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Review of Pakistan's Relations with Afghanistan



Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS)

2015

PAKISTAN SECURITY REPORT



Internal Security Matrix 2015

- 49% decrease in terrorist attacks in Pakistan
- 40% decrease in fatalities in terrorist attacks
- 35% decrease in suicide attacks



Based on data from January 1 to December 31, 2015



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Editor's note

This is the sixth biannual issue of *Conflict and Peace Studies*, a flagship publication of Pak Institute for Peace Studies. Until 2012, the journal has regularly been published as a quarterly research journal. Started in the last quarter of 2008, as many as 22 issues of the PIPS research journal have been published so far with their primary focus on conflict, insecurity, militancy and militants' media, religious extremism, radicalization & de-radicalization, terrorism & counterterrorism, human rights and regional strategic issues.

The journal has been well received by academic and research quarters. Besides adding to existing knowledge, it has been contributing to increase understanding among policymakers, and regional and multilateral institutions about situation-specific needs, early warnings, and effective options or strategies to prevent/de-escalate conflict and risk of violence in Pakistan and the region.

This publication is meant to achieve the following objectives:

- To produce and publish context-specific research work on subjects of conflict, religious extremism, violent radicalism, militancy and terrorism, etc., in local and regional perspectives and disseminate to analysts, research institutes, institutions of higher education, policymakers, media and civil society organizations and others;
- To enhance the empirical knowledge-base and scholarship on interstate and intrastate conflicts and viable options of achieving peace, security and stability in the South Asian region, with particular focus on Pakistan;
- To increase understanding among policymakers and regional and multilateral institutions about situation-specific needs, early warnings, and effective options or strategies to prevent/de-escalate conflict and risk of violence; and
- To improve the effectiveness of local, regional and international partners by strengthening the evidence base and conceptual foundation for engaging in conflict prevention and de-escalation interventions in Pakistan.

Muhammad Amir Rana

Review of Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan

Executive summary

There is a need for direct and sustained multilayered engagement between Pakistan and Afghanistan – for sure, discussing Taliban, a key irritant, but not them alone. Without such a framework, bilateral ties will continue to remain hostage to Taliban.

At present, many in Afghanistan including political and military leaders, and most importantly, its people, see Pakistan in the negative light. Such a view is driven by where the two stood in history. Pakistan's own grievances from Afghanistan evoke references to the Cold War.

But there is no reason why these views can't change: Pakistan can invest in improving its soft power in Afghanistan, with which it has several commonalities – religion, culture, language, and above all, border. Already, Pakistan serves as major transit to Afghanistan and as host to Afghan refugees. These points of goodwill should not be lost to political posturing.

More importantly, Pakistan should realize that international environment around Afghanistan is changing: A growing China, Pakistan's close friend, would not want lingering instability to its periphery touching Afghanistan; an Iran now opening with the west may invest more in increasing Afghan transit through its territory, reducing, to some extent, Pakistan's existing set of choices.

Above all, Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan have a direct bearing on stability inside. Militancy itself is a key byproduct. The massive Pashtun displacement, a humanitarian issue demanding attention in its own right, has been politicized in several parts of the country.

Key findings

After Ashraf Ghani came into power in Afghanistan in 2014 and tried to reach out to Pakistan, a sense of optimism ran that relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan will improve. In fact, Afghan government also sat down with Taliban to negotiate the future. In late 2015, the Quadrilateral Coordination Group comprising China, US, Afghanistan, and Pakistan was constituted, aimed at facilitating talks between Taliban and Afghanistan. The QCG has held four meetings since then.

These meetings had failed to deliver anything substantial yet, mainly due to uncertain Taliban response and increasing mistrust between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

At present, relations between the countries are, arguably, worse than they were before Ghani's rapprochement towards Pakistan in later 2014. Taliban, viewing itself as government-in-exile, doesn't seem willing to talk to Afghan government. At least for a while: in April 2016, they launched their annual spring offense, leading to one of the deadliest attacks in Kabul, in response to which an Afghan official threatened Pakistan of taking to the United Nations.

The issue between Pakistan and Afghanistan is certainly beyond individuals. In Pakistan, there was some satisfaction when Karzai, a Pashtun, had come to power after Taliban were ousted. But in later years, he became an object of intense dislike in Pakistan. When Ashraf Ghani reached out to Pakistan, there were talks of new chapter, but like his predecessor, he has grown discontent with Pakistan.

A thought must be given, what went wrong?

To learn answer to this question and many others, PIPS solicited analyses from experts following Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan. Below are key findings on managing Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan, drawn from the experts' analyses, along with PIPS's own previous work, including on National Action Plan (NAP):

Dealing with Taliban

- Afghanistan sees progress on relations with Pakistan in the context of progress on Taliban. Afghans expected Pakistan to either take action against the "irreconcilable" Taliban or bring to table the "reconcilable" ones.
- Publically, there is absolutely nothing, besides the status on Taliban, on which the two countries talk with each other. A more multilayered engagement is clearly missing.
- Afghanistan argues that the real player to talk is Pakistan, not Taliban. This assumption, whatever its basis, calls for a direct multi-pronged engagement between the two countries including in diplomacy, trade and economy, shared security threats, border security, and socio-cultural exchanges.

- Strikingly, peace talks from Taliban's end themselves are strongly contingent upon their leadership issues. Pointedly, the peace talks came down after the disclosure of the death of Mullah Omar and election of new supreme commander, Akhtar Mansoor, who, partly in the process of consolidating his position among the divisive ranks, shed the talks. Currently, the Afghan Taliban appear disinterested or cautious in joining the peace talks, mainly due to absence of an internal agreement; some however read Taliban's stance as political rhetoric, while others deem it real, pointing to Taliban's ongoing offensives as giving them a sense of 'victory'.
- While Pakistan admitted of having "influence" over Taliban, it cautioned this doesn't necessarily mean "control" over them. The "influence" in turn comes from the presence of Afghan Taliban in Pakistan. Apparently, for Pakistan, the Taliban are among the Afghan political stakeholders – as they are for other members of QCG – and making them hostile would not only undermine its interests in Afghanistan but also add to Pakistan's internal insecurity. It is unlikely that Pakistan is going to change this stance any time soon.

Nonetheless, Afghans complain that Pakistani actions, and statements, are not dissimilar to the ones in the past: cracking down on those who target inside the country, while avoiding action against those targeting outside.

- Given the presence of key players in the QCG, it appears to be a workable forum in ending Afghan stalemate. The QCG will have to be patient and resolute in their efforts of taking forward the talk, as well as contemplate on the alternatives to the talks or the end the group foresees.
- Presently, peace in Afghanistan is largely linked to talks with Taliban, although, after the Kabul terror attack in April 2016, the government issued statements against the talks. It is questionable if linking the peace to progress on peace talks with Taliban alone, is a sound strategy. After all, this, to some analysts, weakens the position of Afghan government not only in peace talks but also in realizing and working out some broad, comprehensive framework of peace and stability in the country.
- While Taliban insurgents launched random attacks, they have not been able, despite their simultaneous advances at multiple fronts, to carve out a territory in Afghanistan.

- In all likelihood, Taliban will have no option, other than coming to the table, if certain concession-granting steps are taken. But a key issue appears to be whether to grant concession before some semblance of peace or after. Perhaps the QCG may contemplate on those aspects.

Changing geopolitics

- Pakistan's narrative behind the framework of its ties with Afghanistan still evokes references to the Cold War, even though the international environment around Pakistan and Afghanistan changes.

The old fears – Pashtunistan, Durand Line status, proxies, global blocs – persist, in part, because the two states couldn't sit over them, calling once again for a contemporary framework that directly engages them.

- Apparently, Pakistan's interests in Afghanistan revolve around curbing Indian influence over there. Pakistani fears are often dated back to the Cold War era, and recent Afghan overtures to India. In recent times, Pakistan blames India for supporting anti-Pakistan elements in Afghanistan.

Arguably, Pakistan, and even Iran, will have more influence in Afghanistan because of many commonalities, above all, border.

But Pakistan needs to work on the threshold of 'tolerable' India's presence, something which guarantees improvement in Pak-Afghan bilateral relation.

Reportedly, Pakistan wants friendly or at least a neutral government in Afghanistan, which is not pro-India. Nonetheless, India is concerned that a pro-Pakistan regime in Afghanistan would allow Pakistan to increase military presence on its eastern border (with India) as well as increase the risk of the strengthening of anti-India militants there.

- More than ten years ago, in 2001, China was a player distantly interested about Afghanistan. Today, China seeks a more active role, having a seat in the four-national group facilitating talks between Afghan government and Afghan Taliban. Ten years ahead, a stronger China will arguably seek a more direct role in Afghanistan, (should things don't change.)

Chinese would not want to have Islamist militants gaining too much strength in its backyard, fearing they might provide support to anti-China militants active in China's Xinjiang region. Seen from this angle, many

may project that China's interest converge with countries like the US and India, in Afghanistan.

But seen from another way, China in Afghanistan has the potential of addressing concerns of those in Pakistan, who are worried about too much Indian influence in Afghanistan. To them, at least, China can be a balancer against India.

Either way, China's involvement, seen as a key change in the entire "strategic calculus" in Afghanistan, should force Pakistan to reevaluate its own calculations.

This calculus may well bring into calculation geo-economics which China itself is projecting: China also sees Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran as part of its One-Belt, One Road initiative, a network of roads connecting western China with the region and beyond to Europe through Central Asia.

- Another entrant with a more direct role could be, Iran. Coincidentally, Pakistan's deep involvement in Afghanistan dates back to 1979, just a few months after Iran saw a revolution, in a gradual outcome of which Iran's ties with the west deteriorated, inviting sanctions upon Iran, ultimately, making it less attractive for others to trade through that part.

2016 saw re-opening of those ties, a response to which has been interest among international players in trading with Iran. Clearly, this will decrease landlocked Afghanistan's reliance – albeit to an extent – on trading internationally through Pakistan.

Some signs are already visible: In April 2016, India and Afghanistan signed agreement with Iran, committing trade between India and Afghanistan over Iran's Chabahar port. In return, Afghans are having little interest in negotiating trade with Pakistan.

- Afghanistan is increasingly relying on other states for trading items, resulting in less share of Pakistan. Pakistan can help reverse this trend, by facilitating Afghans, so as to tap the optimal level of trade, which some estimate, is around \$ 5 billion.
- Afghanistan's other neighbours, to the north, Russia and Central Asian states, are worried about the presence of Central Asia militants. While these groups still pay allegiance to Afghan Taliban, with whom they fought alongside in the northern part of Afghanistan, fighters within these groups have also turned over to the Islamic State.

Bordering areas and people

- For all practical purposes, Durand Line remains international border between the two countries. Both understand where one country ends and another starts. That's how their troops have been operating.
- Yet, Kabul's ambiguous stance on the Durand Line continues to haunt Pakistani officials, who fear that Afghans might still be harbouring ambitions over Pakistan's Pashtun land – a remnant of Cold War. Apparently, the two refer to the border more so to justify their current stances with regards to each other.
- The border certainly needs to be properly managed, not only to stop terrorists – about which the two accuse each other – but also streamline the flow of people. The management framework should, however, be aimed at facilitating the travellers rather than obstructing their movement.
- Any idea of mining or fencing it will end up hitting at economy of the tribesmen, who are among the key traders between Pakistan and Afghanistan and who are already being kept out of the political mainstream.
- Even the continued exclusion of tribal area, in the name of geopolitics, may backfire. The area is seeing effects of a 2011-dated presidential decree that allowed political parties to operate in FATA, similar to rest of the country. In 2016, in several tribal agencies, hundreds of tribesmen, rallying to the call of those parties, took to the streets, demanding they be given the same rights as other Pakistanis. Inclusion will help dispel the impression the area of being kept a springboard into Afghanistan. Instead, for Pakistan, FATA can rather serve as bridge between the two countries.
- Pak-Afghan bordering areas are host to illicit economy and drug. It is, however, questionable if enforcement alone could fully achieve the desired results in the bordering areas. In the case of drug control, for instance, Pakistan should work with Afghanistan, source of 90 percent of the world's opium.
- Pashtuns have been at the center of the Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. Pashtuns form majority of Afghan refugees in Pakistan, many having intermingled with the locals; inside the country, Pashtuns have displaced to all over the country – Karachi, Islamabad, and Balochistan.

Strikingly enough, what started off in response to nib the threat of Pashtun secessionism have ended up Pashtuns 'integrated' in much of the country. Still, even today, the humanitarian response to their dislocation is missing.

Even though the ramifications of the Pashtun displacement are yet to be investigated, one of the changes has been in demographics, which have now turned them into a deeply-contested issue. Today, a reason why census cannot take place is because of that contestation especially in Karachi and Balochistan.

A sound Afghan policy will help achieve internal balance in the country, to the satisfaction of all.

- Many in each country guard suspicion on the leading non-Pashtun groups in the other country. Pakistan suspects Afghanistan's non-Pashtun leaders have little interest in negotiating with Taliban, who are primarily Pashtuns. The peace process with Taliban, after all, was sabotaged by elements within Afghan security sector, which is tilted towards non-Pashtuns. Similar view is also found among Afghans, who view Pakistani decision makers as mostly coming from Punjab.
- There is a greater need of interaction among non-Pashtuns on both sides, especially among opinion makers in Punjab and northern Afghanistan. Frequent track-IIs and media initiatives among these two could also be developed.
- Pakistan's image in Afghanistan is negative. Much of this has to do with Pakistan's historic role in Afghanistan, which negatively gets reflected in Afghan media. Afghans ask as to why Pakistan reflects Afghan's enemies like Taliban in positive light. Many Pakistanis too don't know the realities of Afghanistan. To gather first-hand information, Pakistani channels may well open bureau offices in Afghanistan.
- Many Afghans in Pakistan later took part in Afghanistan's state building. Yet the humanitarian issue of Afghans in Pakistan is painted with the brush of security. Pakistan should shape a proper policy towards the refugees. Instead of casting refugees in negative light, Pakistan should work towards earning public goodwill from Afghanistan and international community.

Other key points

- Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan has largely been steered by the security establishment. Whenever the parliament has been in existence, it has tried to provide input over Afghan affairs; however, because the parliament was either non-existent or in secondary position, when major decisions on that front were taken, (1979-88 and 1999-2008), its role have been sidelined. Arguably, because the policy drivers are bureaucratic officials, there is little innovation, or change, on the part of Pakistan over the years.

An active parliament or parliamentary committees, espousing diversity of thoughts, can live up to its role of accountability of the executive; on Afghan affairs, legislators can, for instance, fact-check assumptions considered as settled.

- There are also linkages between militants targeting Pakistan and those targeting Afghanistan, especially through middle groups like sectarian outfits and foreign affiliates. Pakistan's military operation Zarb-e-Azb has forced many local and foreign militants to move out, into Afghanistan. In northern Afghanistan, for instance, such militants pledge allegiance to Afghan Taliban as well as to ISIS
- Inside Afghanistan, especially its areas bordering Pakistan, there are confirmed reports of ISIS. ISIS's status has direct bearing on militancy in Pakistan, in fact more than that of Afghanistan. Many anti-Pakistan militants joined the ranks of the IS. Similarly, unlike Afghanistan, Pakistan is more diverse in terms of sects. ISIS has a clear anti-Shia agenda, which is often propagated by militants in Punjab – the heart of Pakistan. Any foreseeable threat from the IS or its ideology should ideally let the two countries join hands against the fight.

Why the distance between Pakistan and Afghanistan?

Khalid Aziz*

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Whenever there is an attack within Afghanistan, fingers are pointed towards Pakistan. Afghans constantly castigate the Haqqani network and ask Pakistan to get itself delinked from that group. In April 2016, after an attack in Kabul said to be orchestrated by the Haqqanis, President Ghani threatened to take up the issue to the United Nations Security Council (Khan, 2016).

Earlier, Ahmed Zia Massoud, a senior advisor to President Ghani, argued that peace with Taliban under the four-nation Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) was unlikely. He also blamed Pakistan for having no interest in the peace process. Disguised within these comments are attempts to scapegoat Pakistan for predicted failure of the QCG talks.

Ever since America's engagement in Afghanistan in 2001, many attempts were made to make Afghanistan and its neighbour Pakistan, work in unison. But, as some of America's own top officials now admit, these turned out to be pious hopes. In April 2016, former U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, went to the extent of admitting that one of the biggest failures of the United States in the war in Afghanistan has been the failure in bringing Afghanistan closer to Pakistan (Duzor, 2016).

This article attempts to discover why the Pak-Afghan working partnership has not worked? It explores the issues plaguing the relation for so long.

Common bonds, competing blocs

Apparently, there is little to suggest that the relations between the two countries should be tense, given that they have so much in common. Afghanistan and Pakistan are after all bound by common culture, ethnicities, and religion. Former Afghan President Hamid Karzai once termed these two countries as "conjoint twins" (Anthony, 2010).

More so, the people of the two countries have often assisted each other in times of distress, generously hosting each other.

When in 1920, religious scholars led by Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Hind declared India as "*Dar-ul-Harb* (Land of War)" and called upon Indian Muslims to leave it for a place where they could practice their religion freely, around 60,000 Indian Muslims left for Afghanistan. Of these, 40,000 alone came from modern-day Punjab and KP.

These migrants were readily welcomed by ordinary Afghans, who paid heed to the calls of their own scholars and key clerics. Like JUI's scholars, many Afghan clerics had received their *sanads* (religious degrees) from Deoband-aligned seminaries in India.

Some six decades later, this hospitality was returned by Pakistan by hosting more than 5 million Afghan refugees, who had left their homes following the Soviet invasion of their country in 1979. In Pakistan,

Afghan migrants could move freely. Many started businesses, secured employment, received medical facilities and enrolled in schools in their host country.

The policies of Pakistan and Afghanistan and their accompanying narratives, which are centre of media attention these days, are a product of their peculiar geographies.

Historian Arnold Toynbee once best defined the implications of geographic determinism. He classified nations into two categories: Those which lay across highways, becoming passages either for traders or invaders; and those which were enclosed without any possibility of linkages, thereby turning into blind-alleys.

Both Afghanistan and Pakistan partake the characteristics of a regional 'round-about' for traders and invaders, vying for the Indian heartland all the way from Central Asia and the Middle East. In the 17th and 18th century, before the advent of steam power, great powers competed for occupying this region to gain strength and influence.

In the latter-half of the 20th century, this region again got pulled in different directions. It was the Cold War that shaped much of the international relations of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Throughout that period, roughly from 1950 to 1992, this region was artificially blocked from each other, as Pakistan joined

the American camp, while Afghanistan, the Soviet bloc. As a result, the region saw low growth, violence, wars and poverty.

It was because of Pakistan's assistance that the invading Soviets left Afghanistan in 1988. If this was not to be, the Soviets would have succeeded in occupying Kabul and establishing a pro-Moscow government.

Arguably, Pakistan was in the US camp for its own strategic interests. In Afghanistan's case, Pakistan's objectives have mostly been to ward off any Indian influence and to neutralize any future threat created around the 'Pukhtunistan' movement aimed at creating a Pan-Pashtun state cutting into Pakistan. The contemporary dynamics around these issues are described below:

A mis-founded territorial claim?

The only contentious issue between Pakistan and Afghanistan is over their 2250-km joint boundary, the Durand Line.

Pakistan inherited this border from British India, which was one of the signatories of the border agreement signed in 1893. For Pakistan, this should have settled the issue, as international law guarantees that the agreements of the preceding state devolve upon the successor state.

But Afghans have been questioning

the demarcation, saying this was forced upon Afghan Amir Abdur Rehman by Imperial Britain. This was despite the fact that during the British time, Afghanistan consistently accepted the Durand Line, as various Anglo-Afghan treaties show (Caroe, 1958: 463-466). After Partition, they refused to recognize it.

After the creation of Pakistan in 1947, the Afghans started demanding revision in the original agreement. In September 1947, Afghanistan abstained from voting for Pakistan's entry into the United Nations (Aziz, 2014: 22-23).

By rejecting the border, Afghans laid claim to the areas that today constitute Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and tribal areas, both of which lie within Pakistan. To further their claims, in

November 1947, the Afghan King Zahir Shah dispatched a special envoy to Pakistan, demanding that a separate state be created out of KP and FATA. Unsurprisingly, Pakistan, a sovereign country, found these demands unrealistic.

Afghanistan's claim on parts of Pakistan is based on annexation of these territories in the 18th-century by Ahmad Shah Abdali, regarded as father of modern-day Afghanistan. In 1749, Ahmad Shah was accorded sovereignty over modern-day Sindh and parts of western Pakistan, which compose today's KP, FATA as well as parts of Balochistan.

