1979-80.[11]

Foreign capital can be separated into two classifications: one is the borrowing from foreign countries and the other is accepting FDI from abroad. Chinese government further facilitated the foreign investment process with some new laws. The Chinese-Foreign Joint Venture Enterprise Law was amended to extend the joint venture period to 50 years in 1986. The Foreign Capital Enterprise Law provided conditions for establishing joint enterprises. These conditions included utilizing advanced technology or equipment, exporting all or a portion of production and assurance that foreign capital enterprises would not be nationalized or expropriated in any case.

In October 1986, the State Council announced regulations offering incentives for foreign investors. The incentives included lower cost of labour and land, reduction or elimination of income taxes and other tax holidays. Chinese Ministry of Labour announced regulations offering complete control in selection of staff, in wages, insurance premium, and welfare expenses to foreign capital enterprises. Similarly, complete autonomy was provided to foreign enterprises in importing components required for their production through regulations.[12]

By introducing these regulations, China was trying to attract most advanced technologies like other developing countries. But the American

investors demanded more liberalised conditions for investments. China had considerably liberalised its laws.

In its thrust in the direction of achieving "four modernisations" (i.e. agriculture, industry, science and technology and national defence)[13] China opened its economy to joint ventures. From the Chinese point of view, the best joint venture is that with a major foreign or multinational firm, bringing access to the most up-to-date technology to assist Chinese development. Its benefits should be multidimensional and its potential should be extended to a larger area of economy. Two earlier joint ventures of the 1980s, with multibillion American engineering concerns Flour and Bechtel, fulfilled these criteria. In direct investments, China was now second after the US as a destination for FDI, receiving 30 per cent of all FDI going to developing countries as conventionally reported. Though a large share of reported FDI, about 25 per cent of the total, seemingly has been the capital recycled through Hong Kong (and elsewhere) and brought to China to take benefit of the advantages accorded to capital labelled "foreign". Nevertheless, since 1992, FDI has been a major source for beefing up China's economic and trade sector growth. In the early 80s, FDI accounted for about 0.2 per cent of China's GDP. This share rose to 1 per cent by 1992. However, the later periods — late 90s — saw a rapid increase in the role of FDI in GDP growth rate. FDI share was about 7 per cent by the year 1997 in gross industrial output, 11 per cent in gross domestic products (GDP), and it grew to about 13 per cent of the gross domestic capital formation.

FDI has been a major source of increase in China's exports. Studies show that of the total $ 184 billion exports, FDIs contribution was $ 81 billion. Without FDI, China would have suffered, during 1990-1998 period, a decline of 14.5 to 7.5 per cent a year. There is also a link between investments in China and exports to it via the propensity of investing firms to supply foreign affiliates from within the firm.

Although the early 1990s were the years that saw a heavy inflow of FDI into China, resulting in rapid growth in industrial and economic sectors, yet this inflow flattened later on and sustained at about $ 40 billion a year. The reason for this flat level FDI for years was the backlog of commitments made by Chinese officials and which were not met according to the terms and conditions of contracts. Also, some foreign investors could not earn as much profit as desired, were investing less, or were pulling out.

Although it appears difficult to measure it with any accuracy, arguably the greatest effect of FDI is in transferring technology, management methods, business models, and the building of institutions. It would be incredible to say that a country that saves 40 per cent of its national income lacks financial capital. There are many ways for less-developed nations to obtain technology: licensing, studying academic and trade journals, reverse engineering, learning from trading partners, inviting expatriates to come home, sending students abroad (hoping that they will return sooner or later), and FDI. The last of these is an especially effective way to get advanced technology because it comes via an institution: a multinational corporation that can bring tacit knowledge that is often crucial and that is not conveyed via arms-length techniques such as

licensing. China's fast growth must be due in substantial measure to FDI, and there is much more to come if it continues to make itself an attractive destination.[14]

Bilateral trade

Diplomatic relations between China and US had resulted in enhancing cooperation on other fronts also, particularly the economic and trade front. Chinese trade, according to their Customs Department figures, was valued at $ 54.9 billion in 1998, as compared to $ 11.8 billion in 1990. This shows an annual rate of increase of 21.19 per cent. According to US official records, the bilateral trade volume touched the ceiling of $ 85.4 billion which was 4.3 times the volume in 1990. This report indicates an average increase of 19.9. China has emerged as the fourth largest trading partner of the United States. From the Chinese point of view, the United States stands as the second largest trade partner. Their exports to US account for more than one third of China's total exports.

US decision to make investment in China back in the 1980s saw constant upward trend since then. The US invested in 28,249 projects with a total contracted value of $ 50.9 billion and the resulting actual investment of $ 24.2 billion. The investments cover all the provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions all over China. The investment portfolio covers a wide range of industries including automobile, pharmaceuticals, petrochemicals, textiles, machinery, electronics, telecommunications, food and agriculture, financial services, to name some leading sectors. American multinationals are optimistic about Chinese markets and about 200 multinationals from among *Fortune* 500 companies have established themselves in China. The Fortune Global Forum 99 was convened in Pudong area of Shanghai on 27 September with more than 300 firms represented, a large number being American multinational corporations. The choice of Shanghai as the venue for the Forum itself projected the confidence other nations have in its potential to be an economic hub locally and at global level as well.

China's accession to the WTO

China was one of the 23 founding members of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and officially became a contracting party to it on 21 May 1948. After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, owing to various reasons, the Taiwan authorities continued occupying the lawful seat of China in the United Nations. In 1982, China was granted observer status in GATT.In July of 1986, after an absence of over 40 years, China officially applied to re-join the GATT. After all, following its re-entry into the world community in the 1970s, the GATT was virtually the only remaining major international organization of which China was not a member. Another reason was, of course, the expected boost in export earnings that would come with access to a bigger market. Finally, in the eyes of many policy-makers, GATT membership was an important element of China's domestic economic reform. In

1995, GATT was transformed into the World Trade Organization (WTO). China had been struggling since 1986 for resumption of the membership of GATT and entry into the WTO. The US had been resisting both these objectives.

China's WTO membership could not possibly be a threat to any country including the US; rather, it has great potential of bringing benefits to other countries. A lobby in the US does still harbour "Cold War thinking" which has developed a negative and threatening perspective of China's economic development. China is being perceived as a hypothetical enemy by many quarters in US Congress due to the pace of development it is moving on globally. They opposed China's accession to WTO and sought containment of China on the economic front. An analysis of the recent developments in Sino-US relations of mutual dependence and supportive relations leads to the conclusion that China's economic development is beneficial to the United States. China is a country where wages are low and which could supply low-cost quality goods to American people. This is also helping the US to control inflation and create an environment of sustained economic development in the country. Whereas the US economy reaps benefits, the DFIs in China open up greater employment opportunities for its people. Under these circumstances resisting US-China partnership by some American officials was not seen as a well thought out policy. On the other hand, China in the post-Cold War era has been following its old cultural tradition of "turning enemies into friends."

November 15, 1999 will be remembered as a significant date in the history of Sino-US relations. On this day they reached an agreement paving the way for China's accession to WTO. This historic event opened the doors to further economic growth for Chinese, equally benefiting Sino-US economic and trade relations, symbolizing the beginning of a new era of relationship. This agreement also provided the foundations for developing bilateral relations on the strategic front for achieving their regional and global objectives in a conducive environment.

China's accession to the WTO brought unprecedented benefits to US business community. They had a great opportunity to enter the Chinese market, besides opportunities for investment there, facilitating low-cost infrastructure and cheap labour. This attitude of business community at home also forced the US officials to reflect a softer posture on policies related to Sino-US relations both on economic as well as on strategic fronts.

Opening of Chinese markets with low tariff structure, elimination of quota restrictions, and ever expanding Chinese markets benefited American business community in the form of increased exports. This also affected the employment conditions inside the US positively, producing a softer image of China. In its report, United States International Accession to WTO and the following commitments by China to facilitate the multinationals on foreign trade and distribution rights, which included wholesaling, retailing, maintenance, after-sale services, and transportation,.

