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Paper
Pak-Afghan Relations Emerging Trends and
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1. Introduction and Background

At the NATO Lisbon Summit in November 2010, three declarations called upon the United States, NATO and Afghanistan to create conditions for “irreversible transition to full Afghan security responsibility and leadership” in all provinces by the end of 2014.¹ The proposed transition requires an increase in the pace towards preparedness, in particular towards strengthening and enabling the political, administrative, judicial and security institutions in Afghanistan to effectively manage the post-transition responsibilities. Secondly, a more supportive role by the regional countries, particularly Pakistan, Iran and China, is imperative to facilitate the transition process. With regard to the first pre-requisite, efforts are under way in Afghanistan to find a workable framework for power-sharing with all ethnic groups, including the Taliban, to constitute a representative government in Kabul, with some basic ingredients of conflict-resolution and peace. As far as the second pre-requisite is concerned, Kabul’s focus has increasingly been on regional countries with an eye to the post-transition period.

These developments along with the recent Pak-US strategic dialogue and increasing interaction and bilateral engagement between Pakistan and Afghanistan describe how relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, and certain other regional dynamics—particularly those related to security, terrorism and trade, etc.—are going to be transformed into new realities in the near future. In this backdrop, it is crucial to assess the nature of evolving relations and alliances, explore the level of convergence and/or divergence of interests and foresee national and regional security determinants and variables in South and Central Asian contexts.

This analytical report undertakes a part of this task and tries to explore emerging trends and prospects for Pak-Afghan relations and their implications for counter-terrorism and reduction in violence and insecurity in both countries in particular and the wider region in general.

Historically, Pakistan and Afghanistan have rarely been at ease with each other despite the fact that both are Muslim neighboring countries, and share more than 2,500 kilometers of border, called Durand Line, which was demarcated in 1893 following an agreement between the British Empire and the Afghan king. The Durand Line divides ethnic Pashtun tribes in the Pak-Afghan border areas.

Ethnically, Pashtuns constitute the majority of the population of Afghanistan and also have considerable population in Pakistan. They are Pashtu speaking people of southeastern Afghanistan and northwestern Pakistan. The Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan, which comprise seven tribal agencies are populated by a little over 3 million Pashtuns, in addition to the 28 million Pashtuns who live in Pakistan and the 15 million in Afghanistan. The tribes on both sides of the border intermarry, trade and feud with one another. They largely share a common religious sect, Sunni or Hanafi Islam. These tribes have been living together for centuries and even today’s Pak-Afghan border has only

symbolic significance for them and tens of thousands travel across it on a near daily basis. According to Pakistan's ambassador to Afghanistan Muhammad Sadiq, some 52,000 Afghans crossed the border into Pakistan everyday in 2009 for business, jobs, medical treatment, education or in order to visit their relatives.² More visitors are now undertaking documented travel between the two countries by obtaining visas or visit permits.

The two countries have a long history of mistrust and both have accused each other of harboring the other's opponents and interfering in their affairs. Pakistan accuses Afghanistan of sheltering Baloch nationalists since the 1970s. The Pakistanis also allude to the fact that Afghanistan was the only country that had resisted Pakistan's membership of the United Nations and that as recently as the communist regime in Afghanistan it had closer relations with India than with Pakistan.³ The increasing Indian influence in Afghanistan in the present context also adds to Pakistan's concerns. Afghanistan says that Pakistan supported the Afghan Taliban in the 1990s, and provided refuge and shelter to them later in its tribal areas and other parts such as Quetta from where they, along with Pakistani Taliban, have regrouped and launched attacks on Afghan, US and NATO forces.⁴ Some Afghans also criticize Pakistan's role in the Soviet-Afghan war when Pakistan's military ruler Gen Ziaul Haq had promoted jihad in Afghanistan, funded thousands of madrassas, armed domestic Islamist organizations, and in the process "militarized and radicalized the border region."⁵ Other Afghan concerns relate to Pakistan's focus on only dealing with Pashtun leaders in Afghanistan, meddling in Afghanistan affairs and not treating the country on equal basis.

Pakistan attaches great importance to establishment of a friendly government in Kabul to secure its western borders, while Afghanistan categorizes that as Pakistan's interference in Afghan affairs. After the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, Pakistan had supported the Afghan resistance and later the Taliban, with the same aim.

Although both countries have begun to evolve friendly relations in regional frameworks, the fundamental issues remain intact. For instance, Afghanistan still does not recognize Durand Line as international border between the two countries. Kabul blames Islamabad for fueling the insurgency in Afghanistan in order to destabilize the government of President Hamid Karzai and install a friendly or a more compliant government in Kabul. In turn, Islamabad alleges that Kabul has given shelter to Baloch nationalist insurgents and allows India to use Afghan territory to fuel the insurgency in Balochistan.