But referring to that annexation is impractical on many counts. Ahmad Shah himself violated the agreement, when he sacked Delhi eight years later and took control of

Ahmad Shah Durrani's Empire in 1772



Punjab. More so, these annexations were short-lived. By the time of his death, the control over Punjab passed over to the Sikhs, who at their peak, had annexed parts of modern-day KP and FATA.

Basing claims on centuries-old conquests to delineate today's states, is an absurd proposition devoid of any precedent based on international law. Otherwise, the Macedonians can make a rightful claim to most of Central Asia, Afghanistan, and the Indian subcontinent, Iran and Iraq as they were conquered by Alexander the Great.

Even now, whenever Pakistan asks for better management of the international border properly, Afghans demur, referring to their old interpretation of the Durand Line, and blocking security arrangements along the way that encourages the growth of terrorism and strengthens the criminal syndicates.

The 'Pukhtunistan' imbroglio

During the British rule in India, Afghans would often support tribes in FATA and Malakand. After Pakistan's creation, the Afghans started sponsoring separatist elements in Pakistan. The support was directed at strengthening the Pukhtunistan movement, aimed at creating an independent Pashtun state out of Pakistan's western

territory, which the Afghans contested from the outset.

This support came from the Afghans at a time when Pakistan was confronted by a hostile India. Afghan claims rather drew support from India. There are reports that in the early years of Pakistan, the "Pukhtunistan Day" was even celebrated in several cities of India.

The issue of Pukhtunistan, became part of the Cold-War rhetoric, as the Soviets backed the Afghans. As the timeline below shows, officials of the two states contested the issue more than once. In turn, Pakistan got support from the US.

As described earlier, Afghanistan's position on the Durand Line is divorced from reality and International Law. Evidently, the myth of Pan-Pashtun nation came out of the desire of Afghan rulers to draw resonance from the Pashtun elite, which made the entire border issue controversial so as to win support of the Pashtuns, the country's majority ethnicity.¹

In mid-1970s, Afghan President Sardar Daud began to see the futility of the border dispute with Pakistan. He started to mend bridges with Pakistan, mediated by the Shah of Iran. But Soviet Union's suspicion of Daud's intentions was the likely cause that led to his ouster in 1978

¹ Pashtuns constitute the country's largest ethnicity, with 42% of total population.

(Khan, 2011:166), thus sowing the seeds of destabilization in Afghanistan.²

In the last forty years, Afghanistan has changed a lot, witnessing Communist takeover (1978), Soviet intervention (1979), Soviet withdrawal (1988), civil war (1989-1995), Taliban takeover (1996), and American invasion to oust Taliban (2001).

Even though the demand for Pukhtunistan should have ended, this doesn't seem to be so. Unfortunately, since the Pukhtunistan issue is continuously brought into play it leads Pakistan to keep the Afghan Pashtuns on its side, so that the claims on Pakistani territory do not materialize.

Pashtun dynamics

Afghanistan isn't only the centre of a war, between Pakistan and India, but is also witnessing an internal war between the country's Pashtuns and non-Pashtuns.

The Durand-Line issue, which today has died a natural death, has mostly been agitated from time and time by a minority Pashtun elite like ex-president Karzai. There is little to

suggest that non-Pashtuns are interested in this issue at all, who already compete with Pashtuns in the national polity.

The Bonn-1 Accord in December 2001 reconfigured the Afghan state structure, by clearly relegating the Pashtuns to a minority, and turning dominant the Tajiks and Hazara elites. The Tajiks, who constitute 70% of the Afghan military but are only 27% of the country's population, are now the main ethnic group controlling Afghan policy.³

These new elite, however, also keeps the Durand-Line issue lingering, so as to block Pakistan from getting close to the Pashtuns of Afghanistan.

More so, the new elite are not interested in reconciliation with Taliban. Only recently, the Afghan government's settlement moves towards Taliban were blocked by high-level leaks targeting Pakistan. These leaks, disclosing the death of Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Omar and the memorandum of understanding between the ISI and Afghan NDS, were allegedly the handiwork of Afghan officials who did not want a reconciliation with the Taliban as power sharing will diminish the power of the non-Pashtun ethnic groups inside Afghanistan.

²Daud was on the behest of the Shah of Iran examining the fruitfulness of disengaging from the Soviets. He went to Moscow in 1977 and criticized Soviet policy in the Politburo; that was the last nail. For details, see <http://pr.hec.gov.pk/Chapters/799S-1.pdf>.

³For details, see <http://pr.hec.gov.pk/Chapters/799S-1.pdf>.

Timeline of Pak-Afghan events around Durand Line and Pukhtunistan

Date	Events
26 July 1949	PAF bombed by mistake a village on Afghanistan side of the Durand Line. Afghan loya jirga and Afghan government announced they did not recognize the Durand line.
1955	Diplomatic relations between the two countries break down.
1957	Relations re-established.
February 1958	Afghan King Zahir Shah visits Karachi on the invitation of Pakistan, resulting in improved trade and transit agreement (signed in May).
1959	Relations worsen after Afghan King Zahir Shah and Prime Minister Sardar Daud broadcast radio speeches supporting Pukhtunistan.
23 November 1959	Pakistan lodged protest over violation of its airspace by Afghan aircraft.
10 January 1960	Afghan foreign minister Sardar Naim visited Pakistan to improve relations.
March 1960	Soviet Premier Khrushchev supports Afghan claims on Pukhtunistan. Pakistan foreign minister Manzur Qadir suggested holding of a referendum in Afghanistan whether the Pashtuns wished to join Pakistan or Afghanistan. Afghan foreign minister, Sardar Naim, rejected this idea.
18 July 1960	Afghanistan refuses visas to Pakistan working in Afghanistan.

Date	Events
4 August 1960	Pakistan sent numerous protest notes about mal-treatment of Pakistanis by Afghan authorities.
23-28 September 1960	1) Pakistan reported presence of Afghan military units and tanks, opposite Bajaur. 2) Afghan called 70,000 reservists. 3) Afghan militias infiltrated into Bajaur
September 1960 – May 1961	1) Afghan militias begin attacks on border areas of Bajaur. 2) Afghan send in regular forces. 3) Pakistan Air Force and Army repel Afghan forces.
3 April 1961	Soviet paper ' <i>Pravda</i> ' published an article hostile to Pakistan. Soviet Union reaffirmed support to Afghanistan for Pukhtun self-determination.
4 April 1961	Afghan Premier Sardar Daud arrived in Moscow for talks on Pukhtunistan with Khrushchev.
6 April 1961	Pakistan under took bombing raids in Bajaur destroying an ammunition dump owned by Badshah Gul, a resident of Bajaur, who was supporting the Afghans.
19-20 May 1961	Afghan military attacked Miskinai and Sangpura Pakistani posts in Bajaur.
21 May 1961	PAF retaliated against Afghan attacks on Bajaur. Later, Pakistan ground operations took Afghan prisoners and captured propaganda hand bills. Other Afghan agents were arrested from Peshawar and Mardan districts. Pakistan alleged that the Soviet Union supplied weapons and financial assistance for these attacks.

Indian factor

Wise men reflect that sometimes imaginary shadows appear larger than the object itself. The myth of Pukhtunistan induces the Afghans to treat India as a favourite nation, at the cost of discarding its next-door and more connected neighbour, Pakistan.

This de-construction of reality by Afghans marginalizes Pakistan, which is favoured by India.

Afghanistan counter argues that as a sovereign nation, it is its right to decide who its friends would be. That may be correct, but then, by the same token, Pakistan as a sovereign nation must take all measures possible to defend its own interests.

Pakistan's case of taking preventive action becomes more pressing these days, now that the Indian national security advisor, Ajit Doval has publicly threatened taking hostile action against Pakistan through proxies. Pakistan has complained about Indian manipulation of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA). If this is so, Pakistan should not be expected to change its policies just to please Afghanistan.¹

¹ See here

(<http://hoozpk.com/watch/fsmghS1IOeQ/after-ajit-dovals-threat-baluchistan-freedom-movement-intensed-against-pakistan.html>) a clip from Indian TV,

Conclusion

The prognosis of long term peace in Afghanistan is quite bleak. James Clapper, Director of U.S. National Intelligence, predicted severe challenges to Afghan national cohesion during 2016 and wondered if the Afghan state will be able to withstand the threats.

But blaming Pakistan for all that happens in Afghanistan may not work. Pakistan is just one player amongst many others in Afghanistan. Their involvement, along with their complex motives, hints that the struggle there is not ending soon.

Pakistan thinks that Afghan insistence on its interpretation of the Durand Line is redundant as policy. The time of the border issue has long since passed and has no role in the future of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations.

Secondly, Afghans' friendliness with India causes Pakistan to react negatively, leaving a hostile image of Afghanistan. In recent times, Pakistani officials complain that India uses Afghan soil to launch anti-Pakistan elements for attacks.

This set of assertions also affects negatively upon Pak-US relations, given that US and India are strategic partners. In turn, this delays the

announcing India's support for the independence of the Baloch.

settlement of the crisis in Afghanistan.

If Pakistan and Afghanistan are to be benefit as regional round-about, the first thing they need to do is to remove regional suspicions at the earliest. Before bringing reconciliation between Taliban and Afghan government, perhaps it will be more prudent to have a regional

reconciliation among Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Iran, China and the US. Once they have settled their issues, the progress on Afghanistan would be much quicker. However, this equation leaves out the bigger de-stabilizer of the region which lies within the ethnic imbalance created by the re-structuring of Afghanistan after the Bonn-1 design of December 2001.

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The Pashtun factor

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Pakistan's outreach to Afghanistan has, at least publicly, been hinged on the fears of and 'favours' to one ethnic group: Pashtuns. The way the term "Pashtuns" has been invoked around the last seventy years, to support Islamist proxies, and later, to question the composition of Afghan government, has pushed Pashtuns out of the mainstream socioeconomic and political process.

The first time Pashtun tribesmen were used was in 1948, immediately after the birth of Pakistan, when thousands of them were sent to wrest Kashmir from India. Pre-empting that Afghanistan might use the tribal Pashtuns against Pakistan, authorities here directed them towards Kashmir. Afghan government had expressed reservations over the fate of Pashtun areas with the new state of Pakistan.

Sixty-nine years have passed, but old phobias remain. If you hear the officialdom, you will listen how Afghanistan have caste eyes on Pakistan's territory; or how Kabul, because of its opposition to the Durand Line, the colonial-era border line dividing Pakistan and Afghanistan, is bent on cutting Pakistan. During the Cold War, Pakistan, an ally of the west, hyphenated Afghanistan with Soviet Union and India and added to their side, Pashtun nationalist politicians.

Those fears have proven to be unfounded in the long term. If anything, Afghanistan didn't side with India in its wars against

Pakistan in 1965 and 1971. The fear that India is out there to encircle Pakistan via Afghanistan remained a fear, having no contact with reality beyond spy wars, as Afghanistan's population has too deep a relationship across the Durand Line to be sacrificed for anything else.

Yet, the phobias have persisted in different degrees at different times.

The tipping point of this fear came in 1974, when Pakistan started supporting Islamist proxies in Afghanistan against the perceived threat of Pashtun separatism.

The separatism in question is the series of agitation by Pashtun and Baloch nationalist parties against the central government led by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who had dislodged in 1973 the legitimate and democratically-elected government of National Awami Party (NAP) in Balochistan. NAP was composed of leftist elements and nationalist parties of minority ethnic groups. Young students, including myself, then at the forefront of the Pakhtun Students Federation, took to streets against the aforementioned dismissal. In the present-day Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, then North-West Frontier Province, the coalition government, which included NAP, resigned in protest, sympathizing with their brethren in Balochistan where a military operation was also launched against Baloch nationalists in 1973. It was led by General Tikka Khan who was notorious for his brutal repression in East Bengal in 1971. In 1975, the National Awami

Party was banned – once again – by declaring it anti-state party and its leaders arrested to face trial in Hyderabad in 1976-7.

These Baloch-Pashtun agitations in Pakistan coincided with political upheaval in Afghanistan, where, in 1973, King Zahir Shah was deposed in a coup by Daud Khan, considered as a staunch Afghan/Pashtun nationalist. Daud's government took a public stand on Afghan sensitivities in the context of Pashtun-Baloch unrest in Pakistan. Meanwhile, in Iran, Shah Pahlavi feared that Baloch nationalism might spread into his own territory. To the government in Islamabad, the trans-national character of such nationalisms meant outright secessionism.

The first misstep leading to the polarization was, therefore, taken by the Bhutto government, by dismissing the democratically-elected provincial government in Balochistan. Baloch-Pashtun agitation was a reaction to this unconstitutional and undemocratic decision. The rules of the games were set aside – not by nationalist parties, but by the then central government.

In hindsight, it appears as if the mind to do away with NAP government was already made. NAP government in Balochistan was dismissed on the charge that their leaders were drawing funds and weapons from Iraq's embassy. This was flimsy charge: if someone has to

get weapons, why would he opt for the embassy in Islamabad, when the same could be easily gotten from across the unwatched tribal areas? This charge never surfaced in the subsequent trials against the NAP leaders.

Blaming Pakistan's Pashtun leadership for those events is wrong. If they were so insincere with Pakistan, why would they sign the 1973 Constitution? If the nationalist leaders had the motives the government suspected them of, they could have turned things bad when the military was engaged in eastern Pakistan or after its dismemberment. They could have created a crisis then, at a high vulnerability point. Instead, the leaders signed the social contract, reflecting their will to move forward.

In hindsight, it appears that Bhutto's support to Islamists was calibrated and confined to countering Afghan pressure in favor of Baloch and Pashtun nationalists.

Certainly, what started under his watch in 1970s, however, deepened and took a new quality under General Zia in 1980s. The aim was not only to ward off Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, as part of the grand western strategy, but to also achieve what came to be known as "strategic depth" in Afghanistan.

Writing from his death cell in the spring 1979, Bhutto speculated as to how the military will take care of its

own large and unaffordable size. He likened Pakistani Army to Prussian Army in the 19th century, which, having “expanded beyond the resources of Prussia” for Napoleonic wars faced three choices in due time: expanding the territory; reducing the “longstanding army”; or state collapse under the military burden.¹ Apparently, Bhutto concluded that Pakistan was condemned to have the third option for itself: that the state will be unable to live under the burden of large army.

Had Bhutto been alive, he would have been flabbergasted to learn that Pakistan chose an option no different than the first Prussian one: expansion. On ground, this was how our Afghan policy was shaped then and came to be known as a quest for “strategic depth”.

After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, Pakistan, with the backing of international community, became a frontline state for the Afghan jihad, so much so that Afghanistan was considered not anything more than a mere outpost. Pashtun area on the east of Durand Line became a launching pad for this war.

¹Extracted from Bhutto's *If I am Assassinated*. His exact words were: “Either: (a) Prussia had to expand to become the pivot of the German fatherland; or (b) The large standing army had to be reduced; or (c) Prussia would collapse under the weight of the large standing army.”

Pashtuns were direct victims of this conflict not just militarily. Zia regime, supported by Pakistani and Middle Eastern fundamentalists, tampered with traditional Pashtun identity of Muslim Pashtuns by exaggerating the Muslim part at the cost of the Afghan/Pashtun part. Displaced by intensifying war in Afghanistan, Afghans, a majority of them Pashtuns, started entering Pakistan. General Zia, in his own way, doing away with the Durand Line, called Afghans “*muhajirs*” (refugees) staying with “*ansars*” (hosts), using the analogy of migration in early Muslim history.

It was the first major step towards achieving the “strategic depth”. When the erstwhile Afghan *mujahideen* failed to deliver, the “Project Taliban” replaced them in mid 1990s.

After 9/11, in the post-Taliban Afghanistan, Pakistan continued with the “Project Taliban”, on the ground of “Pashtun alienation” due to lack of their representation in the new Afghan dispensation. Interestingly, Pakistan was invoking – in reverse – the argument Daud Khan used in 1970s about nexus of Pashtun sensibilities on both sides of the Durand Line.

The official Pakistani narrative projects Taliban to be representatives of Pashtuns. Nothing can be farther from truth: Talibanization has not only destroyed lives and properties of Pashtuns on both sides of the Duran

Line, but their culture has also borne the brunt. The actual purpose rather appears to be achieving hegemonic control over Pashtuns on both sides of the Durand Line, rather than helping them.

In the last about-four decades, the continued military conflicts and terrorism have dislocated Pashtuns massively. IDPs in Pakistan are sadly referred to as "Internally-Displaced Pashtuns." This humanitarian crisis is further compounded by the presence of large number of Afghan refugees, who could not return to their homes because of raging conflict and served as cannon fodder for Taliban war.

This Afghan/Pashtun dislocation is on a far larger scale than the ones caused from the invasions of Ulugh Baig and Zahiruddin Babur in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The

widespread dislocation is a phenomenon yet to be investigated with its full socio-economic, political, and cultural ramifications.

The unfortunate prolongation of different stages of Cold War has hindered in integrating Pashtuns into the modern state structures on both sides of the Durand Line. The failure of Pakistani state system to mainstream the tribal areas (FATA) even after sixty-nine years, speaks volume of the callousness of policies dealing with Pashtuns.

FATA, which was originally designed as an additional buffer behind the buffer state of Afghanistan during the classical Great Games, has the potential of becoming a bridge of friendship and socio-economic cooperation not only between Pakistan and Afghanistan but also between Central Asia and South Asia.

Engage Afghanistan to curb drugs flow from there

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To curb in-country trade of narcotics, Pakistan should work on a multi-pronged approach, which takes into account countries in the region, especially neighbouring Afghanistan.

More than 90 per cent of the world's opium and significant cannabis is traced to Afghanistan. Because Afghanistan is a landlocked country, the drugs make their way to the outside world, via neighbouring countries.

One of these is Pakistan, a major transit of those drugs as well as those destined for Afghanistan. Approximately 40 per cent of all opiates and 50 per cent of the heroin, produced in Afghanistan, are trafficked through Pakistan. Much of Afghan drug plants are harvested in provinces like Helmand and Kandahar, which border Pakistan (UNODC, 2013). In the reverse order, drug precursors enter Afghanistan via Pakistan.

Pakistan's centrality as key trafficking route is illustrated by the large number of seizures the law-enforcement personnel make every now and then. Between 1996 and 2011, the authorities captured an average of 7,200 kg of opium per annum, making Pakistan (along with Iran) the top country of drug interception in the world.

This drug trade, from Afghanistan, as elsewhere, is a multi-billion dollar illicit trade, which sustains complex organised criminal networks comprising supplier rings,

wholesalers, financiers, protectors and patrons. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime estimates the value of the heroin that transits through Pakistan at \$27 billion alone (UNODC, 2013).¹

Of the estimated 6.45 million Pakistani adults using drugs, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have the highest users to population ratios. More so, the level of opiate use, although just 0.9 per cent for the entire country, is the highest for populations bordering cultivation areas in Afghanistan. Pakistan often complain how Afghan jihad of the 1980s made way to the narcotics inside Pakistan.

But accusing Afghanistan isn't a solution. Pakistan too has its own drug-producing areas. Some years ago, cultivation was noticed along the Sindh-Balochistan border, but largely, poppy fields are concreted in the tribal areas, adjacent to Afghanistan. These, together with Afghanistan's poppy locations, show how Pakistan-Afghanistan bordering areas are at the root of the world's drug problem. A solution thus has to be regional, too.

After all, the drugs inflicted severe psycho-social damages upon its users – Pakistani or Afghans – such by impairing quality of lives of the

¹An estimated 6.45 million Pakistani adults – 5.8 percent of people aged between 15 and 64 years – used drugs in 2012, according to a government survey conducted in collaboration with UNODC.

users and their families.² On a broader scale, because money minted from drugs flows through illegal channels, the resultant corruption stifles growth, distorts markets, undermines the rule of law, and diminishes the chances for economic, political and social development, in the two countries.

Above all, there is also growing evidence that criminal proceeds including from drug are channelled to fund terrorism. Afghanistan's minister of counter-narcotics told the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Drugs, in April 2016, that "one big reason that caused the insecurity in Afghanistan is narcotics drugs and existence of precursor within the country." In Pakistan, the poppy fields in Khyber Agency's Tirah Valley have long injected the coffers of militants, including those allied with anti-Pakistan Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). In any case, in some places, the organized criminal networks often strike nexus with terrorists, thereby their indirect reliance on drug money.

The need for reversing the flow is, therefore, in the mutual benefit of the two countries.

² Among other things, drug use increases the costs of healthcare for treatment and rehabilitation (including for HIV). Health problems impair family life and productive employment, diminish the quality of life and may even threaten survival. Drug-related problems include criminal and juvenile justice costs — overcrowded prisons have large drug-using populations.

