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SIACHEN GLACIER: GETTING PAST THE DEADLOCK

AARISH U. KHAN

Introduction

On 7 April 2012, an avalanche struck Gayari in the eastern part of Ganche district of Gilgit-Baltistan. A whole battalion headquarters of the 6 Northern Light Infantry (NLI) and 138 persons — mostly military — were buried under a several metres thick cover of snow spread across more than 1,000 metres. Such was the magnitude of the disaster and the inhospitability of the terrain that the rescuers managed to unearth the first body on 26 May after weeks of intense efforts, let alone making any rescue. The unit, 6 NLI, is one of the three battalions of the Pakistan army manning the Line of Actual Contact or the Actual Ground Position Line (AGPL) along the Siachen Glacier conflict zone in the northern-most un-demarcated part of the Line of Control (LoC). The area is a conflict zone since 1984, when the Indian army occupied it, and Pakistani army had to react to the aggression and scramble to hold positions across the Salto ridgeline to halt the Indians' advance.

At altitudes between 16,000-22,000 feet in the un-demarcated border regions of China, India, and Pakistan in the Himalayas, Siachen glacier is one of the most inhospitable places on earth. It actually remained uninhabited by humans until the Indian and Pakistani militaries set foot on it. The conflict has defied resolution despite several rounds of negotiations since 1986. Both countries have paid dearly in terms of human and financial costs. Most of the human losses have been inflicted by the adverse topographical and weather conditions of the region rather than hostile fire as proven by the 7 April incident. Similarly, just keeping the two militaries stationed on the high altitude positions on the glacier or its vicinity is a financially costly affair even if they are not trading fire. The most enduring cost of the conflict for the future generations of

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the two countries, however, is the destruction of the fragile glacial ecosystem because of the presence of the armies.

Since the border region of conflict around Siachen was uninhabited until the two militaries occupied it in 1984, an ideal resolution of the conflict will have to involve a demilitarization of the region. Moreover, given the fact that this region was and still is un-demarcated, and that successive agreements for the authentication of the LoC have deliberately ignored the demarcation of the region beyond a point to the south of the glaciers commonly referred to as NJ-9842, such a settlement will also have to take into account whether the region needs to be demarcated after all the bloodshed or not.

Most studies conducted on the Siachen glacier dispute so far have argued in favour of demilitarization of the glacier. Some environmentalists have gone a step ahead and called for an agreement to declare the region a trans-boundary peace park reserved for conservation and scientific exploration. Almost all of these studies are predicated on the assumption that the presence of the two armies in the region is militarily, economically and environmentally hazardous, and that the glacier in itself has no strategic significance. The two countries are, thus, fighting a futile war in an inhospitable terrain with undesirable levels of human, economic, and environmental costs.

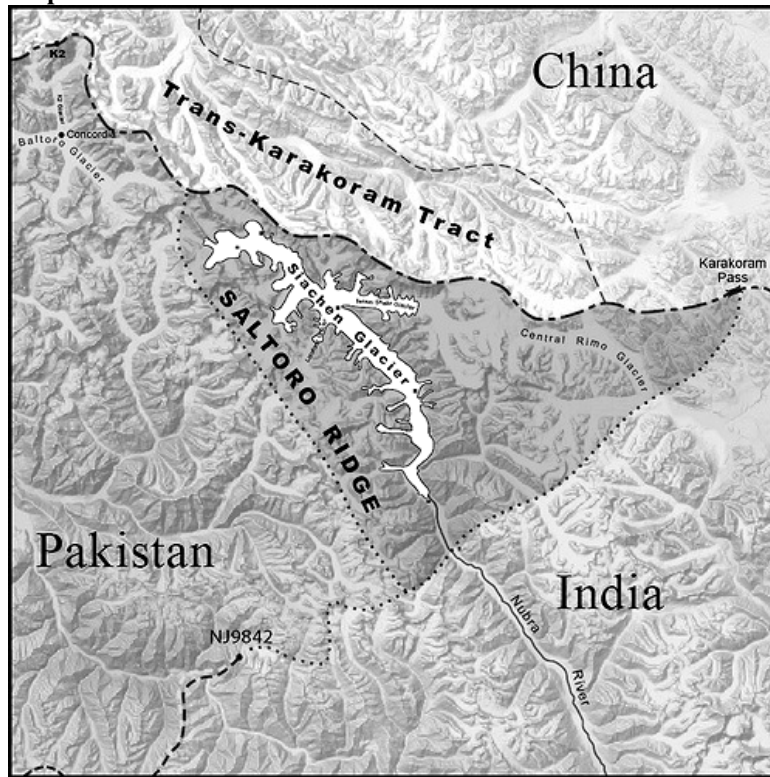
Although the 7 April tragedy is a wakeup call for India and Pakistan to let this natural wilderness be, and demilitarize the region, it is also a time to reassess the costs of this conflict, and the possible alternative discourses for its resolution. A trauma-induced impulsive debate on the subject at times tends to short-sight imagination and shrinks the depth and breadth of understanding. Pakistan's Foreign Office was right in reiterating the persistence of Pakistan's stance on the issue in a statement on 19 April,⁽¹⁾ which could help in de-traumatizing and de-politicizing the discourse on the subject. This study is also an attempt at rationalizing the debate on this important subject by revisiting the aforementioned questions on Siachen. The study takes a fresh look at the intractability of the conflict, its military/economic costs, and its environmental fallout for the glacial ecosystem. It critically analyzes the demilitarization of the Siachen glacier and the peace park proposals for the area in the light of the on-ground realities of the battlefield as well as the overall relations between India and Pakistan, and gives a roadmap for demilitarization of the glacial region as an environmental priority.

The 'Third Pole'

The 70-km-long Siachen glacier is located in the eastern Karakoram Range and runs from Indira Col in the north-west to the starting point of Nubra river in the south-east (see Map 1). The width of the glacier is between 2 and 8 km, and the total area is less than 1,000 sq. km. It is located in one of the most inhospitable terrains of the world owing to extremely cold weather and high altitude. It is the second longest non-polar glacier in the world after the Fedchenko Glacier in the Pamirs, which is 77 km long. "It receives 6 to 7 meters of the annual total of 10 meters of snow in winter alone. Blizzards can reach speeds up to 150 knots (nearly 300 kilometres per hour). The temperature drops

routinely to 40 degrees C below zero, and even lower with the wind chill factor. For these reasons, the Siachen Glacier has been called the "Third Pole."⁽²⁾

Map 1



Englishman W. Moorcroft was the first outsider to step on the glacier in 1821, but it was discovered first by Henry Starchy in 1848. Francis Younghusband, another British, unknowingly bumped on to Bilafond La in the Siachen glacier region in 1889, but he could not affirm his location being on Siachen. The lower parts of the glacier were sketched in 1861 by E.C. Ryll of the Survey of India.⁽³⁾

The glacier was finally discovered by T.G. Longstaff, A.M. Neve, and A.M. Slingsby in 1909. Pioneering survey expeditions of the glacier were undertaken by W.H. Workman and his wife Fanny Workman in 1911-12, who also gave it its current name, the Siachen Glacier. The Workman survey expeditions were undertaken from the Skardu direction.⁽⁴⁾ Despite the assertions by some Indian authors that access to the glacier is easier from the Indian side than the Pakistani side,⁽⁵⁾ mountaineering history and the relative costs of stationing the two armies around the glacier attest to the easier access to the glacier from the Pakistani side.

Fighting over ice

At the time of independence of India and Pakistan in August 1947, the princely state of Kashmir under the British rule was given a choice of either acceding to India or Pakistan. The accession of the state's ruler to India became a matter of dispute between the two countries, which resulted in a war at the end of 1947 extending well into 1948. The war ended leaving a part of the former princely state in the actual control of Pakistani military forces and civilian militias and the rest with India. The Karachi Agreement, which was signed between India and Pakistan on 27 July 1949, gave the control of Gilgit-Baltistan, and Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) to Pakistan. The control of Kashmir Valley as well as Jammu and Ladakh was given to India. The agreement, which took into account the actual positions of the troops of the two countries at the conclusion of the battle, drew a cease-fire line (CFL) between the two parts of Kashmir that was only demarcated up to a point at the base of the Saltoro Range, commonly known as NJ-9842 (see Map 1).

The area beyond NJ-9842 remained un-demarcated and uninhabited until 1984 when India secretly launched "Operation Meghdoot" to occupy the Siachen glacier, claiming to pre-empt perceived Pakistani military designs in the region, which could not be substantiated. Pakistan could not respond to the Indian aggression immediately, although attempts were made in 1984 and 1985 to recapture the area. Air Marshal (Retd.) Ayaz Ahmed Khan gives a detailed account of the major battles in Siachen, as follows:

"To dislodge India from Bilafond La, Pakistan deployed the elite Special Service Group (SSG) in 1987, at Khapalu. General Musharraf, then in charge of the SSG, took part in intensive operations at Siachen. In 1990 there were intense skirmishes on the periphery of the glacier. According to Indian claims in 1995, Pak SSG suffered 40 casualties in an attack on an outpost held by a Sikh battalion. In 1996, Pakistani gunners shot down three Indian MIGs and an IAF MI-17 helicopter. In 1998 there were five attacks in 15 days by the Pakistan Army on Ashok, Malon, Fateh, 5,770 and other Indian posts at Siachen. The last Pak Army attack was on March 10, 1999 some three weeks after the Lahore Summit [between Pakistan prime minister Nawaz Sharif and his Indian counterpart Atal Bihari Vajpayee]. Artillery and mortar fire exchanges have continued for 20 years."⁽⁶⁾

In November 2003, as a goodwill gesture in anticipation of the resumption of the composite dialogue process between India and Pakistan, Pakistan offered a ceasefire along the LoC, which was extended to the Siachen glacier conflict zone in accordance with the Indian desire. The ceasefire is holding since then for about nine years now. While the conflict has arisen out of the Indian aggression in the uninhabited no man's land in the glacial region, it has been perpetuated by differing interpretations of the words, "thence north to the glaciers," in the Karachi Agreement (1949), the Tashkent Agreement (1966), and the Simla Agreement (1972), and the Indian army's refusal to give up an area on the negotiating table that Pakistan has not been able to recapture militarily.

Joydeep Sircar, writing in 1985, summed up Siachen glacier's strategic significance for India in these words: "One, if India loses Siachen, it will lose an enormous chunk of territory. Having suffered several territorial body blows in Jammu and Kashmir, India is evidently not prepared to suffer another. Two, if Pakistan controls Siachen, the whole Nubra valley, and through it Ladakh, is jeopardised. Pakistanis being on high ground will overlook all our outposts in Nubra valley. Three, if we cannot hold Nubra valley, we will also lose access to the rest of our Karakoram territory because the valley provides the best access route to our northern outposts like Daulat Beg Oldi."⁽⁷⁾ Another observer also marked the Operation Meghdoot as an important milestone in cutting off border links between China and Pakistan through Indira Col or Karakoram Pass.⁽⁸⁾ Some Indian strategists also see Siachen as a bleeding ground for Pakistan in which India is at a tactical advantage.⁽⁹⁾ On the other hand, Pakistan lays claim to all the territory between NJ-9842 and the Karakoram Pass claiming that it was always under the administrative control of Pakistan with international mountaineering expeditions obtaining permissions from Pakistan since the 1950s.⁽¹⁰⁾ India is also widely perceived as an aggressor, militarily occupying a no-man's land in violation of the spirit of the Simla Agreement.⁽¹¹⁾ The Pakistanis also fear that Indian occupation of Siachen threatens the Gilgit-Baltistan area and the Karakoram Highway (KKH) that connects China and Pakistan through a land route.⁽¹²⁾

The perceived strategic advantage and threat-perceptions of the two countries have eluded peace efforts on resolving the dispute that continues to inflict heavy human, material, and environmental costs on both countries. Several observers have also argued that the glacier does not have any strategic significance as such but that the issue has been turned into one of national pride over the years. Such national pride is coming at a great cost to the poor people of both the countries that are financially paying a heavy price for the war. The immediate impact of the war is, of course, on the armies of the two countries. Another major and, perhaps most enduring, cost of this war is environmental as already stated above. The presence of the two armies is destroying the fragile glacial ecosystem of the Himalayas and the Karakorams. The three aspects of the impact of the war on India and Pakistan is discussed in the next section of the paper.

A costly and tenacious conflict

The Indian military base camp is at the altitude of 12,000 feet above the sea level, while its forward bases are at altitudes ranging from 16,000 to 22,000 feet.⁽¹³⁾ Although Pakistan's forward bases are at a slightly lower altitude, the terrain and the weather is no less formidable. Several news reports have claimed that at such unforgiving heights and climatic conditions, the Indian forces are losing a man every other day while Pakistanis are losing a man every fourth day. One estimate has put the total loss of human life from the conflict since 1984 at 8,000 (3,000 Pakistani and 5,000 Indian).⁽¹⁴⁾ Most casualties (as was evidently demonstrated by the 7 April avalanche at Gayari) are because of the adverse weather conditions rather than hostile fire. According to one source, only 3 per

cent of the Indian casualties from 1984 to 1998 were caused by hostile fire.⁽¹⁵⁾ The human cost of just stationing the troops in the region is, thus, immense, unlike many other border areas between India and Pakistan and along the LoC in Kashmir.

There are conflicting claims in the press about the numbers of troops on both sides of the border in the Siachen region. One Pakistani journalist who routinely covers defence matters has claimed that India has deployed 20,000 troops in the Siachen region.⁽¹⁶⁾ According to another report, there are 3,000 to 10,000 troops deployed in the glacier region on each side.⁽¹⁷⁾ Yet another source puts the numbers of Pakistani troops deployed along the glacier at 4,000 and Indian troops at 7,000.⁽¹⁸⁾ Air Marshal (Retd.) Ayaz Ahmed Khan claims that Pakistan has three battalions in Siachen while India has nine; Imtiaz Gul has put the number of Indian battalions at seven.⁽¹⁹⁾ Considering that there are around 1,000 military personnel in a battalion, there could be 10,000 to 12,000 soldiers posted in the Siachen battlefield.

The estimates of costs of stationing the troops in the region are equally sketchy. Most estimates, however, hover around similar ranges. Pakistani journalist Saleh Zafar once wrote that India was spending \$ 1 million per day on stationing its troops in the Siachen battlefield while Pakistan was spending one-tenth of that amount.⁽²⁰⁾ On another occasion though, he claimed that daily Indian spending was equal to Pakistan's expenditure of around a month.⁽²¹⁾ Another source that "it costs the Indians \$ 438 million a year to fight for Siachen, while Pakistan's bill is estimated at \$ 182 million."⁽²²⁾ Yet another source says that Pakistan's annual expenditure on stationing troops in Siachen until 1999 was Rs. 3.6 billion per annum while that of India was Rs. 14.4 billion per year.⁽²³⁾ According to the estimates of Strategic Foresight Group (SFG) in their report *The Second Freedom — South Asian Challenge 2005-2025* published in 2005, the Siachen conflict would have cost India Rs. 72 billion and Pakistan Rs. 18 billion from 2006 to 2010. Together they might have lost about 1,500 soldiers in the same five years without fighting a war.⁽²⁴⁾ Imtiaz Gul sums up the daily, monthly, and annual figures of economic costs of both countries on fighting this war in the following words:

According to careful estimates by defence analysts, Pakistan spends approximately Rs. 15 million a day to maintain three battalions at the Siachen Glacier, which makes Rs. 450 million a month and Rs. 5.4 billion a year. On the other hand, the deployment of seven battalions at the Glacier costs India Rs.50 million a day, Rs.1.5 billion a month and Rs.30 billion a year.⁽²⁵⁾

Even though the figures suggest that Indian casualties as well as Indian expenditure on maintaining troops in Siachen is much higher than that of Pakistan, the smaller size of Pakistani economy makes the war costlier for Pakistan in relative terms.

Statistics apart, there is a human angle to the sufferings borne not only by the people of the two countries for financing the war, but also by the soldiers of both sides in just occupying their positions in that forbidding terrain without

receiving a single enemy bullet—which has been the case since end of November 2003. The difference between the lives of the soldiers posted on Pakistan's border with India at, say, Kasur or Bahawalnagar, and those posted in Siachen is stark. The day-to-day life of a soldier in Siachen is a struggle against the forces of nature.⁽²⁶⁾ They have to live in expensive insulated igloos and wear specially designed super-warm clothing (including self-heating shoes) or they would freeze to death in temperatures that drop to 60 degrees below zero Celsius in winters. They have to wear specially designed sunglasses or they would go blind because of the strong reflection of sunlight from the snow. Eating fresh food is unthinkable in that climate as everything reaching there freezes on the way. They have to continuously burn kerosene oil to keep themselves warm and keep inhaling its fumes. Movement from one place to another is fraught with dangers of snow blizzards, crossing deep hidden and visible crevasses, avalanches, frost-bites, and other weather-related diseases and calamities. A soldier that deviates only slightly from the standard procedures regarding safety against weather conditions and terrain, risks losing his life or limb. Several soldiers who serve there return with frost-bites, lung ailments, fungal infections, and mental trauma after finishing their terms, if they survive.

Besides the human and material loss incurred by India and Pakistan in sustaining the conflict, the two countries are also paying a startling environmental cost. The next section discusses this cost associated with the conflict.

Fighting against Mother Nature

The environmental costs of the Siachen conflict are, perhaps, the gravest; because they are not only affecting the current generations but could have longstanding repercussions for the coming generations as well. The 7 April avalanche is a glaring example of nature's revenge on humans for traversing into its domain. A Pakistani glaciologist, Arshad H. Abbasi, who has done extensive research on the subject, argues that Siachen glacier is receding at the rate of 110 metres per year.⁽²⁷⁾ He adds that the conflict is causing the glacier to melt faster than any other part of the world.⁽²⁸⁾ Another estimate suggests that the Siachen glacier is reduced by 1.9 km in longitudinal extent from 1989 to 2006, and its ice-mass has thinned 17 per cent during the same period.⁽²⁹⁾

Dr. Ghulam Rasul of the Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) maintains that not only is the shrinking of glaciers a matter of grave concern, but also the accumulating carbon deposit on them because of human (especially military) activity in the region. He argues that the deposit of carbon on top of ice caused by human activity such as burning of fuel is compromising their capacity to reflect sunlight back.⁽³⁰⁾ This phenomenon, coupled with the recession of glaciers that exposes the unreflective surface of the earth, has auto-accelerated the increase in atmospheric temperature in the region and, thus, melting of the glaciers is spiralling into an environmentally destructive cycle.⁽³¹⁾

While Pakistan experienced an overall temperature rise of 0.76°C from 1960 to 2009, the increase in temperatures in the mountain regions has been 1.5°C during the same period.⁽³²⁾ These factors are already causing formation of

glacial lakes in Pakistan's north, which are prone to Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs).⁽³³⁾ While there are several natural and anthropogenic causes of warming in the mountain region of Pakistan, shrinking of the Siachen glacier—as well as other glaciers in close proximity to it such as the Baltoro glacier—is attributed to military presence in the region.⁽³⁴⁾ Arshad H. Abbasi argues, however, that military presence in the Siachen glacier region is the primary cause of its melting and asserts that other glaciers in Gilgit-Baltistan where there is little or no military activity—including the Baltoro glacier—are actually growing.⁽³⁵⁾ He asserts that military activity as well as deliberate cutting and melting of the glacier by the Indian army—which controls it—with chemicals to construct military bunkers is the major cause for its recession rather than global warming.⁽³⁶⁾

Irrespective of the question whether the cumulative natural and anthropogenic factors are causing the Siachen glacier to melt, or the military activity alone is to blame, the toll on Siachen glacier is also posing a threat to glaciers on the Indian side, such as Gangotri and Miyar that feed the Ganges River, and Milam and Janapa that feed the Chenab and Sutlej.⁽³⁷⁾ According to a study conducted by the State Council for Science, Technology and Environment of the Himachal Pradesh state of India, about 67 per cent of the Himalayan glaciers have shown retreating trends.⁽³⁸⁾

Another concern for the environmentalists is the presence of enormous amounts of human and military debris on the glacier caused by the conflict. One estimate has put the amount of human waste that is discarded into glacial crevasses at around 1,000 kg per day on the Indian side alone.⁽³⁹⁾ Another source estimates that 40 per cent of that waste is plastic and metal, which merge with the glacier as permanent pollutants adding toxins like cadmium, chromium, and cobalt into the ice.⁽⁴⁰⁾ For Dr. Ghulam Rasul, however, the melting of the glaciers because of military presence is the major concern. “Even if garbage disposal procedures are improved, it would only solve one per cent of the environmental problems of the glacier caused by the military presence,” he said.⁽⁴¹⁾ He argues that since the major concern is the melting of the glacier, it can only be taken care of through reduction or elimination of human (military) presence there.⁽⁴²⁾

Considering such huge human, material, and environmental costs of the conflict, India and Pakistan have engaged in negotiations to resolve it from the very beginning. The peace efforts have not borne fruit so far because of a variety of reasons. The next section discusses the peace efforts in resolving the conflict since it emerged in 1984.

Peace efforts

Contrary to the claims of strategic significance of the presence of troops along the ridges astride the Siachen glacier by the hawkish elements in India and Pakistan, there are many observers who think that the glacier has little strategic significance or at least not as much as the cost that both the countries have to pay for it.⁽⁴³⁾ Even though peace efforts for resolution of the conflict started as early as 1984-85 with flag meetings between sector commanders,⁽⁴⁴⁾

the defence secretary-level dialogue started in 1986. Since their first meeting in January 1986, the defence secretaries of the two countries have held a total of 12 rounds of negotiations on the subject (see Table 1 below for a chronology of the various rounds of defence secretary-level talks). Except for the 1989 and 1992 rounds, the talks have been characterized by a lack of serious resolve in finding a negotiated settlement to the dispute on both sides. As a former foreign secretary of Pakistan, Amb. Riaz Hussain Khokhar, said, “I have attended six or seven of the total 12 rounds of [Defense Secretary-level] talks, and the minutes of all of them read almost the same.”⁽⁴⁵⁾

Table 1

The twelve rounds of Defense Secretary-level talks			
Rd.	Dates	Venue	Outcome
1 st	Jan 1986	Islamabad	The two countries resolved to seek a negotiated settlement to the dispute in accordance with the spirit of the Simla Agreement, but no substantial progress was made.
2 nd	Jun 1986	New Delhi	Inconclusive
3 rd	May 1988	Islamabad	Inconclusive
4 th	Sept 1988	New Delhi	Inconclusive
5 th	Jun 1989	Islamabad	An understanding was reached for withdrawal of troops from the glacier.
6 th	Nov 1992	New Delhi	The two sides pledged to implement the 1989 agreement but the Indian side showed reluctance.
7 th	Nov 1998		India backtracked on the understanding reached in 1989 and 1992 with the assertion that certain developments had taken place that needed to be taken into account.
8 th	Aug 2004	New Delhi	No progress was achieved.
9 th	May 2005	Islamabad	India insisted on demarcation of Actual Ground Position Line (AGPL) prior to demilitarization, while Pakistan called for implementation of the 1989 understanding between the two countries.
10 th	May 2006	New Delhi	India and Pakistan remained stuck to their stated positions despite a lot of optimism in the Pakistani press in the run-up to this round of talks.
11 th	Apr 2007	Islamabad	Pakistan did not agree to India’s argument of authenticating the actual

			ground position line legally and internationally before troop withdrawal. Once again, a lot of hope was generated in the Pakistani press in the run-up to the talks.
12 th	May 2011	New Delhi	The talks had resumed after the hiatus caused by the Mumbai terrorist attacks on November 26, 2008; therefore, much could not be achieved in the first round since the attacks.

Source: Compiled from several press reports about different rounds of talks

The major sticking point in the negotiations is the line of actual contact or the Actual Ground Position Line (AGPL) between the two militaries. While Pakistan wants Indian forces to demilitarize this no-man's-land without any preconditions, the Indian side asserts that it would only vacate the region if Pakistan authenticates the AGPL prior to demilitarization to allay any Indian concerns of the future recapture of the commanding heights that they are currently occupying. Indian concerns were further exacerbated by the Kargil conflict of 1999 in which Pakistan's army and irregulars occupied positions atop the hills on the Indian side of the LoC to cut the Indian supply route to Siachen.