However, there is considerable goodwill towards Pakistan among the Afghan people for helping them in their hour of need. In the last 30 years, Afghans of all ethnicities and political views have taken refuge in Pakistan: whether following the mass exodus after the Soviet occupation or flight from atrocities of a decade-long internecine war. At one point, over 5.5 million Afghan refugees were living in Pakistan; currently the number is around 3 million. A large number of Afghans continue to work and study in Pakistan. Some 28,000 Afghans have studied at Pakistani universities and colleges in the last three decades.⁶ Until last year, 6,000 Afghan students were enrolled in Pakistan's colleges and universities; constituting nearly 60 percent of all Afghans studying in institutions of higher education abroad.⁷ Over 500 Afghan nationals attended courses at the Agriculture University of Peshawar alone. Scores were trained in other professions ranging from medicine to civil aviation. Many successful professionals in Afghanistan today have studied in Pakistan.

Similarly, over 90 percent of Afghans who seek medical treatment abroad visit Pakistan. Most of the Afghan patients opt for free treatment at government hospitals or healthcare facilities run by philanthropists and charity organizations. While wealthy Afghan patients are welcomed by many countries, Pakistan has kept its doors open for the less affluent ones also.⁸

Presence of a large number of Afghan refugees in Pakistan, the long border, conducive environment for Afghan nationals to live, work and access education and health facilities in Pakistan, and shared religious and ethnic ethos were perhaps some of the factors which prompted Afghan President Hamid Karzai to declare Pakistan and Afghanistan the conjoined twins while addressing the media in Islamabad on March 11, 2010.

The other reasons for Afghanistan's increasing realization that it needs Pakistan, particularly after withdrawal of US troops, are linked to political, geo-strategic and economic factors. Both countries face similar threats of militancy and terrorism which makes not only bilateral but also regional cooperation and joint counter-terrorism mechanisms imperative to deal with these threats.

Bitterness of the recent past seems to be subsiding now and Pakistan is being seen once again as a key player for resolving the conflict in Afghanistan. Both Pakistan and Afghanistan appear set to work together to counter not only militancy and terrorism but also pave the way for a stable and peaceful region. However, despite some positive developments in that regard irritants remain. Both countries have legitimate security concerns which have internal and external dynamics. There is no end in sight to the war on terror in which both countries are partners. The role of the United States and the fate of the war on terror would essentially determine the future of Pak-Afghan relations. All these issues are discussed below.

2. Security Perspectives of Pakistan and Afghanistan

Pakistan and Afghanistan have both had reservations about the other country's role with regard to their internal security. The actors of violence and terrorism in both countries have many similarities and can be categorized as local and foreign militant groups. The local militant groups are mainly the Taliban groups operating in both countries. They want to topple the governments of the two countries and transform society according to their interpretations of Islam. However, Taliban in both countries have clearly sharp differences when it comes to strategic objectives. There are divisions even within the ranks of Pakistani Taliban groups on issues related to strategic and tactical priorities; some are exclusively focused on fighting in Afghanistan while others are also targeting the Pakistani people and security personnel. But the Taliban groups operating in both countries do not have great ideological differences.

The situation in Pakistan appears to be more complex when one looks at the increasing nexus between Taliban groups mainly based in FATA and parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and some other mainland militant, or Jihadi, groups and also terrorist groups with sectarian motivations. Foreign militant groups such as Al Qaeda and Central Asian militants add a dimension of global jihad to this already complicated militant landscape, besides providing ideological and financial mentoring to most of the militant groups operating in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

In addition to religiously motivated militant and sectarian groups, Pakistan faces a nationalist insurgency in Balochistan. The capital of the province, Quetta, is also allegedly home to senior Afghan

Taliban, referred to as 'Quetta Shura'. Other areas of concentration and influence of local and foreign militant groups inside Pakistan are the border areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

As mentioned earlier, both Pakistan and Afghanistan believe that insecurity and violence in their countries stems mainly from cross-border movement of militants. It does not necessarily imply that the other country is orchestrating lawlessness and militancy in the neighboring country. The occasional blame-game also serves domestic political purposes. But public perceptions in both countries are changing and people are increasingly convinced that by externalizing the issues of insecurity and violence, the governments primarily try to hide their own shortcomings.⁹ Yet Pakistan's partial responsibility in the ongoing insurgency in Afghanistan and Afghanistan's partial responsibility in the insurgency in Balochistan and parts of FATA and KPK remain. According to some analysts, in both cases the two countries are exploiting already troubled situations rather than architecting them.