In Pakistan, some measures point towards an emerging consensus that drug control cannot be a peripheral exercise. In 2010, the government adopted the National Anti-Narcotics Policy and 5-year Drug Control Master Plan. Both, the policy and the master plan, stressed the importance of regional and international cooperation in countering drug threats, besides calling for a balanced approach between development and security, and respect national sovereignty as well as human rights.

When it comes to enforcement, the Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) has been in the forefront of arrest of drug traffickers and recovery of illicit drugs, particularly cannabis and heroin, coming from Afghanistan. On a directive of the Supreme Court in 2010, the trial and prosecution of prisoners involved in narcotics cases improved tremendously, resulting in 100 per cent increase in convictions since then.

Meanwhile, a precursor control unit was also established at the ANF headquarters in Rawalpindi, and its operational sections at the major ports of entry and exit in Pakistan.

These resulted in major hauls of acetic anhydride, used to form black heroin, in containers checked to stop their entry into Afghanistan for conversion of opium to heroin.³

³ Notable seizures of prevented from entering Afghanistan include 14.8 tons in Karachi in 2008, five tons in Quetta in 2009 and 15.6 tons in Karachi in 2010.

After the 18th Amendment, provinces are tasked to come up with dedicated departments dealing with the menace of narcotics. Because the two provinces, Balochistan and KP, are often the first to receive the drugs from Afghanistan, stopping flow there is a must. In 2010, an inter-agency task force on narcotics control was also established that is required to meet regularly under the DG ANF to improve coordination between all the federal and provincial agencies. This has been an effective tactical move.

Moreover, the concerns of KP and Balochistan governments are duly taken note of and conveyed to the Afghan authorities through the inter-ministerial coordination.

Meanwhile, some steps aimed at curbing drug flow at the border have also been taken. At Torkham, along Pak-Afghan border, a multi-agency centre has become operational; another one is going to operational at Chaman, Balochistan, soon. These border posts with ANF in the lead would go a long way in addressing the concerns of both the KP and Balochistan governments.

Several initiatives attempts have been made, too, involving two, three, and four countries:

Under the UN aegis, Pakistan and Afghanistan agreed on a bilateral framework which calls for interdicting drug and sharing of information about the cartels

operating in the harvesting hot-spots.

In the context of regional cooperation, the UNODC, as a neutral partner, is also assisting Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan through a “Trilateral Initiative” to improve coordination at the strategic and operational level. A joint planning cell, in Tehran, coordinates information flow and initiatives joint patrolling between Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan. From Pakistan, a representative of the Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) is embedded in that cell.

Similarly, a quadrilateral initiative between Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan and the Russian Federation is actively promoting cooperation in interception of Afghan opiates smuggled through the Central Asian States.

However, very often there is too much on the enforcement aspect of curbing drug. It is questionable if that could fully achieve the desired results in the bordering areas.

Enforcement should be one aspect of the three-pronged strategy, which also includes prevention of the drug production and rehabilitation of the drug users. A similar reasoning was offered by Pakistan’s interior minister at the UN General Assembly’s special session on “World Drug Problem” that “drug demand reduction, treatment and rehabilitation are high on our priority” (*Dawn*, 2016).

The flow of drug is a threat faced by both countries. While in Pakistan, the traditional orientation is towards Afghan opiates, law-enforcement agencies need to be familiarised with new and emerging challenges such as precursor chemical

trafficking and importation, trans-shipment and production of synthetics and their precursors – which go to Afghanistan from Pakistan. Hence, the need for joining hands.

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How parliament missed Afghan affairs?

Iftikharullah Babar*

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Whenever the parliament has been in existence, it has tried to provide input over Afghan affairs; however, because the parliament has either been non-existent or relegated to secondary status, when major decisions on that front were taken, its role appears to be sidelined.

The rules and the norms

Foreign policy is subtle pronouncement for establishing or maintaining strategic, political or economic linkages with other countries. The policy becomes conspicuous when a country joins a defense, political or economic alliance involving others. The purpose is to achieve national interest, a goal that is static in the long run, but the means to achieving which varies with time.

In Pakistan, the approval of foreign policy or its amendment is in the sole domain of the prime minister. According to the government's Rules of Business, without the approval of the prime minister, no order shall be issued in the cases that involve important policy or depart from the existing ones.

Cabinet's jurisdiction is restricted to proposals involving negotiations with foreign countries, such as exchange of diplomatic and commercial representative treaties and agreements, visits of goodwill missions, representations at international conferences and meetings. Other than these, the

collective thinking of the cabinet has no important role.

Even the president, otherwise the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, has no role in formulating policy or approving it. The president has only to be informed by the prime minister about the decision the cabinet took.

For the outside world, the unveiled face of Pakistan is its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the front runner in sketching the broader contours of foreign policy, such as by maintaining relations, dealings with countries, declaring wars and peace.¹

Practically stating, however, the ministry alone has no monopoly over formulating foreign policy, especially when it comes to Afghanistan. Instead, it shares space with the national security establishment, which includes the military and intelligence agencies, known for quite robust role in relations with arch-rival India in the east and Afghanistan in the west.

Although Pakistani establishment is often focused for its larger role, the fact is that the role of any security establishment is about protecting and advancing their country's interests through foreign policy, is an overt activity recognized the

¹ According to the Rules of Business of the federal government, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is bestowed the task of maintaining relations and dealings with other countries and declaration of war and peace with any country.

world over. In 2007, General Musharraf's out-of-box Kashmir solution was scuttled by Indian security establishment at the very last moment; in 2016, while the United States Congress, especially the Chairs of Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the Armed Services Committee, were initially opposed to the sale of eight F-16s to Pakistan, it was the U.S. administration which supported the sale and which ultimately prevailed.

Policy contour – sans parliament

In Pakistan's case, however, the role of establishment in relations to Afghanistan also got strengthened during the last two military takeovers (1977-88 and 1999-2008), which had to face conflict-ridden Afghanistan. Their policies, which became part of Pakistan's overall policy towards Afghanistan, relied on the security apparatus.

In 1979, as Soviet troops set their boots on the Afghan soil, Pakistan became a front line state facing communist Soviet Union.

At that time, the army under General Zia ulHaq was in full control of the country. Two years earlier, he had packed up the democratic dispensation. The new foundations of Pakistan-Afghanistan policy were laid during that time – sans Parliament. Since there was no parliament, its role did not exist.

This policy entailed pushing the Soviets back inside their borders. The lukewarm relations between Pakistan and the US warmed up, and the hibernating great game once again came into play with tacit support of the US, western Europe, and Saudi Arabia.

The security establishment became attached to this Afghan policy thus subsequent political governments were denied space too, with Zia's own handpicked prime minister being the first casualty. In 1988, the non-party government, working under the military regime, was packed up, partly for negotiating Geneva Accord, which expedited the withdrawal of Soviet Union from Afghanistan. Although Pakistan's then ambassador to Kabul argues that the government was sent home for asking to investigate into the blast at Ojhri ammunition depot, the link with Afghanistan is not lost either: the depot, after all, is alleged to have supplied arms towards *mujahideen* in Afghanistan.²

After the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, Pakistan security establishment continued to play its role viz.-a-viz. Afghanistan, culminating in the

² For details see *Afghanistan and Pakistan: Conflict, Extremism, and Resistance to Modernity* by Riaz Mohammad Khan. Also, Amir Wasim, "20 years on, Ojhri Camp truth remains locked up", Dawn, 11 April 2008, <http://www.dawn.com/news/297623/20-years-on-oghri-camp-truth-remains-locked-up>;

shape of Taliban gaining control of Kabul in 1996.

Even though military rule had ended by 1988, the parliament and political leadership took a backseat on the country's relations with Afghanistan. In 1988, in an informal understanding with the military chief, Benazir Bhutto, the future prime minister, agreed not to interfere in Afghan affairs.³ She retained Zia's foreign minister, SahibzadaYaqub Ali Khan, into her cabinet.

The numerous interventions in the democratic setup during the late 1980's and early 1990's sapped the energy of parliament to find a foot hold for its own survival, rather than carve a role in formulating foreign policy.

Later, after September 11 attacks, once again, Pakistan was under General Musharraf's military regime. This time, it was under Musharraf that the country decided to publicly change its policy towards Taliban, which were unseated by the US forces.

Parliamentary accountability

Even though parliament has been sidelined historically in shaping Afghan policy, the country's supreme institution can, if it wants, play its due role, especially by holding the executive accountable.

³ This is cited in several books including Bhutto's own memoirs.

In fact, the national legislature, whenever in existence, did play a conspicuous role to that end. This role is clearly reflected in the debates in the two houses, Senate and National Assembly, as well as in the meetings of their standing committees of foreign affairs.

Parliamentary committees on foreign affairs have often touched upon issues concerning Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. From 2003 to 2008, the Senate's foreign affairs committee held approximately 30 meetings, of which 6 were on Afghanistan, and presented 23 reports to the Senate. Moreover, during that period, in five in-camera meetings with the foreign minister, the standing committee on foreign affairs provided input on foreign policy.

These committees can invite people from outside of the parliament to share their input. In 2007 the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Senate invited Syed Hamid Gillani, Deputy Chairman of the Afghan Loya Jirga to hold discussion on Pakistan-Afghanistan relations.

Members of the committee, especially the chair, are in turn solicited to share their input. In October 2008, the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee's Chairman visited Iceland to discuss Pakistan-Afghanistan relations at the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, where Pakistan was invited as an observer.

Even though the guidelines or recommendations of the parliament or the committees are not binding on the government, it is quite difficult for the government to ignore those views.

In 2008, the parliament passed a unanimous 17- point resolution, which committed that an urgent review of national security strategy was in order, urged the government to follow an independent foreign policy and to revisit the methodology of combating terrorism so as to restore peace and stability in the country and the region. Today, that resolution is the corner stone of Pakistan's foreign policy in the context of war against terrorism.

Likewise, in early 2009, in a debate on foreign policy in the Senate, the members vehemently opposed drone attacks on Pakistani territory adjacent to Afghanistan, and termed

them an infringement on the sovereignty of Pakistan. This argument, including the fact about parliament's opposition, has been agitated by Pakistan in bilateral and multilateral meetings in the country and abroad.

Conclusion

The parliament does have a major role in the oversight of the ministry of foreign affairs, which legally implements Afghan policy. However, the ministry of foreign affairs is not the only body, which formulates foreign policy, as the national security agencies also take on key roles.

More so, the parliament and political leadership had resigned their role when it came to Afghanistan. Reality and myth should not be intermingled to draw the wrong conclusion.

Afghan peace talks: implications for Pakistan-Afghanistan relations

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In 2015, the first-ever peace talks between Afghan Taliban and Afghan government, broke down after it was revealed that Taliban's supreme leader Mullah Omar was long dead. Since then, the talks have been suspended, with Taliban launching attacks in Afghanistan, resulting into worsening Pak-Afghan relations.

This essay analyzes how the leadership crisis in Afghan Taliban affected the peace talks as well as Pakistan-Afghanistan relations.

A brief leadership crisis

After the announcement of the death of Mullah Omar, his aide, Mullah Akhtar Mansoor was chosen as the new supreme leader. A former minister of aviation, Mansoor hailed from Kandahar, where he often stayed close to Mullah Omar from the onset of the Taliban movement.

Not everyone endorsed Mansoor's elevation as supreme leader. Those who opposed him included Omar's own family members, who questioned the rationale behind secrecy of Omar's death; Mullah Zakir, military commission head, who said that Omar might be alive; and others like Mullah Dadullah, who said that Omar was killed.

Mansoor argued that the decision of not disclosing the news that Mullah Omar had died, was taken by the Taliban's Leadership Council (*Rahbari Shura*), which thought the news might adversely affect resistance against foreign forces.

Omar's family argued that not all the Leadership Council members, religious clerics and military commanders, were present at the meeting that chose Mansoor. Omar's brother Abdul Manan publicly stated that they had refused allegiance to Mansoor.

Zakir was sacked from his position, while Dadullah took arms against the new leader. Another senior dissident commander Javed Nangyal was forced to flee his stronghold in Herat's Shindand district.

So far, Mansoor has prevailed in the internal battles. In mid-November 2015, Dadullah along with his brother and scores of other fighters were killed in Afghanistan's Zabul province by Mansoor's supporters. Dadullah was a deputy of Mullah Muhammad Rasool who headed a dissident group opposing the Mansoor-led main Taliban group. Mullah Rasool was later detained inside Pakistan, after he fled infighting. The most influential man in Rasool's camp is Mullah Baz Muhammad, a former governor of Farah, who reportedly has some 800 fighters. Meanwhile, Dadullah's loyalist, Omar Khetab, now heads a small splinter "Fidayee Mahaz." (Khetab's brother was killed in Quetta in 2015.)

In addition to these, only few known Taliban leaders (like Razziq; ex-interior minister; Jalil, ex-deputy foreign minister) are unwilling to support Mansoor, though they have sworn allegiance to anyone else too. Yet some others (like Tayyeb Agha,

ex-head of Qatar office; Mutasim Agha, ex-finance minister) are undecided. And at least two leaders (Zaeef; ex-ambassador; Abdul Walik, ex-foreign minister) are keeping low profiles.

Mansoor, through his intermediaries, tried to woo the dissidents. It took months to convince some of them to give up the opposition. Omar's family members announced support to Mansoor by September last year. Others attached conditions in swearing allegiance, as Abdul Qayyum Zakir did in April 2016.

One of the most influential leaders, Zakir had earlier sent to Taliban sympathizers a hand-written letter, dated February 17th 2016, detailing his conditions including what he calls "Mullah Zakir's Shariah reservations and demands."

Several Taliban leaders have attached conditions to allegiance to Mansoor. One condition put by some is to investigate into the circumstances of Mullah Omar's death. Although some argue Mansoor had agreed to investigate the cause, there is no progress so far.

In the very meeting where Zakir swore allegiance to Mansoor, Taliban gave positions to Mullah Omar's son, Mullah Yaqoob, and brother, Mullah Abdul Manan, even though both had vowed support eight months earlier by September last year.

Some attribute this delay to certain

reasons such as the unwillingness on part of Yaqoob and Manan in accepting the positions unless infighting is stopped, or that they didn't want to reflect they were vying for positions.

Absent from the meeting was supreme leader Mansoor, who, like his predecessor, couldn't move much out of security concerns. Some Taliban leaders were not in favour of giving positions to the two, who didn't have any position in Omar's time. Appointing them now to senior positions, they thought, would give an impression of Taliban being a family entity.

But Mansoor couldn't ignore family of Omar, an important tagline, more so because of their resistance. In fact, the dissidents had asked Omar's son and brother to lead them, but the two refused. Mansoor had no other option, but to accommodate them. Likewise, the mediators convinced the two to accept Mansoor, else there was no other option. (Because of fear they could be declared as rebels and if someone among the Taliban is declared rebel, he could be killed.)

The guest of honour of this meeting was Sirajuddin Haqqani, known as Khalifa' among Afghan Taliban, Pakistani Taliban and other affiliates. Presently, one of the two deputies of Mullah Mansoor, Siraj was the one who made both the developments – Zakir's allegiance and positions to Omar's family members – possible.

The Haqqani network acted as successful mediator between the opposition and the new leader. Successful because, before him two senior leaders¹ who undertook this task could only win over the support of Mullah Hasan Rehmani, former Taliban governor in Kandahar, who was almost unconscious on a bed in Karachi hospital, where he died.²

With the induction of Zakir and Omar's family members in the "RahbariShura", or Leadership Council, Sirajuddin Haqqani consolidated his position in the powerful decision-making body of the Taliban. For all practical purposes, Siraj would be now dealing with Taliban affairs. Akhtar Mansoor will be more like Mullah Omar, away from meetings due to insecurity, but carrying the title of "Amirul Momineen" (Commander of the Faithful.) As of the second deputy, Maulvi Haibatullah Akhundzada, he is not that prominent among Taliban.

Siraj announced the positions at a time when Taliban were launching their annual spring offensive, wide-scale attacks across Afghanistan. Zakir's own expertise, in the military domain, will therefore be productive

to the group. Omar's son was given the military position in 14 districts.

Siraj's own speech in that gathering focused on the unity within the Taliban ranks and the fighting season in Afghanistan. So much so that not a single word was offered on the peace process.

Fate of peace talks

The platform of four-nation Quadrilateral Coordination Group comprising China, US, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, hasn't been able to restore peace talks between Afghan Taliban and Afghan government.

Initially, when pressed to bring Taliban to table, Pakistan responded that the Taliban were too divided after Omar's death to be asked to sit on the table. But many contest this assertion, now that the new supreme leader has won back most of the rebels. However, while Mansoor seems to have consolidated his position on the peace table, he does not seem in a hurry to go for it yet.

The present head of the Qatar political office, tasked to negotiate on behalf of Taliban, has also declared support to Mansoor.

The office's previous head, Syed Tayyeb Agha, who resigned following Mansoor's elevation, had distanced itself from the Murree talks. Under him, the Taliban reacting angrily to the meetings, saying the Qatar office was never informed about the group's

¹Mullah Noor-ud-Turabi, the former Justice Minister during the Taliban; and Maulana Mutiullah, known as Mullah Nanai.

² According to this report, he died in Karachi:
<http://www.thenews.com.pk/print/97206-Senior-Afghan-Taliban-leader-Mulla-Rahmani-dies>.

meetings since December. (Agha also questioned Mansoor, saying he was elected "outside Pakistan" – a veiled reference to Pakistan.)

The QCG has been for most part interested in inviting Taliban, rather than any other group such as Hizb-e-Islami. However, lately, Afghan government has been mentioning Hizb and its leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar too, who have publicly announced of joining the peace process and appointed two persons to this end. This policy of his caused resentment within Hizb's ranks too. But Hizb continued talks with the government and may even sign a peace deal soon.

Yet, the peace talks essentially revolve around Taliban, who apparently are in no mood to join it, at least for now. On ground, given that peace talks are of immense importance to the Taliban movement, no one individual can take the decision on behalf of the entire movement; it would rather be the Leadership Council to make a decision. As discussed above, Siraj, a key member of that council, wooed the dissidents without committing on the peace front.

A member of Qatar's office, while not completely rejecting the possibility of the talks, said that Taliban want some confidence-building measures to convince the foot soldiers and hardliners. The "Islamic Emirate", Taliban say with concern, could face resistance, if the

group joins the process without any such measure.

The main demands of Taliban are reopening of their office, removing of the names of the senior leaders from the UN's sanctions list, and releasing of prisoners. These demands are directed at Kabul and Washington.

Apparently Taliban leaders would also be thinking that they will be in a much better position to join the talks, after the fighting season, in which they expect to bring more area under their control, is over.

In all likelihood, Taliban will have no option, other than coming to the table, if certain concession-granting steps are taken. But a key issue appears to be whether to grant concession before some semblance of peace or after: Pakistan's advisor on foreign affairs recently asked for some concessions to Taliban to go ahead with the talks, but Kabul rejects this proposition, fearing that concessions in advance will earn the government ire.

Meanwhile, the Taliban continue to see itself as government-in-exile. In April 2016, Taliban Qatar negotiators came to Pakistan. Because Afghan government didn't reciprocate, Taliban, in a face-saving gesture, stated they were visiting Pakistan to discuss the issues of refugees, border, and prisoners – something which should be the talking points of the Afghan government.

Timeline of the talks

- Since May 2015, the Taliban and the Afghan government have held at least two face-to-face meetings.
- However, the representatives of the Taliban and the Afghan government had interactions at several un-official conferences in France, Japan, Norway and Qatar.
- On May 19-20, upon Pakistan's request, China hosted a meeting of three Taliban leaders with Afghan government in Urumqi, the capital of China's western Xinjiang region. Mullah Abdul Jalil, Mullah Hassan Rahmani (late) and Mullah Abdul Razaq participated from Taliban's side, while Masoom Stanekzai, a senior member of the High Peace Council, led the talks from government's side.
- On July 7, 2015, Pakistan hosted talks in the scenic town of Murree. A three-member Taliban team had a direct interaction with an Afghan government delegation. Deputy Foreign Minister Khalil Hekmat Karzai was among the government delegation, while the Taliban delegation included Mullah Abbas, Ibrahim Haqqani and Abdul Lateef Mansoor.
- The Murree process faced a deadlock after Mullah Omar's death was confirmed in late July.
- The Taliban's Qatar office had disowned the Urumqi and Murree meetings.
- In late April 2016, a Taliban delegation from the Qatar office arrived in Pakistan to discuss possibility of peace talks; however, the talks could not be held in the wake of the April 19 attacks in Kabul.

Impact on Pakistan-Afghanistan relations

Pakistan's advisor on foreign affairs, Sartaj Aziz, said that while Pakistan has "influence" on Taliban leaders, because their families reside in Pakistan, this however in no way translates into "control" over Taliban.