Influential Indian authors like V.R. Raghavan have called for making the AGPL an extension of the LoC and, thus, freezing the division of the region into Indian- and Pakistani-controlled territories along the Salto ridge-line where the troops of the two countries are positioned at the moment.⁽⁴⁶⁾ While Pakistan is on a higher moral pedestal owing to Indian aggression in 1984, its on-ground position is disadvantageous. This is the reason the Indian army is against any negotiated solution to the dispute because in their perception the politicians do not need to give Pakistan something that they are unable to achieve in the battlefield. "Of all the issues governing India-Pakistan talks, it is on Siachen that the army has the biggest say,"⁽⁴⁷⁾ wrote Sujan Dutta in 2005.

In October 2006, when Pakistan's then foreign minister Khurshid Mehmud Kasuri was all excited about an impending solution to the conflict and said that India and Pakistan were very close to reaching an agreement on the Siachen dispute, the hopes were dismissed by the Indian Ministry for External Affairs.⁽⁴⁸⁾ The Indian army also stepped in to make sure that the government did not make "undue" concessions on Siachen to Pakistan. "I am sure that security concerns will be kept in mind when any such decisions are arrived at by the government," said Indian army chief General J.J. Singh in November 2006.⁽⁴⁹⁾ "Pakistan has absolutely no claims over Siachen. Our troops are stationed at least 20-30 km west of the glacier. The Pakistanis cannot even get a look in, let alone lay claim to the glacier," added Brigadier Om Prakash, commander of the Indian Army formation responsible for guarding the disputed region of Siachen.⁽⁵⁰⁾ The Indian government showed more signs of non-seriousness towards the resolution of the dispute when in September 2007 the Indian army opened the glacier for trekking expeditions of civilians along with military

personnel and recruits despite Pakistan's protests.⁽⁵¹⁾ India sent a similar expedition in 2008 as well.⁽⁵²⁾

Stephen P. Cohen called Siachen "a dispute between two bald men over a comb" that has evaded resolution.⁽⁵³⁾ Looking at the human, material, and environmental costs of the conflict, and its tenacity to linger on despite the costs, it does appear that it is a dispute between two bald men over a comb in which they are also bleeding their own heads with their nails. This is because in the process of satisfying their national egos, the two countries are destroying and depriving their coming generations most precious common good, i.e. a source of water. Environment of the area in and around the glacier being a common good of both the countries creates a commonality of cause for its demilitarization and, thus, provides that little window of opportunity offering incentive for peace. Therefore, the creation of a demilitarized peace-park has been a focus of attention of environmentalists and peace activists alike. The following section discusses the peace park proposals for the demilitarization of the conflict zone around the glacier.

A Siachen Peace Park?

On 12 June 2005, while on a visit to the Siachen base camp, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said that time had come to turn the Siachen conflict zone into a "mountain of peace."⁽⁵⁴⁾ The statement raised a lot of hope among the peace constituencies on both sides of the border for the resolution of the longstanding dispute. As discussed in the previous section, however, despite very high hopes during the resumed Composite Dialogue process (2004-2008) the dispute could not be resolved. And in the 12th round of negotiations at the defence secretary level in May 2011 after the dialogue was resumed following a hiatus since the November 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai both countries had to restart from stating their respective positions on the issue (see Table 1).

The idea of peace parks is neither new nor is it specific to the geographical location of India and Pakistan. Environment being a transnational concern has built bridges among nation states for some time now. According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), "Parks for Peace are transboundary protected areas that are formally dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources, and to the promotion of peace and co-operation."⁽⁵⁵⁾

Although the transformation of the conflict zone into a transboundary protected area seems like the ideal solution, demilitarization of the region would be a prerequisite for it. Most of the existing peace parks are either between non-hostile neighbouring countries or were created after cessation of hostilities between two warring nations. Even the Condor-Kutuku Peace Park established in 2004 in Cordillera del Condor between Ecuador and Peru—which is considered a precedent for Siachen Peace Park — was established after the cessation of hostilities between the two countries over the control of the territory involved. In other words, peace has not followed peace parks, it has been the other way round.

Some environmentalists have suggested skirting around the hurdle to begin with by calling for encouraging the militaries of India and Pakistan to act as rangers in managing the conservation area as an ad hoc arrangement, and giving tourist access to the area with a visa issued by either of the two countries.⁽⁵⁶⁾ There are others who demand a complete demilitarization of the conflict zone and the creation of an international Science Centre in the area for astronomical, geological, glaciological, and even psychological and behavioural studies.⁽⁵⁷⁾ A transboundary peace park under the auspices of the IUCN or a World Heritage Park under the auspices of United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), or both, is also suggested for the post-demilitarization protection of environment in the glacial ecosystem.⁽⁵⁸⁾ Hakeem *et. al.* have given an extensive overview of how the disengagement and demilitarization process in the region could take place once the decision is taken and that which areas would be included in the demilitarized zone.⁽⁵⁹⁾ Their report gives a comprehensive account of the monitoring of the disengagement and demilitarization process itself and its post-demilitarization verification through on-site and remote monitoring.⁽⁶⁰⁾ All of these studies, while educative and insightful, do not address the basic question of how the lure of a peace park would influence a positive decision on demilitarization, before it could be monitored and verified and before scientists could get to the area for research and conservation.

Although the encouragement of environmental protection and conservation in the presence of the armies could be helpful in protecting certain rare wildlife plant and animal species of the region, the problem of melting ice would stay, and might aggravate with addition of humans in the form of tourists and scientists. Similarly, if human presence is the biggest danger to the glacial ecosystem, there is no point in replacing the two militaries with tourists, mountaineers, and scientists from across the world to do a whole plethora of research in the area from astronomy to psychology under the auspices of IUCN, UNESCO, or any other organization. If all that the glacial ecosystem needs to be protected is to be left alone, there is hardly any need of transforming it into an international laboratory from a conflict zone. Finally, the concept of peace park does not address the question of management of access to the demilitarized area, which was the cause of conflict in the first place. An agreement on access to the area post-demilitarization could itself be a complicated affair, which would need to be addressed as well.

Therefore, jumping on to the idea of a peace park at a time when the Indian and Pakistani governments have not shown any serious resolve for demilitarization is premature and even wishful. In other words, demilitarization of the glacier does not need to be equated with the creation of an international peace park. The focus needs to be on a step-by-step approach at the national levels in both the countries towards environmental protection in the northern glacial region that could also entail demilitarization — not necessarily the creation of an international peace park under the auspices of some international non-governmental organization (INGO), an issue that could be taken up at some later stage.

The rationale behind international patronage for an international peace park in the demilitarized zone is that it would fill the gaps of trust-deficit between India and Pakistan, and that it would also provide some financial incentives for the protection of the demilitarized zone. The two subjects are taken up in the concluding section of the paper below, besides a suggested blueprint for demilitarization of the area.

Conclusion

India and Pakistan have paid dearly in terms of human, economic, and environmental losses because of the war in Siachen. Ultimately, though, it is the environmental costs of the conflict that may endure longest. Therefore, there is reason enough, on both sides, to resolve the dispute as a priority. There have been several rounds of negotiation, but unfortunately they remain hostage to the vicissitudes of relations between the two countries as well as a broader lack of commitment to resolving the Siachen dispute.

Serious differences over the modalities of demilitarization persist. While India wants a demarcation of the AGPL prior to demilitarization, Pakistan considers that tantamount to an acceptance of the Indian military action of 1984. Both sides are reluctant to make compromises because Pakistan thinks that it is on a higher moral ground owing to the Indian aggression, while India thinks that it has a stronger on-ground position considering the territory it controls. For both countries, it is partly a matter of trust and partly a matter of national pride.

Pessimism about demilitarization of the glacier and restoration of the pre-1984 position in the conflict zone around Siachen is now creeping among Pakistani strategic thinkers and intelligentsia, which in turn is influencing them to support the confrontational status quo.⁽⁶¹⁾ If the dispute remains unresolved for another few years, India and Pakistan will not only suffer militarily and economically, they will continue to destroy the precious water resources on which millions of people in both countries depend.

There is a serious need for moving the focus of discussion from moral or strategic high grounds to a collective responsibility for the protection of a common good. Only such a shift in perceptions would help bring about urgency as well as creativity and accommodation for resolving this conflict. At the moment, decision-makers in India and Pakistan appear oblivious to the urgency of the environmental call for the resolution of the conflict. Once there is such a realization, the demarcation or non-demarcation of AGPL as well as issues of national pride would become secondary subjects; and the discussion would move from emotional to rational.

India and Pakistan will have to evolve support for resolution of the conflict at their respective national levels based on the importance of the common good involved, i.e. environment, as well as the collective human and economic costs both the countries have to pay for the war. Currently, the non-government sector — the INGOs, NGOs, and civil society — has taken the lead in raising awareness about the damage the conflict is doing to the Himalayas. The two governments now need to proactively pursue — possibly in a coordinated way — environmental exploration and awareness on the Himalayas

and the Karakorams to generate momentum for the resolution of the dispute. Greater awareness about the danger of environmental degradation and its impact would enable decision-makers in both countries to get past the historical inertia of the conflict.

Aspects of Pakistan's position on the dispute need reevaluation. Whereas Pakistan presses for reversion to the pre-1984 situation — where the glacial region would become an un-demarcated no-man's-land — that would complicate management of future human interventions in the area. One suggested solution is to turn the area into one managed by a non-state entity, such as an INGO — a solution enthusiastically advocated by environmentalists. It also has obvious drawbacks. Abdication of control of an area to an INGO after a loss of more than 8,000 lives in a 28-year-long conflict would draw criticism in both the countries. Secondly, even if managed by an INGO for scientific exploration, access to the area would still have to be controlled by either or both states—an aspect not addressed by the advocates of this solution. Lastly, there is little point in turning a battlefield into an international laboratory, unless it is for environmental protection.

Therefore, the idea of an international peace park or scientific observatory under the auspices of an INGO is premature. India and Pakistan might or might not need third-party mediation for the resolution of this dispute. Even if they did need one, it would be for converging on an agreement rather than implementing the agreement. The two countries do not need an INGO to preserve nature for them once the two militaries have withdrawn. As far as financial management of the protection of environment in the demilitarized zone is concerned, it can be done by the two countries on their own through budgetary allocations contained in a bilateral agreement—which, in any event, would be far less than they currently spend on military deployments.

A workable solution would involve more than a reversion to the pre-1984 situation with the assistance of an INGO. India and Pakistan must come to a settlement involving give and take for the sake of demilitarization of the region for the protection of precious environmental resources in both the countries. This could entail the division of the demilitarized zone into Indian- and Pakistani-administrated domains. Such a division could take place along the AGPL or some other mutually agreed lines. Remote-monitoring methods, such as satellite imagery and motion-sensing equipment, could be used to verify compliance with demilitarization and respect for areas of administrative responsibility.⁽⁶²⁾

Any such agreement, however, would not only involve provisions against remilitarization of the area and effective mutually acceptable monitoring and verification mechanisms for the demilitarized zone, but also provisions for non-tampering with the environment, and non-diversion and non-extraction of its natural resources (such as water, minerals, etc.) in one administrative area without consultation with the other government. The agreement could also have provisions against future permanent human settlement in the area, and construction of power projects and water projects for storage or diversion.⁽⁶³⁾

Inclusion of such provisions would allay Pakistani concerns like the recent ones over Indian drilling in the region for geothermal energy exploration.⁽⁶⁴⁾

Besides, the agreement would also need to have provisions for coordinating any civilian exploration activity in the region, whether scientific or resource-oriented. For instance, there could be provisions in the agreement on pre-notification of civilian activity in one country's domain of administrative responsibility by its own nationals to the other side. Similarly, foreign tourists, mountaineers, or scientists could be obliged to obtain visas for both India and Pakistan and special permission from both governments for visiting any part of the demilitarized zone in the administrative domain of any country. At the same time, joint exploratory and research activities conducted by India and Pakistan with official permission and coordination of both the countries will have to be encouraged to gradually diminish the relevance of the AGPL.

The people and the governments of India and Pakistan should realize that after all the sacrifices in men and material, the two neighbours should be able to evolve a consensus on demilitarization of the area as a priority with or without delineation of the AGPL as long as that decision is taken in the best interest of the people of the two countries rather than some vague abnormal national ego-centric perceptions.

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THE US EXIT STRATEGY: IMPACT ON WAR ON TERROR IN AFGHANISTAN

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In the contemporary global security environment the fate of major nation-states rests on the way they deal with non-state violent actors. Terror has become a global phenomenon. The more global it becomes, the greater the threat to the existential legitimacy of nation-states. In the aftermath of 9/11, to make terrorism a global phenomenon, terrorists have found leverage in the long-drawn-out theatre of the war on terror in Afghanistan. The protracted nature of the war on terror serves the interests of the terrorists much more than that of the coalition forces fighting terrorism.

Since the inception of this war the United States and its allies have wanted to accomplish their objectives efficiently inside the Afghan territory. This efficiency was demonstrated by the US and its allies in the initial phase of the war. However, since 2003 the Taliban resurgence after the beginning of the Iraq war and their spring offensive of 2006 have resulted in a receding trend for the US and its allies. Taliban have scored more successes in the post-2006 period as compared to their gains in the pre-2006 days. As a result the US has had to review its policy of war against terrorism in Afghanistan.

Even before 9/11, the problem of terrorism was still part of the US foreign policy. At the end of the Cold War era and with the advent of the Clinton administration, the US had to deal with a variety of existential threats. The first instance of terrorist existential threat during the Clinton era that came into the spotlight was the bombing of the World Trade Centre on 26 February 1993, killing six and injuring 1,000. Other major terrorist attacks targeting US citizens included: Oklahoma City explosion in a federal government building on 19 April 1995; attack on Al-Khobar Towers (Damam, Saudi Arabia) on 25 June

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1996; and suicide attacks on US embassies (Kenya and Tanzania) on 7 August 1998.

Before the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the US had not taken any comprehensive global initiative against terrorism. It was during the era of George Bush Jr. that the collapse of the twin towers in New York resulted in a loss of nearly 3,000 lives. It was the ‘Pearl Harbor’ event for the Americans in the 21st century. The Bush administration believed the seeds of 9/11 were in the Afghan terrain, ruled by the Taliban. Consequently, a global war against terrorism was launched by the US in response to the perceived existential terrorist threats. This war was initiated on the very ground from where the Americans proclaimed victory against the former Soviet Union. The initial declared objectives and scope of the war on terror, as a US-led multilateral venture, were defined by the United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR).

In order to define the war on terror, these resolutions can be divided into two categories: pre-9/11 and post-9/11 resolutions. The pre-9/11 resolutions include UNSCR 1214, 1267, 1269, while the post-9/11 resolutions are UNSCR 1368, 1373, 1377, 1383, 1386, 1390. UNSCR 1214 demonstrates the United Nations Security Council’s concern for the civil war within Afghanistan and the role of the Taliban in it.⁽¹⁾ UNSCR 1267 established the “sanctions regime” against Al-Qaeda by reaffirming the Security Council’s commitment to “Afghan integrity and sovereignty” while keeping in view the commitment of UNSCRs 1189 (1998), 1193 (1998) and 1214 (1998).⁽²⁾ This resolution was further modified by UNSCRs 1333 (2000), 1390 (2002), 1455 (2003), 1526 (2004), 1617 (2005), 1735 (2006), 1822 (2008), 1904 (2009) and resolution 1989 (2011), in order to strengthen the capacity and resolve of the sanctions regime against Al-Qaeda.⁽³⁾ UNSCR 1269 reaffirmed UN’s resolve against terrorism and emphasized its focus on counter-terrorism strategies.⁽⁴⁾ UNSCR 1368 condemned the 11 September attacks which were meant to hamper American sovereignty.⁽⁵⁾ On 7 October 2001, Operation Enduring Freedom was launched by the Bush administration, in order to topple the Taliban regime and eliminate the terrorist organization named Al-Qaeda.⁽⁶⁾ UNSCR 1373 emphasized UN’s resolve against terrorism by magnifying its counter-terrorism posture. UNSCR 1377 expressed UN’s declaration on global efforts to combat terrorism.⁽⁷⁾ UNSCR 1378 elucidated support for a transitional government in Afghanistan and condemned the Taliban regime for supporting Al-Qaeda network within Afghanistan.⁽⁸⁾ UNSCR 138 endorsed the Bonn Agreement on Afghanistan.⁽⁹⁾ UNSCR 1386 approved the establishment of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) for keeping peace, order and security within Afghanistan.⁽¹⁰⁾

The UNSCRs were meant to establish a joint US-led multilateral venture against terrorism. These resolutions aimed at eliminating the Taliban regime from Afghanistan. These resolutions also sought to legitimize the US moves towards the elimination of Al-Qaeda network. Liberalization and democratization of a reconstructed Afghanistan were thought to be the consequential outcomes of these resolutions, which the Americans thought

would also be heartily accepted by the Afghans, a thought which continues to remain unrealized.

George Bush was not able to get the results that he wanted from the Afghan war on terror. The incoming US president, given the increasing domestic compulsions, felt the urge to review the Afghan war on terror. This led to the need for pronouncing the US exit strategy from Afghanistan. Since 9/11, the Afghan war on terror drifted in strategy from Bush's 'engagement' to Obama's 'end game' announced in December 2009. US President Obama's exit strategy outlines a timeframe for the departure of US troops from Afghanistan, starting from July 2011 up to 2014. Instead of directly combating terrorists, the US would support the Afghan regime and train its forces to make them self-reliant, in maintaining peace and order, within the Afghan borders, after the 'withdrawal' of US forces. It consists of limiting the US focus on eliminating the 'safe havens' of Al-Qaeda across the Pak-Afghan tribal border region, highlighted under the contours of 'AfPak' policy.⁽¹¹⁾ It further includes the initiation of a reconciliation process concerning Afghan nation-building effort while keeping in view the bigger picture of stability at both the regional and international levels..

There have been three instances of exit scenario in Afghanistan by the foreign forces, first followed by British troops in 1842; the second scenario emerged when the Soviets decided to exit Afghanistan in 1989 and the third and last one emerged in the form of US Afghan exit strategy. Afghanistan is already passing through the middle phase of this US strategy and only time will decide its fate.

This paper will attempt to determine the nature of the US exit strategy, i.e. whether it is a disengagement or a transition strategy. The study will also address the issue of the inherent clash between initially declared objectives of war on terror in Afghanistan and the objectives of contemporary US exit strategy. It will also explore the clash of red lines among the regional actors on the issue of US end game in Afghanistan and the probable future withdrawal scenario that will reveal itself in the meantime. The relevance of a research inquiry depends upon its utility for understanding the current dynamics of any past or present phenomenon, while synthesizing a discovery about the phenomenon with the discoveries already made about it. The utility of this research lies in the synthesized understanding and discovery of the core issues, addressed by the US Afghan exit strategy, in view of the contemporary war on terror, going on in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Theoretical framework

The explanatory understanding of US exit strategy from Afghanistan and its impact on the Afghan war on terror can be adjudged by the utility provided by frame analysis of different stakeholders involved in defining the Afghan theatre of war on terror and its consequent futuristic prospects. Frame analysis requires the services rendered by frame theory.

A theory which tends to elucidate the conceptualization and contextualization of problems, issues or any phenomena by means of using the

decisional perceptual lenses of actions and choices is defined as frame theory. It helps in understanding the decision making process. It explicates the marketing and selling of optimal choices, prioritized by decision-makers.⁽¹²⁾ It also clarifies the perceptual academic lenses by addressing the following issues involved in frame analysis: framing; prioritization among different frames; counter frames, and impact of frames.

The suggestion of utilizing frames in the social science discourse was first given by Gregory Bateson in 1955 for understanding the contextual impact and influence of perceptions and presumptions on the construal lenses, while trying to elucidate any situation under study.⁽¹³⁾ Erving Goffman's work "Frame Analysis", written in 1974, is considered a pioneering text on frame theory and frame analysis.⁽¹⁴⁾ He is considered as the key exponent of frame analysis. Goffman tried to explicate his views on how people evaluate their decisions, while interpreting different perceptual narratives of diverse individuals, living in diverse social spheres.

According to Karen Feste, "a frame is a central organizing idea for making sense of relevant events and suggesting what is at issue."⁽¹⁵⁾ Frames are the functional interpretative lenses through which we can understand the discrete features of reality. There is only one objective world, i.e. the subjective world. The frame analysis, generated by the application and utility of different frames is to subjectively interpret the reality under observation. In this manner, frame analysis provides an objective approach to deal with the subjective reality of our social science world. According to David Levin, situations can be defined with the help of frames, constituting three essential elements; "problem, protagonist and solution."⁽¹⁶⁾ The process of framing, defined by these aforementioned variables, would help us understand the US exit strategy and its impact on the war on terror in Afghanistan.

Framing helps in the understanding of the application of various lenses and how they are used by individuals. The application of multiple filters provides an opportunity to decide preferences among a set of various frames. The understanding of prioritization process, relating to the available cluster of frames, offers us an insight into the interactive relationship between status quo frames, counter frames and their consequential outcomes. From a holistic point of view, frame analysis, frame theory, framing and frames collectively provide an academic theoretical platform to understand the decision making process.

Interacting frames do have an impact on each other. Such an interactive discourse between different frames may result in the formulation of new frames. The very nature of the interaction among different frames can be defined into three broader categories; conflictual, harmonious and grey. The frame theory helps in the articulation of interaction between different frames via interpretation of different contextual situations.

In comparison to the status quo defined before 9/11, a new situation emerged for the US in its foreign policy formulation. The 9/11 tragedy was a global game changing event. It affected the existential frames of states and other stakeholders. The state affected most by 9/11 was Afghanistan. The first venture of global war against terrorism began in Afghanistan. The 'Operation Enduring

Freedom' and the resultant ouster of the Taliban regime affected the frames of Afghans as they were the primary affected party. The other main stakeholder, violently affected by the aftermath of 9/11 and 'Operation Enduring Freedom' was Pakistan. It provided the logistic support to the US forces in carrying out its operations on the Afghan soil. Pakistan had to face the retaliation of enemy forces, being the primary supporter of US forces in Afghan proximity.

The frame theory is helpful in understanding the evolution of the status quo in the US, Afghanistan and Pakistan, in the aftermath of both 9/11 and the pronouncement of US exit strategy from Afghanistan. In order to define the scope of the Afghan war on terror, the UN Security Council Resolutions are also helpful in framing the scope and initially defined objectives of the war against terror. In this regard, this research study has focused on the frames provided by the UNSCR 1214, 1267, 1269, 1368, 1373, 1377, 1378, 1383 and 1386.

In order to evaluate Bush's engagement in the Afghan war on terror to Obama's end game announced for Afghanistan, this research study includes the frames of former president George Bush. The sources of Bush's frame have been taken from the statistics associated with the event of 9/11.⁽¹⁷⁾ Tom Templeton and Tom Lumley highlight some interesting as well as ironic statistics associated with the framing of 9/11. In order to frame the achievements claimed by George Bush in Afghan war against terrorism, the research study includes a document from the archives of White House titled "Waging and Winning the War on Terror."⁽¹⁸⁾ One of the major counter frames, generated from within the US against Bush's frame of war on terror, was given by Senator John Kerry, in his 2004 presidential debate against George Bush.⁽¹⁹⁾ He criticized George W. Bush for not having a withdrawal frame for the US war against terrorism.

The official texts of US President Obama's speeches are helpful in framing the US exit strategy from Afghanistan. Two speeches delivered by President Obama are important for framing this strategy. The first speech, which promulgated the US exit strategy from Afghanistan, was given by President Obama on 1 December 2009. The second keynote speech which highlights Obama's frame on the US exit strategy from Afghanistan was given on 22 June 2011. In order to further contextualize the US exit strategy the research study analyzes the frames of US financial crisis of 2008, Iraq war, Obama's electoral campaign promises for exit from Iraq and a renewed focus on Afghan war on terror in Afghanistan.