Only recently have the two countries started to realize that they have a common enemy in militants and terrorists.¹⁰ Some analysts assert that Afghanistan has apparently started to trust the political government in Islamabad but still views the Pakistani military establishment with suspicion.¹¹ Pakistan's major security perspective is not only confined to the spread of insecurity and terrorism it has witnessed at the hands of Taliban groups but it also takes into consideration the role of Afghanistan and India in sheltering and supporting the Baloch insurgents, respectively.

3. Pakistan's Responses to Militancy and Terrorism

Pakistan's relations with its neighboring states, Afghanistan, India, China and Iran are directly connected with its internal and regional security. The geo-strategic dynamics and the presence of militant extremists in Pakistan and Afghanistan signify that peace and security are possible only through collaborative regional approaches.

The internal security situation continues to be a pressing challenge for Pakistan. Critical security challenges remain unaddressed, with the government yet to evolve an effective and comprehensive counter-terrorism policy. The challenges consistently highlighted in the last few years have not been addressed. Better coordination among intelligence agencies, capacity building of law enforcement agencies, curbs on terrorism financing and, most importantly, adequate measures to prevent banned militant groups from operating across the country remain persistently lacking.

Amid multiple challenges and threats such as political instability, institutional confrontation, economic volatility and a precarious security situation both internally and externally, Islamabad has undertaken a host of strategies in the last couple of years to address the mounting challenges. A summary of these responses is given below:

- In the conflict-hit areas of KPK and FATA, the government responded with wide-ranging political and military interventions to counter the militancy. Military campaigns continue in areas where militant networks still hold sway.¹²
- Efforts are under way to reconstruct the destroyed infrastructure and repatriate internally displaced persons to areas where military operations have been concluded. The KPK

government approved a peace-building initiative, called the Post Crisis Need Assessment (PCNA), which guides the political and development initiatives.

- Through formation of peace committees and anti-Taliban lashkars in FATA and KPK, the government tried to encourage residents of the conflict-hit areas to assist the security forces in ensuring law and order in the areas purged of militants. But the government's scant support to lashkars and peace committees creates difficulties for them and risks inter-tribal clashes.
- In 2010, the KPK administration directed government departments to sack employees found guilty of supporting the militants.
- After promulgation of Counter-Terrorism Ordinance 2010 in KPK, Governor Owais Ghani ordered implementation of the ordinance in the conflict-hit areas of KPK's Provincially Administered Tribal Areas (PATA).
- The federal government gave approval last year for trial of some 3,000 militants arrested from Malakand Division, including chief of the banned Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi, Sufi Muhammad, and former TTP spokesperson in Swat Muslim Khan. The militants were to be tried in Malakand Division. However, the trials have not yet begun.
- The Federal Interior Ministry lifted an official ban on recruitment in the paramilitary Frontier Corps (FC) in KPK and FATA and 4,000 new inductions were planned in 2011. The new recruits would get bullet-proof jackets and new vehicles.
- Unlike the government's emphasis on reconciliation in Balochistan in 2009, its strategy in the province in 2010 was a combination of carrot and stick. The government expedited the pace of development projects, extended an olive branch to exiled Baloch separatist leaders for negotiations, recruited over 3,900 candidates in the provincial education department under the Aghaz-e-Huqooq-e-Balochistan Package, and announced a 100 percent increase in the number of seats reserved for Baloch students in the universities and higher education institutions of Punjab. The government also banned five Baloch militant/insurgent organizations, namely Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), Baloch Liberation Front (BLF), Baloch Republican Army (BRA), Lashkar-e-Balochistan and Baloch Musallah Difai Tanzeem in September last. Their bank accounts and other assets were also frozen.

Critical Challenges: Some critical challenges still remain in countering terrorism and militancy and restoring peace in the country.

- There are no major changes in the militant landscape of FATA, which has continued to revolve around the same dynamics in the last few years.
- Despite a dip in the number of attacks in KPK in 2010 compared to 2009, the security landscape is still vulnerable to militant attacks, as is demonstrated by intermittent and sporadic acts of violence by the Taliban.
- The overall security situation in Balochistan continues to deteriorate amid a combination of nationalist insurgency, sectarian-related militancy, Taliban presence in the northern part of the province, politically motivated target killings, attacks on educationists, NATO supplies and enforced disappearances/illegal detentions.