China's joining the WTO on 11 November 2001 was the advent of a new chapter of relations with the outside world. It made this region more attractive than any other place in the world. Pushed by its need to be part of

WTO China agreed to certain terms and conditions which were required for membership. It had to remove the trade barriers and open its market to the outside world from the very beginning of its accession. Other WTO members were provided access to Chinese markets virtually for all the products and services. While supporting these steps China also agreed to undertake, develop and modify its legal framework to introduce more transparency and predictability in business dealings. It also agreed to assume the obligations of more than 20 existing multilateral WTO agreements covering a wide range of trade areas. The main areas of China's concern were: MFN treatment, transparency and availability of independent review and administrative decisions. Other important issues could be found in the areas of agriculture, technical barriers to trade, trade-related investment measures, customs valuation, import licensing, rules of origin, sanitary measures, subsidies, antidumping and countervailing measures, trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights and services. For some of its commitments in these areas, China was allowed nominal transition periods where it considered essential. Under the WTO accession protocol, the US agreed to China's existing economic system based on State-owned enterprises, (SOEs). The conditions China agreed to included: MFN principle and right to trade leading to full national treatment to foreign companies in three years which implies elimination of dual pricing, and designated trading practices; liberalization of the services sector (telecommunication, banking, and insurance) with increase in share from 25 per cent to 49 per cent in three years and abolition of all geographical restrictions on foreign services, removal of export subsidies under the Agreement on Subsidies and countervailing measures including those for the agriculture sector (Article 12), in three years as well as reduction of domestic support in the agriculture sector to 8.5 per cent.

China had already reduced its tariffs significantly before its accession to WTO. Its simple and weighted tariffs rates were more than halved between 1993 and 1998. Further tariff cuts were made at the time of accession in 2001 on parts and components for processing/manufacturing sector. The reduction in China's weighted average tariff rates that came with the accession is quite significant.

Dispute over trade

China joining the WTO in December 2001, reduced tariff barriers so much that it had the lowest protection among the developing countries in the world. By mid-2002, it had abolished or amended 2600 legal statutes and regulations that were not consistent with its WTO accession agreement and had passed legislation on issues such as intellectual property rights. China was so determined to join the WTO that it even accepted terms which violated fundamental WTO principles, such as China's agreement to be considered a non-market economy by other WTO members.

However, differences over specific Chinese trade practices have also been on the rise. The most recent example of a trade dispute between the US and China is the steel war which started in March 2002 and still continues to protect

the American steel industry, which has lost not only 20,000 of a total 175,000 jobs but also some of its competitiveness to cheaper foreign steel imports. In March 2002, president Bush approved tariffs on most of the steel imports into the United States. Tariffs ranging from 13 to 30 per cent were introduced on certain types of steel imported from 15 countries, including China.[15]

The US also imposed anti-dumping duties on Chinese furniture and colour TV exporters on the pretext of 'unfair trade practices.' China made 40 per cent of the furniture sold in the American market.

With millions of manufacturing jobs evaporating in the US, its increasing trade deficit with China, swelling federal budget gap, has angered many politicians, manufacturers and labour representatives. They have pounced on China, accusing it of keeping the yuan undervalued by pegging it to the dollar, of exporting deflation by selling its products abroad at unfair prices, of violating the rights of workers by keeping labour costs low, and of failing to meet its commitment to the WTO. Most of these charges have little merit. An appreciation of China's currency would have a negligible effect on the overall trade balance and manufacturing jobs at home although it will boost the competitiveness of the US exports. As for trade deficit, almost 60 per cent of Chinese exports to the United States are produced by firms owned by foreign companies, many of them American. China is not to blame for this trade deficit. The biggest rise in the US deficit over the last five years has come not with China but with the European Union. It is in fact a shortfall in exports rather than a boom in imports that has been more responsible for the growing US trade gap.[16]

In sofaras there is a real problem with China's trade policy, it has to do with the implementation of some specific commitments. An especially thorny issue is the rampant piracy of intellectual property, which costs the US business 2.5 to 4.0 billion dollars a year. The "Right Laws" are in practice, but China has shown little inclination to crack down on patent, trademark and copyright infringements, or even outright theft of brands and technology by Chinese companies.

The progress made by China and US in developing bilateral trade in other socio-economic sectors demonstrates the desire of both states to increase cooperation manifold for mutual economic benefits. Their bilateral trade relationship has neither been affected by the tides of disputes which did arise in the past nor are they likely to be affected in future. The relations are likely to grow stronger in future.[17]

Conclusions and suggestions

Summing up, 1980 to the end of the Cold War was an optimistic period in Sino-US relations. The Tiananmen Square incident had a serious impact while the end of the Cold War changed the nature and dynamics of their bilateral ties.

The tragic event of 9/11 brought a substantial change in the bilateral relations. Cooperation accompanied with competition has been increasingly evident and China's position in the bilateral ties has improved.

Trade and economic cooperation has been the area where Sino-US relations have seen anomalous growth since the 1970s. However, the subsequent years have also unfolded opportunities for both nations. Whereas China offers a big consumer market with people having a fast rising income, it also provides competitively cheap labour for industry and business. On the other hand, the US offers leadership in the technological field and development of competitive business entrepreneurship and organizational structure. However, the trade balance remains a major issue and only political will and strength could help on this specific issue. What stands out as an undeniable fact is that both the countries have benefited from mutual trade and economic cooperation. There are some facts to be considered for further improving the Sino-US relations:

- The top leaders of China and US need political as well as strategic vision to build a new constructive and cooperative relationship to adapt to the changes in the economic situation.
- It is impossible to envisage a long-term constructive partnership in the future if either side is indifferent to the core interests of the other.
- Both countries need to have better appreciation and take into consideration the core interests of the other side in their specific actions.

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BRIDGING BARRIERS: MEDIA AND CITIZEN DIPLOMACY IN INDIA-PAKISTAN RELATIONS

NIDHI SHENDURNIKAR TERE

Exploring citizen diplomacy

As a practice of state-craft among the various actors in international politics, diplomacy is a widely acknowledged and integral part of the affairs of the international system. States as the major players in international politics need to talk to each other, negotiate and bargain power positions, get involved in exchange of ideas, products and services and locate themselves in the comity of nation-states that constitute the globe. They do this through various channels and modes of communication, diplomacy being one of those. The purpose of this section is not to elucidate upon the background and origin of diplomatic practices in the context of international politics, but to engage with a more micro and niche form of diplomacy, i.e *citizen diplomacy*. The vibrant and multi-layered nature of the diplomatic process lends a kind of flexibility to even the peculiar and more official nature of diplomacy. As understood simply, diplomacy is carried out by those in governmental power and position, far removed from the daily routines of a citizen's political and social life. An ordinary citizen is believed to be isolated from diplomatic formalities as the nature of the process demands highly skilled personnel usually found in the elite circles of political life. Apart from this, the fact that the conduct of foreign policy is a domain of the government also tends to exclude the man on the street from the conduct of international affairs. However, with the emergence of the concept of multi-track diplomacy the scope of diplomatic practices has widened to incorporate all those actors who were previously not a part of diplomatic processes. Different scholars have identified different tracks/levels of

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diplomacy. However, the most popular categorization is that provided by Dr. Louise Diamond and Ambassador John McDonald (1996) of nine different strata of diplomacy which include a range of activities by groups like non-governmental organizations, private citizens, businessmen, researchers, educators, activists, religious groups, and the media in addition to the primary actor — the government[1] A classification provided by T.V. Paul (2006) divides diplomacy into five tracks:

Track I – Official interaction between governments

Track II – Unofficial policy-oriented dialogue aimed at problem-solving between skilled, educated, experienced and professionally informed private citizens of both countries

Track III – Interaction and exchange between business professionals

Track IV – Citizen exchange, people-to-people contacts, cultural exchanges, contacts between the entertainment industries

Track V – Media-to-media based efforts whereby the media of both the countries attempt at educating and exposing the populations to culture, ideas, philosophy and aspirations of the 'other.'