Karen A. Feste has given the presidential frames of Clinton, Bush and Obama, regarding the problem of terrorism. She describes Clinton's approach to tackling terrorism as "conflict avoidance" approach; Bush's approach to tackling terrorism as "fighting" approach and that of Obama as "problem solving" approach.⁽²⁰⁾ Her work is of great significance considering the interpretation of interaction between the US presidential frames and terrorist frames. On the other hand, Gilles Dorransoro's research report is helpful in framing US counter frames against the ongoing US-Afghan exit strategy and its impact on war against terror in Afghanistan. This document particularly focuses on the differences in opinion between the US civil and military establishment on the

US course of action in Afghanistan. The cost of war is also an important variable which frames the US exit strategy. In order to define cost of war while examining the US exit strategy the research has included a journalistic as well as an academic investigative analysis.⁽²¹⁾

In order to access the interaction of US frames with the frames of other stakeholders in the Afghan war on terror, the research study includes the Afghan as well as Pakistani frames, from the point of view of the state. *The IPRI Factfile* (2011) a regular publication of the Islamabad Policy Research Institute, is quite helpful in framing Afghan and Pakistani frames on various issues concerning the US exit strategy and its impact on the war on terror in Afghanistan. These issues range from negotiations with Taliban, costs of war, regional dynamics and perceptions of stakeholders pertaining to post-US withdrawal scenario.

Therefore, the frame theory and frame analysis has great research potential, which needs to be applied and utilized in the study of international relations. Its application in the study of US exit strategy and its impact on Afghan war on terror provides an innovative approach to the study of US exit strategy from Afghanistan.

Frame analysis and US exit strategy

The US exit plan for Afghanistan is, as stated above, in its middle phase. In these troublesome times, there is a greater degree of probability that some unexpected developments might take place, which may not have been framed in the existential status quo frames. The frame theory, in this regard, provides an important structural framework to interpret and get a little closer to the deduction of such prospects, where actors might not be able to find themselves at the losing sight of things. It enhances the probability of better decision making via effective analysis, relating to the scheme of things and available set of choices.

The frame analysis of US Afghan exit plan requires the study and framing of official narratives of the stakeholders at the state level of international relations analysis. It also requires the examination of non-official frames of experts and political writers or commentators. For the sake of convenience, this research study would include the examination of the following frames:

- Bush's frame of 9/11 and Afghan war on terror
- Obama's frame of end game in Afghanistan
- Afghan frames of post-withdrawal milieu
- Pakistani frames
- Costs of war

Bush's frame of 9/11 and Afghan war on terror

"Tuesday, 11 September 2001, dawned temperate and nearly cloudless in the eastern United States. Millions of men and women readied

themselves for work. Some made their way to the Twin Towers, the signature structures of the World Trade Center complex in New York City. Others went to Arlington, Virginia, to the Pentagon. Across the Potomac River, the United States Congress was back in session. At the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue, people began to line up for a White House tour. In Sarasota, Florida, President George W. Bush went for an early morning run. For those heading to an airport, weather conditions could not have been better for a safe and pleasant journey. Among the travellers were Mohamed Atta and Abdul Aziz al Omari, who arrived at the airport in Portland, Maine.”⁽²²⁾

The above excerpt from the 9/11 Commission Report defines the operating US frame of routine before the catastrophic attacks were being initiated on that day. This very passage clearly illustrates the conception of an ordinary American citizen to the highest US executive official, regarding the safety and normality of everyday routine life. Then everything changed for Americans. Nineteen terrorists hijacked four United Airline flights — 11, 75, 77 and 93.⁽²³⁾ Two hijacked flights went for the World Trade Center, one attacked the Pentagon and flight 93 presumably was meant to attack the White House.⁽²⁴⁾ A total of 2,823 people lost their lives as a result of these horrific attacks.⁽²⁵⁾ The probable estimated US financial losses, in the aftermath of 9/11, were 21 million dollars.⁽²⁶⁾ A state of insecurity prevailed in the US, with president Bush, addressing the nation three times on that day.⁽²⁷⁾ The UNSC passed resolution 1368, the very next day, condemning the tragic event.⁽²⁸⁾ On 20 September 2001, while addressing the joint session of Congress, president Bush declared “War on Terror.” His declaration first culminated in the form of “Operation Enduring Freedom”, initiated on 7 October 2001. A lot of achievements were proclaimed by the Bush administration in the war against terror, ranging from removal of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, providing structural support for democratic setup in Afghanistan to establishing more than 200 schools, distributing 25,000 textbooks and training 7000 textbooks across Afghanistan.⁽²⁹⁾

Obama’s frame of end game in Afghanistan

In order to understand Obama’s frame regarding the US exit plan for Afghanistan, this research study will categorize Obama’s frames into two types: precursor frames from 9/11 to 2009 and existential frames.

In precursor frames, impacting Obama’s frame of end game for Afghanistan, the foremost precursor frame is Bush’s frame for war on terror in Afghanistan. President Obama agreed with the former president in principle, in lieu of supporting and financing war against terrorism. There were certain issues in Bush’s policy of war against terrorism, on which Obama had a disagreement with him. The seeds of that divergence can be derived from Senator Kerry’s criticism of Bush’s policy on war against terror, during US presidential electoral debates of 2004.⁽³⁰⁾ Senator Kerry believed that it was not in the interest of America to stay engaged in the Iraq war (2003) for a longer period of time, as it was costing a lot to the taxpaying American citizens and the US forces, given the US objectives in Afghanistan. According to Senator Kerry, America needed a viable exit strategy from Iraq, in order to have a renewed focus on the Afghan

terrain, via a vigorous policy on Afghan war against terror. President Obama, before becoming the president, voted against the launching of the Iraq war.

Adding to the already existing problem of bringing compatibility between the strategies and objectives of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan was another problem that faced President Obama — the financial crisis both at domestic and international levels (2008). As a consequence of that crisis, a series of banks and insurance companies, including; Fannie Mae (FNM), Freddie Mac (FRE), and Merrill Lynch (MER), faced bankruptcy.⁽³¹⁾

During his presidential electoral campaign in 2008, Obama promised to focus on financial and economic recovery at the domestic level. The only way to do that was to limit the American involvement in the war against terror, by cutting back the financial and human loss while creating new job markets for American citizens.

All of these abovementioned framed issues led President Obama to announce his reviewed policy for the Afghan war on terror under a two-pronged strategy, i.e. the Af-Pak policy (March, 2009) and the US exit strategy from Afghanistan (December, 2009). In order to analyze Obama's existential frames on the US exit strategy, this study includes selected frames from his 22 June 2011 speech:

- “10,000 troops will be removed by the end of this year”⁽³²⁾
- “33,000 troops by the end of next summer”⁽³³⁾

The troop withdrawal statistics, illustrate his commitment to the roadmap laid down by his end game for Afghanistan. It also indicates that the exit strategy would be carried out in phases in order to make it compatible with the volatile and complex changes in the future environment.

Describing his vision of an Afghan state he stated “We will not try to make Afghanistan a perfect place”⁽³⁴⁾ adding that it would be controlled and run by its own people with minimal foreign assistance. Given Afghanistan's revenue-expenditure imbalance the need for future foreign assistance remains imperative. The solution needs to be based upon a realistic analysis of the costs — that have been far greater — than the benefits that have been generated. It's about time the US presence in the region was reduced and security responsibility transferred to Afghan forces. It also highlights the US intent to help reconstruct democratic institutions and rebuild stronger foundations, replacing the contemporary security scenario with a stable future for Afghanistan.

“We are starting the drawdown from the position of strength.”⁽³⁵⁾

With this statement Obama implies that the Americans and the world should not take US-Afghan exit strategy as a retreat or a defeat. It should be taken symbolically as a sign of nearing the completion of one phase, in which Americans eliminated the figurehead of Al-Qaeda organization and America's number one enemy, i.e. Osama bin Laden, on 2 May 2011. The allied forces have also made life difficult for terrorists along the Pak-Afghan tribal terrain. The US forces also continue to work towards improving counterterrorism strategies in southern Afghanistan where the Taliban have a strong hold. In this manner, Americans are drawing out their forces from Afghanistan in the aftermath of Osama bin Laden's death.

- “4500 Americans have given their lives in Iraq and over 1500... in Afghanistan.”⁽³⁶⁾
- “Over the last decade, we have spent a trillion dollars on war, at a time of rising debt and hard economic times. Now we must invest in America’s greatest resource, our people.”⁽³⁷⁾

In these statements President Obama makes reference to the financial and human loss that the United States has faced in this ongoing war against terrorism. In policy and strategy formulation, a good leader or the decision maker should consider the equation between sacrifices and benefits. If sacrifices exceed the benefits, it is high time for a decision maker to review policy. Barack Obama with his remarks makes it clear that the focus of policy must shift towards addressing domestic issues by restructuring the economy, providing job opportunities for the masses and overcoming the financial crisis of 2008. This statement is also indicative of the fact that the domestic pressures against the ongoing war against terror would be reflected in terms of US foreign policy changes.

- “We will continue to press Pakistan to expand its participation in securing a more peaceful future for this war-torn region.”⁽³⁸⁾

In the early days of his presidency, Obama called an inter-agency review of policy regarding Pakistan and Afghanistan, in which according to Bruce Riedel, the president said that “no issue on his foreign policy agenda was more important than the fate of Pakistan.”⁽³⁹⁾ He considers Pakistan an important strategic partner and player in the resolution of the Afghan imbroglio. But given the track record of political and strategic cleavages within the ruling administration of Pakistan, the US president believes that a two-pronged strategy is required to engage Pakistan in reaching a consensus on the peaceful future of the Afghan war on terror. On the one hand, this strategy would necessitate the financial and political support of the political administration in Pakistan via the Kerry-Lugar Bill and through other diplomatic means. On the other hand, it would also require a keen observation and check on the activities of the Pakistan military, given that certain powerful sections within the US are of the view that there is duplicity within the character of the Pakistan military. The US found this view credible considering that certain sections of the Pakistan military still support the Taliban. The way forward for the US policy makers, in this regard, is to continue to press ahead (with Af-Pak policy) as well as garner support from Pakistan, particularly in the context of negotiations with Taliban. The next step in the wake of this two-pronged strategy is to convince Pakistan that it should forcefully act against the Haqqani network in its tribal belt, which according to the US is acting as a linchpin in its counter-terrorist strategies in Afghanistan.

- “When threatened, we must respond with force — but when that force can be targeted, we need not deploy large armies.”⁽⁴⁰⁾

The present ongoing application of US reviewed strategy requires a targeted approach, so it yields better results that would provide Americans with a peaceful environment, while making way for an honourable exit of US and NATO troops from Afghanistan. This statement is also indicative of Obama’s

approval for the implementation of “Biden’s plan” in Afghanistan, which calls for targeted operations against terrorists in Afghanistan.⁽⁴¹⁾ Biden’s plan can be best exemplified by the use of drones in Pak-Afghan tribal belt.

- “Some would have America retreat from our responsibility as an anchor of global security and embrace an isolation that ignores the very real threats that we face. Others would have America over-extend ourselves, confronting every evil that can be found abroad. We must chart a more centred approach.”⁽⁴²⁾

Here, President Obama describes his “problem solving” approach for the Afghan war on terror.⁽⁴³⁾ He believes that following a mixed strategy is the way forward in Afghanistan given the sensitivity of continuously changing circumstances. Without getting overambitious, the US should follow a middle flexible path, in view of securitizing its vested interests in this region.

There are certainly official as well as non-official sections within the US, who believe that by following this ‘way forward’ in Afghanistan, America will inevitably face defeat. For example, Henry Kissinger comments that the US Afghan exit strategy is “a mechanism of failure.”⁽⁴⁴⁾ Kissinger is of the view that the US like always is going for an exit, instead of an outcome of this ongoing war. James T. Conway, a Marine Corps commander, is of the view that following the timeline set by the Afghan exit strategy would provide sustenance mechanisms to terrorists randomly dispersed in this region.⁽⁴⁵⁾ Only time will decide whether the blueprints of Gen. Patreaus’ Iraq exit plan will yield the same results for Obama’s end game in Afghanistan or not.

Afghan frames of post-withdrawal situation

- Afghan frame of historical resistance against foreign occupation.

The modern history of Afghanistan shows a repetition of local resistance against foreign occupation forces. Their resistance has always forced the occupiers to formulate withdrawal strategies. There have been three instances of exit scenario in Afghanistan by foreign forces: the first followed by British troops in 1842, in which only a single trooper survived among the 42,000 invading troops, on their way back home; the second scenario emerged during the Soviet-Afghan war of the 1980s, when the USSR decided to exit Afghanistan in 1989, in view of the roadmap laid down by the Geneva Accord of 1988. The Soviets lost the war, but they were successful in peacefully transporting all their troops home safely, as compared to the trauma the British forces faced in 1842. The US Afghan exit strategy, with a time frame from July 2011-2014, is the third instance in which the invading troops have opted for a withdrawal strategy, considering the increase in domestic, regional and international pressures on the US in the form of human and financial turmoil, faced by the Obama administration, in the wake of the Iraq and Afghan wars, and the financial turmoil of 2008.

Afghans initially welcomed the US and its allied forces against Taliban and Al-Qaeda but in the wake of ever rising civilian casualties and the increase in Taliban’s resurgence the Afghan government has realized that it must take responsibility of its own issues. Given this realization, Afghans would

appreciate the financial and moral assistance from the US in the longer run, but the lessons learnt from the historical exit models suggest that Afghans would not welcome any huge presence of US forces for a longer period of time, as a consequence of domestic reasons or of foreign proxy involvement in Afghan affairs. For this very reason, President Hamid Karzai showed his full support for Obama's plan to limit US presence in the country and transfer security responsibilities from the US and allied forces to the Afghan National Army.

- Afghan frame of political reconciliation

Political reconciliation among different Afghan ethnic groups is an important tenet of US Afghan exit strategy. Political reconciliation and military reintegration were originally part of General Patreaus' exit plan for Iraq, which has now been contextualized in the US Afghan exit strategy. Americans do not see Afghan political reconciliation as a process of inducing nationhood among the Afghans as they have realized that Afghan identity or nationalism already exists and does not need to be built. There is a strong rationale to believe this argument as within the 30-year civil war, no Afghan group has gone for secessionist movement. Secondly, the process of rooting nationalism takes a lot more time as compared to the time frame given by the US Afghan exit strategy. The US officials do not want this process to be taken as Americanization of different Afghan ethnic groups. All that the US wants from this process is an initiation of dialogue among different Afghan groups and consensus between regional stakeholders over a stronger and stable future for Afghanistan. Americans tend to support the statebuilding process over the nationbuilding process, considering the overall regional security scenario. The Congressional Study Report of June 2011 suggests that political reconciliation either in the form of nationbuilding process or statebuilding process, is not going too well, due to massive corruption and irregularities in spending. Some analysts speculate that if political reconciliation did not lead to positive results, the future may result in the culmination of the "Blackwell formula."⁽⁴⁶⁾ This formula predicts that if political reconciliation would not support the reintegration process of local militia into the local police and security forces, and the reconciliation within different ethnic groups, the resultant war and ethnic faultlines would yield to the separation of Afghanistan into "Non-Pashtun North and Pashtun South."⁽⁴⁷⁾

Afghans are not so sure whether this process of reconciliation is going to yield positive results for them or not, considering the uncertain outcome of negotiations with the Taliban and the proxy involvement of regional stakeholders within the Afghan quagmire. Afghans have suspicions over the US-Taliban talks as they have not been taken into confidence over it. Fighting with the Taliban on the one hand and negotiations with them on the other hand demonstrates the dichotomy in this whole process. The majority within the Afghan public does not support the Taliban given their past record of marginalizing minority ethnicities, poor human rights record, particularly against women, and the recent surge of bloody suicide attacks, killing innocent people indiscriminately. Recent attacks on Kabul, in the form of Taliban spring offensive, demonstrate the fact that Taliban ended their negotiations with the US

as they demanded release of their top leaders in US custody, and the process has been marred by legal complications. Under such circumstances, it would be difficult to assimilate the Taliban in the Afghan political mainstream, considering the future US plans for Afghanistan.

- Afghan frame of reintegration

The process of reintegration revolves around two variables: Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan Local Police (ALP). General Patreaus former ISAF Commander and now CIA chief, like his predecessor General McCrystal (former ISAF commander) is against a speedy withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan, as both military generals are of the view that withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan should be 'circumstantial' in nature as ANA and ALP are still not ready to take responsibility of security of the whole of Afghanistan. The critics of the reintegration process suggest that the ethnic faultlines of local militia in Afghanistan are a lot more complex as compared to that of Iraq. In Iraq, the local militias were more inclined towards their conversion into the local security forces as compared to the case here.

There have been charges of embezzlement and corruption on the Afghan government regarding the expenditures on the training and equipping the ANA and ALP. Although recent performance of Afghan security agencies against the Taliban attacks on Kabul have been taken as a mark of success by the NATO leaders, Afghan locals, independent experts and opinion makers do not accept the credibility of ANA and ALP, considering the assassination of Burhanudin Rabbani, Wali Karzai and recent Taliban attacks in the heart of Kabul. More severe attacks are to be expected from the Taliban in the near future. The credibility of ANA and ALP can only be established if they are able to counter the Taliban spring offensive with minimal help from foreign forces. For that, they need to have a strong base of intelligence network, capable of locating and targeting terrorist hideouts.

There is an uncertainty within the Afghan circles over whether they would be able to cope with the post-withdrawal situation or not, considering the increase in Taliban momentum towards Kabul. The credibility of Afghan national forces also puts a question mark on the peaceful future of Afghanistan's law and order situation. The writ of the Afghan state can only be established if the local forces are ready and capable enough to take on the responsibility of law and security from the foreign troops.

The first phase of transition, in which seven areas are going to be controlled by Afghan national security forces, will determine the issue of credibility of Afghan security forces.⁽⁴⁸⁾ Loyalty is the main concern with reference to defining the credibility of Afghan forces in the near future.⁽⁴⁹⁾

- Afghan frame of economy

Robert B. Zoellick has done some interesting statistical research on the economic and financial woes of Afghanistan. According to him, in 2010, foreign aid accounted for 91 per cent of the total Afghan economy.⁽⁵⁰⁾ This makes the economy a 'rent-based economy'. High levels of corruption in government sectors are worsening the overall shape of the economy. Without a strong economy, security forces, state institutions and democracy would crumble

against the recent surge of terrorists. For these very reasons Afghans want foreign fiscal assistance beyond the time frame given by Obama's end game. They have to build an effective tax collecting mechanism to create a balance between revenues generated and expenditures incurred. As Afghan Colonel M. Amin Wahidi said, "the international community still has responsibilities in Afghanistan. Their responsibilities have not finished yet because there is still a war going on. We are asking not to be forgotten. We are still not standing on our feet, even after the transition, and we need financial help."⁽⁵¹⁾ If Afghanistan has to move towards a brighter future, it has to take responsibility of solving its own economic problems.

- Afghan frame of Afghan-US relations

In the second tenure of Afghan President Hamid Karzai, tensions have increased between the US and Afghan regime. There has been a lot more criticism from Karzai on the US and NATO forces stationed in Afghanistan. In May 2011, President Karzai strongly condemned the ongoing NATO operations in Afghanistan and termed NATO as "occupiers" in Afghanistan.⁽⁵²⁾ Karzai also has apprehensions on limiting Afghan role in negotiations with Taliban. The US, on the other hand has blamed Afghans for worsening the situation with high levels of corruption in the Afghan government sectors and embezzlements in foreign aid.

Afghans are showing their apprehensions that if Americans leave them in the same manner as they did after the end of Soviet Afghan war, there would be no hurdle for the Taliban to return and capture Kabul. Afghans want proper functioning state institutions, strong security forces, strong economy and effective reconstruction mechanism in the post-withdrawal scenario. Afghans alone cannot deal with all of the existing problems. Americans have realized this fact. This realization has resulted into US-Afghan strategic partnership agreement for 10 years beyond the 2014 time limit given by Obama's end game, which involves training of Afghan security forces by the US trainers and investment for reconstructing Afghanistan for a strong future.

Therefore, the future of US exit strategy depends upon the nature of trilateral relations between the US, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Pakistan's frames

Pakistan has been an important frontline non-NATO ally of the US in the war on terror in the Afghan proximity. Pakistan has great strategic significance for both the US and Afghanistan. The NATO supplies are routed through Pakistan's territory into Afghanistan. Emergence of Af-Pak policy is indicative of the significance of Pakistan and its terrain, in the resolution of the Afghan war on terror. The cooperation of Pakistan is essential for the peaceful resolution of US withdrawal from Afghanistan. The study of Pakistan's frames is necessary in analyzing the outcome of US exit strategy and its impact on Afghan war on terror.

- Starting from the AfPak frame, Pakistan officially has never been a great supporter of this strategy.

The annexation of Pakistan with Afghanistan, in this umbrella term, has been negatively viewed in the strategic circles of Islamabad. Islamabad feels embarrassed being defined as being part of the singular theatre of war in Afghanistan. Adding to this embarrassment is the continuation of drone attacks in Pakistan, which instead of making life easier for the political establishment in Islamabad, has further complicated its problems, considering the variables of public opinion against such attacks, number of civilian casualties in such attacks and the ascending phenomenon of anti-Americanism within Pakistan. The US demand to 'do more' has been met with severe criticism within the foreign office circles of Islamabad. Pakistan's Foreign Secretary Salman Bashir advocated for "an end to the blame game" on the part of US demand to 'do more.'⁽⁵³⁾ The US AfPak policy, drone attacks, demand to 'do more' and the 'blame game' has led the official circles of Islamabad and Rawalpindi to suspiciously view the US exit from this region.

The end of Osama bin Laden episode (2 May 2011) and attack on the Salala checkpoint (26 November 2011) have transformed these suspicions into confrontation. Pak-US relations, in view of the aforementioned events, are currently at a very low point. Normalization in these relations is essential for any progress in negotiations with the Taliban. Pakistan can play a critical role in facilitating negotiations, according to both the US and Afghanistan.

- Indian role in Afghanistan and the US support for this role, this considering the resolution of Afghan quagmire, has not been appreciated by Pakistan.

India has always been considered a security threat in Pakistan's foreign policy formulation. Although there has been a "muted response", a deviance from traditional response, from Islamabad on the "strategic partnership agreement between India and Afghanistan" should not be interpreted as Pakistan's silent acceptance of growing Indian presence and influence in Afghanistan.⁽⁵⁴⁾ Rise in proxy conflict between India and Pakistan would further destabilize Afghanistan in particular and the region in general.

Pakistan's former prime minister Yusuf Raza Gilani said that the resolution of the Afghan problem must be done from within Afghanistan. Both the US and Afghanistan should keenly focus on Pakistan's existential frames related to the Afghan quagmire. Without Pakistan's active involvement in providing support for the resolution of the Afghan problem, it would be difficult for the US to carry out its exit strategy.

Costs of war

The cost of war frame is quite important in order to understand the need for US exit strategy from Afghanistan. The following statistics are worth noting.

- Overall inference of human lives lost is between 224,475 to 257,655, considering the surveys carried out in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan.⁽⁵⁵⁾
- "For every person killed on 11 September 2001, another 73 have been killed since."⁽⁵⁶⁾
- "US deficit projected at 1.4 trillion dollars this year."⁽⁵⁷⁾

- “Costs on the caring for US veterans 32.6 billion dollars.”⁽⁵⁸⁾

All these figures highlight how costly this war has been for all the major stakeholders.

Regional dynamics of Afghan quagmire and US exit strategy

Afghanistan's geostrategic location makes it an integral part of the foreign policies of major nation-states located in its proximity. Afghanistan is a continental transit trade route linking different nation-states. Four nuclear states exist in its proximity. A stable Afghanistan is in the interest of China, India, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and the Central Asian states. China has its 800 million dollars investment in Aynak copper deposits in Afghanistan.⁽⁵⁹⁾ For Russia, it is important as it can reach the Middle Eastern markets and stop the extremist Islamist groups gaining ground in Central Asian states. For Iran, China, Pakistan and India, safe access to Central Asian markets is only possible if there is peace and security in Afghanistan. All these major states, for strategic as well as for economic reasons, have a major stake in the solution of the Afghan quagmire.