- Intermittent cycles of violence lead to complete breakdown of law and order in Karachi, causing an acute sense of insecurity among the city's residents and bringing the economic activity in the country's financial capital to a halt.
- The reincarnation of banned sectarian outfits under new names displays the ineffectiveness of official bans as a tool to tackle sectarian violence in the country. The fluid nature of sectarian militant outfits makes detecting and cracking down on them all the more difficult.
- The continuing wave of terrorist attacks in Pakistan demonstrates not only that the terrorists retain the ability to strike across the country despite major military offensives, but also that they are not interested in suspended the attacks. A nexus of Al Qaeda, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and militant (Jihadi and sectarian) groups on mainland Pakistan is behind the prevailing wave of terrorism.
- Growing radicalization in Pakistan makes a large and unemployed population of youth susceptible to courting by the militants. Meanwhile, the Al Qaeda network in Pakistan attracts radicals from all over the world for terror training.
- Pakistan is yet to develop a comprehensive counter-terrorism strategy amid a systemic lack of ownership, consistency and direction of the overall security and counter-terrorism approach of the state.
- The high ratio of acquittal of suspected terrorists by courts of law in 2010 raised concerns about institutional deficiencies in the prosecution and judicial systems.

4. War on Terror and US

Much instability and disruption has occurred in Pakistan and Afghanistan in the war on terror that began in the region nearly 10 years ago. After 9/11, the US had described Al Qaeda and its sanctuaries in Afghanistan as its major concern. A destabilized South Asia was perceived by the US as a dangerous place that could afford Al Qaeda and other terrorists safe havens to consolidate their position and propagate for a 'true Islamic caliphate' by overthrowing the 'western puppets' ruling these countries. Irrespective of the extent to which these objectives have been met, the situation in Pakistan and Afghanistan remains alarming.

Pakistan had joined the war on terror after the US had already taken the main world powers on board in its efforts to evolve consensus against terrorism and Al Qaeda. Pakistan's refusal to join in could have isolated it internationally, which could have led to heavy economic and political costs. Secondly, an isolated Pakistan was likely to be considered part of the problem of terrorism and militancy. Thirdly, and most importantly, India could have capitalized on the international campaign against terrorism to target the Kashmir-focused militant groups based in Pakistan.

Although Pakistan's tensions with the US and Afghanistan continued after it became part of the war on terror, these tensions had a different character as Pakistan was now part of the alliance, and was providing crucial infrastructure and intelligence support for the counter-terrorism drive. The Arab, Afghan and other militant groups active in Afghanistan got shelter in Pakistan's tribal areas and a new brand of Taliban, the local or Pakistan Taliban, joined them to wage battles against the US and NATO

forces in Afghanistan. In the emerging complex landscape of militancy the militants started to launch attacks inside Pakistan.

The US, Afghanistan and other allies have consistently pressed Pakistan to 'do more' against the local and foreign militant groups in its tribal areas which they think are not only providing support to the Taliban in Afghanistan but are also training the militants who believe in waging a 'global jihad' and are, or can be, involved in acts of terrorism around the globe. Pakistan on the other hand cites its losses and contribution in the war on terror and the resulting threats of insecurity, violence and terrorism for the state and society. Pakistan argues that it faces the threat of terrorism more than any other country and cannot counter it without international support and assistance. The militants have certainly bracketed Pakistan with the US and its allies, and have been launching attacks in Pakistan, particularly since 2004-05.

The most recent US strategic review of its Af-Pak policy in December last put more pressure on Pakistan as Washington thought that Islamabad should do more to eliminate terrorists hiding in its tribal areas and that doing so would strengthen the anti-Taliban war in Afghanistan. Pakistan asserted that this analysis was skewed and was a bid to mask the failures of the US and its allies in Afghanistan.

Pakistan and the US remained engaged in a strategic dialogue in 2010. The first ever strategic dialogue at the ministerial level was held on March 24-25, 2010 in Washington. Two rounds of strategic dialogue followed in July and October 2010.¹³ Washington's interest in the strategic dialogue was apparently to find a way with Pakistan's assistance for a safe and dignified exit from Afghanistan and ensure regional security, whereas Pakistan was mainly interested in US assistance for its economy, and in assurances that Afghanistan's territory would not be used against Pakistan by India. The Tripartite Commission (Afghanistan, Pakistan and US) also reviewed occasionally how the war on terror could be fought effectively and how internal security and economic conditions of Pakistan and Afghanistan could be improved.

At present, North Waziristan is a source of friction in relations between the two allies because of Washington's demand for a military offensive in the region along the Pak-Afghan border which Washington describes as the launching pad for violence in Afghanistan. But Pakistani military leadership has resisted US pressure and insisted that it was constrained by operations against militants in other areas and efforts to consolidate the gains made in the fight against extremists in Pakistan. The army says that it would move into North Waziristan at a time of its own choosing.

Other irritants include the CIA-operated drone strikes in Pakistan's tribal areas. In 2010, a 165 percent increase was witnessed in such strikes.¹⁴ Growing public pressure against drone strikes could have political implications for Pakistan's partnership in war on terror. Although drone strikes do not directly affect Pak-Afghan relations, public sentiments have some relevance for Pakistan's foreign policy, particularly at the political level.