To Afghans, Aziz's statement had raised hopes that Islamabad would either bring Taliban to the peace table or deny them any space on Pakistani soil.¹

Afghans feel disappointed at a lack of development on both fronts. Afghan government's negotiator, Khalil Hekmat Karzai, said "Pakistan has not fulfilled its pledges" in the QCG meetings. More so, that the Haqqanis' leader Siraj called for war in Afghanistan, in his speech, as discussed above, dispelled the impression that the Haqqanis, because of being close to Pakistan, could have joined the peace negotiations readily. Afghans were dismayed.

Instead, attacks inside Afghanistan are followed by accusations against Pakistan. In April 2016, Taliban launched one of the deadliest attacks, in Kabul, days after the group had warned of countrywide annual spring offensive. Some Afghan officials indirectly blamed

Pakistan; Afghan defense spokesman asked Pakistan army chief to take action against the "irreconcilable" elements.

Pakistani officials have often feared that any punitive action against Afghan Taliban could force them to join hands with Pakistani Taliban, who attack inside Pakistan. In May 2016, Advisor Sartaj Aziz said that the military option has not produced any results over the past 14 years. More so, officials have publicly said Pakistan will not fight others' war on its own soil. All these statements are taken as big "no" to Kabul's calls for action against the Afghan Taliban in Pakistan.

After the Kabul attack in April 2016, Pakistan was able to push for its influence on the Qatar office, the delegates from which came to Karachi. Apparently, Pakistan itself was facing mounting pressure, with foreign secretary saying he was "unaware" of the Taliban visit. (Later, Mr. Sartaj Aziz admitted the visit and said it was part of QCG's contacts with the Taliban.) Islamabad was expecting that Kabul would reciprocate. Not so.

But the April 2016 attempt by Taliban negotiators didn't pay off. Now, the Afghan government is not interested in negotiating with Taliban. Kabul, which once praised Islamabad's role in bringing Taliban to the table, took their latest visit as challenge to Afghan government's legitimacy.

¹Author's interview with Afghan officials, December 2015 and March 2016.

The relations today are back to where they had started before the establishment of QCG. The traditional blame game has restarted. President Ashraf Ghani announced in his parliament speech in April that he would no more seek Pakistan's role in reconciliation with

the Taliban in a major policy shift. The tense relationship is evident from the statements of presidential spokesman, who says Kabul has decided to lodge a formal complaint to the UN Security Council against Pakistan.

The Pak-Afghan impasse: can a pro-active Pakistani policy initiative break it?

Ijaz Khan*

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2014-15 turned out to be key years in Pakistan and Afghanistan, with events appearing to have direct impact on their bilateral relations.

In September 2014, Ashraf Ghani was elected as new president of Afghanistan, thereby formally transitioning the power from Karzai, with whom Pakistan's relations were far from smooth. The new president brought a new approach to resolving the terrorist challenge in his country: improving relations with Pakistan, assuming it can either bring Taliban to the table or use force against them.

For one, he sought active Chinese intervention in support of Afghan government, banking on good Pak-China relations. More so, to allay Pakistan's concerns about Indian influence in Afghanistan, the Ghani government, withstanding strong domestic criticism, sent Afghan army cadets for training to Pakistan, and more significantly, both practically and symbolically concluded an intelligence-sharing agreement with Pakistan's ISI.

A major phase of the war against terrorism ended by December 2014, as NATO drawdown completed.

In December 2014, in Pakistan, government came with a counter-terror policy, National Action Plan, aimed at targeting all terrorists, whether the "bad" ones who target Pakistan or the "good" ones who target outside Pakistan. Around the same time, a hectic diplomatic

activity from Pakistan to Afghanistan took place, with Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff at its centre.

All these events raised expectations of a new beginning in Pak-Afghan relations.

The expectations, however, hinged on the two countries taking actions meant to address each other's concerns. Afghanistan was to relieve Pakistan's concerns about Indian influence in Afghanistan, along with acting against anti-Pakistan terrorists who use Afghan territory as sanctuary. Simultaneously, Pakistan was to use its influence over the Afghan Taliban for bringing them to negotiated settlement, as well as denying them the space in Pakistani territory against Afghanistan.

After initial rounds of talks between Afghan Taliban and Afghan government, their negotiations got suspended in mid-2015, when the death of Mullah Omer was disclosed. The collapse of negotiations ended the expectations of change in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations.

By 2016, the two countries were fast returning to their traditional acrimony, accusing each other of hosting hostile elements. Clearly, the expectations have not been met.

Pakistan continues or, some would say has reverted to, its old Afghan policy, despite a short-lived

honeymoon that initially hinted at change. Why?

Old perceptions in a changing region

Pakistan's objectives in Afghanistan are two-fold: No or minimum Indian influence in Afghanistan, and resolution of the Durand Line. The tool to pursue those goals entailed largely supporting a "Talibanized" identity of Pashtuns, no matter which group or leader among them takes the leader.¹

The objectives appear rational, but the tools have inflicted severe damage upon Pakistan as Pakistani Taliban started as a replica of their Afghan counterparts and many groups or leaders splintered, taking on the state of Pakistan. It has promoted extremism, terrorism, and lawlessness in addition. Besides, the tools in no way brought the country closer to achieving their goals.

Again, why do policy makers not understand the failure of tools to achieve policy goals and their cost in terms of domestic extremism and terrorism, and increasingly negative image of the country being soft on

terrorism? One can see a certain level of realization in, at least part of the decision makers. However, one can also see a step forward, followed by two steps back. So, are they unable to change?

To say that actually Afghanistan is not changing – (why should Pakistan then?) – is a self-defeating proposition. The essence of foreign policy towards another state is to change the behaviour of that particular state according to one's interests. Pakistan's current policy towards Afghanistan has failed to bring about the change – in the behaviour of Afghanistan according to Pakistan's interests.

A state's foreign policy is determined by external and internal factors. While external factors include the regional and global environment of that state, the most important domestic factors constitute perception and decision-making system.

Pakistan's external environment is fast changing, especially around Afghanistan: in early 2016, Iran just sought rapprochement with the United States; some months later, in April 2016, Afghanistan, India, and Iran recently signed agreement on utilizing Iran's Chabahar port; meanwhile, China too seems to be showing interest in Afghanistan peace.

A sound foreign policy should have fitted Pakistan in those changing

¹ To be sure, initially, Pakistan also supported non-Pashtuns. However, by and large, Pakistan has been relying its influence among Pashtun sections of Afghan society including the Taliban to achieve those objectives; lately it has been striving to reach out to non-Pashtun segments as well.

environment. But that doesn't appear to be the case; there is hardly any change in perception about Afghanistan.

Admittedly, Pakistan did try to adjust to the changes by launching military operation against all terrorists and facilitating talks with Afghan Taliban.

These steps have, however, overall not yielded any convincing results, which also satisfy the Afghans, who continue to point out the existence of Quetta Shura and presence of Haqqani network, in Pakistan. In 2016, after several years of denial, Pakistan finally admitted having "influence" over Taliban, but stopped short of terming it "control". Sartaj Aziz, advisor to prime minister on foreign affairs, who made this claim, termed the very presence of the families as the basis of that influence of Pakistan on Taliban. Officials often argue that if Pakistan is expected to bring Afghan Taliban to the negotiating table (using the influence, not control), Pakistan cannot act all-out against Taliban.

Whatever little confusion there was, on whether to take action or persuade to talks, was ended in April 2016, when President Ghani "categorically" asked Pakistan not to bring Taliban to the table, but to take action against them. The announcement was made in the joint sitting of the parliament, specially conveyed after one of the deadliest

attacks in Kabul in April 2016, in which more than 60 people died.

So far, Pakistan has reacted by saying it has been trying to bring Afghan Taliban to negotiations, but doing that is not its sole responsibility. More significantly, the Foreign Office reasoned that "force cannot resolve the issue", a statement that can be interpreted as refusal by Pakistan to use force against Afghan Taliban.

To many, Pakistan actions, and statements, are not dissimilar to the ones in the past: cracking down on those who target inside the country, while avoiding action against those targeting outside. Resultantly, there is a mismatch between external and internal environment, with the country being pulled in opposite directions.

One of the casualties of this mismatch is Pak-Afghan relations, which are back to acrimony. The situation today is partly worse than where they left, as Afghanistan seems to be finding new avenues in a changing region.

Prioritizing geo-economics

Both the countries are unable to make any progress as they are stuck with baggage of history, when security policies were state-centric and territory-focused, with utter disregard for the people. Given that this state of affairs didn't deliver in

the past, it would not do so in the future.

A sound approach would be capitalizing on the people of the two countries. Pakistan can play a more proactive role, much more than Afghanistan can; if for no other reason, because Pakistan is bigger, stronger, and relatively stable.

Pakistan should understand that Durand Line cannot be undone by one odd annual gathering of a few hundred people in a square in Kabul. Pakistan needs to ignore such gatherings, by learning from Europe, where many territorial claims have been limited to football grounds, moving beyond the domain of any serious political discourse.

Instead, Pakistan should insist on resolving the Durand Line issue through formal announcement or agreement.

As of India's influence, it can only be countered if Pakistan's influence increases. Significantly, India may also be balanced by China, which

Pakistan trusts and which Afghanistan is seeking active role of.

Pakistan should also realize that influence cannot be imposed by force. A better way is to bring about change in the perceptions on ground. As of now, right or wrong, Afghans accuse Pakistan of protecting, and some even say, of sponsoring those who attack inside Afghanistan. This perception can be taken care of through visible actions.

One avenue in which Pakistan can invest is Afghan economy. Instead of flouting transit trade with Afghanistan as a sign of its dependency, Pakistan should rather promote it as a gesture of goodwill. Given that Iran's Chabahar port is becoming a stronger alternate, Pakistan cannot rely on the traditional security or political means. Pakistan should rather plug in the benefits of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to Afghanistan.

With a right set of policies, Pakistan can rather become the real centre of a new regional economic zone.

Pakistan-Afghanistan ties in the changing regional dynamics

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Historical background

More or less, the bilateral relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have been uneasy. Afghanistan opposed membership of the newly-created state of Pakistan into the United Nations, laying claim to the Pashtun territories on the Pakistani side of the Durand Line, the border between the two countries. Earlier, Afghanistan had also rejected the July 1947 referendum, which decided whether the Pashtun-populated North-West Frontier Province (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) will stay with Pakistan or India. Afghans argued the referendum didn't offer any third choice to the people of the NWFP (Grare, 2006).

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the idea of so-called greater Pashtun land (Pashtunistan), which hinted at Afghanistan annexing Pakistan's Pashtun-dominated areas, continued to trouble Pakistan. Although the idea never became popular in either country,¹ it, for sure, heightened Pakistan's security concerns about its western border.

Nonetheless, Afghanistan continued challenging Pakistan over the Durand Line "through diplomatic pressure, tribal incursions, and

¹ Not only did the majority of Afghan people reject the idea of a greater Pashtunistan, but the Pashtun leadership in Pakistan, particularly Wali Khan, head of his own faction of the National Awami Party, which later became the Awami National Party, also rejected it.

support for secessionist movements" in Pakistan (Tellis, 2011: 3).

Pakistan's Afghan policy in the 1980s and 1990s largely remained focused on seeking strategic depth in Afghanistan and countering Indian influence there. During the Soviet-Afghan war (1979-89), Pakistan's role was very significant in the provision of guerrilla training, weapons and funds to the Islamist resistance forces, or mujahideen. Immediately after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the US had started providing secret military aid to the mujahideen fighting against the Soviets, which was later converted into a combined effort by the US, Britain, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Pakistan, China and others to train, fund and equip the mujahideen (Ostermann, 2003). Although the war was called as jihad against 'Soviet infidels', but most analysts agree that religion as well as Pashtun ethnic ethos were used by Pakistan and other anti-Soviet allies to justify a strategic war, as well as to get recruits and funds.

However, India considered it extremely important that Afghanistan should not fall under Pakistani influence. Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi had told the Soviet president in 1987 that such a scenario would be absolutely unacceptable to India.² Afghan

²Excerpt from the record of a conversation between M. S. Gorbachev and the then-general secretary of the Central Committee of the People's

president Najibullah told his Soviet counterpart during his meeting with him in Moscow on August 23rd 1990 that India was pursuing its own interests in connection with Kashmir and was “stubbornly trying to involve Afghanistan in opposing Pakistan without trying very eagerly to give specific support to settling the Afghan problem” (Ostermann, 2003: 191).

That also describes how Afghanistan served as a proxy war zone for a multitude of stakeholders who were apparently least interested in the country's security and stability. Regional stakeholders' selective support of the Afghan mujahideen and ethnic groups pushed Afghanistan towards a civil war. During the 1990s, when the Afghan Taliban succeeded in capturing Kabul, Pakistan was one of the three nations that had recognized the Taliban government, the other two being Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (Rashid, 1999). India, Iran and Russia supported the Northern Alliance against the Taliban, fearing that the Arab, Central Asian and Pakistani militant groups sheltered in Afghanistan could create security challenges for them. India was concerned about the Kashmir-focused Pakistani militant groups' nexus with the Taliban and the Arab and Central Asian militant groups. On the other hand, Saudis'

Democratic Party of Afghanistan, Najibullah, July 20th 1987, as cited in Ostermann (2003).

support for the Taliban and its involvement in sectarian-related killings in Mazar-e-Sharif heightened Iranian concerns (Sial, 2013).

Post-9/11, Pakistan once again became the frontline ally of the US in the ensuing war against terrorism in Afghanistan, but this time, against the Taliban regime, as it was not in a position to continue its earlier pro-Taliban policy. However, it did not compromise on its strategic interests in Afghanistan that related in particular to countering India's growing ambitions there and ensuring that Afghan land is not used to fuel insurgency in Pakistan's Balochistan province and tribal areas. Pakistani president Gen Pervez Musharraf time and again reaffirmed his resolve to “break Pakistan-based terrorist groups and to pull the country away from the brink of a theocratic state” (Ayoob, 2002: 51) in order to give a message to the world that Pakistan had revised its policy towards Afghanistan and jihadist groups (Haqqani, 2004). The final years of Musharraf's rule witnessed a phenomenal surge in the TTP-led terrorist assault in Pakistan,³ particularly after the July 2007 military operation against the Red

³ The TTP, or Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan was formed in 2007 in South Waziristan as an umbrella organization of largely Taliban groups operating in different FATA agencies and parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Mosque in Islamabad. Through this assault, the TTP and its affiliated tribal and Punjab-based militant groups started making inroads into settled districts of KP, mainly Swat, and Punjab, including Islamabad. Analysts assert that the growing internal militancy made it more difficult for Musharraf to take action against the Afghan Taliban, which he had already done little to confront so far, fearing a serious backlash. Others argue that Musharraf's selective policy towards the various brands of militants was based on strategic choices in terms of Pakistan's future role in Afghanistan (Sial, 2013).

During the post-Musharraf democratic regime in Pakistan, led by the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), Pakistan's traditional approach of inertness against the Afghan Taliban, mainly Haqqanis, continued despite repeated requests from the international allies in Afghanistan to act against them. Meanwhile, Pakistan continued to regard India's political, economic and military activities in Afghanistan with suspicion. Afghanistan's signing of a strategic partnership with India in October 2011 further increased Pakistan's fears that it was being marginalized in Afghanistan (Sial, 2013). Some other significant events and developments that happened in this period made Pakistan more concerned about its western borders with Afghanistan, including the US operation that killed Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad in May 2011

and the NATO air strikes on two Pakistani military checkpoints on the Pakistani-Afghan border in November in the same year that caused the death of 26 Pakistani soldiers (Rana & Sial, 2013).

The PPP-led government also committed itself to supporting an Afghan-led and -owned reconciliation process. But the assassination of the head of Afghanistan's High Peace Council, Burhanuddin Rabbani, in September 2011 derailed this process.⁴ The two countries revived the joint efforts for political reconciliation with the November 2012 visit of the new head of the High Peace Council, Salahuddin Rabbani, son of the slain Burhanuddin Rabbani, to Pakistan. Pakistan released several detained Taliban leaders to help the peace process but it did not bear fruit. On the whole, an environment of bilateral mistrust prevailed between the two countries during this period. Pakistan considered Afghan president Hamid Karzai closer to India, who according to it did little to address Pakistani concerns of border insecurity and Indian influence in Afghanistan. On the other hand, president Karzai frequently blamed Pakistan for supporting the Afghan Taliban who have been a major actor of instability in Afghanistan.

⁴ Afghanistan claimed that the suicide bomber who killed Rabbani was sent from Pakistan, possibly by the Afghan Taliban based there.

Bilateral ties after Karzai⁵

After coming to power after May 2013 elections, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government committed itself to forging friendly relations with the country's neighbours, particularly India and Afghanistan. During his visit to Afghanistan in November 2013, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif reiterated his commitment to support the peace process in Afghanistan and discussed at length how Pakistan, Afghanistan and the US could work together in this regard. Furthermore, discussions at the first meeting of the National Security Committee after the new government took charge, which was held on December 17, 2013, were focused on three key issues: the formulation of a national security strategy to safeguard Pakistani national interests; the drawing up of a strategy on internal security; and relations with Afghanistan (Yousaf, 2013).

Bilateral ties between the two countries witnessed a considerable improvement after National Unity Government was formed in Afghanistan in September 2014 after

the controversial run-off election in June. Ashraf Ghani was sworn in as president on September 29th, while his election rival Abdullah Abdullah was given the newly-created position of chief executive. President Ashraf Ghani considered peace as the foremost pre-requisite to bring political and economic stability in his country, which he thought was not possible without establishing good relations with Pakistan. That assumption was based on the perception that Pakistan held considerable influence among Afghan Taliban's Quetta Shura and Haqqani network and could convince or force them to participate in peace talks with the Afghan government. Therefore, unlike his predecessor Hamid Karzai, the new Afghan president adopted a policy of rapprochement towards Pakistan amid a severe criticism at home.

Ghani's rapprochement towards Pakistan included some important actions, which apparently meant to address Pakistan's concerns including those linked to Indian influence in Afghanistan. First, he delayed the implementation of the strategic partnership agreement⁶ with India and also decided against the purchase of heavy arms from it, a decision that was made by former president Hamid Karzai during his final months in office. Secondly,

⁵This section of the paper largely build on author's report titled "Pakistani-Afghan relations after Karzai," published by NOREF in February 2015; the report can be accessed here: http://www.peacebuilding.no/var/ezflow_site/storage/original/application/3d81e63e01f3a0c6adb2c5af2d0a74ac.pdf.

⁶Signed in October 2011, the agreement had given India a former role in Afghan security including training of Afghan military personnel.

Ghani sought close ties with Pakistan's security establishment unlike his predecessor Hamid Karzai, who preferred to establish warm military and defence ties with India. To that end, Ghani led a high-level Afghan delegation who visited General Headquarters of Pakistan Army in Rawalpindi in November 2014; sent six Afghan National Army cadets, in January 2015, to study for 18 months at military academy in Abbottabad; and made way for a Memorandum of Understanding between Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and the Afghan National Directorate of Security (NDS) for cooperation in intelligence sharing and coordinated intelligence operations on both sides of border (Syed, 2015). Thirdly, Ghani tried to address Pakistani concerns of cross-border attacks by mounting pressure on the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants sheltered in Afghanistan. Afghan security forces conducted some operations in Pakistani-Afghan border areas where reportedly TTP militants allegedly involved in Peshawar's army public school attack (December 2014) were hiding. Fourthly, president Ghani also struck trade deals with Pakistan soon after coming into power that anticipated to boost bilateral trade between the two countries from the current around \$1.6 billion to \$5bn by 2017. The agreements included reducing tariffs and granting each other preferential trade status (Dawn, 2015a).

These measures triggered strong outcry in Afghanistan that entailed severe criticism of the Ghani government from parliamentarians, civil society groups as well as Hamid Karzai group; Karzai publically accused Ghani's administration of treason for signing the intelligence sharing agreement with Pakistan (Assad, 2015).

Pakistan's political and military leaderships responded positively to Afghan president's friendly overtures. For one, Ghani's rapprochement towards Pakistan apparently reduced Pakistan's Indian-centric concerns, which the latter thought had remained unaddressed during the outgoing Karzai regime in Afghanistan. Secondly, there has been a growing realisation among Pakistani policymakers and strategists that an insecure and unstable Afghanistan is detrimental to counter-militancy and peacebuilding efforts in Pakistan. Not only Pakistani Taliban militants have been carrying out cross-border attacks in Pakistan since they sought shelter in Afghanistan after 2009 Swat operation, but Pakistan also cannot afford Afghan Taliban's capture of Kabul because it could embolden their Pakistani counterparts and other militants thus increasing the risk of violence in Pakistan. Thirdly, many in Pakistan believe that due to its increasing economic and trade engagements in the region, China wants to play an active role in restoring peace in Afghanistan and

is encouraging Pakistan for the same.