India and Pakistan have to rise above their mentality of proxy warfare to reach the eastern shores. Iran and the Middle Eastern states have to show flexibility towards each other, in order to achieve maximum gains, as a result of safe access to Central Asian states. Trade can become a source of cooperation as well as a source of conflict between these major states. In consideration of Iran's investment in Chahbahar Port rivalling Pakistan's Gawadar Port, which has its support from India, the conflicting economic interests of regional powers may result in proxy warfare in Afghanistan.⁽⁶⁰⁾ Iran, in the meanwhile, has serious apprehensions against ever increasing US expansionist designs in this region. There are prospects of cooperation as well in Afghanistan for the regional powers, for example Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline project.⁽⁶¹⁾ All the more reason that the United States has expressed its desire for a regional solution to Afghan quagmire as it is in the interest of all the regional powers. A strong transport network would be required to boost trade across this region via Afghanistan. The realist politics, on the other hand, suggests that regional powers would try their best to maximize their interests in the exit scenario, leading to the start of a new great game in this region. Interaction of Afghan 'end plans' of major regional powers with Obama's end game will be consequential in determining the future of Afghanistan.

Impact on Afghan war on terror

Frames relating to the US withdrawal also provide the data base for framing its impact on the Afghan war on terror. The fate of US exit strategy and Afghan war on terror is interlinked. The US withdrawal strategy and its objectives have to remain compatible with the objectives of the war on terror in Afghanistan. If the objectives of both strategies are not mutually compatible, it would yield negative results. In order to carry out the frame analysis of strategic

interaction between the US-Afghan exit plan and the course of Afghan war against terrorism, determination of some frames is going to play an important role, in this regard. These are:

- Disengagement or transition?
- Political transition in 2014?
- Post-withdrawal situation and the Taliban factor
- Role of Afghan democratic institutions and security forces
- Alternative approaches

Disengagement or transition?

Is Obama's end game a disengagement strategy or a transition strategy?

The framing in response to this question would have a huge impact on the course of the war against terror, in the Afghan milieu. 'Even if' analysis would be of great help to offer logical rational understanding of the very nature of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan terrain. Let's consider, for the sake of argument, if America goes for a disengagement policy, is it going to yield more benefits than losses and sacrifices. Given the long-term US vested interests in Central Asia and South Asia, going for a comprehensive withdrawal from Afghanistan would cease the strategic leverage of the US in these regions. In the context of anarchical nature of world system affairs, the space or vacuum, if left over by the US, would definitely be exploited and manipulated by other major global powers such as China, Russia and Iran. This, in result, would hamper the vested interests of the US in this region. The US would not be able to maintain its firm role in the formulation of future strategic oil routes passing through the straits of Central Asia.

The rise of China is another factor which the US believes requires its presence in this region. Considering the critical and complex nature of negotiations with the Taliban, the US cannot afford to engage with them sitting on a weaker seat. This would allow the Taliban to press with more demands. The US has to remain firm in order to negotiate with the Taliban and the presence of 'hard power' is imperative in that case.

On the other hand, for the sake of the argument, if we say that Obama's end plan for Afghanistan is a transition strategy, it would provide a more flexible approach for the US. The US, with a limited presence, going for targeted objectives via targeted means, would be better able to get good results and protect its vested interests in the region. Some of the official frames, regarding the answer to the aforementioned question, are given below:

- Richard Holbrooke Frame (10 November, 2010)
- Gen. John Allen Frame
- Ambassador Ryan Crocker Frame
- Hamid Karzai Frame
- Joe Biden Frame
- The US-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Agreement Frame (2014-2024)

US special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke was of the view that Obama's Afghan end game was not an exit strategy; rather it would represent a transitory character.⁽⁶²⁾ ISAF Commander General John Allen, and US ambassador to Afghanistan Ryan Crocker support the US stay in Afghanistan beyond 2014. Adding to these already existing frames, president Hamid Karzai has confirmed that there have been negotiations between the two countries for the establishment of US bases on the Afghan territory.⁽⁶³⁾ The five bases, for which negotiations were being held are going to lie in areas of Jalalabad, Kandahar, Shindand, Mazar-e-Sharif and Bagram. Vice President, Joe Biden has also suggested partnership with Afghanistan beyond 2014, where if circumstances require, the US would stay beyond the 2014 deadline.⁽⁶⁴⁾ Recent "US-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Agreement" highlights the fact that the US is not willing to disengage from this region and will stay here beyond 2014.⁽⁶⁵⁾

All these official frames discussed above are clearly indicative of the fact that Obama's end game for Afghanistan is a transition strategy.

Afghan political transition in 2014?

According to the Constitution of Afghanistan, Afghan President Hamid Karzai could not be re-elected for the third successive term. The next Afghan election is to be held in 2014. The US-NATO leaders, regional powers and foremost, the Afghans, are uncertain and unaware of who would be their next leader. The absence of this notion in the US Afghan exit strategy may lead to a serious predicament beyond 2014 as it would create a snag in the smooth withdrawal of US forces from this region and the protection of US strategic interests in this region.

Post-withdrawal scenario and the Taliban factor

The success of Obama's exit plan depends a lot on the framing of post-withdrawal Afghan scenario. Since 2001, there have been nine international conferences on the issue of resolving the Afghan imbroglio. The Bonn Conference, 2011, did not prove fruitful, due to Pakistan's boycott, over the Salala incident. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, has also emphasized regional solution for the Afghan problem, where regional powers are going to play an important role in determining a peaceful future for the troubled state.

One of the key factors in this regard is the US engagement with the Taliban. From 2001 to 2009, the Taliban were not seen as part of the US solution to the Afghan quagmire. Increase in Taliban attacks in the vicinity of Kabul has led the Americans to the realization that they cannot completely eliminate the Taliban from Afghanistan. The only way forward is to convince them into becoming a part of the political process and renounce violence. The Taliban, on the other hand, are opposed to a partial withdrawal of the US forces from Afghanistan as Al-Qaeda members, part of Taliban factions, are against this policy. They believe that the only way to end this war is complete

withdrawal of foreign troops from the country. Recently, the launching of the Taliban spring offensive in the form of fresh attacks on Kabul confirms the belief that the Taliban are not serious in negotiating a partial withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan and their assimilation in the national political mainstream.

The re-emergence of the Taliban has been accepted as a ground reality by all the stakeholders. It is up to the stakeholders to minimize the differences among themselves and reach a consensus for the greater good of Afghanistan in particular and the region in general. In this regard, cooperation and understanding between the state stakeholders would be helpful in conducting negotiations as well as counter-terrorism strategies against the Taliban, from a position of strength.

Role of Afghan democratic institutions and security forces

An important aspect of the US exit plan for Afghanistan is the transfer of responsibility to Afghan national security forces. The US exit plan also calls for reintegration and reconciliation between different ethnic groups, with the aim of strengthening nation-building process. The Congressional Research Service Report, 2011, suggests that the training of Afghan national forces and the Afghan nation-building process is not up to the mark. Corruption charges, irregularities in spending and bad governance are factors hampering a bright future for Afghanistan. Although the role of ANA and ALP in combating the recent surge of Taliban attacks at the heart of Kabul has been commended by the US/NATO leaders, yet they have to prove a lot more, since the Taliban are not going to sit idle and will retaliate with more vicious attacks. The role of Afghan democratic institutions is also important for making the transition smoother.

Alternative approaches

In the formulation of a fool-proof strategy, the existence of a backup or alternative plan is always an essential element. The US exit strategy or its framing seems to lack that. It is primarily a strategy with more focus on military means as compared to political and economic ones. It does not take into account the Afghan political transition in 2014. The assimilation of the Taliban in the political mainstream has been badly hurt by their recent attacks on Kabul. Pakistan and India are trying to dominate each other in the Afghan imbroglio, leading to a conflict of interests, and consequently there is no progress on a regional consensus for the future of Afghanistan.

This strategy is flawed considering its dependence on circumstantial developments, as was being suggested by Gen Patreaus. Some of the alternative approaches being discussed in the academic and policy-making circles are:

- **Economic or Silk Route strategy:** This could be presently conjoined with the US Afghan military strategy, making the transition a lot more feasible, while providing the essential

strength to the Afghan democratic and security institutions through regional trade and foreign fiscal assistance.

- **Neutrality and non-interference model:** This might be the most ideal alternative solution to the existing US exit strategy, based upon the neutrality model of Switzerland (1815). It would require a pledge of non-interference from the regional powers as they will vow not to support any non-state terrorist networks or resort to in proxy war. According to the realist prism, the solution seems impractical in its nature, considering the conflicting nature of interests of regional powers in Afghanistan.
- **Sphere of influence model:** If neutrality is not the best available scenario for Afghanistan, the sphere of influence model seems to be the most plausible alternative solution to the Afghan quagmire, in which regional powers will sit together and define their strategic sphere of influence in Afghanistan, whereby they will try to avoid any conflict in Afghanistan.

However, the most critical question here is, would the Taliban or Afghan government buy these approaches?

Conclusion

Lenin once stated that “there are decades where nothing happens; and there are weeks where decades happen.” Today we are facing some interesting times. Every coming new day is bringing some new developments into our existing status quo frames. Obama’s exit plan, announced for Afghanistan, is also unfolding, with probable and unexpected new developments. The nature of the exit plan demonstrates the flexible character of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. Would this circumstantial character of Obama’s end game prove to be a matter of strength or weakness? Chances are that it will prove to be a mechanism of strength as it would help the US strategists to adapt their policies according to the demands of changing environment. The recent US-Afghanistan strategic Partnership Agreement (2014-2024) highlights the review of US Afghan exit strategy taken by Obama administration, as they have realized that in the post-withdrawal scenario, it would be difficult for the Afghan security forces to combat the Taliban alone. Time is the utmost crucial factor in determining the fate of the US exit plan and its impact on the war on terror in Afghanistan.

The existential frames of US officials such as Vice President Joe Biden, General John Allen and Ambassador Ryan Crocker demonstrate the fact that the US is not contemplating a complete withdrawal of its forces from Afghanistan; rather it is going for a transition strategy, which looks for the broader US role in this region, beyond 2014.

Initially declared objectives of the Afghan war on terror, according to the UNSCRs focused on the point of eliminating the safe havens of terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda and stopping the Taliban from re-emerging on the political scene of Afghanistan. It has been almost 10 years since 9/11 happened. The ground realities have changed a lot since then. The US and other

stakeholders in the Afghan quagmire have accepted the fact that they cannot stop the Taliban from re-emerging. All they need to do is to focus on regional dimensions of the solution for the Afghan problem as without the support of regional powers, the very spirit of the Afghan war on terror would be severely jeopardized as the Taliban will seize any opportunity to gain firm ground in Kabul.

Bad governance, corruption charges and irregularities in spending have tarnished the image of the present Afghan government. In view of the US exit from this region, Afghans have to take responsibility of their own affairs. The future and fate of Afghanistan lies in the hands of the Afghan government and the Afghan people.

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WHAT WENT WRONG WITH OBAMA'S AF-PAK POLICY?

DR MOONIS AHMAR

Introduction

Ever since US President Barack Obama unveiled his 'Af-Pak policy' on 27 March 2009 much has changed in the realm of the US-led war on terror in Afghanistan and Pakistan. More than three years after the proclamation of Af-Pak policy which outlined a proactive approach to deal with the threat of Al-Qaeda and other terrorist outfits perceived to be located in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the situation on the ground remains volatile. The massive terrorist attacks in Kabul and other parts of the country on 15 April this year⁽¹⁾ proves the failure of the US-backed Karzai regime to stabilize the situation before the deadline of US military withdrawal from Afghanistan.

In April 2012, after months of negotiations, Afghanistan and the United States finalized an agreement for establishing "strategic partnership" between the two countries. "The so-called strategic partnership agreement" (SPA) outlines how America will stand by Afghanistan after 2014, when most Nato troops are due to pull out, handing over the country's security to Afghans."⁽²⁾ The time-line of 2014 paving the way for the withdrawal of US and allied forces from Afghanistan after more than 13 years of their stay in that war-torn country raises numerous questions about the future of the Kabul regime and the threat of the return of "Taliban rule." Can SPA replace Af-Pak to a new security arrangement in Afghanistan and how Pakistan intends to deal with that situation in the months to come?

The term 'Af-Pak' coined by the Obama administration in 2009 is however not without forceful criticism. Islamabad views Af-Pak policy unfair

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and unjust in view of the fact that the two neighbours cannot be equated because both have different political, security and strategic positions. That the US strategy to deal with the insurgency in Afghanistan must take into account issues which tend to augment the level of violence in that conflict-ridden country instead of blaming neighbouring Pakistan of incidents which are the result of the incompetence of the Karzai regime and its failure to establish its writ in most parts of Afghanistan. Whereas, for the United States, the presence of what it calls ‘safe heavens’ of terrorist groups particularly in the tribal areas of Pakistan bordering Afghanistan requires a comprehensive strategy to protect American interests in the region. Who is right and who is wrong in the entire gamut of war in Afghanistan needs to be examined analytically and critically.

This paper will evaluate the pluses and minuses of President Obama’s Af-Pak policy by responding to the following questions:

1. What is the ‘Af-Pak’ policy and how it is *viewed* in the region and outside?
2. How the *fault lines* in Af-Pak policy deepens crisis and conflict in Pak-US relations?
3. What are the *perceptions* in Pakistan about the Af-Pak policy at the official and non-official levels?
4. To what extent Af-Pak policy can help execute the US ‘*exit strategy*’ and how Pakistan is relevant in this regard?
5. To what extent Af-Pak policy has been *successful* and what are its major *failures* in this regard?

Furthermore, this paper will also examine in detail the implications of Af-Pak policy on Pakistan and the perceived failure of Obama administration in stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan; the surge of anti-Americanism in Pakistan and the worsening of law and order situation in that war-torn country. The role of a major player in Afghanistan, i.e. India, will also be covered in this paper. Finally, the gains and costs of Af-Pak policy in the US counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations will also be examined in some detail.

Afghanistan and Pakistan are neighbours and share common historical and cultural heritage yet the two are unable to bridge the “trust deficit” which exists between Islamabad and Kabul since quite long. Since the creation of Pakistan till today, the mistrust and animosity between the two neighbours continues and given their past and present acrimony there is no likelihood of resolving issues which since 1947 continue to impede the process of good neighbourly relations.⁽³⁾ The United States, under the Obama administration, realizing the significance of Afghanistan and Pakistan in combating terrorism, ventured on a policy to engage the two neighbours in pursuing a coherent approach in dealing with threats posed against the foreign forces in Afghanistan and also the security forces of Pakistan. Trying to act as a buffer between the two rather hostile neighbours, Washington made several attempts to seek cooperative behaviour from Islamabad and Kabul in dealing with the threat and terrorist attacks by forces backed by Al-Qaeda and Taliban leadership.

Established as a loose confederation of various ethnic tribal groups in 1747 by Ahmed Shah Durrani, the state of Afghanistan always lacked coherence, a unified state structure and an effective modest form of governance. In view of its landlocked geographical location, sectarian, ethnic and cultural heterogeneous position and a history of a weak central authority, Afghanistan since 1747 has failed to emerge as a modern state with stable societal and state institutions.⁽⁴⁾ Interestingly, Afghanistan is the only country which in the last 200 years experienced attack and occupation of British, Soviet and American forces and consistently resisted foreign interventions and influence. In view of the culture of defiance to foreign influence prevailing in Afghanistan, no external power was able to bring the local people under its tutelage. The current US-coalition forces deployed in Afghanistan since October 2001 are facing a similar predicament as was encountered by the British and Soviet forces: hostile local feelings and armed resistance against the occupation. The so-called “spring offensive” launched by the Taliban resistance groups against what they perceive as foreign occupation is described in a report in the 20 April 2012 issue of *The Guardian Weekly* as:

Dozens of fighters launched gun, rocket and suicide attacks on embassies, Nato bases, parliament and government buildings in the capital, as well as Nato targets in three eastern provinces, in what a spokesman called a spring offensive to demonstrate its strength.⁽⁵⁾

In retrospect, while the British and Soviet military invasions of Afghanistan took place because of different reasons, the US attack was triggered because of what Washington perceived as the role of Al-Qaeda leadership based in Afghanistan under the patronage of Taliban regime in launching terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, DC, on 11 September 2011.⁽⁶⁾ Unlike the British and Soviet occupations, the US military engagement in Afghanistan is of a longer duration and in the Nato summit held in Chicago in May 2012 it was made clear by the participants that even after 2014, when foreign forces plan to leave Afghanistan, Nato would maintain a semblance of its presence in that country as a deterrent against the resurgence of Taliban and Al-Qaeda and “ordered military officers to begin planning a post-2014 mission to focus on training, advising and assisting Afghan troops to ensure the government can ward off a stubborn Taliban insurgency.”⁽⁷⁾ The Nato summit on Afghanistan attended by 50 countries agreed to pay US\$4.1 billion as security assistance to the Afghan government out of which the United States committed to pay half the amount.⁽⁸⁾ It is another question that to what extent the financial package promised to Afghan government in the post-2014 withdrawal period can help sustain the status quo.

Af-Pak: Rationale or rhetoric?

Since March 2009 when President Barack Obama unveiled his Af-Pak policy the situation on the ground has changed drastically. As a brainchild of Richard Holbrooke, former US special representative for Pakistan and Afghanistan, the Af-Pak was considered innovative and a path-breaking

approach to stabilize the situation in the volatile areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan. But after his demise in December 2010, Af-Pak lost its momentum as the two key countries holding pivotal position in that policy, Afghanistan and Pakistan, failed to develop a better sense of understanding on matters which formed the basis of that policy. Furthermore, tension and animosity between Islamabad and Washington deepened since the beginning of 2010 thus widening the gulf of mistrust and suspicion.

A close examination of 'Af-Pak' is essential in order to probe gaps in theory and practice.

The US-Nato military reverses in Afghanistan during the second term of Bush administration required a new approach to neutralize the growing Taliban-led resistance and prompted an early purposeful if not a humiliating exit from that war-torn country. Massive spending in Afghanistan after 2001 by the US-led coalition to restructure the state, eliminate causes which foment radicalization and terrorism and ensure the non-use of Afghan soil for extra-territorial terrorist attacks however failed to attain such objectives. By 2008, the writ of the Karzai regime further eroded with the rise in suicide and other terrorist/resistance operations against the Afghan/Nato/Isaf forces. When the Democratic Party took the charge of the White House and Congress after 2008 November elections, it was quite clear that a review of US Afghan policy was inevitable. But the new policy, articulated after weeks of consultation between Obama and his foreign/national security advisers, came up with an approach which amalgamated Afghanistan and Pakistan under one set of US policy termed as "Af-Pak."

During his election campaign in 2008, Obama had promised to withdraw US forces from Iraq but on the issue of Afghanistan he called for a policy of surge in American military presence so as to effectively deal with the threat of terrorism present in Afghanistan and in the tribal areas of Pakistan. For Obama, more than Iraq, the real security threats to the United States emanated from the Taliban and Al-Qaeda groups based in Afghanistan and in Pakistan. A further elaboration of the rationale of "Af-Pak" was given by an American South Asia analyst as:

When President Barack Obama assumed the US presidency in January 2009, he inherited an Afghan policy in disarray. After eight years of engagement in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Bush administration never convened an interagency assessment to develop a regional strategy for pacifying Afghanistan. The Obama administration identified what it believes is an achievable end state: a gradual, coordination-based transfer of responsibility to Afghans beginning in 2011, enabling the United States to begin downsizing the military effort and establishing a more normal diplomatic presence there that focuses on development, security assistance, and other forms of governance support.⁽⁹⁾

When President Obama outlined the salient features of his Af-Pak policy, it was certain that Washington wants to make a fresh start on its Afghan

policy by linking it with Pakistan. As without Islamabad's support to counterterrorism efforts it was rather impossible for the Obama administration to eradicate terrorist groups threatening US and foreign forces in Afghanistan. On the pros and cons of Af-Pak policy, Kavita Khory, an American expert on South Asian affairs argues that, "In March 2009, President Obama announced his administration's policy towards Afghanistan and Pakistan. The product of an extensive interagency review of the nearly decade long US war in Afghanistan, the policy set out the new administration's central goal for Afghanistan and Pakistan: to disrupt, dismantle and eventually destroy extremists and their safe havens within both nations. The review proposed an integrated civilian and military strategy for tackling the insurgency in Afghanistan and recommended that Afghanistan and Pakistan should be tested as one theatre for diplomacy. President Obama commissioned the interagency study soon after his inauguration, and after several months of deliberations, he formally announced the new strategy at West Point in December 2009. Under the new plan, he committed an additional 30,000 US forces to Afghanistan."⁽¹⁰⁾ The so-called "surge" of US military presence in Afghanistan aimed to exert maximum pressure on insurgent groups and destroy their control and command structures inside Afghanistan and east of the Durand Line by launching periodic drone attacks. Four reasons which formed the basis of Obama administration's decision to amalgamate Afghanistan and Pakistan in the form of a comprehensive policy in order to neutralize and eliminate insurgent groups, terrorist outfits and sources of command and control were:

- Better coordination between Afghan and Pakistani security officials for sharing intelligence information about terrorist networks in areas bordering Afghanistan and Pakistan.
- Involvement of US/Nato/Isaf officials with Afghan and Pakistani security agencies on monitoring the presence, planning, funding, training and activities of terrorist groups perceived to be located in the tribal areas of Pakistan.
- Sharing expertise and providing assistance to Pakistan in combating what the United States perceives as Al-Qaeda groups and their Pakistani supporters located in tribal and settled areas of the country.
- Encourage Afghan and Pakistani officials to take steps for re-radicalizing society and curb militancy through coordinated efforts.

To what extent the vision of Obama administration to jointly deal with Afghanistan and Pakistan in its broad objective to protect the United States and its citizens from future terrorist threats and attacks was realistic and produced results still remains to be seen.

More than three years of the launching of Af-Pak policy, Washington still believes that Al-Qaeda groups are operating from Pakistan and are a major threat to foreign and Afghan forces in Afghanistan. US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta during his visit to an Indian think tank in New Delhi said that the "US would continue to launch drone attacks against Al-Qaeda in Pakistan despite

complaints from Islamabad that the strikes violated its sovereignty.” He made it clear that, “this is about our sovereignty” arguing that “Al-Qaeda militants who orchestrated the September 11 attacks on the United States were in Pakistan’s tribal areas.”⁽¹¹⁾ Criticizing the remarks of Panetta on “insurgent safe havens in tribal areas,” a foreign office spokesman said in Islamabad that, “we strongly believe that such statements are misplaced in bringing about peace and stability in the region and the country’s fight against extremism and terrorism would proceed according to its own schedule.”⁽¹²⁾ Pakistan’s protests over the US drone attacks carried out in tribal areas for the last six years however failed to prevent such “breach of sovereignty” by a country which is considered a strategic ally of Pakistan in the war against terrorism. Many Pakistanis argue that what sort of an ally the United States is which frequently threatens its ally and kills civilian and military personnel in drone and other attacks in the name of counterterrorism? On the other hand, many in the United States resent the way Pakistan, its ally in the war on terror, provides space to various terrorist groups that make deadly attacks against the Afghan and US forces. For many Americans, Pakistan is an unreliable ally which has not done enough to prevent the use of its territory for cross-border infiltration and attack on American-coalition forces based in Afghanistan. Based on the soft and the hard approach shaping its Af-Pak policy, the Obama administration believes that still it is Pakistan, and not Afghanistan, from where the threat of terrorism against the US and coalition forces deployed in Afghanistan emanates. If soft measures fail to eradicate terrorist Al-Qaeda presence in the tribal areas of Pakistan, then hard power in the shape of drone attacks must be used regardless of protests from Islamabad about violation of its sovereignty.