5. Irritants in Pak-Afghan Relations

India's role: The US and its allies find it difficult to 'tinker' Pakistan Army's Afghan policy which is fundamentally India-centric.¹⁵ Pakistan has always considered India a threat to its stability and existence, and in order to counter-balance this threat over the last two decades it has attempted to secure

its western borders with Afghanistan. Certain sections within the military think of Afghanistan as Pakistan's strategic depth in case of an attack on the eastern border by India.¹⁶

Afghanistan and the US are aware of Pakistan's concerns with regard to Indian influence in Afghanistan. Pakistan believes that India's role in Afghanistan is not confined to the development and reconstruction effort but rather it seeks to use its presence in Afghanistan to create instability in Pakistan, particularly in Balochistan, FATA and Karachi.

After independence from Britain, the Pashtunistan issue provided India with a chance to pressurize Pakistan on both the eastern and western borders. Later Afghanistan became a battleground for an India-Pakistan proxy war. India was part of a vicious propaganda campaign launched against Pakistan in Kabul during the communist regime.¹⁷

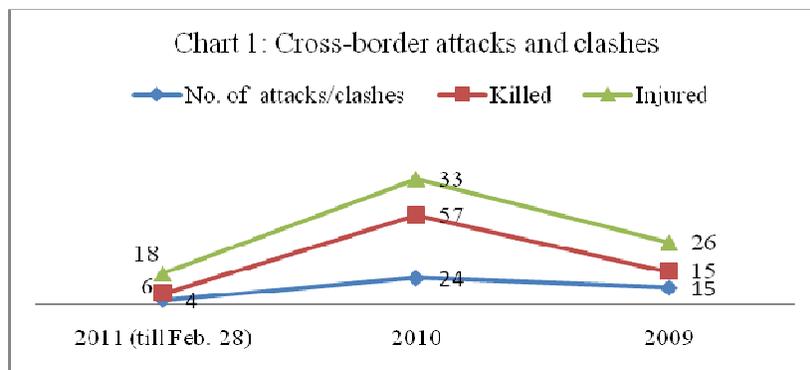
Notions of 'balance of power' and 'strategic depth' have long haunted the Afghans who consider such efforts by Pakistan as interference in Afghan affairs. On the other hand Pakistan believes that a pro-India government in Kabul is a critical danger to its security. The Afghan people fear a return to Taliban rule. The situation demands addressing the trust deficit between Pakistan and Afghanistan by demonstrating that Islamabad is committed to playing a sincere role to allay concerns of the Afghans.

At present Pakistan's 'bottom-line' in strategizing its policy towards Afghanistan seems to be a 'proxy-free' Afghanistan. Some analysts believe that Pakistan has revisited its Afghan policy and committed itself to non-interference. Pakistanis believe that the Americans have a confused strategy on Afghanistan; that the reconciliation policy, first embraced by the US in its annual review, was not aligned with the transition process; and not enough attention had been paid to development.¹⁸

Cross-border movement of militants: The Taliban insurgency and border security are two major and interconnected issues that have had an impact on regional security and Pak-Afghan relations.

Uncontrolled flows of people and legal and illegal goods have traditionally taken place across the Pak-Afghan border, along Pakistan's FATA region, districts of Dir and Chitral in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan.¹⁹

One of the main challenges faced by Pakistan and Afghanistan is the security of their border, which is porous to a great extent for common citizens and militants. Both countries have deployed their border security forces there, with some 1,000 border control posts on the Pakistani side and 100 on the Afghan side. Border tensions in the form of attacks and clashes are mainly related to infiltration of militants across the Pak-Afghan border. (See Chart 1) Both countries and other allies in war on terror understand that it is not possible to seal the border and that cross-border movement of militants cannot be checked without support from local tribesmen.²⁰



Finally, tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan on water sharing are also expected to emerge in the near future. A number of rivers are shared, including the Kabul River, on which a dam has been proposed in Afghanistan. There have been attempts to renegotiate a 1921 water treaty on water sharing between the two countries.²¹

Pashtun factor: Until recently, Pakistan was blamed for its Pashtun-specific foreign policy towards Afghanistan. But over the years Pakistan, particularly its embassy in Kabul, has launched extensive efforts to reach out to non-Pashtun Afghans. Pakistan's ambassador to Afghanistan has made extensive visits to northern Afghanistan and inaugurated several Pakistan-funded development projects there. All this demonstrated that Pakistan's Afghan policy is no longer entirely Pashtun-specific. Seemingly this irritant in Pak-Afghan relations is transforming into an opportunity.