Pakistan responded by bringing the Afghan Taliban leaders to the negotiating table in July 2015 in Murree. Several weeks before that, Pakistan had started to influence the Afghan Taliban leaders in support of political reconciliation in Afghanistan. During a joint press conference with Afghan president in Kabul in May 2015, Pakistani prime minister condemned the Taliban's summer offense as an act of terrorism and vowed to eliminate their sanctuaries, if found, in Pakistan (Haider & Haider, 2015). He also stated that the enemies of Afghanistan were the enemies of Pakistan. Apart from that, Pakistan had also conveyed very clear and categorical message to the Taliban leaders that they should stay away from creating trouble in Afghanistan and instead engage in talks with the Afghan government. Pakistani efforts including those by Pakistan army and the ISI played a key role in bringing the Taliban leaders to negotiation table.

The announcement of the death of Afghan Taliban supreme leader Mullah Omar in July 2015⁷ not only

derailed the fledging peace process between the Afghan government and the Taliban but also took the level of trust between Pakistan and Afghanistan back to pre-Ghani era, when the two countries were caught in mutual blame-game of cross-border terrorism.

Eventually, bilateral pledges and agreements made by the two countries including of non-interference in each other's affairs, improving border security and counter-terrorism coordination, and increasing bilateral trade did not fully materialise. There were two main reasons for that: first, Ghani's high-level decisions viz a viz Pakistan did not enjoy across-the-board and top-down acceptance in Afghanistan; and secondly, increasing Taliban attacks after the announcement of Mullah Omar's death increased political and security opposition to Ghani's pro-Pakistan overtures.

The Afghan government might have released the news of Mullah Omar's death to get sort of leverage over the Taliban in the negotiations but it proved, as the following developments indicated, counter-productive. First, as cited earlier, it derailed the peace process, exposed and increased internal rifts among the Taliban leaders, and prompted

⁷Afghan government announced on July 29th 2015 that the Taliban supreme leader Mullah Omar had died in 2013 in a hospital in a Pakistani city Karachi and was buried secretly in Afghanistan. The announcement came just two days before the second round of the talks

between the Afghan government and the Taliban was to be held; the first round of talks was held on July 7th in Murree, Pakistan.

the new Taliban emir Mullah AkhtarMansoor to take a hardliner's stance to appease the dissident Taliban commanders, who did not want to engage in talks with the Afghan government. Consequently, the Taliban reverted to their traditional stance- that they would not hold talks with the government until the international forces are completely withdrawn and Afghan government's agreements in that regard are abolished-and increased attacks inside Afghanistan to dispel the impression of weakness. The recent Taliban offensives have not remained confined to south-west and eastern Afghanistan but also expanded to northern Afghan provinces including Kunduz, Takhar and Badakhshan.

After the derailing of peace process and increased Taliban attacks, including the one in Kabul on August 7th 2015 that killed more than 50 people, even President Ghani started issuing anti-Pakistan statements. After few days of Kabul attacks, Afghan president said he no more wanted Pakistan to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table but instead wanted it to eliminate the Afghan Taliban's sanctuaries that existed on Pakistani soil (Mashal, 2015). First-Vice President Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostum, CEO Abdullah and NDS officials followed suit, accusing Pakistan of contributing to insecurity in Afghanistan.

However, the fifth Heart of Asia Conference,⁸ which was held in Islamabad on December 6th 2015, increased the prospects of the resumption of Afghan talks with the Taliban as well as of long-stalled comprehensive dialogue between Pakistan and India, which could also support a constructive engagement between Pakistan and Afghanistan. During the discussions at the Conference, Afghanistan, Pakistan, the US, and China all called for a renewed effort to open talks with the Afghan Taliban groups willing to reconcile with the government. A quadrilateral arrangement known as Quadrilateral Coordinating Group (QCG) was also formed comprising these four countries to steer and coordinate the Afghan political reconciliation. The group has met four times since then, twice in Pakistan and twice in Afghanistan. Following the fourth meeting of the QCG, which took place on February 23rd (2016) in Kabul, the participants invited "all Taliban and other [armed] groups to participate through their authorized representatives" in the round of peace talks, which was expected to take place by the first week of March

⁸Pakistan, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, China, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and the United Arab Emirates are part of the initiative launched in 2011 for encouraging economic and security cooperation between Afghanistan and its neighbours. The U.S. and over 20 other nations and organisations serve as "supporting nations" to the process.

2016 (Ruting, 2016). The QCG framework apparently builds on two main elements: first, achieving peace and reconciliation is a shared responsibility of all members; and secondly, Kabul will hold talks with only reconcilable groups.

As the Taliban continue to refuse to participate in talks—which some describe as a political rhetoric and others deem it real for the Taliban's ongoing offensives have given them a sense of 'victory'—the QCG members will have to be patient as well as resolute in their efforts. Secondly, they will also have to contemplate on the alternatives to bringing peace and stability in Afghanistan if the Taliban refuse to join the process or they join but talks do not yield some results. At the moment, the whole focus of achieving peace and stability in Afghanistan appears set on peace talks with the Taliban, which in a way weakens the Afghan government's position not only in peace talks but also in realizing and working out some broad, comprehensive framework of peace and stability in the country.

Major issues

As things stand now, Pakistan and Afghanistan appear to be moving back to a state of affairs which president Ghani often describes as a state of undeclared war or hostilities between the two countries. As the Afghan Taliban continue to refuse to

join peace talks and have increased offensives inside Afghanistan, Afghan leaders' criticism of Pakistan has also increased for the latter's alleged support to the Taliban. The acting head of the Afghan National Directorate of Security (NDS) Massoud Andarabi told a meeting of Afghanistan's lower house of parliament (Wolesi Jirga) on March 28th 2016 that Pakistan's ISI "widely continues its support for Taliban and will continue supporting them with attacks this summer and spring in Afghanistan" (Joenda, 2016). On the other hand, Pakistan's longstanding concerns about Indian and Afghan security agencies' alleged anti-Pakistan activities in Balochistan and Pakistani tribal areas have grown particularly after the recent arrests of Kulbhushan Yadav—who operated with the name of Hussein Mubarak Patel and claimed in a video to be working for Indian RAW—and an Afghan NDS officer from Balochistan's Chaman district.

Militancy including cross-border terrorism

The two countries face a shared threat of internal militancy and border insecurity. Pakistani security forces and law enforcement agencies are actively engaged in countering the threat of terrorism in different regions of the country. The military operations Zarb-e-Azb (in North Waziristan) and Khyber-1&2 (in Khyber Agency) have significantly weakened militants' infrastructure

and operational capacity that has resulted in a relative improvement in internal security. However, these operations have pushed many of the Pakistani Taliban groups and their Central Asian allies such as East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) and Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) to other side of Pakistani-Afghan border thus increasing the risk of border insecurity, or the threat of cross-border terrorism inside Pakistan. On the other hand, as cited earlier, Afghanistan believes that Pakistan continues to host and support the Afghan Taliban and has not taken any action against them. The two countries' failure to realize the shared threats and develop some joint border-security and counterterrorism mechanism will eventually encourage the militants' cross-border incursions thus negatively impacting bilateral ties between them.

For Pakistan, border insecurity is more threatening than the internal militancy and terrorism, because its security and law enforcement agencies have the capacity to deal with the latter as is evident from a relatively improved internal security in recent years. However, the Afghan security forces face a huge challenge from different brands of militant groups operating across Afghanistan, who are increasingly becoming offensive. The US Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) revealed in a recent report that the Afghan government's sovereignty has

declined compared to recent years and that the government has control over only 72 percent of Afghanistan's territory (Arian, 2016). The US National Intelligence Director, James R. Clapper, also believes that multiple factors including political divisions, increasingly assertive local powerbrokers and the concerted countrywide Taliban attacks are eroding Afghanistan's stability, which put the country at serious risk of a political breakdown during 2016 (Ibrahimkhil, 2016a). Similarly, Democracy International's third survey of the Afghan parliamentarians revealed that more than three quarters of the respondents believed that the security of Afghanistan had worsened in 2015 compared to previous year. About 42 percent of the parliamentarians said that it has become almost impossible for them to access their home provinces due to [growing] insecurity, terrorism, and violence (Democracy International, 2016).

An unstable and chaotic Afghanistan however will also be problematic for Pakistan because it will not only increase border insecurity but also provide anti-Pakistan militants sheltered in Afghanistan more space and liberty to operate and launch attacks inside Pakistan. That is what makes it imperative for Pakistan to contribute in achieving security and stability in Afghanistan.

After the December 16th 2014 attack on Army Public School (APS) in Peshawar, Pakistan and Afghanistan developed sort of cooperation to check cross-border terrorism. Afghan government also mounted pressure on the TTP militants sheltered in Afghanistan; Pakistan claimed the group was behind the APS attack. The two countries also coordinated border patrols. But the dwindling bilateral ties since July 2015 have also hindered the attempts of achieving security at Pakistani-Afghan border. For instance, on December 4th 2015, the Senate Defence Committee was informed that Afghanistan was delaying finalization of a new border coordination mechanism due to its internal political impediments. Ever since the tripartite commission completed its mandate following the end of International Security Assistance Forces' (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan in December 2014, there has been no border coordination mechanism between the two countries (*Dawn*, 2015b).

Afghan political reconciliation

Apart from security and militancy, including cross-border incursions by militants, another major issue that largely impacts Pakistani-Afghan relations is linked to Afghan government's efforts to politically engage with the Afghan Taliban and Pakistan's contribution for that. Pakistan supports an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned reconciliation process that includes the Afghan

Taliban, but believes that it cannot use military force against the Taliban and at the same time try to convince them to engage in talks with the Afghan government (Upadhyay, 2015). For Pakistan, the Taliban are among the Afghan political stakeholders and making them hostile would not only undermine its interests in Afghanistan but also add to Pakistan's internal insecurity. The US and China have also acknowledged the Afghan Taliban as stakeholders in the Afghan political reconciliation. Pentagon spokesman Navy Captain Jeff Davis said in a news conference in Washington on November 4th (2015) that the US was not conducting counter-terrorism operations against the Taliban and it viewed them as "being an important partner in a peaceful Afghan-led reconciliation process" (Iqbal, 2015). Few days later, China's special envoy for Afghanistan Deng Xijun was quoted by Pakistani media as terming the Taliban as "one of the main forces in Afghanistan's political arena" (Khan, 2015a).

Although Pakistan is no more in a state of denial about the Afghan Taliban's presence on its soil but also knows its limitations as to what extent it can influence or force them to join the Afghan peace process. Nor can Pakistan over-press the Taliban and make them hostile at a time when Afghanistan and other key stakeholders see them as a political actor in Afghanistan. Also,

as cited earlier, it could also have implications for Pakistan's internal security. Adviser to the Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz said in Washington on March 1st (2016) that Pakistan has some influence over the Afghan Taliban, for their leadership is in Pakistan, which it can use to bring them to the negotiation table but it cannot negotiate or offer them something on behalf of the Afghan government (Siddique, 2016). According to a report by an international news agency Reuters, in a secret meeting held with Pakistani officials, the Afghan Taliban rejected pressure on engagement in Afghan peace process. Two weeks later, the Supreme Council of Akhtar Mansoor-led Afghan Taliban decided against joining the peace talks anticipated by the QCG members for March 2016 (Malik & Ahmed, 2016). There were also reports that the Afghan Taliban could move to the areas of southern Afghanistan under their control to avoid Pakistani pressure (Khan, 2016a).

However the Afghan Deputy Foreign Minister Hekmat Khalil Karzai sees the Taliban's refusal to join peace talks as a tactical move and hopes to reach a result in the peace process (ABC News, 2016). Taliban's refusal also accompanied some preconditions including withdrawal of all foreign troops; removing Taliban leaders from international blacklists, which

impeded travel; and the release of Taliban prisoners (Reuters, 2016). According to Qutbuddin Hilal, adviser to President Ashraf Ghani on peace affairs, the Taliban had put two other preconditions related to amendments in the Afghan constitution and formation of an interim government. Hilal claimed his government was open to discuss all these conditions except the last one because president Ghani will not compromise on the government elected by the Afghan people (Khan, 2016b).

The resumption of Afghan peace talks could take more time than is being anticipated because the Afghan Taliban also appear disinterested or cautious, mainly due to internal challenges and rifts. Not all Taliban leaders in the Akhtar Mansoor-led main Taliban group have same idea about the peace talks. Internal differences and fears of further splits could be the main reasons behind the group's continuing refusal. Also, as the Taliban believe they are winning the 'war', they would think that it is the Afghan government that needs peace more than they need. Even if they agree to participate, Taliban will hardly compromise on their position as there seems to be no reason thus far to do so when they think they have an advantage in the battlefield. They are employing urban warfare as a new tactic in their fight and have been able to

make significant inroads into different regions including Kunduz, Khost, Ghazni, Takhar, Faryab, Herat, Farah, Sar-e-Pul, Baghlan, Badakhshan and Helmand regions. Experts on Afghan affairs see the poor performance of the government-supported local tribal militias and Afghan police, lack of coordination among security institutions and dysfunctional nature of local politics as the factors which are providing the Taliban spaces to invade (Osman, 2015).

Mullah Muhammad Rasool, who heads a major dissident group of the Afghan Taliban, in principle is not against talks but does not agree with the Mansoor-led Taliban' lead role. Instantly after announcing his new group, Rasool had expressed willingness to join talks but with almost similar precondition as put forth by the Akhtar Mansoor camp. Rasool also thinks the QCG does not represent all regional stakeholders, mainly Iran, and considers the participation of those Taliban close to Iran in the peace process as essential (Giustozzi & Mangal, 2016). Meanwhile, former Afghan president Hamid Karzai also believes that India, Iran and Russia should be included in the peace talks with the Taliban (Haider, 2016).

Radio Free Europe reported in late March (2016) that Gulbuddin Hekmatyar-led faction of Hezb-e-Islami was negotiating with the Afghan High Peace Council some positions in civil and security

institutions (Bezhan, 2016). About a week later, reports emerged that the group was also seeking the removal of "all restrictions imposed on it" by the US and other countries as a condition for taking part in the peace process (Moosakhail, 2016). On April 5th, the group's spokesman Amin Karim said that the group did not condition talks with the withdrawal of foreign forces although it was one of its goals. Afghan officials think that if they reach a peace deal with Hekmatyar it could help convince the Taliban commanders to join the process (O'donnell, 2016).

Afghan people and political leaders also see little hope in the success of Afghan reconciliation with the Taliban. A recent survey conducted by the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies in 15 provinces of Afghanistan revealed that more than 70 percent of the respondents were not optimistic about peace talks between government and the Taliban with most of them believing that the talks will compromise human rights, mainly women's rights (Ibrahimkhil, 2016b). Similarly, the Afghan parliamentarians are divided in their support for peace process with the Taliban. According to Democracy International, "disagreement with the government pursuing reconciliation has increased among parliamentarians from 26 percent in 2012 to 38 percent in 2014 to 40 percent in 2015" (Democracy International, 2016).

As cited earlier, larger focus of achieving peace and stability in Afghanistan is currently set on peace talks with the Taliban, and Afghanistan sees its relations with Pakistan also in this perspective. Indeed, in absence of a framework of multilayered engagement between Pakistan and Afghanistan, bilateral ties between the two countries will remain hostage to the Taliban. That is evident from the fact that after the peace process was derailed in July last year, bilateral trust achieved between the two countries over the past several months took no time to disappear.

Regional political and geo-economic dynamics

China

China's two main concerns in Afghanistan are linked to the provision of security to its expanding economic and trade engagements there and in the region, and countering the internal security threats posed by Chinese Uyghur and ETIM militants, who have increasingly concentrated in Afghanistan in recent months and years. At the same time, China is concerned about the inspiration of the Islamic State (IS) group among militant groups based in Afghanistan including Central Asian and Pakistani Taliban which have maintained close ties with the Uyghur militants. Uyghur militants from western Xinjiang province of China have been part of militant

landscape of Pakistan and Afghanistan since the Soviet-Afghan war in the 1980s. Over the past several years, many of them remained entrenched in Pakistan's tribal areas along with the Pakistani Taliban, mainly the TTP, and ETIM and IMU militants. After the launch of military operation Zarb-e-Azb in North Waziristan in 2014, they relocated to Afghanistan along with the Pakistan Taliban and Central Asian militants. Apart from that, pockets of ETIM and IMU militants already existed in Afghanistan, mainly in the northern provinces. In recent times, the strengthening Taliban insurgency and growing presence and activities of different militant groups including Central Asian and those inspired by IS in north of Afghanistan has also disturbed China. Northern Afghanistan is adjacent to Wakhan strip that connects it Chinese province Xinjiang, which faces security threats from Uyghur militants.

China also sees Afghanistan and Pakistan as important countries for the realization of its 'one belt, one road' project, which is expected to strengthen its trade and commerce connectivity with different regions of the world. In September 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping emphasized reviving the ancient trade routes connecting China, Central Asia and Europe through developing three main corridors through southern, central and northern Xinjiang, which connect China with Russia, Europe and

Pakistan (Jia, 2014). The China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is one element of this larger project and entails the linking of Pakistan's Gwadar Port to China's northwestern region of Xinjiang through highways, railways, oil and gas pipelines, and optical fiber links. Both China and Pakistan want Afghanistan to be part of CPEC through the links which have been provided in the planned project. Reportedly, it was due to Chinese influence that Pakistan has decided to increase the number of CPEC-linked trade routes with Afghanistan to 16 from the existing four (Mustafa, 2015); five new trade routes would be opened in Balochistan and seven in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.⁹

Apart from Pakistan and Afghanistan, China's larger 'one belt, one road' dream also realizes the role of Iran, Central Asian Republics and Russia. While Beijing and Russia are seen by many as geostrategic and geo-economic competitors in Central Asia, on May 8th 2015, presidents of the two countries signed an agreement on the integration of the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and China's Silk Road Economic Belt

in Central Asia. The declaration meant "to build a common economic zone in Eurasia, including a Free Trade Agreement between the EEU and China. Experts believe that with the Chinese money and Russian security infrastructure—mainly in form of its Collective Security Treaty Organization—this integration agreement if materializes could become major driver of economic development in the region (Gabuev, 2015).

China believes that without ensuring peace and security in Afghanistan and wider region, it cannot fully materialize its economic and trade projects and engagements in Afghanistan, Pakistan and beyond, to Central Asia. For that purpose, apart from providing economic and military support to Afghanistan,¹⁰ China has also been encouraging Pakistan to play its role in the Afghan political reconciliation. Indeed, China has been manifesting since late 2014¹¹ that it is willing to play a key role in the Afghan government's reconciliation with various "political factions, including

⁹The existing four trade routes between Pakistan and Afghanistan include Chaman, Torkham, Ghulam Khan and Miran Shah. The Miran Shah route is currently non-functional due to a military operation going on in North Waziristan.

¹⁰ For instance, most recently, during his visit of Afghanistan in late February this year, Chief of China's People's Liberation Army General Fang Fenghui pledged more than \$70 million in support to Afghan military sector (Khaama Press, 2016b).

¹¹Besides Chinese diplomats' holding meetings with the Afghan Taliban emissaries in the Gulf and inside Pakistan, a Taliban delegation had also visited Beijing late 2014.

the Taliban” (Siddique, 2015). As cited earlier in the report, China is also a member of four-nation Quadrilateral Coordinating Group that was formed in December 2015 to steer the Afghan peace process.

India

The India factor has always remained at the heart of Pakistan’s relations with Afghanistan. During 1980s and 1990s, Pakistan’s Afghan policy largely remained focused on countering the traditional Afghanistan-India alliance, which it believed was creating trouble in Balochistan and Pashtun populated areas in the northwest Pakistan. India, nonetheless, during these and following years remained concerned that Pakistan’s seeking strategic depth in India should not create an environment that strengthens anti-India militant groups there.

Since 2001, India’s influence has significantly grown in Afghanistan in terms of assistance in reconstruction projects, mainly related to infrastructure, and strengthened diplomatic, and security and defense ties between the two countries. For instance, India funded the construction of Salma dam in Herat, which was completed in 2015. In December 2015, Modi also inaugurated the Afghan parliament building, which was constructed with Indian financial assistance. Some reports estimate that India has provided around \$2 billion since 2001, mainly for

infrastructure projects in Afghanistan (Brown, 2016:127).