Af-Pak: Challenges and Opportunities

What are the challenges and opportunities emanating from Af-Pak strategy and how the triangular partnership of the US, Afghanistan and Pakistan can cope with strategic and security matters worsened as by continued pressure on the Nato/Isaf forces caused by the Taliban and Al-Qaeda groups operating particularly in the southern and eastern parts of Afghanistan? Expectations and hopes which prevailed in the Obama administration circles about stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan before implementing their exit strategy seem to have diminished now. According to a Pakistani scholar,

The Obama administration’s strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan offers peculiar challenges and potential opportunities for Pakistan. The challenges pertain to Pakistan’s alleged reliance on irregular warfare in South Asia as an instrument of national security policy, especially the continuing external perception regarding its security establishment’s dual approach of practicing toughness toward homogenous domestic terrorists and leniency toward home-based regional terrorists. The opportunities include the possibility of a long-term strategic relationship with the United States and the creation of a regional security environment addressing

Pakistan's pervasive sense of national security, especially vis-à-vis Afghanistan and India.⁽¹³⁾

Further elaborating his observations on Af-Pak policy, he argues that "the Obama administration's subsequent policy initiatives toward Afghanistan and Pakistan constitute major manifestations of the Af-Pak strategy. For instance, in November 2009, President Obama signed the Kerry-Lugar-Berman Act, under which Pakistan would receive \$ 7.5 billion in US civilian assistance on a five-year basis. Then in March 2010, at the first ever ministerial level strategic dialogue in Washington, the United States and Pakistan signed a long-term partnership in ten areas of cooperation, including energy and water, defense and security, and science and technology."⁽¹⁴⁾ In the context of Afghanistan, "in December 2009, President Obama announced a major revision in the Afghan war strategy. Then at the International Conference on Afghanistan held in London on January 28, 2010, the United States unveiled a plan to reintegrate low-level and mid-level Taliban."⁽¹⁵⁾ So far so good, but what went wrong in Obama's Af-Pak policy also needs to be explored. Some of the salient features of Af-Pak policy as narrated by Ishtiaq Ahmed are as follows:

- It treats Afghanistan and Pakistan as two countries but one challenge. The reason Pakistan is bracketed with Afghanistan is because its tribal areas along side the Afghan border are perceived by the Obama administration to be a safe haven for al-Qaeda and its terrorist allies, fuelling Afghan insurgency and threatening to increase international terrorism. The Af-Pak strategy, there, focuses more intensively on Pakistan than in the past, calling for more significant increase in the US and international support, both economic and military, which are obviously linked to Pakistan's performance in counterterrorism in the region. Additionally, it aims to engage Afghanistan and Pakistan in a new trilateral framework at the highest levels and to foster their bilateral relationship in areas of political, economic and security cooperation.
- The Af-Pak strategy is based on a clear and focused "US strategic goal" for Afghanistan and Pakistan. To disrupt, dismantle and defeat al-Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan and to prevent their return to either country in the future.
- The Af-Pak strategy supports reconciliation with those local Taliban and other insurgents who are ready to surrender arms and dissociate from al-Qaeda and its hardcore allies while implementing the components of the Af-Pak strategy, Obama signed the US Defence Bill on 28 October 2009. The bill contained a new provision under which the United States was to pay Taliban fighters who announced the insurgency for mainly protection of their towns and villages.⁽¹⁶⁾

If these salient features are evaluated, three conclusions could be drawn. First, the US focus on Pakistan to dismantle what it perceives as "safe havens" of Al-Qaeda groups in the tribal areas on the Pak-Afghan border failed

to materialize because even after three years of the proclamation of Af-Pak policy, drone attacks targeted inside the tribal areas of Pakistan continue and allegations by the high-level American officials blaming Islamabad of not doing enough to dismantle the terrorist infrastructure responsible for attacks made inside Afghanistan also continue unabated. Second, the “trust deficit” between Afghanistan and Pakistan on matters related to operations against the terrorist groups and their activities seem to have deepened in the last three years. The US role in coordinating Pak-Afghan efforts against terrorist groups has also not helped in seeking a better working relationship between Islamabad and Kabul on combating terrorism. There are frequent reports about allegations made by Afghan officials on the failure of Pakistan to prevent the incursion of the alleged terrorist groups attacking Afghan-foreign forces and the installations. Yet, the two countries periodically held meetings on security matters and counterterrorism strategy. In early 2009, Pakistan and Afghanistan agreed on a comprehensive “action plan” to “flush out terrorism, organized crime and drug trafficking and plan to form a joint border security force. The two countries also agreed to help each other by sharing information and improving border control management. They will also hand over to each other criminals and other anti-state elements.”⁽¹⁷⁾

Third, as far as reconciliation with Taliban groups is concerned, there is no headway because a segment of Afghan society is against holding talks with the Taliban or accommodating them in the country’s power structure. Even the Taliban groups who are pitted against the Afghan-US-Nato-Isaf forces have expressed their unwillingness to enter into talks with the Kabul regime unless their demand, i.e. the withdrawal of foreign forces, is met. Michael Semple, a Taliban expert based at the Harvard University, rightly assessed the Taliban phenomenon in Afghan insurgency by arguing that,

If the Taliban fight on, they are simply involved in a violent power struggle over who gets to take over after the US departure. Pragmatists in the Taliban movement want to settle this at the negotiation table rather than on the battlefield, which is why they have left the door ajar for resumption of talks. But they are still not convinced that the Americans are serious about these talks, which is why they have decisively bounced the ball back into the American court.⁽¹⁸⁾

The notion of “good” and “bad” Taliban has failed to catch the imagination of those who want to see an end to fighting in Afghanistan and peace in that country. All the three players in the Afghan conflict, United States, Pakistan and Afghanistan, in principle want an end to fighting in Afghanistan but the three lack a cohesive approach, vision and strategy to deal with issues which are responsible for violence and instability in that West Asian country.

Why equate Pakistan with Afghanistan?

Since the launching of Af-Pak policy by President Barack Obama in March 2009, it has been a source of criticism by different circles. The fundamental criticism emanates from the argument that Pakistan and

Afghanistan are quite different in terms of their security, political, economic and military positions and the two must be dealt differently instead of being equated with each other. One such criticism narrated below proves a degree of reservations on equating the two neighbours by the United States in order to effectively deal with the threat of terrorism and the activities of what Washington calls Al-Qaeda and its supporters holed up in the “safe havens” of the tribal areas of Pakistan.

Shahid Javed Burki, a well-known economist, who is originally from Pakistan but lives in the United States, in one of his columns published in a national English daily of Pakistan came up with the proposition on Af-Pak that,

Pakistan is not Afghanistan. By comparing the two countries together and calling it 'Af-Pak', the United States' intention was to make policy making simpler. It may have the opposite effect. The idea was that by lumping Afghanistan and Pakistan into one analytical framework, Washington and its allies would be able to focus on one geographic entry and would be able to use the same strategy to counter the threat posed to the West by the risk of Islamic terrorism.⁽¹⁹⁾

Tracing internal faultlines in the Afghan society partly responsible for decades of chaos, disorder and instability in Afghanistan resulting into foreign interventions, he further argues that “they (Afghans) don't have an interest in creating an Afghan state that would work for bringing economic development or improving the welfare of the common man. Women in particular remain suppressed. The few that have benefited from some openings in the system that accompanied the overthrow of the Taliban regime once again fear for their lives and their social status. But Pakistan is different. When it emerged as an independent state in 1947 it already had a functioning state with functioning institutions put in place during the long British rule. Although there is not much resemblance between the Pakistan of today and the one at the time of independence, it has the making of a modern state. Two things set it apart from Afghanistan: it has a large well-organized military with 650,000 men and women in uniform and a large and growing middle class. Treating Pakistan in the context of the Af-Pak strategy would be a colossal mistake. The West under the leadership of President Barack Obama needs two different strategies, one for Pakistan and the other for Afghanistan.”⁽²⁰⁾ It is perhaps the feeling in Pakistan that a country like Afghanistan which lacks central authority and with weak state and societal structures cannot be compared with Pakistan which despite its faultlines is better than its western neighbour. Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari in an interview to the *Financial Times* rejected the Obama administration's strategy of linking the policy on Pakistan and Afghanistan in an effort to end a Taliban insurgency and bring stability to the region. According to him, “Afghanistan and Pakistan are distinctly different countries and cannot be lumped together for any reason.”⁽²¹⁾ But, one thing that needs to be noted while examining the internal and external dynamics of Pakistan and Afghanistan is their inability to detach each other from the implications of crises which cause instability in the two countries.

On the positive side of equating Afghanistan and Pakistan in Obama's Af-Pak policy, it is argued that "Obama can be credited with fully realizing the close interconnection between Pakistan and Afghanistan and with giving greater importance to the Pakistani side of the Afghan crisis. To this end, his administration has attempted to build a wide-ranging bilateral relationship with Islamabad which includes enhanced intelligence cooperation, continued military assistance, and greater investment in training in counterinsurgency warfare. The administration has also developed measures to address the long-term problems in Pakistan that breed extremism, thereby giving greater attention to non-military assistance for education and poverty alleviation, as evidenced by the Kerry-Lugar Act passed in Congress in October 2009 and the proposal to create Reconstruction Opportunity Zones (ROZs) in the border areas along the Durand Line."⁽²²⁾ Yet, despite such measures taken by the Obama administration since its launching of Af-Pak policy, relations with Pakistan remained strained and devoid of mutual trust and understanding. Back-to-back events commencing from the arrest of CIA official Raymond Davis from Lahore on charges of murder in January 2011, the US navy Seals attack on the Osama Bin Laden compound in Abbottabad on 2 May 2011, and the attack on Pakistan military's Salala checkpoint in late November 2011 leading to the suspension of Nato supplies caused a major dent in Pak-US relations.

However, the abovementioned events were not the primary reason for the rupture in their bilateral relations. Rather, it was the diminishing level of trust and Washington's failure to maintain a degree of neutrality in Pak-Afghan schism on cross-border infiltration that did the greatest harm. The US not only failed to prevent repeated allegations from Kabul about the perceived role of Pakistan's Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) in destabilizing the Karzai regime but it also launched its own tirade against Islamabad about the existence of "safe havens" responsible for what it termed suicide attacks and other terrorist acts against the US and coalition forces.

Af-Pak and the exit strategy?

How Af-Pak strategy could have set the stage for an honourable exit of US-Nato forces from Afghanistan? What are the successes and failures of Af-Pak policy and why the United States has deviated from its original stance of working closely with Pakistan and its security agencies to deal with terrorist outfits and networks particularly in the tribal areas? What went wrong in Af-Pak policy in the recent past?

When the Af-Pak strategy was unveiled by the Obama administration in 2009, the idea was to defeat insurgents by pursuing a three-pronged strategy: First, to increase the number of US forces in Afghanistan so as to effectively combat the threat from Taliban-Al Qaeda groups. By increasing the number of US forces under its forward policy, the Obama administration hoped to neutralize the insurgent groups leading to the ultimate withdrawal of US-coalition forces from Afghanistan. Second, to make it clear to Pakistan that its military operations along the Afghanistan border cannot be separated from its policy to stop cross-border infiltration of Taliban-Al Qaeda groups alleged to be

based primarily in the tribal areas. The launching of drone attacks to target Al-Qaeda elements manifested the application of 'hard power' under the Af-Pak policy. Pentagon and White House assumed that by getting tough on Pakistan it might be possible to prevent attacks on Afghan and US-coalition forces. That assumption however proved to be wrong because it is not only the role of Taliban-Al Qaeda groups who have taken hard on foreign forces in Afghanistan but the failure of the Afghan regime and its western backers to eradicate the causes which have fomented insurgency. Deep-rooted misgovernance, corruption, lack of accountability and the absence of ownership on the part of Afghan elites to solve grave problems caused frustration and anger particularly among the Afghan youth against the Foreign-backed Karzai regime. Furthermore, collateral damage in US/coalition-led attacks on suspected targets also added to the anger among the Afghans. Third, to strengthen the Afghan national army as a counter to meet local resistance. Washington, like Moscow, had calculated that by better training and equipping the Afghan forces, resistance groups could be tackled effectively. Like the Soviets, Americans also think that in the absence of their military presence, their supported Afghan military can fill the vacuum and maintain the political status quo. Such a wishful thinking which was devoid of any pragmatic and logical reasoning failed to prevent the collapse of the Kabul regime once the Soviet forces pulled out of Afghanistan in 1988-1989 and the United States may face a similar predicament despite its best efforts to sustain its supported regime in Kabul in the post-withdrawal period.

Unfortunately, no lessons have been learned by foreign powers militarily involved in Afghanistan about the culture of resistance in the Afghan society against foreign occupation especially of Western/non-Muslim powers. It is true that unlike the British and the Soviet military interventions when resistance against their occupation was launched by all segments of Afghan society regardless of their ethnic affiliations, the resistance against the US-coalition forces is waged primarily in the Pashtun-dominated south and the eastern parts of Afghanistan.

One may ask is it possible for the Obama administration to pursue a successful exit strategy for Afghanistan particularly when this is an election year and the surge of resistance against foreign forces launched by different Afghan groups, including Taliban, can cause more casualties? Insurgent groups will try to step up their pressure on US forces by carrying out more attacks particularly in Kabul so as to embarrass the Obama administration and raise political cost for the Democratic Party. In fact, Obama's exit strategy lacks a strategy which can "bail out" the United States from more than a decade of military involvement in Afghanistan. Obama can claim to have made strides in war on terror by launching "Operation Gerimino" which successfully killed the most wanted target, Osama bin Laden. He can also claim of successfully targeting and eliminating highly valued Al-Qaeda targets and limiting the scope of insurgency in Afghanistan. On 4 June an unnamed CIA drone attacked Pakistan's remote tribal area of North Waziristan, apparently killing Al-Qaeda's deputy leader Abu Yahya al-Libi.⁽²³⁾ Following Libi's presumed death, perhaps the only significant

figure believed to be left there is Ayman al-Zawahiri, group's leader since Bin Laden's killing.⁽²⁴⁾ American interests, and for that matter, the interests of the Western world in Afghanistan are: to prevent Al-Qaeda from gaining foothold in Afghanistan and using that country for its terrorist operations; to prevent the surge of Taliban for taking over control by force. But, the smooth sailing of Af-Pak and the "exit strategy" cannot materialize without tangible support from Pakistan. It is this "grey area" which is a source of serious predicament for the Obama administration because its entire strategy to seek an "honourable exit" from Afghanistan and prevent the return of Taliban to power depends on to what extent Pakistan can cooperate in this regard.

Successes and failures of Af-Pak

Three years are enough to judge if, and to what extent, Obama's Af-Pak policy has been able to deliver positive results or is an utter failure. For the first two years, Af-Pak managed to sustain the triangular partnership of Afghanistan-Pakistan and the United States in regular meetings on security and counterterrorism matters but beginning with the year 2011 things went wrong for the reasons mentioned earlier in this paper. Success of Af-Pak policy can be measured keeping in view the following observations:

- The neutralization of insurgent groups in terms of their attacks on coalition forces and targeting of Afghan government installations.
- The imposition of the writ of the Karzai regime in providing security to its people.
- Better coordination and cooperation with Islamabad in eliminating what Washington calls "safe havens" of terrorist groups in the tribal areas and other parts of Pakistan.
- Meaningful steps for the de-radicalization of Afghan and Pakistani societies, particularly its youth, which is essential in order to neutralize groups who use the younger people for their ulterior motives.

To what extent these conditions have been met needs to be gauged. From a realist perspective, Af-Pak policy merely succeeded in giving strategic depth to American policy in post-9/11 Afghanistan and making sure that Pakistan is on board while eliminating terrorist threat perceived to be coming from Al-Qaeda and other militant groups.

About the failures of Af-Pak, you can come up with four propositions. First, the strategic axis which the United States was trying to evolve including Afghanistan, Pakistan and US was unable to materialize. Except for trilateral meetings of officials from Washington, Kabul and Islamabad no concrete headway was made on institutionalizing anti-terror mechanism. Second, de-radicalization and counter-extremism which formed important features of Af-Pak also remained unattainable because enormous funding provided by foreign powers to help eradicate militancy, extremism and radicalization in Afghanistan and Pakistan was unable to neutralize groups fomenting violence and terrorism in the two neighbouring countries. The conservative youth of Afghanistan and

Pakistan, which is vulnerable to the influence of hardline groups, continue to augment the predicament of foreign, particularly American forces in Afghanistan. Anger and hatred against the US-coalition forces among some of the Afghans is because of collateral damage resulting from anti-resistance operations and night raids. Therefore, on 8 April General Abdul Rahim Wardak, Afghanistan's defence minister, and General John Allen, the American commander of the international coalition in Afghanistan, signed an agreement transferring leadership of special operations, particularly the so-called "night raids" to Afghans.⁽²⁵⁾ Third, Pak-US relations, which should have been better after the launching of Af-Pak and the Kerry-Lugar Act, reached their lowest ebb. Seldom in the history of their relations the level of mistrust, animosity and antagonism has any parallel. It is therefore, the most noticeable failure of Af-Pak that the two countries, perceived to be allies in the war against terrorism, blame each other for letting each other down. Fourth, resistance and terrorist activities in Afghanistan remain a major threat to Nato/Isaf forces, a fact, which cannot be denied either by the United States or its western allies because of periodic incidents of suicide bombings and other forms of violence perpetrated by the Taliban and other resistance groups. The killing of various Al-Qaeda leaders in drone attacks conducted by the CIA on the tribal areas of Pakistan caused no tangible setback to resistance against foreign forces and their Afghan allies.

The future of Af-Pak?

With the death of the architect of Af-Pak policy, Richard Holbrooke, on 13 December 2010, one can observe the diminishing role of Af-Pak in strengthening strategic axis between the United States, Afghanistan and Pakistan on combating terrorism, extremism, militancy and radicalization. His successor, Marc Grossman, tried to keep the momentum of Af-Pak policy but unfortunately with the dawn of the year 2011, Pak-US relations plummeted to their lowest ebb. As mentioned earlier, back-to-back events in 2011 (the Raymond Davis episode, the Seals raid that killed OBL, and the Salala attack), even though not the primary factor, put a question mark on the future of Pak-US relations and the Af-Pak policy. These events not only contributed to straining the relations but also led to the suspension of Nato supplies by Islamabad and curtailment of US aid to Pakistan. President Obama's exit strategy and its endorsement by the Nato allies means the beginning of the most critical phase in Af-Pak policy.

Even if Af-Pak policy is close to its logical conclusion, there is no indication on the part of the United States and its allies to abandon Afghanistan and cause a power vacuum to the advantage of the Taliban and other anti-US forces including Al-Qaeda. The Nato summit held in Chicago in May 2012 also made it clear that the international community would not give space to groups who might take advantage of the withdrawal of US forces and has pledged to continue its pivotal security role in that war-torn country. How the US intends to replace Af-Pak with another policy in the post-2014 period and what shall be its priorities while dealing with Afghanistan in future remains to be seen.

The time-line from the end of 2012 until 2014 is quite critical in Af-Pak because of two main reasons. First, the role of Pakistan in assisting the smooth

and safe withdrawal of US-Nato forces from Afghanistan and second, the capability of the Taliban and various resistance forces in filling the void resulting from that withdrawal. The surge of anti-Americanism in Pakistan because of periodic drone attacks and what many Pakistanis perceive “humiliating” attitude of American officials when they repeatedly blame Pakistan for not eliminating Al-Qaeda and other terrorist network, particularly in the tribal areas, also raise the stakes in Af-Pak policy and its successful conclusion.

The role of India

America’s Afghan predicament is blamed often on Pakistan but one interesting development which has taken place is a trilateral understanding between Washington, Kabul and New Delhi on the issue of Afghan security bypassing Islamabad. On 14 June 2012 the US and India signed an agreement for holding regular trilateral talks with Afghanistan in order to help it strengthen its hold over power particularly in the post-American withdrawal period. By giving India a pivotal role in Afghanistan, the United States intends to give a clear message to Pakistan that it has other options rather than merely relying on Islamabad for the support which it requires for security and counterinsurgency in Afghanistan. The agreement, which was signed after the conclusion of third US-India strategic dialogue on 13 June, also included a joint statement which said, “they reiterated that success in Afghanistan and regional and global security require elimination of safe havens and infrastructure for terrorism and violent extremism in Afghanistan and Pakistan.”⁽²⁶⁾ Denying that Washington aims to squeeze Pakistan from both sides, US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Robert Blake stated in a press briefing that “a trilateral agreement which brings the United States and India in a new arrangement with Afghanistan, is not directed against Pakistan. On the contrary, it’s to talk about the situation inside Afghanistan but also how we continue to support Afghanistan.”⁽²⁷⁾ But Pakistan’s preconceived notions *vis-à-vis* US-Afghan-Indian trilateral forum are not misplaced. Till 2010, the United States acquiesced to Pakistan’s suggestions that India should not be given a role in Afghanistan because of its reservations against New Delhi’s activities on the Afghan soil directed against Pakistan’s volatile province of Balochistan. But since 2011, Washington as a result of deteriorating relations with Islamabad has seriously tried to provide strategic depth to its Afghan policy by co-opting India and marginalizing Pakistan.

Even before the US policy of engaging India in Afghanistan, the two South Asian countries had developed close strategic ties on security and political matters. Harsh V. Pant, an Indian writer, is of the view that

New Delhi and Kabul agreed that the strategic partnership between the two neighbours, to be implemented under the framework of a partnership council headed by the foreign ministers of the two nations, will entail cooperation in areas of security, law enforcement and justice, including an enhanced focus on cooperation in the fight against international

terrorism, organized crime, illegal trafficking in narcotics and money laundering. Until now, India has relied on its soft power in wooing Kabul. It is one of the largest aid donors to Afghanistan and is delivering humanitarian assistance as well as helping in nation-building projects in myriad ways including: building roads, providing medical facilities and helping with educational programmes in an effort to develop and enhance long-term local Afghan capabilities.⁽²⁸⁾

One thing that needs to be noted about the future of Af-Pak and the role of India is: neither Pakistan can marginalize the role of India in Afghanistan nor can India use its influence in Kabul to neutralize the role of Pakistan in Afghanistan. Furthermore, the United States cannot have a smooth sailing in its Af-Pak policy and the withdrawal process without taking Pakistan on board. For the Pakistani military establishment, one thing which it should not ignore is: neither the United States nor its allies, including the Kabul regime, would allow cross-border infiltration and activities of “Haqqani network” and other groups targeting coalition-Afghan forces. The red lines which are drawn by the Obama administration *vis-à-vis* Pakistan are clear: that its territory should not be used to destabilize Afghanistan and cause more hardships to the US coalition forces. Likewise, for Pakistan, the red lines in its relations with the United States are also clearly drawn: no more killing of Pakistani forces by the US drones or by its forces. When that line was crossed on 26 November 2011 by attacking the Salala post killing 24 Pakistani soldiers and officers, Islamabad’s reaction was swift. It stopped Nato supplies across its territory to the US-coalition forces in Afghanistan and froze its strategic-military ties with Washington pending a formal apology by the US on the Salala incident. Allegations of cross-border infiltration levelled by the Kabul regime and the United States are however countered by Pakistan. For instance, on 27 June Chief of Army Staff Gen Ashfaq Pervaiz Kayani in a meeting with Isaf commander General John Allen held in Islamabad “demanded action by Isaf forces against Afghanistan-based militants who attacked a Pakistani checkpost in Dir.”⁽²⁹⁾ Consequently, as a result of the meeting between Isaf and Pakistan’s military, the joint communiqué released by the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) and Isaf on 29 June “resolved that territories of Pakistan and Afghanistan will no longer be used as safe havens for cross-border attacks.”⁽³⁰⁾ Will such meetings help ensure regional stability and to what extent incidents of cross-border attacks from both sides of the Durand Line will stop? These are the questions that are raised from time to time in order to contemplate prospects for stability in the West and South Asian regions.

Conclusion

Since 2011, the United States and its Nato allies are caught in a dilemma: the military exit from Afghanistan in the later part of 2014 will leave a power vacuum. That vacuum can only be positively filled by a broad-based government in Kabul capable of establishing its writ in the whole of Afghanistan and preventing those forces who intend using the opportunity for destabilization

and re-establish a Taliban-type government. The future of Afghanistan in post-2014 era however largely depends on internal ethnic and political cohesion and the role of the neighbouring countries. The stability of Afghan institutions, including political parties, and the role of civil society in stepping up the pace of human development with minimum foreign assistance will contribute immensely to ensuring a bright future for the people of Afghanistan. Kabul's heavy dependence on foreign aid and assistance while not tapping domestic resources will not help gain political or economic stability.