The rationale behind the concept of multi-track diplomacy was to widen the base of diplomatic efforts as well as find a solution to the persistent incompetence and failure of governments to engage in successful diplomatic exchanges. Contentious issues between rival states which cannot be resolved only with governments engaging in a dialogue and need a broad-based approach to conflict resolution and peace-building may do well to make diplomatic practices inclusive and multi-track. Among the different levels in diplomacy, this paper will explore the concept of *citizen diplomacy* which is referred to by some as 'Track II' and by others as 'Track III' diplomacy. To dispel this confusion of the varying terms used by different scholars in the field, this study uses the term *citizen diplomacy*. The intention is to not reduce this kind of diplomatic practice to a numerical or a level but to highlight the significance of citizen efforts in it.

As a practice in diplomatic relations, the emergence of citizen diplomacy is very recent. The concept cannot be understood in isolation. This paper examines the concept of *citizens as diplomats* in the context of four crucial developments which drastically changed the conduct of international politics in the post-Cold War era. These are: *globalization, developments in technology, mediatization and the rise of non-state actors such as the civil society, non-governmental organizations, pressure groups,* among others. The abovementioned developments played a significant role in transforming and widening the role of citizens in international affairs. The emergence of a unipolar world order after the dissolution of the Soviet Union witnessed the influence and hegemony of American culture over the globe. The concept of borders becoming redundant, physical distance between different peoples reducing as a result of technological innovations, rise of newer and alternative forms of media like the internet, social networking, blogs, community media and the civil society assuming an upfront role in international politics — all of these developments provided the push for a much larger and more constructive role

for citizens in the process of diplomacy. The concept first emerged in the United States which sought to exercise its 'soft power' in the form of projecting its culture, way of life and American perspectives on international issues to citizens across the world who held an extremely stereotypical and narrow views about Americans. In a world that was linked as never before, the power of citizens serving as diplomats and ambassadors of a national culture was recognized by initiating exchange programmes, one-to-one interactions, educational and cultural interactions and visits to foreign lands in a bid to establish bonds of friendship and cultivate a deeper understanding of American culture — something which was difficult to achieve through traditional diplomatic efforts.[2]

Joseph Montville (1981) defined citizen diplomacy[*] as *"unofficial, informal interaction between members of adversary groups or nations which aim to develop strategies, influence public opinion and organize human and material resources in ways that might help to resolve their conflict."* The paper identifies a few distinct features of citizen diplomacy to distinguish it from official diplomacy which usually involves people from the government, the armed forces and the foreign office.

➢ The power in citizen diplomacy lies with people who are in no way associated with the government or any power position. These are the people who are viewed as the least important stakeholders in bringing about a change in antagonistic relations.

➢ The capacity of citizen diplomacy lies in building trust and confidence among rival populations who have long been fed with hatred and distrust of the 'other'.

➢ A process of questioning stereotypes and enemy images can be initiated by citizen interactions between populations who have kept away from each other for reasons that are at best political.

➢ The possibility of direct contact, personal experience and humanizing the 'other' is offered only by citizen diplomacy whereas official diplomatic energies are aimed at asserting political and military superiority over the 'other'.

➢ As a practice, citizen diplomacy works mutually with official diplomacy and lends a kind of complementarity to ongoing governmental interaction. It can be easily incorporated into the framework of official diplomatic processes.

➢ It localizes grassroots experiences of citizens who engage with the 'other'.

➢ It does not require highly skilled knowledge and expertise that is essential to the conduct of foreign affairs as any citizen can serve as a diplomat of their country, with of course a minimum level of knowhow about the culture, tradition and history of their nation, eg travellers, teachers, and Journalists as Diplomats.

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[*] The term that Montville used was Track II Diplomacy clearly distinguishing it from the official Track I processes.

➢   Since it is unofficial in nature, citizen diplomacy is devoid of the pressure and expectations that surround an official diplomatic meeting.

➢   The informal nature of interactions involved in citizen diplomacy offers a wide range of perspective and ideas to be incorporated into discussions without the rigid and structured approach that characterizes official diplomacy.

➢   It is possible that sustained citizen diplomatic efforts result in popular demand and make governments realize the urgency of working on peace-based programmes and solutions.

The efforts at citizen diplomacy however cannot succeed in isolation since a conflict usually manifests itself at the macro levels of the government and then percolates down to the citizens who develop contempt or hostility towards the 'other'. Interactions between citizens of rival nations are regulated and managed by their respective governments and hence we need to acknowledge that citizen diplomacy is a process which can work in the larger diplomatic framework set up by rival states. Critics of citizen interaction and citizen efforts at peacebuilding allege that it does not result into concrete and workable solutions for long-term plans at conflict resolution. How can informal conversations, meetings and citizen summits pave the way for actual policy decisions when the ultimate power in international politics remains with the state? How can small/large group of people meeting and discussing with each other impact a macro-level foreign policy decision? These and other concerns limit the scope of citizen diplomatic efforts and the recognition that is due to citizens in foreign policy affairs continues to elude them.

With these arguments, the paper introduces the media into the landscape of citizen diplomacy. Apart from being an actor in this process, the author intends to explore how the media can become a platform for the conduct of citizen interaction, what are the advantages that the media offers to citizen diplomacy, how it facilitates various functions associated with the practice and how it can move beyond its predetermined role of information and communication when acting as a medium for citizen diplomacy. These and other questions guide the next section of the paper.

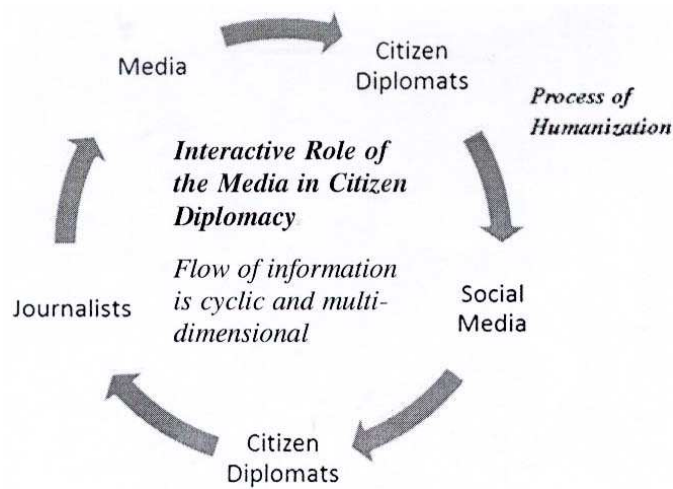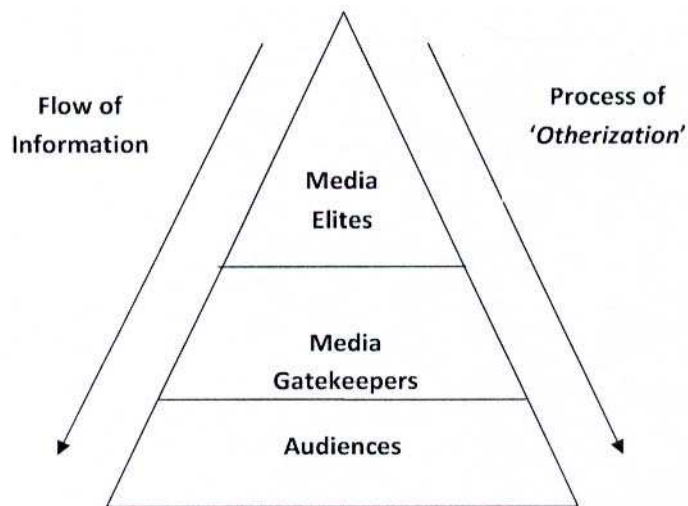## The media's role in citizen diplomacy