The incumbent Afghan president Ashraf Ghani sought close relations with Pakistan with a view to achieve intra-Afghan political reconciliation. However, as cited earlier, after the fledgling peace talks with the Taliban derailed in July 2015, Ghani’s rapprochement towards Pakistan was the first casualty. Eventually, Ghani not only started blaming Pakistan again for being in a state of ‘undeclared war’ with Afghanistan but also revived its strategic defense ties with India, which he had put on hold during his early days in office. Towards end of 2015, India supplied three Mi-25 attack helicopters to Afghanistan (Ghaswalla, 2016), which suggested that the Ghani administration has reversed its earlier decision of not receiving heavy weapons from India.

Pakistan has recently arrested two high-profile Indian and Afghan alleged spies from Balochistan, in two separate incidences, which Pakistan’s security officials claimed were working, though separately, to create trouble in Balochistan through supporting the Baloch insurgents and acts of terrorism. Pakistan has since long remained concerned about the use of Afghan land by anti-Pakistan militants, mainly the TTP and Baloch insurgents. Also, there have been suspicions in Pakistan that elements within Indian and Afghan intelligence agencies could be supporting anti-Pakistan

militants sheltered in Afghanistan. According to a recent report by the National Bureau of Asian Research, Afghan politicians have been at times very vocal that Kabul should “exploit the fact that Pakistani militants do cross into Afghan territory, thus serving Pakistan some of its own medicine” (Brown, 2016:134).

Pakistan wants friendly or at least a neutral government in Afghanistan, which is not pro-India. Nonetheless, India is concerned that a pro-Pakistan regime in Afghanistan would allow Pakistan to increase military presence on its eastern border with India (Sauerborn, 2015) as well as increase the risk of the strengthening of anti-India militants there.

The US

After the Taliban's temporary capture of Kunduz on September 28th (2015) President Barack Obama announced to delay withdrawal of the US troops from Afghanistan to support the Afghan security forces in their fight against the militants. There are around 9,800 US troops in Afghanistan that would be reduced to 5,500 in about one year. The US wants to maintain a minimum number of troops in Afghanistan beyond 2017 who will have mainly an advisory and training role.

The US has been urging Pakistan to contribute in Afghan political reconciliation by bringing Taliban

factions to negotiation table. Similarly, the US does not mind the Chinese influence in Afghanistan as long as it contributed in bringing peace and achieving political reconciliation there. Currently, the US and China are members of Quadrilateral Coordination Group (along with Pakistan and Afghanistan) that oversees Afghan government's talks with the Taliban. The US will also welcome Chinese influence in Pakistan if that works to bring Pakistan and India closer.

Since 2001, the US has largely seen its relations with Pakistan through the lens of war on terror in Afghanistan. The US will also not want Afghanistan moving in a direction where strategic and geo-economic interests of its main regional ally, India, are compromised.

Iran

Iran supports the ongoing Afghan-led peace process that it thinks could lead to security and stability in the country. It is worried about anti-Iran and extremely sectarian Islamic State's footprints in Afghanistan. Iran is also concerned about security of its borders with Afghanistan and Pakistan because anti-Iran militant groups such as Jundullah are largely financed by drugs and arms smuggling. In recent years, there has been growing convergence of trilateral interests among Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan such as in the

areas of counterterrorism, border security and preventing drug trafficking etc.

However what might disturb Pakistan is Iran's partnership with India in many strategically significant construction projects in Afghanistan. Besides the construction of the Zaranj-Dilaram road link to the Iranian port at Bander Abbas, Iran in collaboration with India is also building a road and railway system to link western Afghanistan with the Iranian port of Chabahar (Sial, 2015). In February 2016, Indian cabinet approved \$150 million for developing Iranian port of Chabahar. India had signed a multi-million-dollar memorandum of understanding with Iran in May 2015 to develop the port (*Express Tribune*, 2016a). Although Pakistan said that it believed that Iran had no anti-Pakistan design, yet it was concerned about Kulbhushan Yadav's operating from Chabahar; an alleged Indian spy arrested in Pakistan in March this year.

Iran has also established links with the factions of Afghan Taliban, reportedly to counter the emerging threat from IS. As cited earlier in the report, Mullah Rasool faction of the Taliban wants Iran to be included in four-nation QCG (comprising Pakistan, Afghanistan, US and China). Iran is also furthering its interests in Afghanistan through trade and investments as well as relying on its influence in the Afghan province of Herat and

among ethnic Tajiks and Hazara communities (Trenin, et al., 2014).

Another Iranian interest in Afghanistan could be to counter Saudi Arabian influence. Although Saudis are currently least focused on Afghanistan due to their engagements in the Middle East, yet they hailed Ghani's victory considering him a closer ally compared with his election rival Abdullah Abdullah. This was reflected in Saudis' urging the Taliban to not disrupt 2014 presidential elections, which could impact Pashtun areas where Ghani held relatively larger support (Daud, 2016). However the Ghani administration has managed to maintain balanced ties with Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Russia and CARs

Like other neighbors of Afghanistan, Russia and Central Asian states also regard the presence of IS there a major threat to their security. For that purpose, it supports a peaceful and stable Afghanistan. Indeed, the growing presence of the Taliban, Central Asian and IS-inspired/affiliated militants in Afghanistan, including in north, has worried Russia and Central Asian republics of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan which share more than 2,000 kilometers long borders with Afghanistan. An Afghan security official told Pajhwok Afghan News, Afghanistan's leading news agency, on March 19th (2016) that Afghan

security officials had detained three Russian and seven Tajik national from the house of an IS commander in the eastern Nangarhar province. The detainees had been trying to reach Achin and Shinwari areas under the control of IS-inspired or affiliated militants (Pajhwok, 2016).

Around mid-March 2016, Russian and Tajik forces started week-long military exercises along Tajik-Afghan border which, according to Russian Defence Minister Sergey Kuzhugetovich Shoygu, meant to “foil militant group attacks, eliminate their strongholds and other relevant practices” (Majidi, 2016). In May 2015, too, Russia had held military exercises in the Tajik southern province of Khatlon close to Afghanistan as part of “combat readiness exercises” with Russian partners (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan) in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) (Torfeh, 2015).

Nonetheless, Russia sees the intra-Afghan political reconciliation the only way for achieving security and stability in Afghanistan as well as the most viable option for the Taliban, who Russia believes are weakened and fractured. This is what Russian Special Envoy to Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov told Afghan president in a meeting in

Kabul on February 29th 2016 adding that Russia's leaders and especially President Vladimir Putin were greatly concerned over the growing activities of IS in Afghanistan (Haidari, 2016).

Like Iran, Russia also seems willing to work with the Taliban if that helps counter the influence of IS in Afghanistan. Russia's special envoy to Afghanistan acknowledged in October 2015 the existence of channels of communication between his government and the Taliban. Later, there were reports about Russian president Vladimir Putin's alleged meeting with the Taliban's leader in December 2015 in Dushanbe, which were described by some as Putin's assertion to provide funds, training and modern military hardware to the Taliban in the fight against IS in Afghanistan. The reports were denied by both the Taliban and Russian officials (Daud, 2016).

Russia is also providing military assistance to Afghanistan. In February this year, Russia donated 10,000 AK-47 assault rifles and millions of rounds of ammunition to Afghanistan, which Afghan National Security Adviser Mohammad Hanif Atmar described as an important donation from an important friend of Afghanistan in a crucial time (Putz, 2016).

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Analyzing the strategic calculus of Afghan state and non-state actors

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This paper aims to study, analyze and evaluate the strategic security calculus of both state and non-state actors in Afghanistan, keeping in view of an ever-evolving situation in the war-torn country.

The strategic calculus¹ of any given situation depends upon the number of actors involved. In Afghanistan's case, the number of actors – both state and non-state – is increasing, as the turn of events around Taliban-Afghan government suggest.

In 2001, the US forces ousted Taliban regime from Afghanistan; subsequently, Bonn talks paved way for a new state of Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the Taliban insurgency took off by 2004, touching its zenith in 2008-2010. With President Obama's troops 'surge' strategy, the insurgency's momentum was reversed, and by 2013, the insurgents were at the back-foot, while the US and Afghan forces were able to retake all the districts previously under Taliban control for many years.

Yet, by 2015, with the withdrawal of bulk of US forces – the number has trimmed to 9,800 – the Islamist insurgency's momentum appeared to be slightly rising: in August 2015, Afghan Taliban suffered a major blow when Afghan government

declared the death of Taliban supreme leader Mullah Mohammad Omar.

The new supreme leader Mullah Akhtar Mansoor had to steer through turbulent Taliban ranks before sitting on the throne of the Islamist movement. The new leader has to prove his metal to Taliban, who were either fighting or joining the newly-opened chapter of Da'esh in Afghanistan. Scores of other militants, including commanders of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), had also joined ranks of Da'esh. The new Taliban leader raised the ante by orchestrating terrorist attacks across Afghanistan, including in the north, where Kunduz was shortly taken over by them.

All these belligerents carefully measure their options and develop their own strategic calculus, the sum of which in turn defines the broader calculus in Afghanistan. The coming in new Afghan government, drawdown of foreign troops, advent of Da'esh in Afghanistan, the election of new Taliban leadership, and a resilient Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) are going to redefine the calculus in next few years.

The strategic calculi of above-mentioned state and non-state actors have more to do with the country's neighborhood. Pakistan on the eastern side has serious concerns with what it perceives as growing involvement of its *bête noire* India; these concerns appear to stay for a long time. China, to the north-east, is now much interested in

¹Strategic calculus refers to carefully measuring and managing the strategy and devising and implementing it in accordance with the on-ground situation to achieve strategic objectives.

Afghanistan, evident from their growing investments. China wants peace along its western border, evident from China's involvement in Afghan government's peace talks with Taliban.

Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS aka Da'esh)

The newest (non-state) actor on the Afghan stage is the ISIS, commonly termed as Da'esh. As with militants from 71 other countries, Afghanistan's too have joined the Da'esh, fighting alongside it.

The ISIS considers Pakistan-Afghanistan and Central Asian region as part of its Khurasan province (Walaiyat-e-Khurasan). But in Afghanistan, Da'esh, having global ambitions, directly comes into competition with Afghan Taliban, which calls itself the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. Both claim to lead the Muslims all over the world. Da'esh's leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi proclaimed his caliphate with a message to all Islamist groups:

"It is incumbent upon all Muslims to pledge allegiance [to him], once the caliph and his fighters arrive in a particular area, the legality of all emirates, groups, states, and organizations, becomes null by the expansion of the khalifah's authority" (Goodenough, 2014).

Da'esh first nominated Afghan Taliban commander and ex-Guantanamo Bay detainee Muslim Dost Mohammad as its emir of Walaiyat-e-Khurasan. Many others to join were once members of anti-Pakistan TTP. Muslim Dost himself was replaced by former chief of TTP's Orakzai Agency Hafiz Saeed Khan, who was later killed in a drone strike. Other Pakistani Taliban commanders pledging Baghdadi allegiance included Shahidullah Shahid, spokesperson of TTP; Gul Zaman, TTP's Khyber Agency leader; Mufti Hasan, chief of TTP Peshawar; Khalid Mansoor, TTP's Hangu chief; and Daulat Khan, TTP's Kurram Agency chief. Shahidullah said:

"I declare allegiance to the Caliph of Muslims, Amirul Momineen Abu Bakar al Baghdadi al Qarshi al Hussaini. I will listen and follow his every instruction whatever the situation may have been. This allegiance is neither from the TTP or its leader Maulvi Fazlullah. This is only from me and five leaders,... I appeal to the Ameer ul Momineen to accept my allegiance" (Khan, 2014).

ISIS had been able to inflict heavy losses to Afghan Taliban. Heavy fighting had been reported last year between the two in eastern and southern Afghan provinces

previously contested by Afghan force and Afghan Taliban. Hafiz Saeed was reportedly killed in an air strike in Nangarhar province of Afghanistan last year but the group denied his death.

There are confirmed reports of ISIS opening training camps near Pakistan border with Afghanistan. Da'esh fighters also exploded captured fighters with landmines. According to a report, the eastern Nangarhar province near Pakistan border is ISIS's main stronghold and base of operations in Afghanistan, where the ISIS is taking full advantage of Nangarhar's mountainous and rugged terrain (South Front, 2016). ISIS has been able to capture four districts of that province. Increased activity of ISIS has also been reported in LoyaPaktia region (Paktika, Paktia and Khost) and some parts of Badakshan province.

According to one Afghan Defense Ministry report, the ISIS has killed more than 600 civilians in last six months and internally displaced 20,000 Afghan families. Most of the victims are those who refused to join hands with ISIS (South Front, 2016).

The ISIS network in Afghanistan is growing despite of the triangular fighting among Afghan Taliban, Da'esh and Afghan forces. According to US Army sources, the estimated number of ISIS fighters in Afghanistan is in between 1,000-3,000.

Overall, the strategic calculus of Da'esh is dependent upon the weakening of Afghan Taliban at the hands of Afghan security forces and upon the damage inflicted by Da'esh in areas where it is gaining strength (e.g. Nangarhar and LoyaPaktia regions).

Afghan Taliban

There are various estimates about the strength of active Afghan Taliban insurgent forces. Matt Waldman, fellow at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, has termed the number over 60,000 (South Front, 2016), whereas other sources consider the number not more than 25000.

2013 saw reversal of Afghan Taliban insurgency, quelled by the surge in US forces. According to one UN report, up to 12,000 Taliban fighters were killed, wounded and captured during the fighting season of 2013 (Dawn, 2013), making up to 20,000 to 35,000 Taliban fighters who been killed during the thirteen year insurgency (Dawi, 2014). All in all, by then, the Taliban forces suffered massive losses and did not manage to make any major gains.

It is only after the drawdown of US forces one year later, that the Afghan Taliban has been able to make a comeback. They appear reinvigorated after the advent of their new leader Mullah AkhtarMansoor. He was subsequently able to consolidate his

position among Taliban ranks, by luring disgruntled elements too. More so, Akhtar rejuvenated the morale of Taliban fighters, who were upset with the death of their former leader, by launching multiple operations across Afghanistan.

One major assault was on the northern city of Kunduz in October 2015. The fall of Kunduz to Taliban was the fruit of two consecutive assaults on the northern city. The Taliban forces had been able to take over the city for at least four days but Taliban managed to free 500 prisoners (Al-Jazeera, 2015).

The strategic calculus of Afghan Taliban would currently carry the momentum after the assumption of charge of Amir ul Momineen by Mullah Akhtar Mansoor in September 2015. The Afghan Taliban have to maintain a strategic balance as now they have to calculate risks involving fighting two enemies at different fronts and also to strike a balance.

As discussed, Da'esh appears to be pursuing Taliban territories and redefining the landscape of Islamist insurgency in Afghanistan. One of the reasons, according to an American brigadier, why both Afghan Taliban and ISIS are fighting over small patches under their control, is loss of territory as a result of airstrikes (Babb, 2016).

Afghan National Security Forces

With the drawdown of foreign troops, the primary force to thwart Afghan Taliban insurgency is Afghan security paraphernalia, which include the Afghan National Police and Afghan National Army. Both forces are trained by the US military in cooperation with British, Italian and German assistance.

As per the data released by Afghan Ministry of Defense spokesman, 1,392 soldiers were killed fighting the Taliban in 2013, and 1,868 soldiers and 3,720 police were killed in 2014 (Crawford, 2015). Overall, according to the data, as of December 2014, a total of 7,750 Afghan Army soldiers and 14,200 police have been killed while fighting the Afghan Taliban.

The Afghan security forces could not become the frontline fighting arm of the state against the Taliban insurgency. Strikingly, Iraqi security forces have been facing a same kind of situation. After the end of US forces' 'surge' in 2008, the Iraqi forces successfully handled the situation, up till 2014, after which the situation started deteriorating, in part because of sectarian politics, leading to fall of key cities like Mosul to the ISIS.

In Afghanistan, police and army have been fighting alongside the US forces since the raising of the two in

2007. In fact, the Afghan forces had a secondary role in all major military operations against the Taliban.

The fighting capacities of the two forces may be debated because of their massive casualties, but for surely, Taliban insurgents have not been able, despite their simultaneous advances at multiple fronts, to carve out a territory in Afghanistan (unlike what ISIS did in Iraq.) Kunduz's fall was for days only.

Overall, the balance of power in Afghanistan is still tilted towards Afghan security forces, despite their heavy losses. The prevailing discords within the country help sustain the Afghan security forces in keeping at bay the overwhelmingly Pashtun-dominated Taliban. After the surfacing of Da'esh in Afghanistan, there is a need to slightly change the strategy of those forces.

The US forces in Afghanistan

Despite the drawdown which completed in December 2014 the US forces are still part of the strategic landscape of Afghanistan. After the end of 'surge' in 2014, the US troop level has come down to 9800 from a hefty figure of 130,000 (Brook, 2016).

But the current US strategy is far different from the one used to be, during 'surge'. The US would like the Afghan forces to steer the vehicle of counter-insurgency operations

whereas the US will be taking on the backseat. Their calculus doesn't want to let the rudimentary Afghan forces fight on their own.

The US role is primarily advisory. It is now limited to train, guide and at times provide air support to the Afghan troops fighting the insurgent forces. An American military official argued that because of US air strikes, Taliban are splintering and ISIS is being pushed back (Babb, 2016).

The presence of the US forces owes to the failure of the Obama administration in not devising a strategy to pull back the remaining troops on-ground in Afghanistan. These forces will ensure continuous assistance to Afghan combat troops.

Overall, the presence of US forces in Afghanistan is pivotal in maintaining the current strategic calculus. The Afghan Taliban despite their alleged support bases in Pakistan may not be able to achieve the desired targets, in presence of US troops in Afghanistan. Moreover the US troops provide guidance, training and vital assistance to Afghan forces in tackling the insurgency.

Managing the strategic calculus in Afghanistan

It is indeed pretty much difficult for anyone player in Afghanistan to easily alter the course of events and completely out-manuever all other actors. Each actor inside Afghanistan

has devised strategies influenced by both internal and external factors.

As discussed, the US presence in Afghanistan is now 15-year old; apparently, it might even stay for at least one more decade. The US forces play a sideline advisory role and the maximum they do is to provide air support. There is some limited presence of US on-ground troops in cases of extreme emergencies such as the situation which emerged out of Fall of Kunduz in October 2015. The situation appears to remain the same until the US combat role is increased.

Much has been written about Pakistan's alleged interferences in Afghanistan in order to counter the Indian and Iranian involvement. Pakistan as usual would continue to play the role of balancer against the Indian presence in Afghanistan. The Pakistani role in bringing Afghan Taliban on table showcases that Pakistan may stick to its Afghan policy except that it may now play a subservient role in presence of China.

In fact, the new player on the scene and whose presence may allow the strategic thinkers to reevaluate the security landscape of Afghanistan is, China.

To be sure, the Chinese involvement in Afghanistan is not new; however, the role China has recently started to play especially during peace talks

with Afghan Taliban is certainly new. Last year, China was also present at the Murree peace talks, held at hill resort near Islamabad, between Afghan Taliban and Afghan government.

China has its own geo-economic interests in the region. It is a major investor in Afghanistan. In next-door Pakistan, China is laying down Pakistan-China Economic Corridor. In a way, the Chinese appear serious in playing a role of strategic balancer in Afghanistan. China's involvement may certainly affect the strategic calculus of all other actors.

That would certainly change the strategic calculus but again that may hinder Afghan Taliban objectives as the Chinese would definitely not like to have an Islamist government in their backyard because of their own Islamist terrorist groups quite active in Xinjiang autonomous region.

As far as the current security situation is concerned, minus the Chinese involvement, the on-ground situation seems to remain the same despite heavy losses by the Afghan forces.

Conclusion

Since October 2001, when the war on terror was announced, more than 32,000 Afghan civilians have lost their lives. Many were killed in attacks by Afghan Taliban.

Today, Afghan citizens have to face the brutalities at the hands of Da'esh too, as it aspires to make its presence. The only way Dae'sh could gain ground is by sending in more and more fresh recruits to its newly established training camps near Pakistan-Afghanistan border.

Da'esh and Afghan Taliban may compete with each other as both claim to be the true leaders of Muslim world. There is no way the two could adopt a reconciliatory approach as the turf war may continue. The Da'esh would attempt to play its Islamic-Caliphate card and also by showing itself devoid of any ethnic color, which Taliban could not rebuke. The persistent growth of Da'esh may even completely disrupt the strategic calculus of both Afghan Taliban and Afghan security forces.

But at the end of the day, Afghan Taliban despite their loss of Mullah Omar has a comparative advantage of being local and more experienced. Even if peace talks with Afghan Taliban yield some positive results, their tussle with Da'esh issue will remain.