6. Promising Developments: Bilateral and Regional

Since President Karzai's re-election in 2009, there has been a positive shift in Pakistan-Afghanistan bilateral policies and also in regional perspectives. Although political leaders still issue statements critical of the other country, they are far less venomous and frequent than before. Increased bilateral visits and interaction have considerably overshadowed such statements.

President Karzai visited Pakistan in March 2010 to seek Islamabad's support for reconciliation with the Taliban. He acknowledged that Pakistan had a critical role in dialogue with the Taliban. Media reports suggest that Pakistan principally agreed and tried to broker a deal between Kabul and the Haqqani network and presented a roadmap for political settlement.

But talks between Kabul and the Haqqanis failed to get Washington's backing. The Americans were apparently interested in holding talks only with Mullah Omar. The Haqqanis have also shown little interest in joining the Afghan government, unlike Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's militia, which in 2010 presented a 15-point peace plan to Karzai. Ground realities suggest that it is not possible for any Taliban group, including the Haqqani network, to completely break away from Al Qaeda. They can only offer an assurance that they would try and persuade Al Qaeda to not attack US or NATO forces, and guarantee that their soil would not be used for terrorist attacks against the West.

The reconciliatory overtures with Taliban in Afghanistan have also inspired debates in academic and policy circles in Pakistan for a similar reconciliation with Pakistani Taliban. But in 2010 that did not get serious attention of the political and military establishment. The main reason behind that may be the two

opposing approaches to tackling the Taliban problem. The allies want talks with Taliban in Afghanistan but demand military action against them in North Waziristan. Ground realities suggest that the issue would remain critical in 2011.

Some recent high-level exchanges between Afghanistan and Pakistan have resulted in a renewed commitment to security collaboration and trade relations, with a transit trade agreement signed. Afghan interior minister Mohammad Hanif Atmar and head of the National Directorate of Security Amrullah Saleh, two key members of the Afghan security establishment, who were seen as anti-Pakistan, were sacked. Many analysts saw Karzai playing the Pakistan card in the face of a sudden US withdrawal. Pakistan saw this as an opportunity to reassert its comparative strength as a neighbor of Afghanistan. It also saw itself replacing India in Afghanistan as a key ally.²² Afghanistan also tried to address another key concern for Pakistan regarding harboring Baloch insurgents by sending Brahamdagh Bugti, a key Baloch militant leader who had been hiding in Afghanistan, packing.

Track-two diplomacy also continues between the two countries to find a future framework for engaging Afghanistan, Taliban and Pakistan. Mullah Rocketi, former Taliban interior minister, is leading this exercise.

Recently the Afghan President expressed increasing interest in engaging regionally with Afghanistan's neighbors, apparently with a view to prepare his country for departure of US troops. He even went to the extent of saying that any decision about permanent US military bases in Afghanistan would be subject to the wishes of the Afghan people and also neighboring countries, particularly Pakistan, Iran and China.²³

Pakistani Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani visited Kabul in December 2010, exchanged views with members of Afghanistan's Chambers of Commerce and Industry and discussed the newly signed Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA). He also asserted that parliamentarians could play a positive role in bringing people of the two countries closer.²⁴ A joint declaration issued at the end of Gilani's visit said the two countries reiterated their commitment to effectively cooperate, combat and defeat the terrorists' threats and eliminate their sanctuaries.

President of Pakistan Asif Ali Zardari, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad and President Karzai were part of the 11th Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) summit in Istanbul, on December 23, 2010.²⁵ In a mini-summit in Turkey on December 27 President Hamid Karzai discussed security-related issues with Pakistani officials and stressed that the security of Afghanistan and Pakistan was inter-linked.²⁶

A high-level delegation of Afghan High Peace Council, led by former Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani, visited Pakistan in February 2011 and met religious scholars, leaders of political parties, parliamentarians, and government and military officials. One of the many purposes was to see prospects for Pakistan's role in the reconciliation process with the Taliban. The delegation saw a great urge for peace at every level in Pakistan and hoped that Pakistan would play a major role in reconciliation and rebuilding of Afghanistan. The delegation returned home with the impression that Pakistan genuinely desired to be part of the Afghan solution and if Pakistan's genuine concerns in Afghanistan were addressed, Islamabad would be ready to play the role of a peacemaker.²⁷ The visit was in a way an

expression of how Afghanistan and other stakeholders in the Afghan conflict had started to think about Pakistan with regard to its role in the future of Afghanistan. The council was constituted by Afghan President Hamid Karzai after getting a mandate from a traditional 'Loya Jirga' in September 2010, which was attended by some 1,600 delegates from across Afghanistan. Following the visit of the delegation, Pakistan and Afghanistan agreed on January 7, 2011 to establish a high powered Joint Consultative Commission to pursue peace in Afghanistan.²⁸

Not so long ago the current regime in Kabul and its international backers opposed giving Pakistan any role in resolving the Afghan conflict. Instead, Pakistan was considered solely responsible for keeping the Taliban intact by providing the militants safe havens, enabling them to hide, train and launch attacks against the Afghan and international forces. But the recent developments have put Pakistan centre stage and provided it with an unprecedented opportunity to play a role in helping to end the Afghan insurgency.