The media is recognized as one of the many important actors in multi-track diplomacy, even though its potential as a platform for conducting diplomatic exercises is yet to be satisfactorily explored. Institutionalized media exchanges are a regular affair among rival nations wherein the effort is to educate media professionals about the culture, practices, and traditions of the 'other'. The main function of the mass media in unofficial diplomacy is 'information' and 'communication'. Media representatives in their capacity as citizens of their country as well as members of the civil society are expected to report accurately and truthfully on matters of inter-state concern, to not exaggerate the enmity among nations, make efforts to build a positive image of the 'enemy' and to report more on peace and reconciliation than on conflict and antagonism. Johan Galtung's model of Peace Journalism normatively prescribes

the media's role in conflict. Going by the nationalist and profit-oriented nature of the global media, structural, organizational and professional changes are required in the mainstream media for it to play a constructive role in unofficial diplomacy. With its arguments in this section, the paper intends to broaden the base of the media's role in citizen diplomacy by envisioning a diverse, multi-layered and independent media which acts as a venue/platform for citizen diplomacy to take place.

Venturing beyond the scheme of media exchange as a facilitator of citizen diplomacy is a must because the media (especially in South Asia, which is the focus of this paper) has remained obsessed with national security, patriotism and jingoistic nationalism. It has not wholeheartedly supported peace initiatives in the region. Besides this, South Asia is plagued by a serious information deficit whereby the exchange of media between antagonists[*] is minimal, difficult and hindered by obstacles. In such a scenario, the role that media exchange among rival nations promotes is that of the media as primary sources of information whom the citizens trust when it comes to the 'other'. A whole chunk of information about the enemy is delivered through the media and it leaves no scope for questioning and doubting this information in the absence of any other credible source. This is a very limited role played by the media. What the paper envisions is a role where the media acts as a facilitator of citizen diplomacy by becoming the forum where citizen interaction takes place in its most primary form. It is a more cyclical kind of approach where there is continuous exchange of information between citizen diplomats and the media, leading to the establishment of both as highly reliable sources of information. This is depicted figuratively below:

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[*] Henceforth, the term 'antagonists' will signify parties/groups with conflicting interests or engaged in a conflict situation. The term is borrowed from Gadi Wolfsfeld's seminal work *Media and Political Conflic* (1997).

Traditional Role of the Media
In Citizen Diplomacy
Flow of information is top-down

Flow of
Information

Process of
'Otherization'

Media
Elites

Media
Gatekeepers

Audiences

Media

Citizen
Diplomats

Process of
Humanization

Interactive Role of
the Media in Citizen
Diplomacy

Flow of information
is cyclic and multi-
dimensional

Journalists

Social
Media

Citizen
Diplomats

How the media works in citizen diplomacy

Based on the second model suggested in the earlier section of the paper, a more interactive and informal role is proposed for the media in activities of

citizen diplomats. The routines of media and journalistic exchanges are surpassed to give way to a more comprehensive and broad-based role for the media in citizen diplomacy. There are many advantages of this kind of role. The following are ways suggested as some of the media can work as a platform for citizen diplomats and what benefits it imparts compared to the media's traditional roles:

➢ Whereas media exchanges have to be instituted and worked out within the frame-work of the official policy dialogue initiated by the government, there is no such constraint in the interactive model because it is here that the media works to fill a void that is created due to the lack of a free and vibrant platform of citizen diplomacy.

➢ As a part of the popular culture, an interactive media model is best suited to alter perceptions of rival populations when they have few chances of meeting and interacting with each other.

➢ An interactive media model can also surpass the official state-sponsored information channels and work for enhancing people-to-people contact. It can initiate independent conversations free from the prejudices of state dialogues and lead to some kind of direct contact between citizens. For example, Facebook has come up with a peace initiative that tracks the number of friend connections between people from different conflicting sides (http://peace.facebook.com/). The aim is to track each day the friend connections between people of different regions, religions, and political affiliations.[3]

➢ As a venue for citizen diplomacy, the media can be used as a forum to air alternative points of view which may not be possible in media exchanges conducted by regimes. The limitations and constraints of such interactions can be overcome through the interactive model. Citizen diplomats working through the media can also play the role of citizen journalists in their respective countries disseminating truthful and accurate information about the 'other' side.[4]

➢ For improved relations between rivals, it is essential that the engagement with the 'other' is not state-driven but 'people-driven'. This gives a better chance of improvement in relations as media's 'soft power'* can be aptly utilized by citizen diplomats.

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* The concept of 'soft power' was developed by Joseph S Nye (1990) in his book *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*. The concept was developed further in his book *'Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics'*. Nye talks of soft power as the second face of power which serves as an indirect way to get what one wants. It rests on the ability to shape preferences of others. It is attractive power that can produce desired policy outcomes without coercion or force. Among the many resources of soft power apart from the values and culture of a country, the media and the images that it disseminates also constitute soft power. As a medium that transports cultural mores and images across the media is a resource for soft power as it can be used successfully to convey a positive image of one's own country and influence the 'other'. In this case, India's popular Hindi TV serials and Bollywood movies have worked as an effective 'soft power' tool for Pakistanis to gain an impressionistic understanding of Indian culture and ethos.

- There is a fear that citizen diplomacy like official (Track I) and Track II diplomacy may become elitist in nature; involving only a few who have the privilege. The entry of the media in citizen diplomacy will assure that the process remains inclusive and non-elitist so that those with media access can use it as a channel of communication with the 'other'. All sections of populations that were previously on the margins of diplomatic efforts (youth, women, marginalized segments of population, to name a few) can become a part of the process. The media may be able to create a more localized and grassroots-based experience for citizen diplomats. Through the media, citizen diplomacy can be made to reach even the most common of citizens who may otherwise have no stake in foreign affairs.

- The engagement of the young populations of embittered rivals with the 'new media' can be positively explored and experimented with. A generation which may not have witnessed the conflict but harbours ill-will towards the 'other' can be reached out to by the new media resulting into a toning down of rigid perceptions.

- As a medium characterized by virtual exchanges,[5] possibility of creation of a network of common interests, facilitation of dialogue, ease of media sharing and advocacy as well as virtual support for global causes, the new media can become an 'enabler' of citizen diplomacy. The flexibility in collaborations — creation, publication and sharing of content across borders — is a real-time experience through the new media. For instance, the comments section on Facebook or on a blog can serve as platforms for idea sharing.[6]

- Media platforms can offer novel ways of conducting citizen diplomacy, not adhering to formal contacts and exchanges. There lies a possibility to explore the many ways in which citizens from either side interact via the media following an unstructured and flexible approach. The nature of exchanges is more free, uninhibited and not bogged down by constraints as compared to the traditional model of interaction.

- Citizen diplomats working through the media are now recognized by the mainstream media as well as the mainstream diplomatic process. In a sense, the media works for the democratization of citizen diplomacy.

- The media can act as an initiator of the dialogue process which may then be taken further by various levels of official dialogue among the antagonists. It can serve as the first point of contact between citizens.

- The power of citizen engagement and that of the media can be harnessed together to root out the image of the 'alien other' from the minds of citizens.

- There is a possibility that the state may create barriers to traditional media exchanges by prohibiting contacts, visits and interaction by not granting visas for travel. This can be overcome when citizen diplomats continue to talk to the 'other' through the media.

- By becoming an active agent of citizen diplomacy, the media can translate peace into a marketable concept. Global media shows an

inclination towards profits and revenue, thereby citizen diplomacy could easily fit into the frame of media economy. This shall also broaden the peace media constituency which otherwise remains extremely limited to scholars, academicians, peace activists for whom talking about peace is 'fashionable'/'trendy'.