The transition phase of US engagement in Afghanistan has numerous pitfalls ranging from the issue of security in the post-withdrawal period to the formation of a regime which is not corrupt and enjoys the support of different segments of society. Washington knows that Islamabad cannot be bypassed while formulating a new security mechanism for Afghanistan but its concerns about its perceived Taliban-Al-Qaeda influence in Pakistan cannot be underestimated. The road map for the normalization of Pak-US security and strategic ties needs to reach its logical conclusion.

Here it is interesting to observe the circumstances which led to the decision of Islamabad to reopen Nato supplies for Afghanistan which remained closed after the Salala incident in November 2011. After weeks of negotiations, the Obama administration announced on 3 July about the understanding reached with Pakistan government on the reopening of Nato supplies. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's "sorry"⁽³¹⁾ to Pakistan on the Salala raid casualties paved the way for Pakistan's decision to reopen the supplies. To what extent the breakthrough in Pak-US ties will impact on the US-Nato withdrawal from Afghanistan and how groups opposing the reopening of Nato supplies would react? Pakistan's tightrope walking on the US-led war on terror will also have its implications for future strategic and security cooperation between Washington-Kabul and Islamabad on pursuing counter-terrorism measures and denying space to militant and terrorist groups in the post-Nato withdrawal phase in Afghanistan.

Since Af-Pak has seldom been mentioned by Washington in the recent past, one can contemplate the review of that policy and its replacement by a new one. No final word has been given by the Obama administration on winding up the Af-Pak policy, but it seems the failures and adverse circumstances engulfing Pak-US relations since 2001 seem to have contributed to transforming Af-Pak from a proactive to stagnant form.

Two major factors which will shape the US policies impacting on Afghanistan and Pakistan relate to political dynamics in Pakistan and the United States. First, the outcome of US presidential elections scheduled for early November 2012 and the holding of national elections in Pakistan due in 2013. The fact that the Obama administration failed to take concrete policy steps on Afghanistan reflects the election dynamics in the United States. If President Obama is re-elected and is also able to get a majority in both Houses of Congress he will be able to pursue a more proactive approach on Afghanistan and Pakistan. Whereas, presidential elections results culminating into the defeat of his Democratic party may cause a major setback to Af-Pak policy under the

new US administration. As far as Pakistan is concerned, if political parties pursuing a clear anti-American policy on Afghanistan are able to win an electoral victory, it will have a far-reaching impact on Pakistan's relations with Washington, drone attacks on the tribal areas of Pakistan and the future of strategic-security ties with the United States. Second, the process of nation-building in Afghanistan is the need of the hour because, without removing the internal faultlines in that country, having stability and peace may remain an uphill task. Without focusing on securing the Afghan identity and good governance, the future of Afghanistan would remain chaotic with negative implications for neighbouring countries, including Pakistan.

Notes and References

1. See, Alissa J. Rubin, "Afghan capital confronts toll of attacks," in *International Herald Tribune*, The Global Edition of the *New York Times*, 17 April 2012. According to senior Afghan officials, "the attacks that immobilized much of Kabul and touched the capital cities of three eastern Afghan provinces ended Monday morning in all but one province with 38 of the attackers killed, 16 of them in Kabul." Also see, "attacks in Afghanistan," *The Economist*, London, 21 April 2012, p.34.
2. "Afghanistan and the United States Agreement, at last," *The Economist*, 28 April 2012, p.27.
3. Afghanistan was the only country which voted against Pakistan's admission to the United Nations on 30 September 1947 having its irredentist claim over the Pashtun territories located east of Durand Line.
4. Amin Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan: A History of Struggle and Survival* (New York: I.B. Tauras & Co. Ltd, 2004).
5. Jon Bonne, "Taliban launch spring offensive," *The Guardian Weekly*, London, 20 April 2012, p.4.
6. In September 1998, after the bombings in the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar-as-Salam, the Clinton administration conducted missile attacks on the perceived hideouts of Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda organization based in Afghanistan. These attacks however failed to cause any substantial damage to Al-Qaeda control and command system present in Afghanistan under the patronage of the Taliban regime led by Mullah Omar.
7. "Nato sets 'irreversible' road map to withdrawing troops from Afghanistan," in *The Telegraph*, 22 May 2012.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Christine Fair, "Clear, Build, Hold, Transfer: Can Obama's Afghan Strategy Work?" *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, Vol. 37, No. 3, 2010, pp. 113, 115.
10. Kevita R. Khory, "Assessing Af-Pak Strategy: Regional Perspectives on the Obama Administration's Foreign Policy in South Asia" in *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, Vol. 37, No. 3, 2010, p. 105. She further states that "in the short-term, the Obama administration's strategy in Afghanistan can claim only limited success by most measures. Despite the military surge and a vast expenditure of human and material resources, the Taliban insurgency is proving to be far more resilient than anticipated, and US and international forces have been forced to modify their tactics in areas such as Kandahar, Afghanistan's second largest city, because of much stiffer local opposition to military action than expected. See *Ibid.*, p.107.
11. "India linchpin in new US military strategy, says Panetta," *Dawn*, Karachi, 7 June 2012.

12. "Panetta's remarks unhelpful: FO" *Dawn*, 10 June 2012.
13. Ishtiaq Ahmed, "The US Af-Pak Strategy: Challenges and Opportunities for Pakistan," in *Asian Affairs. An American Review*, Vol. 37, No. 4, 2012, p. 192. On convergence of Pak-US interests at the time when Af-Pak policy was launched, he writes: "I agree that during the time the Af-Pak strategy has been in operation, the counterterrorism policies of the United States and Pakistan have converged in some areas, while noticeable incompatibilities remain in others. The convergence may be largely coincidental, as the enormity of domestic terrorist threat facing Pakistan and the country's military response to it have occurred simultaneously with the evolution of the Af-Pak strategy." *Ibid.*, p.192.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 193.
15. *Ibid.*, Further elaborating the major aspects of Af-Pak, he argues that, "the Af-Pak strategy is presumed to have evolve in accordance with the changing political and security realities in the two countries, although the review and policies formulated on its basis have thus far largely conformed to the strategy principles initially articulated. Given its evolutionary nature and the fact that it aims to defeat al-Qaeda and its allies simultaneously in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, the new US strategy has a great scope for adopting to new political realities of the two countries, besides reinforcing and re-shaping their respective counter-insurgency mechanisms. Af-Pak strategy is originally coined to adapt to intricate circumstantial realities in Afghanistan and Pakistan as they evolve is apparent from the manner in which the Obama administration has recently started to reach out to Pakistan's powerful military leadership and co-opt it in US counter-terrorism mission in the region" *Ibid.*, pp. 193-194, 201.
16. *Ibid.*, p.194.
17. "Af-Pak border security introduced," *Dawn*, 9 May 2009.
18. Emma Graham-Harrison and Ewen MacAskill, "Double blow to Nato's Afghanistan strategy," *The Guardian Weekly*, 23 March 2012, p.6.
19. Shahid Javed Burki, "Af-Pak policy a mistake" *Dawn*, 17 November 2009.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Quoted in, "Zardari rejects US Af-Pak strategy," *Dawn*, 11 September 2009.
22. Elisa Giunchi, "What is missing in Obama's Strategy Towards Af-Pak?" *The International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs*, <http://doi.org/10.1080/03932727.2010.489310>, accessed on 19 May 2012, p.12.
23. "Pakistan and the United States Bazaar bargaining," *The Economist*, 9 June 2012, p.31. According to the newsmagazine, "Mr. Libi's presumed death only deepened the rift between two supposed allies. Patriotic Pakistanis greatly resent the drone attacks over their territory.

The country's armed forces felt humiliated by the secret American raid on Abbottabad a year ago that got Osama bin Laden. They were furious that 24 soldiers manning a position on the border with Afghanistan were killed last November by American aircraft in a 'ghastly friendly fire' incident and the government demanded an apology it has yet to receive."

24. Ibid.
25. "American-Afghan relations: Over to you," *The Economist*, 14 April 2012, p.34. The night raids are deeply unpopular among ordinary Afghans. Mr. Karzai has long insisted that the raids, in which foreign troops often forcibly enter Afghan homes in search of insurgents, must either cease or be "Afghanized,." See, Ibid.
26. "US, India sign pact on Afghanistan," *Dawn*, 15 June 2012.
27. Anwar Iqbal, "US to allay Pakistan's concerns over new Afghan forum," *Dawn*, 18 June 2012.
28. Harsh V. Pant, "India's Af-Pak conundrum," *Orbis*, Winter 2012, p.100-105.
29. "Kayani asks Isaf commander to curb cross-border attacks," *Dawn*, 28 April 2012.
30. "Pak-Afghan soil not to be used," *Dawn*, 30 June 2012.
31. "Pakistan and America Making up, a bit," *The Economist*, 7 July 2012. The report further says that "after seven months of bitter haggling the word "sorry" has at last been uttered in Washington. That allows Pakistan to begin to restore its ties with America, after they were strained, almost to breaking, following the deaths, in November, of 24 Pakistani soldiers manning a post on the Afghan border".

STATE-BUILDING FOR PEACE: AFGHANISTAN FROM BONN 2001 TO BONN 2011

PROF NAYANI MELEGODA

Introduction

It is now over a decade that the US-led coalition forces ousted the Taliban regime in Kabul. During the past several years an Afghan-led US-initiated statebuilding exercise to establish positive peace in the country has continued. It has not been an easy task to change the war-torn society and get it to engage in democratic practices to establish peace. Afghanistan can be considered a prime case study where major peacebuilding agencies began emphasizing construction or strengthening legitimate governmental institutions or what is called “statebuilding” in order to build peace. This ambitious programme for sustainable peace in Afghanistan which in turn would contribute to peace in the world has been a costly task for the United States and its allied western governments. The venture has earned no credit from their war-weary voters. Neither the Afghans nor the United States traditional friend in the region, Pakistan, seem to be happy at the current turn of events. The United Nations experiment of its “light footprint” approach in post-conflict peacebuilding in the country failed miserably.

Already in preparation for the forthcoming presidential elections in the United States, the Obama administration is talking about early retreat from Afghanistan. As in the US, in France the outgoing leadership ran its re-election campaign projecting itself as the government that was bringing the boys home. The Afghan exercise — statebuilding for peacebuilding — cost the American taxpayers \$119 billion in 2011.⁽¹⁾ The US secretary of defense announced on 1 February 2012 that he hoped American troops in Afghanistan would be able to withdraw from combat to an ‘enabling’ role soon after the middle of next year,

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which would be 18 months earlier than the existing plan for the drawdown. It seems that US President is now bent on a speedy drawdown and further announcements are expected in the summer of 2012 prior to November 6th elections in US.

The reason for President Obama's change in Afghan policy is partly attributed to the forthcoming presidential election, and partly to the realization that the US has overstayed the welcome. Burning of the copies of the Quran at a US military base in Afghanistan early this year (there was a similar incident by a US pastor in April 2011) that sparked off the recent chain of violence only highlights the fact that the involvement in that country without an understanding of its culture was a mistake. Ten years is also a long time for foreign troops to be tolerated in a country.

America's main ally in South Asia since the early 1950s, Pakistan, is now considered as hostile in most American writings on Afghanistan. Since the killing of Osama bin Laden in a hideout near Pakistan's elite military academy in Abbottabad in May 2011, Pakistan's relations with the US got strained and deteriorated further when 24 Pakistani soldiers were killed and 13 others injured in a NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) airstrike on a checkpoint which occurred on a confused night of fighting which the Americans called an accident in November 2011. An angry and disillusioned Pakistan government announced that it would boycott the 2011 Bonn conference on Afghanistan. These events have put Pakistan's civilian government under undue pressure from its army in the months leading up to national election. Already the Pakistan Supreme Court has found fault with the Prime Minister's action over an incident dubbed as Memogate.⁽²⁾ A high-level diplomatic repair mission was sent by Washington to Pakistan in April 2012 to ease the strains and restore their former good relations.

Since most NATO partner countries are not keen to prolong their stay in Afghanistan, expediency in drawdown before its previously decided deadline is now a reality. Yet the lessons from the past must be kept in mind as the abrupt departures ignite civil wars. In the case of Afghanistan the Soviet withdrawal left behind an ill-equipped government to deal with the mujahedin which resulted in thousands of civilian deaths. Afghanistan deserves better. Perhaps now the time has come for South Asian neighbours who unlike the western coalition countries understand the local conditions of Afghanistan to take the lead in positive peacebuilding there.

Defining statebuilding and peacebuilding

Statebuilding is defined, by the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), as a purposeful action to develop the capacity, institutions and legitimacy of the state in relation to an effective political process for negotiating the mutual demands between the state and societal groups (the emphasis is on state-society negotiations). It further says that legitimacy will be a principal outcome of the effectiveness of such a process over time, although legitimacy may also be embedded in historical identities and institutions. Together, capacity and resources, institutions, legitimacy and an effective political process combine to produce resilience. Successful statebuilding will

almost always be the product of domestic action, but it can be significantly enabled by well-targeted and responsive international assistance.⁽³⁾

Those who devise and pursue statebuilding strategies need to appreciate the fact that states are comprised of more than formal institutions. To understand any contemporary state requires understanding the historical movements and moments that have shaped it, recognizing that the nature of the state is dynamic, and appreciating that the bargains and relationships that affect comparative weakness, fragility or failure are continually shifting and renewing.⁽⁴⁾

According to Roland Paris, who won the Grawemeyer award for ideas for improving world order (he won two other awards for the same work) for his famous work *At War's End: Building Peace After Civil Conflict*, peacebuilding is action undertaken at the end of a civil conflict to consolidate peace and prevent a recurrence of fighting. He further defines peacebuilding as nothing less than an enormous experiment in social engineering aimed at creating the domestic conditions for durable peace within countries just emerging from civil wars.⁽⁵⁾

In his landmark 1992 United Nations policy statement, *An Agenda for Peace*, former UN secretary general Boutros Boutros-Ghali defined peacebuilding as “action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in the aftermath of civil strife, with the ultimate goal of preventing a relapse into conflict.”⁽⁶⁾

Michael Barnett and Christoph Zurcher say that peacebuilding is statebuilding. Ultimately, peacebuilding aims at building: human security, a concept which includes democratic governance, human rights, rule of law, sustainable development, equitable access to resources, and environmental security. This multidimensional and highly intrusive undertaking involves a reconstruction of politics, economics, culture, and society, leaving no stone unturned. Standing behind peacebuilding is statebuilding.⁽⁷⁾

Afghan-led statebuilding in UN 'light-footprint' approach

At the defeat of Taliban as a result of the US-led operation 'Enduring Freedom' in 2001, a conference took place in Bonn to map the future of Afghanistan. Eighteen countries, including Afghanistan's neighbours, acted as observers. After nine days of intensive negotiations, the UN-sponsored talks in Bonn culminated in the signing of a series of agreements on Afghanistan, pending the re-establishment of permanent government institutions. The Bonn 2001 Agreements, officially negotiated and signed under the auspices of the UN and endorsed by United Nations Security Council (UNSC), outlined the work of statebuilding in Afghanistan targeting international community's twin goals in Afghanistan's future: statebuilding and peacebuilding.

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks on the United States, the motive of statebuilding in Afghanistan was to combat international terrorism, building the state as antidote of reversion of warfare as stated by Francis Fukuyama. It must be noted here that the Bonn agreements were victor's agreement and not a peace agreement, since if it was a peace agreement then the Taliban should have been

invited for talks as well. Also, the defeated Taliban were not invited to participate at Bonn discussions since the Afghan negotiators who attended the conference were selected by the US and not the UN.

It is remarkable that even after over two decades of war, weak and highly fragmented Afghanistan still had state institutions or previous experience of such institutions. Therefore, the Bonn 2001 conference decided that the statebuilding for peacebuilding in Afghanistan would be nationally led with international cooperation and funding. The Bonn participants also agreed that Afghanistan statebuilding for peacebuilding would be done in the way of new approach — “light footprint” — adopted by the United Nations the previous year.⁽⁸⁾ The Brahimi report, released in October 2000, provides the main frame of reference for discussion and reform of peacekeeping capacities within the UN, where the UN Secretariat successfully argued for a more modest role in the ‘means’ and ‘ends’ dimension of UN operations.⁽⁹⁾ In making the case for a limited UN role, Lakhdar Brahimi, appointed special UN envoy to Afghanistan in October 2001, resisted calls for a large and complex peacekeeping force to be sent to Afghanistan (like the ones sent to Cambodia and East Timor), arguing that the council should “not ‘rush’ into Afghanistan with a peacekeeping force that lacks the political and financial support required to succeed.”⁽¹⁰⁾ Therefore, the UN mission to Afghanistan in 2001 adopted the strategy, relying on Afghans with few international staff to assist so that transitional government run by the Afghans would have greater credibility.

The UN’s central principle in ‘light footprint’ approach was to rely on Afghan capabilities in statebuilding, so that the UN would work through the Afghan government providing more legitimacy in statebuilding with more civilians than military. It also meant no UN transitional administration in Afghanistan unlike other peacebuilding exercises undertaken by the UN.

Another reason behind the UN light footprint approach would also be that the UN during the decade of 1989-1999 deployed 33 peace operations across the world, more than double that the organization conducted in the previous four decades. It was also performing more complex and less familiar tasks.

From mid-1988 to early 1990 the UN Good Offices Mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan (UNGOMAP) operated in Afghanistan with staff not exceeding 50 military observers.⁽¹¹⁾ The United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSM) was established by the UN General Assembly with a mandate to get negotiations between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance resumed in an attempt to broker a ceasefire, thus first and foremost a diplomatic mission, and was supposed to be neutral between the various parties to the conflict. It was later directed by Lakhdar Brahimi, followed by Frances Vendrell in 2000-1.⁽¹²⁾

Further, in March 2002, UNSC resolution 1401 established United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) with a mandate to ensure full-scale implementation of Bonn agreements. The UNAMA mandate, as it developed over time, included constitutional reform, reconstruction, initiatives

on gender issues, and new human rights institutions.⁽¹³⁾ The above are the main UN commissions operating in Afghanistan in the ‘light footprint’ approach.

With the escalation in violence and with elusive peace, doubts are raised on the viability and effectiveness of the light footprint approach. In a country where physical geography, traditions and culture separate its citizen from the centre of power, light footprint administration was not able to reach the people in remote areas, in the drug trade or to prevent Taliban regrouping from their hideouts. As early as 2004 Roland Paris wrote that the light footprint approach was ineffective.⁽¹⁴⁾ The modest role of the international agencies did not prevent the warlords from remaining in control. The light footprint approach to peacebuilding in Afghanistan seemed by its very nature to be incapable of addressing this problem.⁽¹⁵⁾

Establishing democracy

The Bonn agreement provisions included establishing institutions like the judiciary, the army and the police force, the constitutional commission, the election commission, banking, the drug enforcement directorate and disarming and demobilizing militias, drafting of a new constitution, fighting terrorism, drugs and organized crime, repatriation and resettlement of refugees, and other related subjects. The agreement sought to find a solution to the country’s monetary crisis by authorizing the establishment of a new central bank capable of accounting procedures for the issuance of currency. For the first time in history Afghan authorities were required to establish a human rights commission. The entire process aimed at supporting to establish a multi-ethnic, fully representative government, elected through free and fair elections by the people of Afghanistan.

Thus the Bonn agreement laid the foundation for statebuilding for peace in earnest in introducing mechanisms to establish security, legitimacy, public finance and economic policy making and justice and the rule of law. An Afghan Interim Authority (AIA) was established upon the official transfer of power on 22 December 2001. Having proven to the Afghan delegation his capability and sincerity, Hamid Karzai became an acceptable candidate to head the AIA; of course he was selected by the US and supported by Pakistan.

The main task of the AIA was to convene an Emergency Loya Jirga (ELJ) or the Grand Council of Elders to decide matters of political and national importance. It is also important to note here that for the first time in its history women entered the political life of Afghanistan — among the 1000-strong delegates of the ELJ, 200 selected were women. The task of the ELJ was to select an Afghan Transitional Administration (ATA) to run the country until the national elections were held. Behind the scene the US officials worked to ensure that the former king of Afghanistan, Mohammed Zahir Shah, made way for Karzai to be reconfirmed as head of state at the ATA.

Next was the appointment of the Constitutional Loya Jirga (CLJ) to draft a new constitution. It convened its first meeting on 14 December 2003 and used the 1964 Constitution as the basis for drafting a new constitution. The 502-member CLJ presented a 162-article Constitution which provides for a

presidential form of government with bicameral legislature, Meshrano Jirga (upper house) and Wolesi Jirga (lower house).⁽¹⁶⁾ An independent Election Commission (IEC) was also established under Article 156 of the Constitution. The 2004 Constitution defined the parameters for national elections, the final stage of Bonn 2001.

The presidential election date was set for 9 October 2004. The UNAMA was given the responsibility of the election process and its supervision together with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and together they managed all resource mobilization and donor relations for the presidential election followed by parliamentary elections in 2004 and 2005. UNAMA also facilitated some two million refugees in Pakistan and Iran to vote in the presidential elections. Hamid Karzai was elected President with 56 per cent of the vote from nearly 70 per cent turnout of the registered electorate.⁽¹⁷⁾

The Bonn 2001 process ended with the parliamentary elections, the road map was successful on the above. A democratically elected government was in place. As the general assumption of peacebuilders (western) is that democratization and marketization would foster domestic peace, the Afghans were on their way to establishing sustainable peace.

Steps towards disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration

The key to statebuilding for peace is DDR — disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. In late 2001 all Afghans had grown war-weary and the Taliban appeared to be defeated. There was a window of opportunity to commence DDR activities. Yet the Bonn agreements did not accord demilitarization a central status (keeping up with light footprint strategy). The DDR was painfully slow to commence. As noted before, a UNSC resolution authorized ISAF, a non-UN led international security force, to provide security for the political process until Afghan security institutions could be developed. Its presence stabilized the capital Kabul but this security was not shared by the rest of the country. The call for a greater ISAF went unheeded until August 2003 when NATO assumed control of ISAF in its first New NATO beyond European theatre operation.

A comprehensive vision of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) considers it as a holistic, long-term development process rather than a discrete and time-bound activity with disarmament as a logistical component. This vision of the DDR has led some analysts and practitioners to suggest a new definition of DDR which focuses on finding alternatives for weapons possession and use, and improving community security by enhancing livelihood opportunities through social and economic investment in the community. This broader conception of DDR opens a range of options to violence reduction strategies that go beyond the physical collection of weapons.⁽¹⁸⁾ The fundamental goal in DDR is to breakdown military formations and initiate reintegration to provide basic tools for former combatants to re-enter civilian life. Demilitarization is the key to peacebuilding but it is a highly

politically sensitive process. Hence it is a political exercise which demands political will of all parties concerned to succeed.

The Afghans themselves were keen on demilitarization. The first donor conference to fund DDR held two years after the Bonn conference in Tokyo in 2003 titled “Consolidation of Peace (DDR) in Afghanistan — Change of Order from Guns to Plows.”⁽¹⁹⁾ DDR was initiated in February 2003 with Japan as the lead nation (Japan had no prior experience in DDR except maybe rebuilding its own country after World War II). Implementation of the programme started in October 2003 through pilot projects and became national by May 2004. DDR had two main goals: to break the historical patriarchal chain of command existing between the former commanders and their men and to provide the demobilized personnel with the ability to become economically independent — the ultimate objective being to reinforce the authority of the government.

However, the DDR programme in Afghanistan was never mandated to disarm the population per se or provide direct employment but to assist militants in transition from military into civilian occupations.⁽²⁰⁾ The total amount of funding was \$141 million, out of which the lead donors, Japan and the US, committed \$91 million.⁽²¹⁾ It goes on record as being one of the most ambitious and expensive DDR programmes in history. It was named the “Afghan New Beginning Programme (ANBP)” project designed by the UNDP and was accompanied with Disarmament of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) in 2004. The implementation of the ANBP was carried out by Japan and the UNDP.