The focus of Afghan security forces is to hold ground in Pashtun-dominated eastern and southern provinces, where the Afghan Taliban is the strongest. The rest of Afghanistan may be controlled amicably with some exceptions like fall of Kunduz.

The focus of operations against Dae'sh must take precedence over Afghan Taliban as the time is high for nipping the nascent Walaiyat-e-Khurasan in the bud. Practically speaking and while measuring the strategic calculus of Afghan security forces, this may be difficult to achieve in the presence of an Afghan Taliban onslaught. The Dae'sh in Afghanistan may not like to lose such opportunity in Afghanistan as the success in this country would allow the movement to spread its tentacles in Central Asian Republics and Pakistan. From Dae'sh's strategic calculus Afghanistan holds the key. By having a bird's eye view of Dae'sh recent strategic adventures, one could assume that the organization capitalizes on chaotic situations as they did in parts of the Middle East.

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Fencing border will strangle locals

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Very often, when Afghanistan and Pakistan accuse each other of not stopping the cross-border terror attacks, we hear Pakistani officials asking for fencing or mining, of Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Many inside Pakistan call for starting off with unilateral fencing of its side of the border.

Such suggestions will turn out to be counter-productive in short- and long-run. Not only may excessive border tightening fail to extract its original purpose, but will further marginalize people of the border areas.

Pakistan and Afghanistan are in agreement on transit trade; 34% of Afghan's transit trade travels through Pakistan. There is an additional bilateral trade of more than 2 billion dollars. Taken together, Pakistan and Afghanistan are one of the largest trading partners.

Among the direct parties to this huge, regular flow of trade are the tribes living across the border. With negligible socio-economic development, services, and employment opportunities, these tribes end up depending on trade and commerce between the two countries.

The residents of the border areas are also traders, taking up trucking, transport, and service delivery. Lacking other economic opportunities, many of them have taken on trading within the tribal areas or across into Afghanistan. The

figure is even higher for those in the markets: according to the author's field work to a few accessible bazaars, 8 out of 10 people were involved in trade with their Afghan brethren. Some bordering villages, in both Pakistan and Afghanistan, are even interdependent for other services such as health, education and utilities.

In part from their involvement, the trade is made smooth in the face of significant infrastructural challenges – dilapidated roads, non-existent services, insecurity and harsh terrain. Isolating the tribes will therefore also hit at the economy of the two states.

Many people would call for affording to Pak-Afghan border the same treatment as meted out to other borders, say with India. The treatment they mean is closed border. Any scholar of political economy would find this suggestion based on wrong assumption: the nature of trade activities along Afghan border doesn't much differ than those along Iranian or Indian border. They are not as tightly fenced as popularly imagined; else informal trade would have stopped altogether. And like tribal people on Afghan border, local populace benefit from the trade on the other two.

These realities fit into various studies showing how similar ethnicities living across the border, survive. Frederick Barth's seminal work on borderland even shows that the borders between hostile states

are irrelevant if those bordering areas have similar ethnic groups.

Fencing instead will help a select class of people, who are already making millions through both formal and informal trade, robbing a common tribesman of his living. Already, Pakistan-Afghanistan border areas are among the poorest in each country, which invested little there. Tightening will rather create hostility between the state and tribes. One wonders as to why our officials press for isolating these people, rather than integrating them as Pakistanis with full rights.

It is also questionable that sealing the border would even help in securing the border. If that was so, we would not be hearing news of an Indian agent entering Pakistan through Balochistan, in parts of which a trench has been dug out.

In any case, the entire debate on fencing and/or closing borders is redundant in today's globalized world, undergirded by regional and international treaties. Being a member of World Trade Organisation, Pakistan will ultimately have to relax its other borders too, with Iran and India. Already, the revised transit treaty between Pakistan and Afghanistan calls for direct trade between India and Afghanistan via Pakistan; in return, Pakistan will expect transit to Nepal. We cannot have both.

Conflict or peace – trade shouldn't stop along any border. It doesn't. Even during tense times with India, regular trade amounted to 1.8 billion dollars annually along Wagah border.¹

For various reasons, both countries didn't develop their border areas, which, with time, couldn't stop the rising unrest. Economic vacuum can be filled with more trade, especially among people most affected by conflict. One such route goes through Ghulam Khan, in the troubled North Waziristan Agency. This route, which was suspended for trade in the wake of the military operation, can be made operational.

There is little to suggest that state has sufficient will and resources to reach out to the displaced people. If the people are allowed to trade, they take care of themselves to some extent.

¹Figures from Chambers of Commerce of Pakistan and India.

Pak-Afghan trade: overview and trends

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Pakistan serves as trade conduit to Afghanistan in more than one way.

The first is about the bilateral trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan, wherein one country exports goods and services to the other country.

The second relates to transit trade: because Afghanistan is a landlocked country, Pakistan serves as transit route to Afghanistan's trading partners.

In addition to these, high-volume illicit trade is also carried out, by taking advantage of lengthy porous border and corrupt culture at the border checkpoints.

Bilateral

As of the bilateral trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan, the present level stands at \$2.5 billion (2014-15). This is official figure, given that there are some instances of discrepancies such as of under-invoicing.

Historically, Pakistan has exported more to Afghanistan than it has imported. About 80% of this trade – around \$1.96 billion – entailed exports by Pakistan, while 20%, or \$0.323 billion, were exports by Afghanistan.

The main products from Afghanistan are dry fruit, fresh fruit, coal, grapes and jewelry. And Pakistan exports almost all of its commodities used in Afghanistan.

On a larger scale too, Pakistan is Afghanistan's largest exporter and importer. On the other hand, Afghanistan is the second-largest export market of Pakistan, an important position in its own right.¹

However, business persons argue that the level of trade is much less than what could have been. The two, after all, consume more or less same goods. President of Pakistan Afghanistan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry said that the potential could rise as high to \$10 billion.²

As if to tap that potential, authorities on both sides have more than once vowed to increase the volume of formal trade to \$5 billion. In 2014, Pakistan's ambassador to Afghanistan pledged to increase the trade to that number by 2017. This year, in February 2016, at the meeting of Joint Economic Commission (JEC), both countries agreed to double their annual bilateral trade to US \$5 billion by 2017.³

But the potential is not tapped. An insecure environment in parts of Afghanistan often slumps the demand to those parts. Moreover, bureaucratic hurdles at both ends, with traders asked to pay fees, also contribute in lessening the trade level. Above all, illicit trading acts a

¹Author's telephone conversation with Zubair Motiwala, President of Pakistan Afghanistan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

² Ibid.

³As per commerce ministry documents.

bottleneck in boosting the formal trade, which is further discouraged by the absence of any agreement that guarantees free or preferential bilateral trade.

The official statistics show that the bilateral trade is falling since 2010-2011. Last year, 76,000 Pakistani containers with export goods left for Afghanistan. As of this year, till March 2016, only 30,000 such containers left.

Part of this decline owed to the phased drawdown of NATO forces from Afghanistan since 2011. Moreover, some of Afghanistan's bilateral trade with Pakistan has shifted to transit through Iran; instead of many Afghan traders importing bulk items from Pakistan, they now prefer a longer, but convenient, route through Iran's Chabahar port.

Transit

Pakistan earns a lot of money through the transit destined for Afghanistan. According to one estimate, around Rs. 13 billion per year are added into the national economy from the transit truckers, which are levied fares for travelling from Pakistan's Karachi port to Afghanistan (Khan, 2015).⁴ Moreover, this trade also

serves as livelihood for several Pakistanis associated with the trade or serving the truckers (Husain & Elahi, 2015).

The transit trade operates under the framework of the Afghanistan Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement, originally signed in 1965. In 2010, the Agreement was revised by, among other things, asking for connectivity through railway.

The Agreement permits Afghan goods to go to India, but till Pakistan's Wagah border, from where Indian truckers take on the goods. This seems to be consistent with Pakistan's view, which have longed refused to allow Indian goods to travel through Pakistan.

Afghanistan's deputy commerce minister termed this move of Pakistan as "illogical and unfair" (Hashim, 2015). For long, Afghanistan has demanded direct access to Indian markets via Pakistan. But Pakistan argues that no third party like India should be included in the trade meant between the two countries, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Some businessmen also fear that direct trucks would end up flooding Pakistan markets with smuggled Indian goods.

on Pakistani trucks. The fare of each truck from Karachi to Kandahar and Jalalabad ranges between Rs 250,000 to Rs 400,000 respectively. This alone adds Rs 13bn per annum to the national economy."

⁴ A report in *Dawn* said, "According to customs estimates, 40,000-50,000 containers, on average, move from Pakistan to Afghanistan and vice versa

The point of how to incorporate India in the Pakistan-Afghanistan transit pact, has been, in the words of commerce minister, a “key hurdle” between the two countries. This hurdle was removed recently, as Afghanistan withdrew from its stance, according to the minister. In return, the two countries would expedite work on further liberalizing the bilateral trade under the Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA), discussed below.

However, it appears that Afghanistan was already working on another route to get to India. In April 2016, Afghanistan together with Iran and India signed an agreement on trade partnership via Iran’s Chabahar port. With this, Afghanistan would not much press Pakistan to include India.

Afghanistan complains about high cost of transit under various heads like terminal charges, port clearance charges, etc. Afghan truckers have long been levied formal and informal fees at several points of their route, to their discontentment. This could be a reason why some of them are now opting for transit through Iran.

Entry of Iran

Given that international sanctions have been removed from Iran in 2016, Afghanistan’s transit via Iran might increase, thereby having an adverse effect on Pakistan’s bilateral trade with Afghanistan.

Already, on its part, Iran, took several steps to attract Afghan importers. Many Afghan traders count that compared to Pakistan’s Karachi port, Iran’s Chabahar is free-trade zone, thereby lessening the transaction cost to them. A Peshawar-based businessman cited that many Indian goods are cheap in Afghanistan because of a free-trade agreement between the two.⁵

The number of containers from Iran to Afghanistan increased dramatically too, from 30,000 in 2008 to 80,000 in 2013 (Khan, 2015). In April 2016, Afghanistan and Iran along with India finalized Parameters to sign a transit trade agreement on transit trade through Iran’s Chabahar port. The agreement is now commonly known as “Chabahar Agreement.”

President KP Chamber of Commerce and Industry termed the agreement could be a “blow” to bilateral and transit trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan. “The entire trade”, he said, “will shift from Pakistan to Iran and India, and Karachi and Gwadar port will not be used by Afghanistan for transit trade.”⁶

Smuggling

A key challenge is smuggling, often an outcome of the barriers put on bilateral and transit trade. Some estimates suggest that three-quarters

⁵Author’s interview with Zulfiqar Ali, President Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

⁶ Ibid.

of all smuggled goods are the transit goods that are diverted inside Pakistan before reaching Afghanistan.

Afghan traders "complain that Afghan-origin products are sold back to Afghanistan from Pakistan at higher prices, forcing Afghans to pay custom duties on their own goods" (Husain & Elahi, 2015).

The fluctuations in duties have direct impact on the level of informal trade or smuggling. When, in 2014, Afghan government increased duties, smuggling increased. That is why, some analysts call for liberalizing the trade to make smuggling costly.

Steps taken

To increase the bilateral and transit trade, the two countries have holding several initiatives.

The both sides also agreed to revise Afghanistan Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement in addition to preparing draft Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) by 2016. This Agreement, although not a free-trade undertaking, will boost the bilateral trade by removing significant hurdles like tariffs on many items.

Meanwhile, business community in Pakistan is also working to increase the trade. As of now, both the authorities in Kabul and Islamabad are engaged in redrawing their trade targets to \$ 5 billion by 2017, by

working on a PTA. In this regards, many rounds of bilateral meetings have been held by the authorities in the two countries; according to official sources, the PTA may be signed later this year.

President Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chamber of Commerce and Industry suggested that authorities must accelerate the efforts for signing of PTA and FTA with Afghanistan, to establish more dry ports and take other steps to facilitate the bilateral and transit trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan to create a competitive environment so that it will not shift to Iran.

According to the commerce ministry of Pakistan, it has already handed over the proposed draft to Afghan authorities, seeking their comments. Pakistan is still awaiting a reply. According to Pakistani commerce ministry officials, they were told by Afghan authorities that the draft has been passed on to Afghan security officials for clearance.

Both Afghanistan and Pakistan are working on strengthening and expanding road infrastructure as well as laying out railway tracks between the two trading partners. As of now, according to official documents of the ministry of commerce, feasibility study is underway to construct road and railway between Miranshah and Khost. In November 2015, Pakistan informed visiting Afghan delegation that a railway costing Rs. 1262

million is being constructed from Pakistan's Chaman to Afghanistan's Spin-boldak. From the Afghan side, the government is working on the Kandahar-Spin-boldak railway track. Moreover, authorities are also considering connecting Peshawar and Jalalabad through railway. So far, except for few meetings between the officials and on-off statement by ministers, no significant progress has been made on these fronts.

In August 2015, Pakistan approved the International Transports of Goods Convention (TIR) that allows transit goods to go through "without involving payment of customs duties, taxes and undergoing

checking" (Muhammad, 2015). The Convention has been put into effect from January 2016. This way, at least the excessive formal duties have been taken care of.

There are also talks of amending APTTA to the satisfaction of the two parties, by updating the Agreement in light of the TIR Convention to further liberalize the transit trade.

Moreover, the Pakistan Afghanistan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry is working on a specified yard at Gwadar port dedicated to promote transit trade with Afghanistan.

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Missing the optimal trade

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In a changing region, with Afghanistan's trade relations increasingly relying on other states, Pakistan should work with Afghanistan to achieve the optimal level of trade.

Since 2011, the level of Pakistan-Afghanistan trade has been dwindling around 2 billion, with Pakistan's share in exports to Afghanistan declining.

This decline, however, hasn't touched the level to warrant labeling it as "serious." In any case, this decline will have its limits, because of shared needs and geography as well as interconnectivity of tribes.

Yet, the \$2 billion-trade figure is far less than what could have been achieved, with some estimates calling for ten-fold increase. The two countries committed to increase by 2015, the bilateral trade from 2 billion dollars annually to 5 billion dollars, and the transit trade by 2%. None of this could materialize.

This failure is partly owed to mistrust between the two governments. Pakistan's strained relations with India and at times with Iran also pushed them to invest more and more in Afghanistan, resulting in reducing Pakistan's share.

The bilateral targets were not achieved also because of obstacles in the transit trade, reflecting how the two are interconnected. The truckers, for instance, face obstacles, irrespective of whether they are

transiting or simply exporting to Afghanistan. For one, the decline in exports came as Afghan and tribal traders failed to accord the new transit trade agreement, which puts in place restrictive terms and conditions regarding trucking, tracking devices, and bank guarantees, among other things.

But the most important reason is that Afghan commodities have found new markets - in other neighboring states beyond Pakistan. To become a member of World Trade Organization, Afghanistan has undertaken several economic reforms including free liberal trade with world community. Once Afghanistan becomes WTO member by the end of this year, it will get to trade with many other states, further reducing Pakistan's share.

A pivotal role to this end is played by Iran, Afghanistan's another neighbor. Afghanistan may want to access international markets via Iran, which is presently normalizing its relations with the United States and the west in general. For one, Afghan traders will benefit from Iran's Chabahar port, instead of relying on Karachi's port alone.

Additionally, Iran's friendly ties with India can also address Afghanistan's long-held demand of access to Indian markets. In April 2016, Iran, Afghanistan, and India signed an agreement on Chabahar port, allowing India to transit goods to Afghanistan. Already, with Indian assistance, a 218-km road has been laid down from Zaranj to Delaram,

in south-western Afghanistan, for smoothly moving goods and services to Afghanistan-Iran border and onward to Chabahar port.

For Pakistan to retain its trade share with Afghanistan, it should work with Afghanistan in building political trust.

A win-win situation would come from connecting region through agreements and arrangements. Some of these are already committed: the new transit agreement provides for Pakistan transit to Central Asia

through Afghanistan, contributing into economy of both countries.

More so, consensus on actions against drug trafficking, illicit trading, weapon smuggling and human trafficking will further save the two countries a lot of money.

Above all, the domain could be expanded to include India. With a trilateral trade agreement, for instance, they will be able to overcome the trust deficit and ultimately invest in their people.

Managing perceptions on media

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Even though the media of both Pakistan and Afghanistan have risen sharply in the last one decade, the media ties between the two neighbouring countries, which face interconnected security issues, still remain low.

Pakistan traditionally has a thriving print media, with scores of papers in English, Urdu, and regional languages. The latest entrant has been the electronic media industry, which saw a sudden rise during the regime of General Musharraf. From just one state-owned TV channel in 2001, Pakistan today broadcasts more than 89 private Pakistani TV channels, besides granting landing rights to some 20 foreign media outlets including CNN and BBC. In addition, there are at least 141 commercial and 45 non-commercial FM radio channels. Ironically, Musharraf's move was mainly meant to counter the narrative of Indian media, which sided with the state's narrative during the 1999 Kargil conflict.

In Afghanistan, the local media too saw a sharp increase in the last decade, after the fall of Taliban regime. As of 2015, "Afghanistan had 174 radio stations, 68 private television stations, 22 state-owned provincial channels, and Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA)" (Procter, 2015). Much of the modern Afghan media, established after the ouster of Taliban, received foreign assistance.

Despite the media proliferation on both sides, the media relations

between the two have largely remained frozen. As of now, not a single media channel from Pakistan or Afghanistan has any bureau office in each other's country. Nor are there permanent staff members to report about one another. Instead, TV channels mostly rely on their information from international news agencies or channels.

Pakistan and Afghanistan share cultural, religious, historical ties besides having a long border as well as similar security issues. Because of these, said Afrasiab Khattak, former senator, many common issues exist: "While we have been hosting millions of Afghan refugees since the Cold War, one-hundred thousand Pakistanis from Waziristan had migrated to Afghanistan as a result of recent military operation."¹ Likewise, thousands Afghans daily cross into Pakistan for medical treatment in hospitals of Peshawar or better employment prospects.

These are all news-worthy issues, which can find a well-attended audience on both sides. After all, people in KP, the tribal areas, and parts of Balochistan even speak the same language, Pashto, one of the two languages of Afghan media. A fair number of Afghans also understand Urdu, the language of Pakistani media.

Negatively reporting

The media's coverage about each

¹Interview with the authors.

other is full of biases or ignorance, reeking of existing mistrust between the two countries, according to several journalists from Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Pakistani media is neither aggressive nor friendly towards Kabul, but nonchalant towards its issues. Many a times, Pakistani media portrays the Afghan society as much conservative, mountainous and hardliner tribal people. These pictures clearly miss out the hustle and bustle in Afghan urban areas.

The mistrust between the two countries gets reflected in their media. For instance, Pakistani media drumbeats about Indian influence in Afghanistan, without sharing that Afghans view India as their traditional friend.

The head of Pajhwok Afghan News, Afghanistan's largest independent news agency, claimed that "more than 80 percent reporting of Kabul affairs, in Pakistani media is either incorrect or incomplete."²

To be fair, in Pakistan, media don't have much knowledge, or may be interest, about how vibrant Afghanistan's media and or civil society are. The authors, journalists themselves, were also surprised to see many media outlets in Kabul. Many Afghans appearing on TV would share independent views on a

broad range of issues.

Pakistani media also misses its goodwill because of no presence in Kabul; none of its TV channel ever covered key developments in Afghanistan including its presidential election. By comparison, Indian media has more than 70 correspondents deployed in Kabul.

Afghan media, which is otherwise considered vibrant and independent, is not much even-handed in its portrayal of Pakistan.

They aggressively take on the policies of Pakistan, in particular its military establishment. One of the favourite recipes of the Afghan talk shows is: the ISI, Pakistan's premier intelligence agency. A participant who frequently appears on such shows argued, "Afghans are as firm about ISI's involvement in Kabul's internal affairs as they are about the blazing sun on their heads."³

A senior Pakistani diplomat who served in Afghanistan found Afghan media as "pro-India", accusing it of "airing propaganda" against Pakistan.⁴

Afghans dismiss the charge, saying that Pakistani media see every development in Afghanistan from

²Authors' interview with Danish Karokhel in Kabul.

³Authors' interview with Syed Masood in Kabul.

⁴Authors' discussion with a senior diplomat in Pakistan's embassy in Kabul in November 2015.

an Indian perspective or (Pakistani media) come up with a counter argument that is unproductive. Afghans rather blame Pakistani media for its tilt of news concerning Afghanistan. One journalist said:

“When Afghanistan says that militants from North Waziristan were involved in a terrorist attack in Afghan territory, Pakistani media will point out TTP chief Mullah Fazaullah’s whereabouts [in Afghanistan].”⁵

A Pakistani embassy official in Kabul confided that Afghan government was so hostile towards Pakistani media that it even banned the circulation of Pakistani newspapers in Afghanistan on the pretext of allegedly publishing single “wrong news about Taliban’s activities.”⁶

Former senator Khattak summed it up, “Afghan media gives due space to news of arrest of Afghan refugees in Pakistan, and Pakistani media, to some extent, gives coverage to victories of Taliban.”