➢ The media's involvement in citizen diplomacy can enrich and widen the scope of the activity since the media in itself is a diverse and multi-layered entity. Also, the need of the hour being a multi-level dialogue, the media has to fit itself somewhere into the scheme of dialogue.

The media can work with manifold objectives as a platform for citizen diplomacy. Some of these could be: *to influence governments into taking action for peace, strengthen regional ties, increase people-to-people contact, alter stereotypes and popular perceptions, facilitate a meeting of people across rival regions, create an assertive and strong civil society fabric for conflict resolution and to work for policy change.*

However, interaction and dialogue through the media may not serve the purpose of peace-building in isolation. Physical contact and long lasting interactions must follow. The kind of engagement that is made possible through the media needs to be sustained and built upon by citizen diplomats. Such interactions must be translated into real-life, long-lasting and mutually beneficial relationships that work on the ground. Such everlasting bonds created by interactive exchange via the media go a long way in eradicating the clouds of suspicion and hatred. The following sections of the paper focus upon the nature of India-Pakistan rivalry — why and how the media-aided citizen diplomacy can work in their case.

India and Pakistan — understanding the discord

The nature of India-Pakistan conflict

The South Asian security and military complex is singularly defined by the India-Pakistan discord since 1947 — when the sub-continent witnessed a bloody and traumatic partition of British India into two independent nations: India and Pakistan. It is because of this 'persistent', 'enduring' and 'intractable' conflict that peace continues to elude the South Asian region. Among the many causes of the conflict are: *conflicting national identities, power asymmetry, dispute over territory, internal political dynamics, terrorism and stereotypes of the 'other'.* In this section, the paper seeks to focus more upon the stereotypes and perceptions that Indians and Pakistanis hold about each other. The attempt is driven by the belief that to understand the concept of citizen diplomacy and how it can work in the case of India and Pakistan, it is essential to uncover the way stereotypes, prejudices and perceptions of identity come to play in the conflict.

The India-Pakistan discord is mainly played out at the psychological level apart from the fact that it works on political, social, cultural, historical and religious planes. In spite of sharing a common cultural base, both nations remain rigidly firm about their conflicting and incompatible national identities. While Pakistan sees itself as a homeland for the sub-continent's Muslim population,

Indian polity is rooted in the ideas of secular nationalism. Thus, the conflict remains embedded in the peoples and civil society of both countries. Stereotypes and rigid perceptions guide how Indians think of Pakistanis and vice versa. Each has a self-created image of the 'other' based on hatred, fear of the unknown and suspicion. So while an average Indian thinks of the average Pakistani as a religious fundamentalist, the common Pakistani perception is that India is out to undo the existence of Pakistan as it never reconciled itself to its emergence in the first place. Each has been successful in creating an 'enemy' image of the other that is equally resented on both sides. This is reinforced through negative media coverage and through the tools of popular culture like movies, music and television. Added to this are the restrictions imposed on citizens travel to each other's country. People in both countries are alien to each other and their culture because they are not exposed to the 'other' side. Negative propaganda from all sides has resulted into the 'other' being perceived with hostility and contempt. Leaders in both countries have also tried to aggravate and play politics around bitter memories of the past, leading to further alienation.

Stephen Cohen terms the India-Pakistan conflict as a "paired minority conflict" which is rooted in perceptions held by important groups on both sides. Both parties in such a conflict adopt the position of the 'weaker' or 'threatened' party under attack from the 'other' side. There is an inexhaustible supply of distrust in such types of conflicts making it difficult to reach a compromise and offer concessions.[7] Both parties feel threatened by each other and regard themselves as more vulnerable than the other. Paired-minority conflicts over a period of time become integral to each side's identity. The legacy of the partition has a firm footing in the minds of Indians and Pakistanis, the political elites and the leaders on both sides. Adversarial images are vehemently promoted by the state apparatus and the media, leaving very little room for alternative views. Hostility of the 'other' has been a marked feature of the conflict. It is true that with all the misperceptions, distrust and miscommunication with the 'other', most Indians and Pakistanis when they meet each other recount very positive and friendly experiences of the warmth and hospitality accorded.[8] However, this stands true only when people get to visit each other and explore the traditions and way of life of the 'other'. Such instances have been very few as there are a lot of travel hurdles put in place by governments on both sides when it comes to issuing of travel visas. Hence, the average Indian and Pakistan remain in the 'no contact zone' wherein all information that they receive about the other side is dominantly state-oriented and mediated.

In this absence of direct contact between the citizens on both sides, stereotypes flourish, which is where the media-aided citizen diplomacy can play an important role. It is in this context of the India-Pakistan conflict that the paper examines the backdrop of citizen diplomacy, its development and its successes and failures. The study also uses the case of the India-Pakistan conflict to highlight how and why citizen diplomacy through the media can work for this kind of a conflict and accelerate efforts towards conflict resolution

and peace-building. This is done using case accounts of media platforms which are working for promoting citizen diplomacy between the two rivals.

Enemy images shattered — citizen diplomacy through the media

It is quite clear that stereotypes and perceptions have guided the existence of the India-Pakistan conflict since its beginning in 1947. This is a very crucial aspect of the conflict since the nature of the conflict is determined by the very fact that citizens in both countries hold negative views about the 'other'. This remains the biggest hurdle for peace-building and conflict resolution because without changing the way people think about the 'other', there is little possibility of working for peace. It is in this context, that the paper presents its argument about citizen diplomacy conducted via the media working as a bridge to overcome the barriers and hostile attitudes that have dominated this conflict ever since its inception. Both India and Pakistan have explored official platforms to resolve contentious issues without much success. Hence, there is a need to bring in other actors in the diplomatic dialogue. The paper's focus here lies upon how and why the media can work as a tool for citizen diplomacy, engage citizens on both sides and come up with innovative solutions of longstanding disputes. The study builds on this argument by discussing case accounts of three prominent media initiatives in diverse mediums which are working to facilitate citizen diplomacy between India and Pakistan.

Citizen diplomacy through the media — How and why?

> *I wasn't informed of my mother's demise because all forms of communication between India and Pakistan had been cut, she said. It was the year 1971 and I was in Karachi. I received a telegram from a relative in London three days after she had passed away. There was nothing I could do.*[9]

These and other countless tales of the pain of separation in the aftermath of the 1947 partition emerge highlighting the artificial barriers that prohibited communication between the people across the border. Undertaken as a part of official policy measures, this was done to prohibit contact and dialogue among them in an attempt at mutual alienation so that state-held perceptions of the enemy could be reinforced. Naturally, if people do not get to know the 'other', they are bound to accept whatever the state tells them about the 'other'. The lack of knowledge about the 'other' is exploited by those in power to enhance the bitterness that already existed owing to a troubled history of the sub-continent. It is here that citizen diplomacy via the media can play a constructive and transformative role.