The DDR process in Afghanistan was completed in July 2006 — in time and within costs (US\$ 141 million). In addition, as the reintegration phase was brought to an end, 25 per cent of the ex-combatants have found a long-term and sustainable activity.⁽²²⁾ The statistics shows a positive picture, but a few years later the insurgency was seen to be on the rise again.

There was a delay in the start of the DDR programme and as a result by 2006 the Taliban reignited the insurgency from their safe havens in the borderland tribal areas resulting in many illegal armed groups (IAGs) everywhere. A RAND study identified several groups of insurgents apart from the revitalized Taliban. They were the Hezb-i-Islami (HiG), the Haqqani network, foreign fighters and local tribes.⁽²³⁾ The RAND study by Seth G. Jones, also gives reasons for the re-emergence of the insurgency as the failure in building competent and legitimate Afghan security forces. The Afghan Police, which was corrupt, incompetent, under-resourced and loyal to local commanders than to the central government was one reason. Secondly, the local governance in the south and east was ignored for security reasons.

In 2006 the insurgent attacks included suicide bombings, a tactic previously not known in Afghanistan and late May 2006 was recorded as the deadliest week in the country in five years. The Taliban became strong in the provinces of Oruzgan, Helmand, Zabol and Kandahar. Resurgent Taliban, Al Qaeda and HiG insurgency appeared to be to force the US military to fight the war according to the “Taliban game plan.”⁽²⁴⁾

Mark Sedra attributes the failure of DDR to the lack of political will of the Afghan government, the donor community and the local power-brokers. The

key success to DDR would have been from the local ownership, and the programme should have been carried out by local government actors with the support and mentoring of external actors.⁽²⁵⁾ The Ministry of Defence resisted demobilization insisting on demobilization of the reserves than full-time soldiers and withdrew from the process fairly early. Sedra further says the design of the DDR was flawed with no comprehensive needs assessment nor effective monitoring and evaluation mechanism. The role of the United States too undermined the DDR when the US undercut the demilitarization activities in the mobilization of militia proxies in south and east to support its anti-Taliban operations.⁽²⁶⁾

Japan as the lead donor or lead nation (an arrangement that encouraged sector ownership, ensured commitment but the division of responsibility did not guarantee that donor strategies would be collaborative) undertook the DDR implementing a technically proficient programme with the UNDP with Tokyo having no prior experience in DDR activities. Though its ministry of foreign affairs says that the DDR in Afghanistan is successful it does not really elaborate and enlighten on the matter or talks of its DDR experience in Afghanistan.

Instead the second Tokyo conference congratulated all stakeholders on the completion of DDR in June 2006. The DDR programme disarmed 63,380 ex-combatants, demobilized 62,044 and provided reintegration programmes for 55,804 that also contributed to the creation of a new, unified and professional national army for Afghanistan. The conference paid special tribute to those Afghan and international stakeholders who had made great efforts for the success of the DDR programme. Among others, ANBP was particularly commended for the excellent service it had rendered in this regard.⁽²⁷⁾ It further examined the current status of implementation of the DIAG programme. The conference was not entirely satisfied with the progress made thus far and requested that Afghan and international stakeholders further enhance their efforts so that DIAG might be completed by the end of 2007. In particular, the conference stressed the need for robust engagement in the DIAG process by the Afghan security organizations, namely, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and the National Directorate for Security.⁽²⁸⁾

The failure in DDR, deep ethnic tensions in the Afghan Army and American distraction of the Iraq war reignited the insurgency. In this backdrop the surge took place when newly elected US President Obama ordered 30,000 more troops to Afghanistan in late 2009.⁽²⁹⁾

It is worth noting that from the Japanese government's point of view their attempt at DDR in Afghanistan was not such a great success as the Japanese government and its taxpayers would have hoped for.⁽³⁰⁾ A young Japanese volunteer wrote that the reintegration through vocational training and community development projects overwhelmingly concentrated on children (back-to-school campaigns and school reconstruction) with little attention paid to the youth.⁽³¹⁾

Security sector reforms (SSR)

The five pillars of security sector reform (SSR) were managed by a lead donor country: Japan for DDR, the United States for training of the Afghan National Army (ANA), Germany for training the Afghan National Police (ANP), Italy for legal reform, and the United Kingdom for counternarcotics. ANA was created replacing the AMF which was formed at the fall of Taliban with a collection of factional militias on MoD payroll.

Although Afghanistan has a relatively long tradition of having a national army, it has a much longer tradition of tribal militias. The aim of ANA was to provide the central government with a loyal and professional armed force.

In the initial stages of the process, the AIA and the United States, as lead nation, needed to decide whether to build the new ANA from scratch or to build on some of the existing structures. This decision was postponed until September 2003 when they decided to commence the process from a “tabula rasa,” meaning that all structures from the MoD to the ground units were to be built from scratch.⁽³²⁾ The United States encountered recruiting problems, high absentees without leave, issues with ethnic balance, and poor unit discipline and quality. But by 2005 the ANA was emerging as a relative success.

By 2008 ANA had recruited nearly 79,000 soldiers, and the goal of 122,000 personnel plus an additional 12,000 in training, transient, holding, and student status seems possible, even if it is somewhat difficult.⁽³³⁾ An enduring concern is the ethnic makeup of the ANA. Developing an ethnically balanced army was one of the key goals of the training programme. After years of civil war and mistrust among various groups in Afghanistan, achieving an ethnic balance has been a significant challenge.⁽³⁴⁾ A priority is to get more recruits to ANA from the Pushtun-speaking parts of the south. The top leadership in ANA is currently heavy with northern Tajiks.

The people of Afghanistan view the army positively. While the overall perception of security has declined recently, the ANA is seen as a positive force in providing security. The perception of the police is, however, much less positive.

After years of training and other support offered by international sources, under German coordination and Indian training, by 2005 some 50,000 trained officers were inducted into the newly reconstructed ANP.⁽³⁵⁾ The training improved the quality of policing and the accompanying pay raise has helped boost their morale. However, shortage of professional administrators and keeping the corrupt factionalized police commanders in their posts are factors that have made the ANP a much less success compared to ANA. Hence the ANP is seen as less well trained, frequently corrupt and often guilty of human-rights abuses. In a survey done in 2009 it was estimated that 60 per cent of the ANP in Helmand province were drug addicts.⁽³⁶⁾

In his inaugural speech after his re-election in 2009, President Karzai emphasized the need for ANA and ANP taking up lead roles in providing security and stability. In the backdrop of drawdown and transition which started in 2011 with the withdrawal of 10,000 American troops and a further large

number expected to leave before the US presidential elections in late 2012, President Karzai sought a 10-year strategic partnership agreement with the United States and got it.⁽³⁷⁾

The Italian-led judicial reforms and the attempt to establish the rule of law in Afghanistan was another of the biggest challenges facing statebuilding efforts. The judiciary was destroyed in the 23 years of conflict and abuse of power. Instead of the rule of law, it was mostly the rule of the gun that prevailed. In practice, most disputes were settled by the *jirgas* (elders councils) using both local customs and Islamic Sharia as the sources of law. During the Taliban period it was rough justice for most people.

Therefore, in 2001 Afghanistan had only a handful of trained lawyers and little physical infrastructure with no record of country's law. Successive regimes imposed traditional, informal justice practices most of the time for political ends with no protection for the right of the individual to a fair trial. The challenges in rectifying the situation were enormous in the face of insecurity, rampant corruption and bribery and intimidation of judges and prosecutors.

The Bonn 2001 agreements saw to the establishment of independent commissions to oversee the rebuilding of the judiciary (Judicial Reforms Commission), drafting of the constitution (discussed above) and monitoring of human rights (Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, AIHRC). Unfortunately for the Judicial Reforms Commission, neither the Office of the Attorney General nor the Ministry of Justice want to cooperate with it. Judicial reforms also suffered from the Italian initiative depending on foreign experts unfamiliar with the Afghan context and its aim of modernizing the Afghan judiciary without due consideration paid to tribal and traditional institutions.

The process also suffered at the hands of Fazal Hadi Shinwari, the 80-year-old Islamic scholar who was Afghanistan's chief justice from 2001, reappointed by President Karzai in 2002 (despite the stipulated age of 60 laid down in the constitution) to serve until 2006. The International Crisis Group (ICG) reported in 2003 that Shinwari put all political allies in key positions expanding the number of Supreme Court judges from 9 to 137 with no proper educational qualifications. Since he was an ally of the Saudi-backed fundamentalist leader Abd-al-Rasul Sayyaf there was fear that the hardliners had taken over the judicial reforms before the people could express their will in a democratic process.⁽³⁸⁾

In a 2010 report the ICG had this to say: "Afghanistan's justice system is in a catastrophic state of disrepair. Despite repeated pledges over the last nine years, the majority of Afghans still have little or no access to judicial institutions. Lack of justice has destabilized the country and judicial institutions have withered to near non-existence. Many courts are inoperable and those that do function are understaffed. Insecurity, lack of proper training and low salaries has driven many judges and prosecutors from their jobs. Those who remain are highly susceptible to corruption. Indeed, there is very little that is systematic about the legal system, and there is little evidence that the Afghan government has the resources or political will to tackle the challenge. The public, consequently, has no confidence in the formal justice sector amid an atmosphere

of impunity.”⁽³⁹⁾ To date the progress in building the foundations of the rule of law has been disappointing. Most women lack access to justice and are still severely restricted by cultural norms.

In contrast to judicial reforms, the AIHRC has emerged as a strong national advocate for human rights of the people. It is the principal human rights body in Afghanistan. It works with the UNAMA. Though the Afghan parliament passed an amnesty law in 2007 preventing the prosecuting of past war crimes, the AIHRC continues its work as a strong national advocate for human rights with authority. It has worked to inform all government and non-government organizations, civil societies, and the national and local media about human rights and formally advocated human rights principles. In 2009, the AIHRC intensified its efforts to increase its overall effectiveness and impact in the protection, promotion and monitoring of human rights. As a result its four-year Strategic Plan (2009-2013) was developed.⁽⁴⁰⁾

Afghan economy

Afghanistan like its counterparts in South Asia is an agricultural country. It is one of the poorest countries in the world. There are two main challenges that are to blame for the failure in its agricultural economy. One is the weather, extreme drought conditions that result in poor harvest; and the other is opium poppy cultivation which had been difficult to eradicate despite the efforts of the British counternarcotics programme conducted under SSR spending \$180 million as the lead donor to eradicate the cultivation with the US, too, spending another \$120⁽⁴¹⁾ The concentration of effort has been on eradication with little input on establishing alternative livelihoods. The eradication programme had negative impacts when the reduced opium supply benefited the suppliers who profited more from higher prices. This fuelled the spread of cultivation.

The Afghan government has not yet been able to control the booming illicit agricultural economy based on harvesting opium poppies for the drug trade, with the profits financing the insurgency and violent extremism. Promoting the growth of legitimate agriculture would have positive effects including providing jobs, encouraging economic growth, and slowing the drug trade which now serves as a major source of funding for the Taliban.⁽⁴²⁾ At present it is the poppy cultivation and drug trafficking that constitute a large part of the country’s economic activity. Afghanistan’s illicit opium trade had an estimated value of \$2.8 billion in 2009, equivalent to one-quarter of its GDP.⁽⁴³⁾

The world’s largest poppy production is in Afghanistan. Opium poppy is then refined to produce more potent heroin and morphine. The illegal drug economy is a complicating factor in statebuilding as the state institutions have neglected their responsibility by not providing security, border police within local administration. The nexus between drugs, insecurity, warlords, and weak government is a profound threat to sustainable peace.

The World Bank says that since 2002-03 the country has seen average growth rates in the double digits, but with great volatility because of its heavy reliance on agriculture. Even with an uncertain and deteriorating security

situation, strong output was driven by increased donor spending — a 24 per cent increase in core budget donor grants and about US\$ 4 billion in off-budget donor funding — and recovery from the severe drought of 2008-09. Last year's harvest led to agriculture output growth of 36 per cent (constant 2002-03 prices) and the non-agricultural component of 14 per cent. Afghanistan's real GDP growth in 2009-10 was at 22.5 per cent which was a record.⁽⁴⁴⁾

Though statistics paint a positive picture, the ground reality is contrasting. Many Afghans live on less than \$1.25 a day, and it is one of the two fragile states in South Asia and the poorest country outside Africa. Out of 187 countries in the HDI (Human Development Index) of the UNDP, Afghanistan ranked 172 in the low human development category in 2011.⁽⁴⁵⁾

Public finance which is taxing and spending activities of a government and their influence on the allocation of resources and distribution has been limited mainly to the external assistance given to Afghanistan since Bonn 2001. The Afghan Assistance Coordination Authority was created to track the flow of resources from donors to the government. The progress achieved in most aspects of public finance management so far is fragile and excessively dependent on unsustainable external capacity. A new central bank was established to oversee the monetary policy. One of the biggest challenges faced by the government is generating and self-sustaining the revenue levels.

Public finance suffers from the extremely low revenues and is a big concern. Afghanistan's revenue to gross domestic product (GDP) ratio (below 5 per cent) is one of the lowest in the world — it would be even lower if the opium economy were included in the GDP — well below half the level achieved by most poor countries. Only around 8 per cent of total budgetary spending is covered by domestic revenue. This constitutes a major constraint and liability for the country.⁽⁴⁶⁾

A taxation policy styled after the US system was introduced since Bonn 2001 but the tax collection system remains completely broken down. Though the tax laws are in existence, there is no proper enforcement where government could collect its revenues.

Challenge to democracy in 2009

The first cracks in the statebuilding venture appeared in the presidential election of 2009 which was marked in contrast with the 2004 presidential election. The first problem that popped up was the date of the election. The date that should have been in May 2009 but was postponed by the IEC in view of the resurgence of Taliban terrorist activities and the security risk provoked controversy. The IEC therefore fixed the election date to 20 August 2009, a few months after the expiry of President Karzai's term, though constitutionally it should have been 60 days before the end of the five-year term. The Supreme Court extended Karzai's term until a new leader got elected. The next issue that arose was that all the Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran were facilitated to vote in the 2004 election while in 2009 the IEC failed to make that arrangement citing lack of funding as a reason. The new Constitution stipulates that the winning candidate should have more than 50 per cent of the vote.⁽⁴⁷⁾ Hence the

absence of the refugee vote would make an impact on the outcome, it was argued.

The Independent Election Commission noted that there were 17 million registered voters.⁽⁴⁸⁾ The major parties were: the National United Front of Afghanistan (UNF); National Democratic Front (NDF); Payman-e-Kabul, comprising former Leftist and Maoist groups, and the Afghan Social Democratic Party (Afghan Mellat). It may be correct to assume that the main objective of most of these parties was to strengthen democracy. According to IEC there were 44 candidates.⁽⁴⁹⁾ The top two were Hamid Karzai and Dr. Abdullah Abdullah.

Both Karzai and Abdullah claimed victory having obtained 50 per cent of the vote. There were allegations and counter-allegations of vote rigging, fake polling stations where no one voted and other fraudulent activities. As a result a serious crisis developed and with allegations and complaints mounting the international actors had no option but to get involved to avert a disaster in the newfound democracy. Hotline diplomacy got started between the US and Afghanistan and the UK and Afghanistan and there were visits by American and French top diplomats who met the two leaders and at the end it was decided to go for a run-off in November 2009 considering substantiated proofs of fraudulent conduct of the polls.

On 1 November, Dr. Abdullah withdrew from the run-off leading to IEC cancelling the run-off and declaring Hamid Karzai President for the second time. Abdullah's announcement threw the election into disarray, with some analysts describing the situation as "a shocking failure" of efforts by the west and other international communities to build a democracy in Afghanistan.⁽⁵⁰⁾ Going from bad to worse, the parliamentary election the following year was also hit by a fraud and irregularity crisis. President Karzai has insisted that he would not run for presidency in 2014. So as Roland Paris says the rapid liberalization without adequate attention to the building of effective institutions is a risky strategy. In Afghanistan the efforts in this direction remain relatively insubstantial.⁽⁵¹⁾

‘Exit Afghanistan’ plan

In the list of agents of peacebuilding Roland Paris names the world's leading international organizations. He also says that almost all are predisposed to adopt strategies promoting liberal market democracy as a remedy for conflict. One such is the NATO which in 1992 decided to reorient its activities to support conflict resolution and in 1994 established the "Partnership for Peace" programme.⁽⁵²⁾ The Washington Summit in 1999 established the "new" NATO capable of operating beyond the European theatre to combat emerging threats such as terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Afghanistan is NATO's first "out of area" mission beyond the European theatre. Its mandate in Afghanistan was stabilization and reconstruction. In the pursuit of that objective it leads the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) which at present comprises 130,000 soldiers of whom 90,000 are American.⁽⁵³⁾ The huge American military presence created suspicion among the Muslim fundamentalists and also in Iran which has its own problems with that country.

Hence when the insurgency resurged midway through the statebuilding for peace process many NATO members had doubts and worries over the security of their troops. At the same time the economic crisis that struck the US and Europe also saw the public turning away from international commitments to demand their governments to solve the immediate problems of finances at home. President Obama made two statements in March and December 2009 to say that there would be a boost in American troops in Afghanistan but he also mentioned in December 2009 that the US would also start withdrawing its troops in 2011. The Dutch troops were the first to quit Afghanistan in August 2010.

Just before that in July 2010 Wikileaks published thousands of classified US military documents relating to Afghanistan. A new NATO commander, General David Petraeus, was appointed.

To discuss the exit plan for ISAF/NATO a conference was held in Kabul on 20 July 2010. Dubbed the “Kabul Process,” the international conference discussed the future of Afghanistan setting the date for exit in 2014. The communiqué issued on the conference stipulates that the Afghan government would take over the full responsibility for country’s security by the end of 2014.⁽⁵⁴⁾ The conference was the critical stepping stone of the “Kabul Process” of transition to full Afghan leadership and responsibility.

Next, the discussion on the future of Afghanistan in a regional setting took place in Istanbul, Turkey, on 2 November 2011 titled the “Istanbul Process on Regional Security and Cooperation for a Secure and Stable Afghanistan.” The countries that called themselves the “Heart of Asia”⁽⁵⁵⁾ took part in the conference. The US and other Bonn signatories welcomed the declaration of the Istanbul process which supported the transition of responsibilities for providing security in Afghanistan from ISAF/NATO to ANSF in the framework of the “Kabul Process,” and remained convinced that progress to be made between now and 2014 when transition will be completed.⁽⁵⁶⁾

NATO’s heads of states, who met in a Lisbon summit on 20 November 2011 to discuss NATO’s future course, took up the issue of strategy and transfer of security responsibilities to Afghan forces and confirmation of withdrawal in 2014. The Lisbon summit declaration, paragraph 4, recorded that “the process of transition to full Afghan security responsibility and leadership in some provinces and districts is on track to begin in early 2011, following a joint Afghan and NATO/ISAF assessment and decision. Transition will be conditions-based, not calendar-driven, and will not equate to withdrawal of ISAF troops. Looking to the end of 2014, Afghan forces will be assuming full responsibility for security across the whole of Afghanistan.”⁽⁵⁷⁾

In this backdrop the Bonn 2011 was held in December, almost a decade after the first. The conference aim was to commit the international community’s support to Afghanistan after 2014 in a number of areas including prevention of violence from reaching intolerable levels again, to help the government develop its capacity to provide the services that its citizens depend on, in particular a less corrupt and more efficient system of administering justice, to create scope for economic progress including exploitation of the country’s plentiful mineral and energy resources and, finally, to send a clear message to Afghanistan’s

neighbours that the country is not going to be abandoned as happened in the past.⁽⁵⁸⁾

Prior to the conference some incidents that occurred (as mentioned in the introduction) severely strained the relations between the US and Pakistan, its friend and ally in South Asia. Therefore Pakistan boycotted the Bonn 2011. The Americans also invited the Taliban for talks about opening of an office in Qatar with no indication of this to Pakistan which supported the US war on terror in Afghanistan.

The year 2012 started with rapid deterioration of trust between NATO/ISAF forces and the Afghan people. Among many incidents that contributed to this situation was the incident of burning of the Quran at the Bagram airfield in February, killing of American advisers in a joint-command centre at the interior ministry, the killing of 16 Afghans that included nine children by an American soldier who went on a murderous rampage in Kandahar (the incident was reminiscent of the My-Lai massacre in Vietnam) resulted in Taliban suspending their talks on 15 March⁽⁵⁹⁾ and President Karzai calling for NATO-led forces to keep out of Afghan villages.⁽⁶⁰⁾

So despite the NATO's Lisbon statement on a conditions-based rather than a calendar-driven drawdown or the Bonn 2011 commitment on not abandoning Afghanistan like before (meaning after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989) it looks that the NATO is now stepping up the withdrawal of its troops in view of the violence that is taking place as well as the forthcoming presidential election in the US. The feeling in NATO countries is that Afghanistan is a hopeless case, too dangerous to help. The feeling in South Asia is that it is the liberal peacebuilding that does not work but there is hope for hybrid peace in Afghanistan.

Conclusion

In the exercise of Afghan nationally-led statebuilding for peace with great hopes for South Asia, the western countries ventured into Afghanistan by committing large amounts of aid with great hopes in one of the biggest statebuilding exercises for peace in world history with \$286.4 billion investment by 2010.⁽⁶¹⁾ External assistance became the main source of income in post-Taliban Afghanistan but the large-scale corruption at almost all levels of government, the tribal rivalries, militia groups, warlords and the centuries old opium economy were the challenges that the donors did not easily understand.

As Roland Paris notes, a more sensible approach to post-conflict peacebuilding would seek, first, to establish a system of domestic institutions that are capable of managing the destabilizing effects of democratization and marketization within peaceful bounds and, second, to phase in political and economic reforms slowly over time, as conditions warrant. To do this effectively, international peacebuilders will have to abandon the notion that war-shattered states can be hurriedly rehabilitated.⁽⁶²⁾

Yet development goals of education, health sector reforms, establishing democratic form of government all were readily welcomed by the Afghan people. In the process media freedom and television have now become a part of

life. Women became free once again to access education, and taking part in policy-making and in running government. Therefore the fading hope for democracy is not because the Afghan people themselves were not genuine in their quest for peace but rather a case of trust being broken. Among the Afghans there is determination to avoid a relapse into civil war. A big test will be in 2014 to see whether President Karzai will keep his promise not to run for presidency.

The US and its western allies rushed into Afghanistan; similarly, now they are rushing out of it; the NATO is not very clear on its strategy anymore except that American, British and French leaders are keen to point out that an end to their commitment to Afghanistan is in sight. Now it is time for Afghanistan's neighbours to take the necessary steps to build sustainable peace in that country. In this context Pakistan will have a major role to play in future statebuilding ventures for peace in Afghanistan. It is necessary for peace and stability of Pakistan too.

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INDO-PAKISTAN TRADE RELATIONS: NEED FOR FASTER IMPROVEMENT

BADAR ALAM IQBAL AND IQBAL TABISH

Introduction

Regional trade has been found to be the most effective and efficient way of bringing progress and prosperity to countries in a region. This is the reason for the emergence of regional trading blocs namely the European Union (EU), North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) and Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN). This is the right time for India and Pakistan to be thinking about strengthening the South Asian regional trading bloc.

The South Asian region has strategic significance for Asia and the rest of the world.. This notion has also been recognized by the United States of America. Accordingly, the Obama administration has attached greater importance to this region and the US has been pressurizing both India and Pakistan to make collective and concerted efforts for the development of the South Asian region. There is no option for both countries but, to help each other, and develop the required degree of mutual cooperation to accelerate growth and development of South Asia.