The Afghan Peace Council's visit to Islamabad was followed by a visit by Pakistan's Foreign Secretary Salman Bashir to Kabul for policy consultations and exploring ways of strengthening bilateral ties.

US Vice President Joe Biden visited Islamabad on January 12, 2011, after meeting Afghan President Hamid Karzai in Kabul. In Pakistan, he met the president and the army chief to discuss the Afghan strategy and eventual pullout of US forces. The two sides deliberated at length on the need for jointly charting a course of action to bring peace and stability to the insurgency-torn Afghanistan and the region. The United States was reportedly interested in finding out "Pakistan's bottom line" and its "intentions" regarding Afghanistan. The United States also acknowledged as "legitimate" Islamabad's apprehensions about foreign intervention in Pakistan through Afghanistan. Pakistan vowed to continue its policy of non-intervention and of respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Afghanistan.²⁹

President Zardari met with Afghan Foreign Minister Dr Zalmay Rassoul on January 27 in Islamabad, and called for joint bilateral efforts to resolve all issues disturbing regional peace, security and stability.³⁰ Addressing the inaugural ceremony of the Wolesi Jirga (lower house of parliament) on January 26, the Afghan President reiterated that Afghan soil would not be allowed to be used against Pakistan.³¹

Pakistan and Afghanistan signed the Pak-Afghan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) for boosting bilateral trade and exports on October 28, 2010 in Islamabad.³² The new accord was to replace the 1965 bilateral trade agreement that governed the transit of goods to a landlocked Afghanistan through Pakistan. The issue of bank guarantees and some other matters have however held up the implementation of the agreement, which was scheduled to become operational on February 12. In line with the international practice, it was made mandatory in the new transit law for Afghan importers to deposit with Pakistani authorities a bank guarantee equivalent to the taxes on goods. The Afghan government wants this clause removed while Pakistan says it is part of the agreement and cannot be done away with at a technical-level meeting.³³

Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India agreed on December 11, 2010 to proceed with the TAPI gas pipeline starting from Turkmenistan and ending in India after passing through Afghanistan and Pakistan.

With regard to joint counter-terrorism efforts, Pakistan and Afghanistan agreed to boost intelligence sharing in August 2010. President Karzai and Pakistan Army chief Gen Ashfaq Kayani met on the sidelines of the 31st Tripartite Commission meeting of military representatives in Kabul on August 9 to discuss the revised counter-terrorism strategy.³⁴ In December, the Turkish President announced after a trilateral summit in Istanbul that Turkey, Pakistan and Afghanistan would hold joint military exercises as part of efforts to build trust between Kabul and Islamabad.³⁵

7. Conclusion

Given the geographical, political and economic realities in Afghanistan, efforts for reconstruction of the battered country, which already face criticism on accounts of lack of integration, direction and political will, are likely to assume a traditional and indigenous outlook after the US and its allies leave the region.

Pakistan's foreign policy towards Afghanistan seems to have acquired a progressive outlook with the objective of ensuring peace and peaceful co-existence in the region. A shared threat from terrorists seems to be the underlying factor.

Pakistan remains concerned over India's presence and influence in Afghanistan and holds it responsible for supporting the insurgents in Balochistan. Afghanistan's main concern is Taliban's shelter in Pakistani tribal areas and cross-border movements of militants to support the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan has to live with its domestic and regional realities, which is perhaps what has persuaded President Karzai to think more in regional terms. That is something which can be built upon to establish friendly relations among regional countries, particularly with a view to establishing peace.

Secondly, the US is aware that after its troops leave Afghanistan, the country can drift into anarchy and civil war as had happened in the early 1990s after the Soviet withdrawal. It needs 'assurances' from regional stakeholders that they would commit themselves to achieving enduring peace and stability.

Pakistan also faces extensive security threats from domestic militant groups and cannot afford to let militancy and terrorism continue in Pakistan and the region at large. Militancy and terrorism are neither in the interest of Pakistan nor Afghanistan. This is something which can pave the way for long-term strategic collaboration between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Economic and trade collaboration and availing economic opportunities are dire needs of both countries.