The India-Pakistan official dialogue is characterized by elitism in which issues of humane concern are totally ignored. What matters are the issues of macro level conflict and those which are important and common to the citizens of both countries — issues like poverty, education, terrorism, climate change — are not a part of the official discourse. By engaging in citizen diplomacy through the new media, such issues of common concern can be deliberated upon by people on both sides. The presence of a vibrant civil society

and social movements working at the grassroots level in both countries has turned citizens into active stakeholders in the dialogue process. For this reason, it is now that the media can take advantage of the active involvement of citizens in socio-political issues and become a venue for citizen diplomacy. The nature and orientation of the mainstream media in both countries is state-centric and guided by the principles of nationalism, jingoism and market economy. Therefore, there is a dire need to reorient the objectives of the mainstream media and make them work for citizen diplomacy. There are very few forums on which Indians and Pakistanis can engage in intellectual exchange of views. Most of the time, regimes become suspicious of the 'other' and hence prohibit any sort of contact. In such a scenario, the media can become the forum where exchanges in academics, research,[10] business, travel, culture, history among other things, can take place. The author's major contention for the belief in media's role in citizen diplomacy is the lack of travel infrastructure and the rigid visa regime that exists between India and Pakistan. Travel between the two countries is enormously difficult owing to the poor travel services as well as infrastructural issues.[11] These have a direct bearing on networking and communication and on people-to-people contact. Despite the recent facilitation of travel and issuing of visas, it is a Herculean task for Indians and Pakistanis to visit each other.[12] The fact that it is easier to travel to the distant UK and USA than to neighbouring India/Pakistan conveys it all. Both citizens and the media working together add a lot of value to diplomatic inter-state relations. The best example is cricket diplomacy between India and Pakistan (2004) which received overwhelming support from cricket enthusiasts both in India and Pakistan as well as the mainstream media in both countries.[13] The limitations that citizen diplomacy encounters in using the mainstream media as a platform can be overcome by the use of social media which provides a better and larger scope for alternative viewpoints. An example is a project by the name of *Ummeed-e-Milaap* undertaken by university students in Mumbai and Lahore who worked to maintain an online diary on different aspects of the peace process, student exchange and the role of the media. The project was launched in 2011 with the aim of forging India-Pakistan student friendships.[14] The other advantages that citizen diplomacy conducted through the media are: providing the necessary human touch in inter-state relations, a possibility of bridging the physical barriers between citizens, increase in the number of people having access to the media in both countries, free and uninhibited flow of information using new media technology, possibility of involving more youngsters in information exchange and interaction, countering restrictions on mainstream media distribution in both countries, helping official diplomacy to grow and expand its purview, spreading peace messages that go viral and using the potential of media forums to facilitate citizen exchanges in the future.

Among the many attempts at encouraging people-to-people contacts between Indians and Pakistanis, a few are worth noting:[15]

- WISCOMP (Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace) works to build trust between Indian and Pakistani peers by organizing conflict transformation workshops - www.wiscomp.org/

- India – Future of Change (http://www.indiafutureofchange.com/)
- Sesame Workshop teaches the younger generation to respect differences among cultures (http://www.sesameworkshopindia.org/)
- India-Pakistan Friendship Society, 1987
- South Asian Dialogues in the early 1990s
- Pakistan-India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy (1994) has been the largest and the most prominent citizen initiative to promote the values of peace and democracy (www.pipfpd.org/).
- India-Pakistan Soldier's Initiative for Peace, 2000
- Pakistan Peace Coalition, Karachi - http://www.sacw.net/PPC/
- Committee on Nuclear Disarmament and Peace, India.[16]

These dialogues and forums have played an important role in expanding the peace constituency in India and Pakistan, by giving an entry to common citizens in the dialogue. However, what is missing in these dialogues is the use of the media as a platform to engage citizens with each other. This is a big deficit that these dialogues face because they have not been able to venture beyond traditional journalistic exchanges. The study addresses this gap in the next section where it examines in detail three peace ventures undertaken by the media in India and Pakistan in the recent past to counter the negative, stereotypical and nationalistic kind of coverage that the mainstream media remains obsessed with. The theoretical framework used to analyze these initiatives is Johan Galtung's model of *peace journalism.*

Case accounts

Here are three case accounts of forums where the media is a venue for citizen diplomacy. These three ventures are interesting to examine primarily because they operate in three very different mediums and varying contexts. While *Aman Ki Asha* is a joint peace initiative of the two largest selling newspapers of India and Pakistan; *Romancing the Border* (RTB) is an online initiative on Facebook that attempts to establish connections among young Indians and Pakistanis. SAFMA (South Asian Free Media Association) is an institution that works for media exchange and interaction in South Asia. These case accounts re-emphasize the fact that the media can and must become an active forum for citizen diplomacy if the frequency of interaction and communication among Indians and Pakistanis is to be encouraged and sustained in an atmosphere of distrust and hostility. Media ventures like the ones mentioned above are based on the model of *peace journalism* propounded by Johan Galtung.[17] The concept of peace journalism works on the premise that the media should adopt the high road while reporting conflict and pay more attention to the causes of discord and violence rather than violent events. By reporting and highlighting 'peace' in news stories the media does a great service to conflict resolution and management. Peace journalism was developed in opposition to mainstream war journalism that views conflict as a sport in which one side has to necessarily win. Peace journalism promotes values of humanization of the enemy, explores the reasons behind violence and conflict,

focuses on the invisible effects of violence rather than the visible and direct effects, talks about the sufferings of 'us' *and* 'them' and not 'us' *vs* 'them' and aims for a win-win outcome for conflict transformation and mitigation. Galtung argues for some standards on the basis of which media reporting of conflict should be analyzed. Peace journalists make conscious efforts to report stories which encourage peace and reconciliation between/among mutually hostile groups, thereby giving media professionals the opportunity of playing a positive role in conflict.

With inspiration from Galtung's model of peace journalism the paper analyzes three key media-peace ventures in India and Pakistan that serve as a model for citizen diplomacy via the media.

Aman ki Asha

Aman ki Asha which means 'Hope for Peace,' is a collaborative peace effort by the *Times of India* Group (India) and the *Jang* Group of Newspapers (Pakistan) — the largest circulating dailies of their respective countries. While the word *Aman* is an Urdu word that stands for peace, *'Asha'* is a Hindi term which means hope. The campaign was initiated by the two leading media houses in India and Pakistan with a view to countering mainstream media reporting that promotes a nationalistic sense of viewing Indo-Pakistan relations. The campaign was launched on January 1, 2010 and is still going strong after four years of success and achievements. The initiative is a first of its kind by the print media in the sub-continent. The prime purpose of the campaign is to encourage people-to-people contact by organizing seminars, conferences, literary meetings, cultural festivals and promote the cause of peace between India and Pakistan. It has committed itself to a positive and transformative use of the print media to give space to each other's point of views on issues of dispute. The campaign believes in the power of the written word to trigger a change in the rigid and stereotypical mindsets of people on both sides. So far, under the banner of *'Aman Ki Asha'* literary and music festivals, *mushairas* (poetry reciting symposium), editors conferences, trade conferences and strategic seminars have been organized to realize the shared vision for peace.

The concept of a peace journalism campaign led by newspapers is in itself a unique step undertaken by mainstream and popular media because of the reach and credibility that the two media groups enjoy among their readers. For mainstream newspapers to advocate peace is a bold step which defies the view that the media can work only as warmongers. The author carried out a qualitative content analysis study of the campaign using Galtung's model of *peace journalism* to understand what role the campaign plays in promoting peaceful relations between India and Pakistan, what kind of events are organized under the umbrella of the campaign and what are the issues that campaign articles address and cover. The study period spanned from July 1, 2011 to

December 31, 2011.* An attempt was made to critically evaluate the campaign and its contribution to people-to-people contact.

Aman ki Asha and citizen diplomacy⁺

The content analysis study revealed the areas covered by campaign articles as well as the kind of events that were organized under the campaign banner. Among the several issues that the campaign addressed a few prominent ones were: health concerns that afflicted both countries, cooperation in business and economy, policy decisions on issues of discord, features on cultural commonalities and the adverse impact of war and hostility. Cooperation in soft areas like education, agriculture, tourism and information technology (IT) was also emphasized. Meetings of Indian and Pakistani doctors to exchange views on issues of concern (August 1, 2011), Pakistani children being treated by Indian doctors (November 20, 2011), Pakistan commerce minister's first visit to India in 35 years (September 30, 2011), Use of culture, and music and cinema as a binding force between people (December 17, 2011) are some examples of the way the campaign is oriented. Under the forum of Aman ki Asha, various exchanges among students, artists, businessmen, academicians and researchers have been carried out to facilitate a knowledge of the 'other'. Even seemingly serious issues of war and conflict are given a humane touch under the campaign. War is associated with the idea of grief, an event which can bring about only loss and not victory. People who spearhead this campaign also legitimize it in terms of the need for people-to-people engagement in crucial areas leading to normalization in relations. By facilitating a meeting ground for citizens of both countries, the campaign serves as a successful model to be emulated for citizen diplomacy via the media. An emphasis on sector-wise engagement is what Aman ki Asha endorses successfully. With help and support from the campaign, Indians and Pakistanis have been able to visit each other's land and see for themselves as to how different the 'other' actually is! Concerts, musical events, theatre plays, business meetings have been organized to introduce people to each other and facilitate conversations. Advocating and signing of petitions related to peace and visa restrictions, corporate campaigns, involving school children in sending peace messages across the border, poetry, strategic seminars, road shows have been a regular part of Aman ki Asha in a bid to make the enemy seem familiar!