Much of the mistrust has to do with the sources of information and analysis about each other. Experts from one country are rarely invited on current-affairs talk shows in another country. A journalist said

⁵ Authors’ interview with an Afghan journalist associated with Tolo News.

⁶ Authors’ interview with the diplomat in Kabul.

that often, media in one country seek opinion about the other country from “their own so-called experts rather than on-the-ground reporters.”

A presenter at Tolo News TV quoted a survey of an international organization, according to which 92 percent Afghan people had anti-Pakistan views, as “local media shaped up those views”.

Because Afghanistan’s print media is not much mature, it contributes little in opinion making. This leads Afghans to rely even more on electronic media, which has “not come of age” in both the countries, resulting in “sensationalizing the news.”⁷

Way forward

Several Pakistani and Afghan journalists blame the governments for not offering platforms to share views. While Afghan TV channels want to bureau offices in Pakistan, they are unable to get security clearance from Pakistan’s interior ministry.⁸ Afghan journalists blamed Pakistani government for the obstacles.⁹

But media should not fall prey to government’s intervention. “It will

⁷ Author’s interview with Sohail Abdul Nasir, a journalist

⁸ Authors’ interview with a senior Pemra official.

⁹ Authors’ interaction with journalists during thier visit to Kabul, Mazar-e-Sharif and Herat.

always be difficult for the two governments to mend the relations and media can do this", said, Khattak, a senior politician with a keen eye on Pak-Afghan relations.

The media of both the countries should rather assist them in resolving their issues, rather than furthering them. For that to happen, journalists on both sides need to interact more frequently with each other. A journalist-exchange program, for instance, could be laid down, entailing meetings with state dignitaries, parliamentarians, and media professionals.¹⁰

Accurate reporting can also help remove mistrust between the two countries. That however is the responsibility of the media houses, which need to send their staff in each other's countries, from where all sorts of issues, including positive ones, could be covered.

For instance, as Khattak pointed out, "a number of Afghan people were brought up in Pakistan during cold war, studied here and then returned to Afghanistan. They can be promoted in goodwill gesture to boost relations between the two countries. But media would have to look at such potential."¹¹

¹⁰Authors' interviews with AfrasiabKhattak in Pakistan and aTolo News presenter in Afghanistan.

¹¹Authors' interview with AfrasiabKhattak.

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Pakistan's Afghan refugee policy: politics trumping humanitarian concerns

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One of the direct victims of the physical attacks by militants in Pakistan and Afghanistan, or of the verbal war between officials of both countries are the over-three million Afghans in Pakistan. In Pakistan, terrorist attacks are often followed by a spotlight on Afghan refugees. In Afghanistan, an attack is followed by the Afghan government insinuating that Pakistan is responsible, while also calling its neighbor for dignified treatment of Afghan refugees. Whenever bilateral relations deteriorate, the continued existence of Afghans in Pakistan is made a thorny issue.

Pakistan hosts around 1.63 million registered and 1.40 million undocumented Afghans, predominantly ethnic Pashtuns (ICG, 2014).

Pakistan's approach towards Afghan refugees has largely been guided by "ad-hocism" (HRW, 2013). The country hosts one of the largest refugee populations in the world without having signed the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. The country's legislature has also yet to enact a national law codifying privileges of refugees in its territory.

The Tripartite Agreement, signed between the governments of Pakistan, Afghanistan and the UNHCR, is the guiding document on Pakistan's Afghan refugee policy. The Agreement calls for the facilitation of Afghan refugees willing to return to their homeland,

while rejecting the possibility for long-term integration in Pakistan of refugees unwilling or unable to return under present circumstances. In effect, it is completely silent on what to do about the refugee populations who remain in Pakistan despite repatriation efforts, a question which any comprehensive refugee policy must address.

Additionally, proper implementation of the Tripartite Agreement is largely left to the whims of the government in power and the quality of its relations with the Afghan government. The Agreement also fails to enshrine a mechanism to ensure that Pakistan fulfills obligations under it, and a legal course of action for Afghan refugees who, according to the Human Rights Watch, at various times during their asylum period, have been illegally detained and harassed by law enforcers (HRW, 2015).

Encouragingly, in December 2014, a draft refugee law jointly framed by the Ministry of States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON) and the UNHCR-Pakistan was being reviewed by the Government for further action (*Pakistan Today*, 2014). The passage of this law would have provided a long-term legal solution to refugees in line with international standards. But so far, little progress has been reported on this front.

Even though many Afghans moved back to their country in the 2000's, many of those remaining in Pakistan will be unable to return, even in the

years to come. The deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan, coupled with the drawdown of foreign troops, may even force more to seek refuge in neighboring countries including Pakistan (ICG, 2016). In 2015, for example, Afghans were the second-largest community to escape to Europe, after Syrians.

Pakistan therefore needs to shape a long-term solution for Afghan refugees on its soil. At home, this would entail mitigating the precariousness of registered and unregistered Afghans. Outside, the solution requires Pakistan's cooperation in aiding Afghanistan to become a viable state by ensuring refugees are able to integrate in the long-term on both sides of the border.

“Registration and voluntary repatriation”

Since 2003, successive Pakistani government have drafted and/or implemented several policies related to Afghan refugees. These are primarily focused on repatriating them to Afghanistan in a gradual and voluntary manner.

Foremost among these policies was the Tripartite Agreement on Voluntary Repatriation of Afghan Refugees, reached between Pakistan, Afghanistan and the UNHCR. This agreement sets the framework for Pakistan's treatment of refugees by calling for their registration inside

the country and their gradual and voluntary return to their homeland.

Between 2003 and 2013, about 3.8 million Afghan refugees had been repatriated under this Agreement (*Express Tribune*, 2013), and, between 2006 and 2007, 2.16 million Afghans were issued Proof of Registration (PoR) cards, documenting their stay in Pakistan for a specified time-period and entitling them to certain rights (UNHCR, 2014).

Another document, the Afghan Management and Repatriation Strategy of 2010, emphasizes the principles of “voluntary and gradual reintegration of refugees in Afghanistan, and rejects the possibility of integrating them in Pakistan in the long-term.

More recently, in 2015, after the country's first counter-terror plan, the National Action Plan (NAP) was finalized, Pakistani and Afghan officials considered the registrations of documented and undocumented Afghans afresh. This exposed ignorance on part of the officials, given that a registration drive had already been completed between 2006 and 2007. Unsurprisingly, the post-NAP registration process, which was due to begin in July of 2015 was scrapped, presumably after officials realized the exercise had already been undertaken before.

Today, on account of their PoR cards, documented Afghan refugees can access public-sector education,

get health services, seek employment (Leghari, 2014), open bank accounts, have birth certificates issued for children born in Pakistan and initiate foreign travel from Pakistan.

These cards, however, do not grant holders the right of indefinite stay in Pakistan; rather, they have a certain time limit, after which the cardholder is supposed to leave Pakistan or have their registration renewed. Clearly, since 2006, the situation in Afghanistan hasn't improved enough to warrant Afghan refugees' "voluntary repatriation." On its part, Pakistan has repeatedly extended the Tripartite Agreement and the validity of PoRs for time periods varying from six months to two years (*Pakistan Today*, 2014; ICG, 2014; Ali, 2016).

However, the PoRs themselves were issued only once – during the 2006-7 drive. Afghan refugees who remained undocumented after this registration drive for various reasons cannot have themselves registered now, even if they want to. They are treated as illegal aliens by the Pakistani government, to be deported to Afghanistan at the earliest.

Shifting positions

Although Pakistan's policy on Afghan refugee meets several international standards on the treatment of asylum-seekers, its

implementation of this policy has been inconsistent, at best.

Pakistan has shifted positions on refugee question a number of times ever since it first began hosting them in 1979. The country's response to changing geo-political circumstances has driven this inconsistent approach (ICG, 2014).

As discussed earlier, Pakistan never signed the international convention on refugees and hosted Afghans fleeing the conflict of 1979 on "religious" grounds.¹ At the time, refugees were played up as the "*muhajireen*" and their Pakistani hosts as the "*ansar*", in reference to the early migrations in Muslim history.

However, when the steady stream of foreign aid for refugees in Pakistan began drying up after the post-1989 pullout of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, the Pakistani government started to feel burdened by its "guests" and began urging for their repatriation (Leghari, 2014).

When Afghanistan again plunged into an international conflict after 2001, Pakistan officially shut its borders to the refugees, although many were still able to gain entry into the country illegally (Khan, 2014).

¹ Pakistan refused to sign the Convention when it first came into force due to its limited geo-temporal coverage. The 1967 Protocol removed the spatial and temporal limits to the Convention.

Afghan refugees have long been blamed for militancy and crime by both Pakistani state and society, even though no solid evidence has been put forward in this regard (Khattak, 2015). Since the Army Public School (APS) attack in December 2014, suspicion has intensified and Afghan refugees have been increasingly subjected to abusive checks and official harassment (HRW, 2015). One of the official proposals under NAP even called for the shifting of Afghan refugees to designated camps (HRW, 2015).

Pakistan has remained inconsistent on the matter of Afghan refugees even after the Tripartite Agreement came into effect. Even though the Agreement has been extended numerous times for periods ranging between a few months to a few years, such extensions come with their own set of problems. Stop-gap measures such as these short-term extensions also make it harder for officials to work towards more long-term solutions to the refugee crisis (HRW, 2015).

On ground, Afghan refugees, both documented and undocumented, are exploited and harassed by corrupt and predatory police personnel, especially when the expiry deadline of PoRs approaches (HRW, 2016).

The most vulnerable to exploitation are undocumented Afghans, who have repeatedly been denied a chance to register after completion

of the sole registration drive in 2007. In comparison, many wealthy or well-connected Afghans not accounted during the 2006-7 registration were subsequently able to obtain PoRs, and, in some cases, even Pakistani citizenship.

Need for humanitarian solution

In March 2015, Pakistani government, once again, extended the stay of refugees, as well as called for registering over 1.4 million undocumented Afghans living in Pakistan. This seems consistent with Pakistan's public policy of allowing refugees to live in its territory until the situation in Afghanistan normalizes (Khan, 2015). Yet, Afghans in Pakistan continue to be evicted and harassed, and some are even deported to Afghanistan (HRW, 2015).²

Rather than viewing the issue of undocumented Afghan refugees from a humanitarian angle, Pakistan continues to block their registration on perceived security grounds. This position sums up the issue with Pakistan's policy and practice on Afghan refugees. Pakistan has allowed the encroachment of short-term strategic and political calculations into what is essentially a long-term humanitarian issue, often at the expense of the rights of

² Around 9,920 undocumented Afghans were deported from Pakistan in 2015.

refugees on its soil and its relations with the Afghan government.

Resettling refugees to designated villages, as proposed in the wake of NAP, is also indicative of security trumping humanitarian concerns in Pakistan's refugee policy. Such resettlement drives will limit the economic prospects of Afghan refugees. A whopping 67% of all registered refugees live in Pakistani cities and engage in economic activities. A fair proportion of their earnings is sent to Afghanistan as undocumented remittances and will likely be instrumental in the post-conflict rebuilding of the country (UNHCR, 2014; ICG, 2014).

It is also likely that forced resettlement of Afghan refugees will hamper the economic development of FATA, an area whose economy depends, to some extent, on continued bilateral trade between Afghanistan and Pakistan, in which Afghan refugees are important players (UNHCR, 2014; ICG, 2014).

When the tripartite agreement was put in place, it provided legal cover for over 2 million refugees to continue living in the country and codified the provision of basic rights to them. However, in the absence of any grievance redressal mechanism to ensure that the Pakistan respects its obligations under the Tripartite Agreement and international customary law, the position of Afghan refugees living in the country remains precarious.

Pakistan must thus revise its policies to address the precariousness of Afghan refugees living on its soil. Their status and treatment in the country can no longer be subject to the whims of the government in power and its relations with the Afghan government.

A more durable solution to the refugee question will require the passage of legislation affording legal cover to both registered and unregistered Afghans in line with international standards, and ensuring their long-term economic and social integration in Pakistan.

Over the years, Pakistan has missed the opportunity to consolidate its "soft power" within Afghanistan due to its largely strategic policy towards Afghanistan.

Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan could benefit greatly from the passage of legislation on the status and rights of refugees living in its territory. Such legislation will allow Afghans to access a greater number of services in Pakistan, including education in public-sector universities. At present, even though the government provides scholarships to registered Afghan refugees in public-sector universities, funding for such programs is often cut as soon as relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan turn sour.

Ensuring the long-term economic and social integration of Afghan refugees in Pakistan will also boost

Afghanistan's remittance economy and reduce its reliance on foreign aid.

Finally, Pakistan must chart a contingency plan for increased refugee inflows from Afghanistan in the future and consider the registration of all undocumented Afghans residing in its territory, who are often deported in large numbers, whenever possible (HRW, 2015).

If Pakistan ignores international customary law and mistreats Afghans inside its borders, it will be missing out on a significant opportunity to contribute towards the long-term political transition in

Afghanistan and consolidate its influence within the emerging political arrangements of the country.

At the recently held "Heart of Asia Conference" in Islamabad on the long-term political transition in Afghanistan, the treatment of Afghan refugees in Pakistan was lauded by all concerned parties (*Business Recorder*, 2015). Pakistan must build on the goodwill gained in Afghanistan by renewing and expanding on its commitment towards Afghan refugees living in its territory.

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Seeds of mistrust

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*Extracts from an interview PIPS conducted with Mr. Rahat Malik Kakayzai, a columnist and author of three books. He is a member of National Party and provincial organizer of Anjuman Tariqi Pasand Musanifeen Balochistan.

Current state of insurgency

There has been an increase in insurgency in Afghanistan. Afghan and Pakistani Taliban come from the same stock. While Pakistani Taliban have attacked inside Pakistan, Afghan Taliban haven't taken action directly. I am not concerned with their inter-linkages. The back of the Pakistani Taliban has been broken, due to which religious militancy may not increase here. Meanwhile, Afghan Taliban have also been shifting to Afghanistan. That explains the increase.

Signs of diminishing influence

For long, Pakistan has been in a paradox: it wanted to say it has influence, but didn't want to be known (it has links with such groups). If Afghan Taliban shift, Pakistan can say it doesn't have any influence any longer. As Taliban rely less and less on Pakistan, they come under the influence of Qatar, where the Tehreek-e-Taliban Afghanistan opened its office. Qatar, in turn, can come under the influence of Saudi Arabia, which has good relations with Pakistan, thereby retaining its influence in the end.

This is not to say that Pakistan could always influence Afghan Taliban. Even when the Taliban were under the control of Pakistan, could we use them properly for our own interests? Did we ask them to accept the Durand Line, the boundary line between Pakistan and Afghanistan?

They didn't. Was there any formal agreement about the terms of relation? No. I believe Taliban got more benefits from Pakistan, than other way around. Even that influence has gone away now.

Secondly, another source of influence, or reliance of Taliban on Pakistan, is linked to their economy. (They draw their funds from inside Pakistan, especially Karachi.) Recently, Afghan Taliban captured Helmand and Kunduz. Suddenly, the rate of opium shot up from 30-35 to 100. After capturing Helmand, Taliban relaxed the ban on opium, put in place by Afghan government. The opium business will benefit Taliban, decreasing their reliance on Karachi's economy.

I believe even Kabul government got involved in this whole affair. (Why do I say so?) Commander Jabbar, who is commander of People's Democratic Afghanistan, a Pashtun party, defends the same territory. The Khalq elements are supporting Taliban. Khalq people understand Kabul wants its share too.

Yet, there often are news reports about people fighting and dying inside Afghanistan. These reports are covered publicly in local newspapers in Quetta. This shows both Pakistan and international forces stationed in Afghanistan cannot stop those movements. Often, we are asked to curb such movement, but we can also pose the same question to the NATO forces: why can't the largest war machinery of the world, not stop them? On

Pakistan's side, at least the newspaper should stop reporting about the dead bodies arriving from Afghanistan. I believe our inability to do so have to do with the crisis of national identity, reflective in our policies, which aren't national in scope.

Seeds of mistrust

Pakistan and Afghanistan live like members in a joint family system, where are frequent bickering among family members. That much of interference will remain.

Durand Line is a case in point. It should have been settled by now. Then, there was a talk of the issue of Pashtunistan, the land of Pashtuns surpassing the boundary line. I think that was never a serious issue, not even for Kabul. Yes, Afghan President Daud raised the issue a bit. But also remember that in July 1977, Afghan President Daud met Pakistani Prime Minister Bhutto in Islamabad over this Pashtunistan issue. But the concept got close there; reason being it wasn't much of a strong issue in the first place. The point is the issues were so weak that they nearly got resolved in one or two meetings.

The problem with the two countries is that while both are two countries with two societies, none of them are much modern states. There are still people-to-people relations across the border. I believe such ties have

bounded the two states from any major conflict. The societal relationship between the two countries varies from their state-to-state relationship.

Thus, unless the two countries sign documents to solve the historical issues, changes in personalities will not have lasting impact.

There are of course interests of Afghanistan too, which, being a landlocked country, want access to sea.

Wide linkages

Trade

Afghanistan is a landlocked country, which relies on countries like Pakistan for international trade. Afghanistan's trade with Pakistan are of two types: one, the transit trade which involves Pakistan as a route for Afghanistan's exports and imports; and two, the bilateral trade involving export and imports between the two countries. As of the first one - the transit trade, - it is either based on banking channels or through individuals, who contact dealers in the world. The second one - bilateral, - is believed to be \$6 billion through official channels and much more than that in unofficial channels.

The transit trade, especially through individuals, benefits Pakistan's bordering areas. Today, Chaman is a

relatively small town, but with a much higher annual banking. The people of Chaman are direct shareholders in that transit trade. For example, someone from Kandahar, Afghanistan, opens an LC, that is a request for items to be imported to Afghanistan, where there are marginal to no taxes. Some of those items are opened up in Karachi; much of the rest is received at Chaman, instead of even entering Afghanistan.

Another route involves Dubai; Bandar Abbas, Iran; Lashkar Gah, Afghanistan.

To be sure, such trade damage industrial growth in Pakistan. But in this business, the elite are also involved, for whom the amnesty schemes are announced.

As of the bilateral trade, items are sold between the two countries or their people. Afghanistan's dry fruits would go all the way to India. (Pakistan could benefit from that trade, too. Pakistan is bypassed in such trade.) Already, India, with its low airfares, imports dry fruits through air route.

By creating economic opportunities, free from drugs, for the people on the border areas, we can control insurgency.

Political developments

It is even whenever Afghanistan is ruled by religious forces, Jamiat Ulema e Islam wins in Chaman.

When progressive forces rule there, Pakhtunkhuwa Milli Awami Party wins here. In a way, towns like Chaman are litmus test of the government in Afghanistan, or other way around.

Tribal justice system

Putting in place a justice system, acceptable to all, is another key. The justice system that goes with Afghan's psyche is different than European. Whatever the system be, it should be acceptable to locals. Justice done should be timely and have impact. To a tribesman, Pakistani justice system might punish the culprits, but not avenge the accused. In a tribal society, tribal people accept the decision of the sardar or elder, putting an end to the enmity.

I am not against modern state, but first lay down the paraphernalia of modern state. You can mainstream them if you have developed those areas. Even now, in parliament sit people, who, when go to their villages, adjudicate among their tribes, despite that the constitution warns against parallel justice system. This is the real picture. Expecting uniform code and its application in an uneven society is being unrealistic.

Sealing border is no way

If you want to make Pakistan Israel, then you can install barbed wires, but if you want them to live in harmony, manage the border. 30,000

people cross the Chaman border daily. Each one of them gives 50 rupees to check in. A tiny minority of them might be criminals. But the government doesn't have data on these people. Given that the people are often from those areas that are neglected, why not issue them cards on both sides? Take 200 rupees from those crossing the border, but then issue them time-bound cards. One result of these cards, and ensuring process, would be that people will reduce travelling to India by air. Instead, they will use Pakistan's land. Moreover, trade will become documented by small traders.

Regional solution

There is a need for regional conference comprising Afghanistan, Pakistan, and other countries. Kabul should strive for being an impartial country.

Also, on trade, Pakistan should negotiate with India on land rights. While India may get access to Central Asia, Pakistan should get to Calcutta. If TAPI can be negotiated without Kashmir, why not trade rights.

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Comprehensive Review of National Action Plan



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