Finally, neither country can ignore the wishes of their people for peace, prosperity and security. An unstable Pakistan or Afghanistan would continue to pose a threat to regional and world peace. A visible alignment of interests among Pakistan, Afghanistan and even the US is vital to determine the future course of the war on terror, and also relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Notes:

- ¹ See the "Declaration by NATO and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on an Enduring Partnership," the "Declaration by the Heads of State and Government of the Nations contributing to ISAF," and the "Lisbon Summit Declaration." The Lisbon Declaration builds upon the international agreements at the London Conference (January 2010) and the Kabul Conference (July 2010) that focused on the agreed process of *Inteqal* (transition), which included aligning assistance with Afghan National Priority Programs as outlined in the Afghan National Development Strategy.
- ² Mohammad Sadiq, *Pakistan-Afghanistan: The Conjoined Twins* (Kabul: Publication Department of Embassy of Pakistan in Kabul, May 2010).
- ³ Afghanistan voted against Pakistan's accession to the United Nations after its independence because of Kabul's claim on the Pashtun territories located on the Pakistani side of the Durand Line. This claim quickly generated a quasi-alliance between Kabul and New Delhi, and Islamabad saw in the Soviet invasion an opportunity to try and reverse that situation.
- ⁴ Aqeel Yousufzai (a Peshawar-based journalist and author of two books on Taliban and Talibanization in Pakistan and Afghanistan), interview by the author, February 2011.
- ⁵ Barnett R. Rubin and Abubakar Siddique, "Resolving Pakistan-Afghanistan Stalemate," United States Institute of Peace, October 2006.
- ⁶ Mohammad Sadiq, *Pakistan-Afghanistan: The Conjoined Twins*.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ To quote some examples, 40 percent of patients in Peshawar's major government hospitals and 11 percent patients in tertiary hospitals all over Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are Afghans; over 50 percent patients in major government hospitals in Quetta are Afghan nationals; and two Pakistani philanthropic hospitals perform free eye surgeries on about 30,000 Afghans every year. (Source: Mohammad Sadiq, *Pakistan-Afghanistan: The Conjoined Twins*, (Kabul: Publication Department of Embassy of Pakistan in Kabul, May 2010).
- ⁹ Aqeel Yousufzai, interview by the author.
- ¹⁰ Dr. Akbar Khan (Editor Frontline), February 2011.
- ¹¹ Aqeel Yousufzai, interview by the author.
- ¹² Military operation Rah-e-Nijat, launched in South Waziristan and Orakzai agencies in 2009, continued in 2010. A second military offensive was launched in Orakzai Agency in March and the army declared around 90 percent of Orakzai had been cleared of militants. A military operation in Kurram Agency was still underway as the year 2010 ended. Three small-scale military campaigns were launched in 2010, in Frontier Region (FR) Kohat (January), in FR Peshawar (September), and in Kala Dhaka area in Mansehra district of KPK (April).
- ¹³ Humera Iqbal, "Pak-Afghan ties in the Light of Pak-US Strategic Dialogue," *Regional Studies* XXIX, no. 1 (2011).
- ¹⁴ *Pakistan Security Report 2010* (Islamabad: Pak Institute for Peace Studies, 2011).
- ¹⁵ Aqeel Yousufzai, interview by the author.
- ¹⁶ Marco Mezzera, Safiya Aftab, "Pakistan State-Society Analysis," Initiative for peace-building funded by European Union, January 2009, available at http://www.clingendael.nl/publications/2009/20090300_cru_pakistan_mezzera.pdf.
- ¹⁷ Aqeel Yousufzai, interview by the author.
- ¹⁸ Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Warming Pak-Afghan ties signal new strategic alignment," *Dawn*, January 19, 2011.
- ¹⁹ Marco Mezzera, Safiya Aftab, "Pakistan State-Society Analysis."
- ²⁰ Dr. Akbar Khan.
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- ²² Shuja Nawaz, "Wikileaks' aftermath in the region," *The Boston Globe*, August 6, 2010.
- ²³ *Daily Aaj Kal* (Urdu), Islamabad, February 20, 2011.
- ²⁴ *Dawn*, December 6, 2010.
- ²⁵ *Dawn*, December 24, 2010.
- ²⁶ *Dawn*, December 28, 2010.
- ²⁷ Hasan Khan, *Dawn*, January 24, 2011.
- ²⁸ *The News*, Islamabad, January 8, 2011.
- ²⁹ *Dawn*, January 13, 2011.
- ³⁰ *Pakistan Today*, January 28, 2011.
- ³¹ *The News*, Islamabad, January 27, 2011.
- ³² *Daily Times*, October 29, 2010.

³³ Mubarak Zeb Khan, "Differences stall enforcement of new Afghan trade accord," *Dawn*, Islamabad, February 14, 2011.

³⁴ *Daily Times*, August 10, 2010.

³⁵ *Dawn*, Islamabad, December 25, 2010.



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