Romancing the Border (RTB)

Romancing the Border (RTB) is an India-Pakistan citizen psyop — an effort to convey a message of peace to influence emotions, opinions and behaviours of people across the border. The idea behind the initiative is to highlight similarities between Indians and Pakistanis because they hardly get to meet and know each other. Grudges built by the media and political propaganda

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* Only the articles published in *The Times of India* were analyzed as a part of the study. Stories from the *Jang* could not be incorporated due to lack of knowledge of Urdu.
⁺ <http://www.facebook.com/amankiasha.destinationpeace?fref=ts>.

make Indians and Pakistanis apprehensive of each other. Hence, RTB provides the opportunity to people from both sides of the border to interact, get to know each other, befriend each other, discuss their apprehensions and eventually rid themselves of mutual hatred. Indian and Pakistani university students Shirin and Rehman came up with the idea of building a people-to-people movement on the social media in 2012 while engaged in a casual discussion on the campus of University of Hong Kong where both study. With only a logo (the image of two linked hearts) and a basic idea in their mind, RTB's first testimonial received an overwhelming response which reinforced their faith in investing time and energy in the cause of Indo-Pakistan peace. RTB is being carried out with the help of Stanford University's Peace Innovation lab.

RTB is unique in its attempts for peace in South Asia in many ways:

➢ RTB Fortnightly Testimonials are published in *The News* and *Daily Jang*.

➢ It receives support and recognition from Aman ki Asha.

➢ By initiating several innovative campaigns like video greetings, smile for peace, photo booth campaign, it innovates the concept of sharing peace and smiles across the border.

In the future, RTB intends to be more than just a peace junction. With the aim of making peace viral in South Asia, it wants to become a think tank and prove that peace is more profitable than war. The message of this peace forum is beautifully summed up in the following lines which strike a chord with anybody who desires peace.

We don't know if Romancing The Border's campaign for peace in South Asia will make a difference. We don't know if Indians and Pakistanis will learn to look through what their governments and media feed them. We don't know if youths from both sides will realize their obligation in the peace process. What we know for sure is that RTB has brought together Indians, Pakistanis and other foreign nationals. We cared … We put time and effort … We tried and will continue to do so. We all came together for a peaceful South Asia. And that, is the difference.*

RTB is also novel in its efforts to harness the power of the social media to propagate the cause of peace. RTB's page on Facebook invites testimonials, peace messages and gives a unique opportunity to interact with young Pakistanis and Indians who may have shared like-minded views but not had the chance to communicate those to the 'other.' The forum of RTB is very colourful, vibrant and attractive to any social media user. It is the most appropriate use of the social media to build ties between the younger generations in India and Pakistan who may not have been a witness to the conflict but still harbour ill-feelings towards the 'other.' The author interacted with three Indians and four Pakistanis on what inspired them to be a part of RTB and how in their opinions could the

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* Reproduced with authority and permission from the RTB forum — <romancingtheborder@gmail.com>.

media work as a stage for citizen diplomacy. Some of the responses are quoted below:

Productive discussions, youth orientation and the use of motivational posters make RTB stand apart. The Media needs to work positively for highlighting the cause of peace between India and Pakistan — Ishwar Devgan, Operations Manager (India)

Platforms like RTB can bring about a great change in mass thinking. Forums like these bear the responsibility and also the credit for bringing about real-time change in the ways Indians and Pakistanis perceive each other — Muhammad Owais Iqbal Bhatti, Chemical Engineer (Pakistan).

RTB has a wonderful tone to begin with. More than preaching it has left open a platform that not only helps us to interact with the youths across the border but gives us insights on little-known facts or places that we might have never known or visited. The best part about RTB is that it is a platform where a common youth can express his/her opinion. And that's where change begins! — Paromita Bardoloi, Writer (India).

It's been over a year now that I have been associated with RTB. Having a very hostile stance before, association with RTB made me think that if not on the political front; there is certainly a scope for positive change on the social front if given a chance. — Rahema Hasan, Student (Pakistan).

The cost of setting up platforms and interactive spaces are virtually zero now, and that is why actually RTB was possible. Besides so many people end up chatting with or interacting with people from across the border and these interactions work wonders in dispelling hate, it fulfils the need for a purely youth based interactive platform with no association with bigger entities. — Rehman Ilyas, Co-founder of RTB with Shirin.

RTB is a great forum for people on both sides to raise their progressive voices. Not only does it post their messages but the pictures of the participants too which gives them a chance to be heard and seen at the same time.… in fact we romance the friendship between the two nations and we romance Indo-Pak peace. — Sehyr Mirza, Student (Pakistan).

RTB provides a forum for youth engagement and gives an opportunity of interacting directly with people across the border. Media forums like these are a great asset and can work to strengthen ties and reduce differences. — Umang Kochhar, Student (India).

The RTB experiment goes on to prove that the media, especially the online and interactive medium, is a potential forum to be explored by citizen diplomats. The cost of setting up such forums is minimal, with internet access being the only requirement. The advantage of forums such as these is that they

work on an informal level, without the constraints faced by mainstream media and can primarily engage the youth in the peace process. "RTB is different from other interactive forums in a way that it is solely based on input from the young activists who strive for change, who want a peaceful sub-continent, who stand against extremism and who want cordial bilateral relations to develop between the two countries. How the forum engages the youth in peace-making through personal messages on the social networking sites is a great and absolutely unique initiative," says Sehyr Mirza who contributes on the forum through photographs, messages and comments on posts. Here romance is brewing on both sides!

South Asian Free Media Association (SAFMA)

In the year 2010, South Asian Free Media Association, a mainstream media body devoted to freedom of expression and access to information in South Asia, celebrated ten years of its existence. It was established with the two-fold objectives of:

a. Media development, free flow of and access to information and a free, professionally competent, unbiased and independent media in the region.

b. Promote a culture of dialogue and an environment for understanding, tolerance, peace, conflict resolution and cross-border cooperation leading towards a South Asian Union.

The association has eight national chapters in South Asia and has contributed to the cause of a free flow of information exchange in the region by organizing several workshops, conferences, media summits, parliamentary conferences and sub-regional exchanges. The activities of SAFMA find support from those occupying the highest political positions in India, Pakistan and other countries of the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) region. SAFMA is an institutionalized mechanism for media exchanges between India and Pakistan. Journalistic exchanges have been a regular affair under its banner. Its larger aim is to build an atmosphere of peace and harmony between the two countries. For this purpose, several activities are undertaken: conferences which bring together people across national boundaries, SAFMA's website is devoted to the coverage of news related to the South Asian region, development of a think tank on South Asian affairs and a struggle to improve media laws and press freedom in the region. As a highly credible organization in the region, SAFMA's role in peace-building is that of a facilitator and catalyst.[118] In some cases, its efforts have also had a positive impact on easing tensions between India and Pakistan. Even though it is primarily a media body, it has worked on several pertinent issues in the region ranging from human rights, women's rights, minority rights, people-to-people contact, nuclear disarmament to cultural cooperation in South Asia.