India's economy is key to the emergence of South Asia as one of the world's most powerful regional blocs. It accounts for 75 per cent of South Asia's total population and 82 per cent of its combined GDP (US\$ 4.10 trillion of US\$ 4.96 trillion, at Purchasing Power Parity). How can India provide leadership to the region beyond the dated, bureaucratic confines of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)? Pakistan's granting of most favoured nation (MFN) status to India is a starting point. At an average annual GDP growth rate of 7.5 per cent, India's economy would more than double in 10 years to over US\$ 8.50 trillion. Pakistan's own economy — even

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assuming annual GDP growth at 4 per cent (twice its current rate) — will be just US\$ 0.70 trillion 1/12th of India's GDP. These statistics provide a realistic future for the economies of India, Pakistan and the rest of South Asia.

The future global geopolitical scenario would be dominated by three economic zones, namely the American Economic Zone, bridging the Atlantic from North and South America to Europe; the Chinese Economic Zone, tracing an arc across the Pacific Ocean; and the Indian Economic Zone, sweeping through South Asia to West Asia and Africa. Hence, positive and constructive trade relations between India and Pakistan are imperative.⁽¹⁾

Trends in trade

While sentiments and emotions are strong on both sides, the mindset seems to be changing for the better. Unmindful of the political tensions between the two nations, the man on the street and traders from India and Pakistan have strongly pitched for keeping trade and politics separate from each other.

All business organizations across the borders are of the opinion that trade between India and Pakistan should get priority over politics and political tensions should not be allowed to create obstacles for economic development. Accordingly, the fruits of growth, development and prosperity should be shared between the two neighbours rather than letting any third economy take advantage of it.⁽²⁾

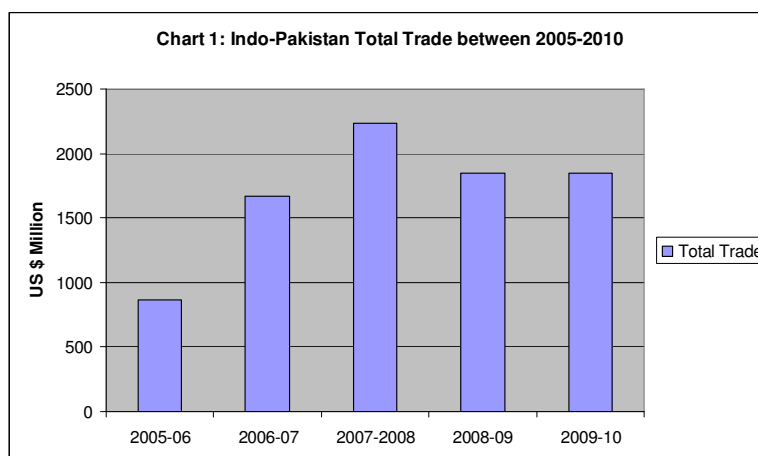
India and China have border issues and tensions, but trade between them is booming. The question then is that why can this not happen in the case of India and Pakistan. Hence, governments of both India and Pakistan should de-link economic and commercial relations from politics so that both economies would be able to share their untapped economic potential.

Pakistan has a limited approved list of commodities for bilateral trade. Between 2004 and 2008, Indo-Pakistan trade went up by a huge margin of 550 per cent and touched an all-time high figure of US\$ 2,239 million. However, in 2008-09 bilateral trade declined by more than 19 per cent. Its total value amounted to US\$ 1,810 million during 2008-09, considered below the expected level. But in 2009-10 there was a marginal improvement with the figure reaching \$1,849 (Table I). During 2010-11 there was an appreciable increase in total trade. Since 2004 Indo-Pakistan trade in terms of total trade has continued to fluctuate [Chart 1].

Table 1**Emerging Trends in Indo-Pakistan Trade from 2005-2010**

Year	Total Trade (US\$, Million)
2005-06	869
2006-07	1674
2007-08	2239
2008-09	1810
2009-10	1849
2010-11	2666

Source: The Economic Times, New Delhi, 5 September 2011



Source: The Economic Times, New Delhi, 5 September 2011

The bulk of bilateral trade between India and Pakistan is held through Attari/Wagha border

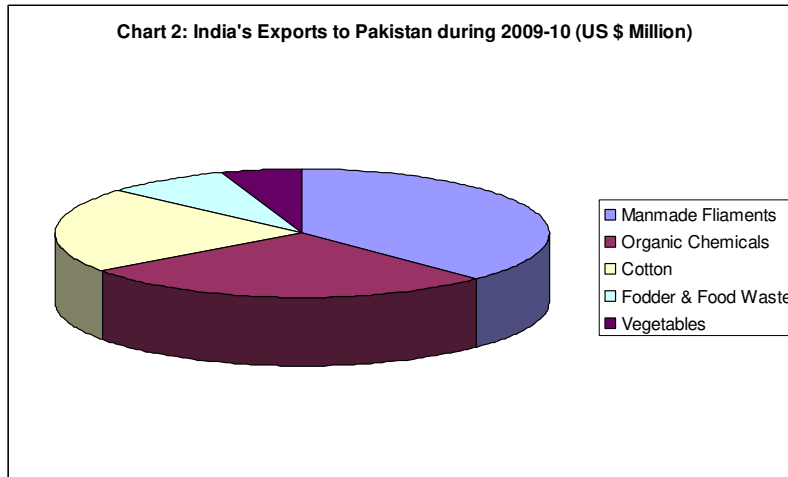
Table 2**Indo-Pakistan Trade through Attari/Wagha border**

Year	Attari Road Land Custom Station (Value in Rupees Crore)		Attari Rail Cargo Land Custom Station (Value in Rupees Crore)	
	Exports	Imports	Exports	Imports
2008-09	421.18	410.30	588.55	491.22
2009-10	395.92	798.05	417.89	640.36
2010-11	452.86	1170.46	306.31	892.23

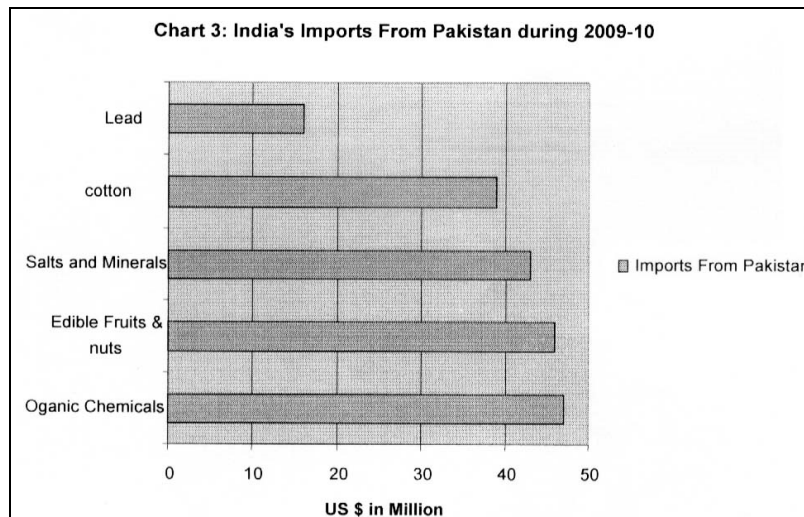
Source: Rajya Sabha Secretariat, Government of India, New Delhi

India's exports to Pakistan went up by 9.2 per cent during 2009-10 and touched a level of US\$ 1,573 million, while India's imports from Pakistan declined by 25.4 per cent and amounted to US\$ 270 million.⁽³⁾ This is because India and Pakistan have failed to capitalize on the potential that each country has to offer the other.

India's major exports to Pakistan are manmade filaments, organic chemicals, cotton fodder and food waste and vegetables. India's major imports from Pakistan are organic chemicals, fruits and nuts, salts and minerals and lead (see Charts 2 and 3).



Source: The Economic Times, New Delhi, 5 September 2011



Source: The Economic Times, New Delhi, 5 September 2011

A status paper on Indo-Pakistan business relations opines that, with a proper trade environment both micro and macro, India's trade with Pakistan could be enhanced to a total value of US\$3-4 billion. This also incorporates the legalization of US\$2 billion of unofficial trade. This could be possible if hostility between the two countries is removed and a conducive trade environment is created. The major sectors where there is a high degree of potential for increasing bilateral trade include: engineering industry, transport equipment, tea, pharmacy, textile machinery, tyres, chemicals, plastics, textiles, coffee, paper and agricultural commodities.⁽⁴⁾

Higher bilateral trade, estimated at over US\$ 3 billion, is carried out either through trans-border smuggling or through third countries, namely Singapore and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Goods and commodities smuggled across the border include cheap textiles, audio and video cassettes, betel leaves, etc. Exports to Pakistan through a third country are mainly made up of machinery and spare parts, particularly for the textile industry and even for government-owned port installations. Before 9/11, the governments of both countries encouraged third-country trade in importing Indian machinery and spare parts. This was largely because of Pakistan's precarious position of foreign exchange reserves. Industrialists in Pakistan could not afford to import machinery and spare parts from the West or Japan or South Korea. But after September 2011, Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves increased nearly seven-fold and as a result its dependence on third-country imports from India declined. Hence, post-9/11 improvement in Pakistan's economy and a seven-fold increase in its forex reserve meant that it was no longer as dependent on the transit fee. However, Pakistan continues to be keen on early implementation of projects for gas pipelines without linking it to the Kashmir issue because of its growing energy needs.

New Initiatives

India and Pakistan have taken serious practical measures and have shown greater political determination to develop economic relations. The time has come for both nations to transform South Asia with full cooperation to alleviate hunger, poverty and bring the desired level of economic and social progress in the region.

MFN status granted to India

Pakistan has moved closer to granting most favoured nation status to India by switching to a system of "negative lists" that would restrict the import of only 1,200 items from India. Earlier only 1,900 goods were permitted to be shipped across the border. In the next stage, Pakistan would further phase out the negative list by the end of 2012 and move to a regime that complies with the norms set by the World Trade Organization (WTO). This would mark a dramatic shift as almost 90 per cent items would be tradable with Pakistan as compared to only 17 per cent earlier. Following the Pakistan government's decision, which approved a negative list of 1,200 items, Pakistan would now

permit import of nearly 6,800 goods from India. This move would not only enhance import of textiles and pharmaceuticals from India, it would also result in direct trade between the two neighbours.⁽⁵⁾

A win-win situation

India and Pakistan are going for a discussion on a Preferential Trading Agreement (PTA) to lower import duties on an array of products. The discussion may be held under the ambit of South Asian Free Trade Association (SAFTA), the free trade agreement signed eight years ago between member states of the ASEAN. India exported to Pakistan goods worth \$ 2.33 billion and imported items valued at \$330 million during 2011-12. Under SAFTA, both countries are required to bring down tariffs by up to 5 per cent.⁽⁶⁾

India has not been providing any preferential access to 865 items from Pakistan included in a sensitive list. Now it is considering lowering tariffs for Pakistan on nearly 30 per cent of the import items included in the sensitive list within four months of implementation of the negative list. On the other hand, since Pakistan allowed just 1,967 items from India, it automatically did not have to extend tariff preferences to the country under SAFTA. Pakistan has now allowed import of all goods from India except those included in the negative list. In March 2012, Pakistan decided to end its discriminatory trade regime with India by giving up its positive list of imports in favour of a negative list. This initiative would create a win-win situation and would also lead to an almost three-fold increase in imports from India India's exports by the end of the year. When the negative list is phased out, 7,000 items would be allowed. This should logically mean that more goods from India would not only get access to Pakistan's markets but would get preferential terms under SAFTA. Trade analysts are of the view that both sides could benefit from SAFTA with the dismantling of barriers. There is a scope for India to bring down its sensitive list to nearly 57 items under SAFTA. It could be brought down further, depending upon the response from Pakistan, if India is ready to exclude all textile items from the list.⁽⁷⁾

The most vital issues to be resolved between India and Pakistan are lack of road trade routes, irregular railway traffic and an expensive shipping route. This requires immediate attention of both countries. If these issues are not resolved there are chances that global competitiveness would increase the cost of trade. Further, under South Asia Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA), India has extended Pakistan tariff concessions on 393 items up to the third round of SAPTA, but Pakistan has provided India tariff concessions on only 248 items. 73 of these items cannot be imported from India as they are on the banned list. Further, not much headway has been made on investment promotion and protection treaty, arbitration, and regional motor vehicular treaty, etc. that are essential for speedy growth in Indo-Pakistan economic relations.

India and Pakistan are living in unpredictable times. The international system is in a constant state of instability on several horizons, endangering the international security system. It is imperative to create interdependence and partnerships based on trade and commerce to act as a check on governments'

initiating hostile action. Corporate leaders are more capable of turning the course of history than the political leadership of both India and Pakistan. A people- or a media-led civil society movement can also play a crucial role as the people are the most important stakeholders and their will needs to be galvanized.⁽⁸⁾

The burden of peace is heavier on South Asia as it is home to half the world's poor. Peace is no longer a luxury but a prerequisite that every member of society needs to strive for. While the responsibility on the privileged is greater, changing the public mindset requires initiatives from the whole society.⁽⁹⁾

Industry has an important role in improving relationships and bilateral linkages. Pakistan needs to permit India transit trade to Afghanistan and Central Asia, replace the positive list with a negative list to allow imports from India and improve its infrastructure for trade and transport.⁽¹⁰⁾

South Asia is the least integrated region compared to all other regions. Successful regional cooperation and integration initiatives around the world have demonstrated that regional cooperation is a win-win situation that benefits to the entire region. There is no reason why SAARC nations in general and India and Pakistan in particular cannot replicate such a model which has become the sine qua non for progress and development.

New Silk Road

Unlike its ancient namesake, the New Silk Road would be an international web and network of economic and transit connections. That means building more rail lines, highways, energy infrastructure, like the proposed pipeline to run from Turkmenistan, through Afghanistan, through Pakistan into India. It means upgrading facilities at border crossings, as India and Pakistan are now doing at Wagha.

The New Silk Road would also focus on removing bureaucratic barriers and other impediments to allow free flow of goods and people. Today, an Indian businessman has to import cement from Southeast Asia instead of from the flourishing cement industry just nextdoor in Pakistan, and a traveller moving between India and Pakistan has a difficult time getting a visa often has to be routed through airports a thousand miles away just to get across the border. But a New Silk Road aims to eliminate hassles for people and goods to cross borders.

Such a trading structure will help an entrepreneur in Chennai, South India, to put his/her products on a truck that travels uninterrupted through Pakistan, through Afghanistan, to a customer in Kazakhstan. It would also mean that a Pakistani businessman should be able to open a branch in Bangalore.

Officials say the Silk Road strategy would also essentially help Afghanistan become economically self-sufficient. It would give impetus to big regional projects like the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline. While it would take time to realize such cooperation, it would be in the interest of India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan as well as other nations.

Liberal visa regime

India and Pakistan are entering a new phase of full normalization of bilateral trade relations that augurs well for enhancing mutual trust and understanding. The approval of a new liberal visa regime with Pakistan would pave the way for easier travel and increase people-to-people contact and exchange. The signing of a new visa agreement between the two nations would make the historic 1974 agreement a reality. Under the liberal visa regime, businessmen are likely to be issued multi-entry non-police-reporting visas and have access to at least five cities instead of three as at present. However, the credentials of the businessmen for qualifying for such a visa would be endorsed by the chambers of commerce on both sides. From India, it would be the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and from the Pakistan side, it would be the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI).

On 13 April, Pakistan's Commerce Secretary Zafar Mahmood indicated that India and Pakistan would, in all likelihood, announce a new liberal visa regime by May 2012 to facilitate easy movement of businessmen and give a boost to trade. India and Pakistan have been working hard behind the scenes to do away with the 1974 visa agreement and put in place a liberal regime that would allow more free movement for people-to-people exchange. However, May 2012 came and passed without any new arrangement materializing in this regard.

The new liberal visa regime would allow common people to visit at least three earmarked cities. Senior citizens would be exempted from police reporting in both nations. This step may go a long way in expanding vistas for bilateral commerce. A more secure regional environment would also result in progressively helping India and Pakistan to continue liberalizing visa arrangements for the business community.

The two countries have also inked an MoU between Indian Trade Promotion Organization (ITPO) and the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) to promote trade and investment. This MoU would foster better, effective and efficient trade promotional operations for the benefit of business communities.

Cross-border investments

A breakthrough in cross-border investments came on 1 August 2012 when India lifted a ban on foreign investments from Pakistan. A statement issued by the Indian commerce ministry said their government has decided to permit a citizen or a corporate entity from Pakistan to make investments in India. However, Indian ban on investments in defence, space and atomic energy sectors would not come under this permission.⁽¹¹⁾ India did not allow FDI from Pakistan until this decision was announced and Pakistan was the only country for which investment restrictions were in place. Pakistan on the other hand does not have any curbs on Indian investment.

The second phase of the process would involve consultations between

India and Pakistan Chief Executive Officers' Forum (CEOs Forum wherein governments also want to have their representatives. The Forum would discuss the issue and then decide on the sectors where they want investments to flow.

Presently, there is no joint venture between India and Pakistan. Several Indian firms have shown interest in having joint ventures in Pakistan. It is imperative to understand the nature of such investments and provide timely facilitations. In order to make this more productive and purposeful, both governments should set up an "institutional mechanism" that would guarantee protection of each other's investment.

Will economics win over politics?

In the context of Indo-Pakistan political as well as business relations, this is a very complex question to analyze. Greater volume of business between India and Pakistan would open doors for realizing the dream of a South Asian economic bloc.

Today, not only the business community but also the common people are of the view that the time has come to put all issues behind and take economic relations to a new level. There is already a strong demand in Pakistan and India for establishing air and sea links between Mumbai and Karachi and to further put in place a Mumbai-Karachi Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Electricity trade

This is another area where the potential and opportunities of trade are enormous. The Joint Working Group on electricity is working on the modalities for opening up electricity trade between India and Pakistan. This step may help enhance economic cooperation to a great extent.

What does Pakistan's move mean for both economies?

Presently Pakistan is importing a small set of goods from India, but with an expansion in the existing list of commodities to be imported from India there would be an enormous increase in the volume and value of trade between the two economies of South Asia. Another strategic benefit of this measure is that the unofficial trade which has been taking place through third-country route (worth \$ 10 billion) would be shut down and would lead to a reduction in costs for Pakistani consumers and industry.

According to a survey conducted by FICCI, steel costs in Pakistan would go down by a margin of 55 per cent; engineering products by 26 per cent, bicycles by 20 per cent, pharmaceuticals by 35 per cent; fruits and vegetables by 40 per cent, and sugar by 30 per cent if these goods are imported directly from India. The survey further opined that liberalized trade in agriculture would result into the generation of 2.7 lakh jobs in India and 1.7 lakh in Pakistan. Further governments of both countries would earn considerable revenue through direct trade or formal trade. The entire region would benefit immensely from the move of granting MFN to India. Trade access to Pakistan would ultimately help Indian

manufacturers to get access to Afghanistan and CIS economies whose markets are still waiting to be explored.

Social face of India-Pakistan relations

It is an undisputed fact that after some six decades the people of India and Pakistan have finally moved forward towards a historic agreement. There are many social products (social face) that India is importing from Pakistan and also exporting to Pakistan.

Freedom fighters

Freedom fighters are useful for India as they de-legitimize indigenous movements against the state.

Musicians

Musicians are the raw material for Indian Bollywood movies. The Pakistani musicians popular in India include Nusrat Fateh Ali, Adnan Sami Khan and Rahat Fateh Ali, to name a few.

Key social goods that India is exporting to Pakistan are:

Bollywood movies

Indian movies are a part and parcel of Pakistani people's lives. Similarly, not very long ago, Pakistan Television (PTV) plays were very popular in India.

The abovementioned social products exchanged between India and Pakistan would open new vistas in enhancing bilateral relations and may go a long way in strengthening bilateral business ties.

What is required immediately?

India wants to increase business with Pakistan through the border route but concerted efforts would be required to tone up the infrastructure at the Attari-Wagha border. On the Indian side the customs checkpoint, too, needs a facelift. Rows of trucks line up on both sides of the road as they approach the border gates. A spell of rain brings trouble. Mud and slush make loading and unloading of goods more difficult.

The border of Pakistan is different. Manicured lawns and neat roads welcome visitors. The customs and immigration checkpoints are modern with state-of-the-art infrastructure.

Keeping in mind the possible constraints with regard to infrastructure, both governments agreed to open a second gate. Despite some initial delay, the new integrated checkpoint is operational since April last. It is estimated that the new gate would help raise the number of trucks to 500-600 daily from the current 100-150 trucks that transport goods through the Attari-Wagha border.

India and Pakistan also need to focus on increasing trading hours for faster movement of goods. The approach road to Attari needs to be widened significantly to facilitate movement of large-sized trucks and containers.

Besides, telecommunication links also require revamping for better and efficient data sharing.

Both the governments have also discussed opening another trade route at Khokrapar- Munabao. They have set up a joint working group to examine the feasibility of this new business route.

Any rise in business relations through the land route would have “spin-off effect” on the infrastructure and incomes of people living near the border areas. Development of cold chains, warehouses and logistics is expected to transform the region.

Very recently, Pakistan allowed bigger trucks and containers into its territory. Earlier, only 10-wheeler trucks were allowed. Now that has been enhanced to 22 wheelers. Added to this, containers with opening of the new Integrated Check Post (ICP) are allowed on the Attari-Wagha border

Strategy for future

There is an urgent need for evolving an action plan on the following points:

- a. To infuse confidence among businessmen and common people.
- b. Identify those areas of cooperation which could be projected to Pakistan as stand-alone areas. In one of his statements in India, Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani of Pakistan was quoted as referring to cooperation in the field of agriculture between Indian and Pakistani Punjab as another possible stand-alone area which Pakistan would be prepared to take up without linking it to the Kashmir issue.
- c. Planners and Policy makers both in India and Pakistan as well as influential sectors of political and economic elite are also aware of the considerable potential of Indo-Pakistan economic and technological cooperation in areas of “mutually beneficial commonalties” that have come up in the wake of business liberalization (NEP).
- d. To exploit and capitalize on opportunities arising out of changed political and economic environment, governments in both nations need to demonstrate their resolve to incrementally revise fiscal policies that have prevented the flow of human capital and knowledge exchange across their common borders. This is a major constraint in the way of the much needed economic and technological collaboration.
- e. Intensify interactions with those sections of the Pakistani business community which are in favour of an early normalization of bilateral economic relations.

- f. Identify areas of cooperation. Pakistan's agriculture has not been doing as well as that of India. Pakistan has to import wheat periodically while India is self-sufficient in foodgrains. This is an area which needs to be explored intensively and extensively for possible co-operation.
- g. Governments in both countries must demonstrate their resolve to revise official policies that have prevented the flow of human capital and knowledge exchange.
- h. Identified areas, namely agro-products, automobile spare parts and pharmaceuticals require concentrated action and their real potential needs to be tapped.

Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that there has been a minimal degree of trade relations between India and Pakistan. Trade between the two countries could be doubled, i.e. from \$2 billion to \$6 billion, in the coming years. There is also a possibility of materializing talks on preferential trading arrangement proposed by Pakistan. This may go a long way in bringing down tariffs. There has hardly been any significant flow of investment especially FDI and ODA. Hence, there is an urgent need to promote greater economic cooperation, which could provide mutual economic benefits and help them both to develop a strong and viable South Asian region.

Businessmen and trade analysts from India and Pakistan are hopeful that with a little push from their respective governments, bilateral trade can jump five-fold to \$10 billion in the next two years. If Pakistan can make a negative list, instead of the present positive list and some of the trade barriers are lifted by both the countries, bilateral trade can easily touch this figure in the next two years. In 2000, their bilateral trade was only \$200 million, which, rose to \$1.86 billion in 2010. Normalization of business relations with Pakistan would be a step in the right direction and would certainly result in enormous growth and development in the South Asian region.

The exchange of visits between commerce secretaries of India and Pakistan, which resulted in the adoption of the April 2011 communiqué, provides a viable future agenda for facilitating economic cooperation, which needs to be implemented with positive perception on both sides. Using trade as a tool to mitigate political tension between the two neighbouring countries is a welcome move; however, a greater political will with a changed mindset shall remain the key to success of all such endeavours.

It is imperative that both India and Pakistan work towards achieving an economically interdependent relationship. The much talked of 'Asian Century' rhetoric can only be truly realized if it is preceded by peace, harmony and stability, specifically in the Asian subcontinent.

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