SAFMA and citizen diplomacy

In its present form SAFMA's objectives are limited to creating a conducive atmosphere for the media in South Asia to work in an environment

free from political and social barriers that are a part of the South Asian security complex. However, as an institutionalized forum for media exchange, the power of SAFMA has not been utilized in building people-to-people contacts. Media freedom, media networking, monitoring of violation of media rights, training of South Asian mediapersons, promoting media collaborations, lifting barriers that hinder the free flow of information, encouraging healthy practices in communications across the region and producing joint publications are some of the core objectives with which SAFMA has worked so far. Looking at the broad canvas on which the forum was formed, it must work to encourage citizen contacts especially between India and Pakistan since there is a complete lack of institutionalized mechanisms for the purpose. The credibility it has established in all the years of its operations in South Asia should not be let off without using it to create a forum for common people on both sides to visit and get to know the 'other'.

The efforts of SAFMA have been limited to carrying out exchanges among elite groups in the region — editors, journalists, parliamentarians, academicians. There is no doubt that with the kind of political atmosphere that prevails in South Asia, SAFMA has achieved much. However, the concept of free media should also be inclusive of information exchange between those who do not belong to the elite group in either country. So far its work in journalistic exchange is commendable even though it follows a top-down approach wherein it is the media which is the epicentre of information in the region. SAFMA seeks to bring about a change in the attitudes of populations by exposing them to media content that is factual, accurate and peace-oriented in nature. It is believed that the kind of information that the media passes on to its citizens goes a long way in shaping and reshaping their opinions about the 'other'. In a way, the media serves as an intermediary between citizens of both nations and it becomes its responsibility to ensure a rethinking of attitudes and opinions. Being a well-established institution, SAFMA's objectives could go well beyond media and journalistic exchange whereby it could serve as a forum for students, researchers, scholars, artists from the region to meet and interact with each other and use the media as a channel for the purpose of bridging barriers among populations. There is an urgent need that SAFMA shift its emphasis to include exchange and interaction through the media.

Conclusion

Some criticism is levelled at the media's role in citizen diplomacy. There is no dearth of forums encouraging people-to-people contact between Indians and Pakistanis, even though such existing mechanisms have not been able to function effectively. The concern is the rationale behind introducing the media in this process when there is a lack of political will to make such forums work. Also, in an era where the media is excessively controlled by the state and corporate giants, how successfully can it play a role in citizen diplomacy? Those arguing from the standpoint of national security contend that people-to-people contact will not help in resolving problems which are essentially the domain of the government. During a security situation, will the media continue to be a

platform for citizen diplomacy or will it portray a state-centric view? For example, during the border skirmish between India and Pakistan in January 2013 where allegations of beheading of soldiers were levelled by both countries, Sunil Shanker, a Karachi-based theatre director was not allowed to stage his play *Mantorama* at the *Bharat Rang Mahotsav*, organized by the National School of Drama.[19] The concern is what consequences will citizen diplomacy via the media lead to in case of a conflict of national interests? Will the media continue to encourage and foster citizen diplomacy or will it become jingoistic and patriotic in its coverage? What about the stance of those media forums like the ones discussed in this paper? Will they continue to trumpet for peace journalism? A very glaring example is the coverage given to the border skirmish issue by a popular Indian news channel 'Times Now,' which is part of *The Times of India* Group that spearheads the *Aman ki Asha* campaign. It was surprising to note that while *Aman ki Asha* continued with its peace overtures, the tone of coverage by 'Times Now' was overtly nationalistic. What explains two different standpoints of media houses belonging to the same group? Citizen diplomacy efforts, even those that are facilitated by the media cannot bypass the information and communication channels of the state. What if the state decides to censor media content or interaction that is encouragingly positive of the 'other'? In most cases, citizen diplomacy remains a hostage to the will of the state. Journalists also question the media's role in citizen diplomacy on the basis of journalistic ethics and objectivity which are sacrosanct for the journalistic profession. Can the media promote peace and take sides when it is supposed to be functioning neutrally and objectively?

There is no doubt that people-to-people contacts will enhance regional cooperation in South Asia. With the media explosion in this region, it could be rewarding to utilize its potential for citizen diplomacy. However, the media's role has to go beyond virtual exchanges; to be harnessed to let people actually meet the 'other'. Media's role in citizen diplomacy may help to negate the adverse impact that official diplomacy has on relations of the two nations. Since, social media messages on Twitter and Facebook go viral, the mediums can create a network of professionals on both sides of the border. Citizen diplomacy via the media is thus an informal attempt at improving formal political and diplomatic relations. Of course, in the case of India and Pakistan, even the role of the media has been observed to remain hostage to inter-state relations. Citizen diplomacy via the media can work only when it resolves its tiff with those who support the national security paradigm in inter-state affairs.

However, with the three case accounts presented briefly in this paper it is evidently clear that the media can present a shared vision for peace in the subcontinent. The media's involvement in citizen diplomatic efforts is a very fresh and innovative concept since its strikes at the very root of the prevailing hatred and mistrust. However, there are many factors which will determine the success of media efforts at promoting citizen diplomacy in the subcontinent: support from government and bureaucracy, support from the mainstream media on both sides, how successfully is the media able to filter solutions provided by citizen diplomats to government-operated channels, financial and infrastructural

assistance, an incorporation of the human security issues apart from political and military discussions, improved media access in both India and Pakistan and a proper institutionalization of the channels through which the media can participate in citizen diplomacy.

The author is not of the view that media-aided citizen diplomacy can replace face-to-face, regular interaction and meetings between Indians and Pakistanis. Opinions cannot be changed only by the media; they need to be reinforced by arranging and facilitating more meetings between the two sides because the conflict is as much about the emotions of people as it is about territory, strategy and politics. As noted Bollywood lyricist Gulzar on his recent visit to his birthplace in Pakistan, Dina, near Rawalpindi said*: All I wanted was a moment of solitude so I could sit and weep. But I could not get that. I just touched the salt from their hands, that was enough. That salt from my own nation. In my poems I always say, India is my country but Pakistan is my nation because that is where I was born.*[20]

Notes and References

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5.   Virtual exchanges facilitated by media technology can be used to promote cross cultural understanding, tolerance and promote a more humane view of the 'other'. When it is not possible to establish physical connect with the 'other' or transcend physical barriers of time, space and distance, virtual exchanges can help to know the 'other' in a better way. The presence of mediated technology is used to transcend geographical distances and converse with people who belong to a different culture. As a student of the Master's of Communication Studies (MCS) programme of the Faculty of Journalism and Communication, M.S. University, the author was a part of the *'Global Understanding through Virtual Classroom' (GUVC)* project (2006-08) in which students engaged in sustained and regular interaction with their counterparts in different countries through the use of video conferencing, chat technology and audio-visual aids. The aims were manifold — to enhance cultural knowledge, cultural sensitivity and an acceptance of the 'other' who may be different from you. It also provided an opportunity to students to engage in interaction with others

from different corners of the world and demonstrate knowledge and understanding of their own cultural ethos. For the time period of the project, students performed the role of citizen diplomats helping the 'other' to learn about the culture of their own country as well as getting to know the culture and practices of the 'other'. This is an example of how the media can serve as an agent of citizen diplomacy and help dispel myths that surround alien cultures and populations. The project proved to be a meaningful exercise in gaining an in-depth understanding of world cultures as well as in inculcating respect and tolerance for those who are different than you.

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11. There are several political, administrative, legal and psychological barriers to civil society contact between Indian and Pakistani citizens. Apart from the mistrust, animosity and hostility perpetuated by historical grievances, there are also other hurdles in the way of people-to-people contact. Among these, the foremost is the suspicious attitudes of Indian and Pakistani officials in granting visas for travel. Even though bus and rail links have been established, they remain limited and poorly developed. The trouble for citizens does not end when they reach the 'other' country. They are required to report at local police stations on their arrival in a city, their travel movements are tracked by intelligence officials and there is a limitation on the number of places that they can visit.

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