

AFGHANISTAN FROM
“ENDURING FREEDOM”
TO “ENDURING CHAOS”?

IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

Anwasha Ghosh

Introduction by

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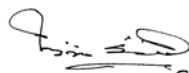
Ma has been my pillar of strength and I dedicate this book to her.

INTRODUCTION

I feel privileged to introduce the reader to this series of **New Delhi Papers** which contain focused research on one or two issues concerning India's national security and interests. It is also a matter of satisfaction that these objective studies have been carried out mostly by young academic and military scholars (normally below 30 years age) affiliated to this Centre on a 9-month "Non-Resident Fellowship" programme. The details of this programme are to be found at the end of this paper.

National security is a multidisciplinary subject ranging from core values, theory, security interests, challenges, options for management and other aspects covering almost all areas of national enterprise like defence, internal security, economic and technological security etc. all linked in a holistic manner. But unfortunately this is absent in our education system at the hundreds of universities and other teaching establishments. Without adequate education and understanding of national security India's multi-cultural diversity within the liberal democratic freedoms, therefore, tends to only progressively strengthen regionalism and parochialism with far reaching consequences. Hence this modest attempt to fill a serious vacuum in our education system which for three centuries has remained mired in Lord Macaulay's educational model leading to narrowly conceived approach to national imperatives which, by definition, require a broader *national* approach.

I am confident you will enjoy reading this paper and you are welcome to raise comments and critique so that we can improve future efforts. The views expressed in the study are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Centre or any other institution.



Jasjit Singh

Director General

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New Delhi

1. INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY IN AFGHANISTAN: A BACKGROUNDER

Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbour or support terrorism, will be regarded by the United States as hostile regime.

— US President George W. Bush, September 20, 2001¹

We are going to rain Holy Hell on Them.

— US President George W. Bush, October 7, 2001²

Undoubtedly it was an optimistic start. As the Northern Alliance backed by United States (US) Special Forces and massive airpower swept through Afghanistan on October 7, 2001 indicating the onset of *Operation Enduring Freedom*, Al Qaeda and its Taliban hosts were not left with many options but to flee to the safe havens of south and east or over the borders into Pakistan tribal areas in disarray. Afghanistan had to be rescued from itself,³ was the overall sense. While there remained confusion and questions about the nature of post 9/11 configuration of Afghanistan, the general feeling was that of optimism and victory. The people of Afghanistan, after a century of misrule, were in desperate need of a way to govern themselves that would offer some defence against the abuses of power that have marked Afghan history. Initially it seemed that the attacks of 9/11 on the United States would ensure that the world addressed the social stagnation and state failure in South and Central Asia. It was felt that the autocratic regimes in this region would be compelled to change their repressive policies and listen to their alienated and poverty-stricken citizens. Along with an enormous sense of apprehension, a tremendous expectation of change and hope was created for a sustained Western commitment to the region that would lift it out of poverty and underdevelopment. The United States declared that it would establish democracy, rebuild the country's infrastructure, and defend human rights, with particular focus on liberating women from Taliban oppression.⁴ The international community, which had backed the American decision to wage war against "terrorism," acknowledged the need

to help build a stable government in Afghanistan, while many wondered how Afghanistan should be ruled once the Taliban were defeated.

As a result of heavy US bombing on November 13, the Taliban abandoned Kabul⁵ without a fight which added to the prevailing flavour that the Taliban was “defeated.” With this several contenders emerged who wanted to rule: The ex-king, Muhammad Zahir Shah; the Pashtun ethnic group; the opposition Northern Alliance who entered Kabul and consolidated their position and, of course, the Taliban. While the focus shifted to *who*, the question of *how* Afghanistan should govern itself was conveniently brushed off. With the overall feeling of a task well done, the Americans started their “mopping up” operations and shifted their attention to the inexorable march of events in Iraq. However, as the intervening powers contemplated what they had shaped in Afghanistan as declarations of “victory,” it began to look increasingly premature, and accordingly a series of pertinent questions began to be raised in policy-making circles around the world: What was considered to be of interest in Afghanistan? What were the goals that were being set? How far were the goals set by the international community achievable? To what extent was the West willing to stretch itself to achieve its preferred outcome? What were the backup agendas in case things did not move as planned? What role could regional actors play in influencing the course of development in Afghanistan?

More than a decade has passed since the international coalition and US-backed Afghan groups removed the Taliban from power and a blueprint of political, social and economic reconstruction was forwarded by the Bonn Agreement. The nation since then is struggling to establish a “modern state” with a centralised and legitimate all-inclusive democratic government. The path to a reconstruction of democratic institutions has been obstructed by acute dilemmas and crucial challenges. While foreign formulas may be denounced for being non-Afghan and imposed from above, it must be kept in mind that no Afghan national consensus for Afghanistan’s future could emerge either. In a country that spawned Al Qaeda and which the United States had promised to transform after 9/11, the crisis today is far greater. Afghanistan is once again staring down the abyss of state collapse, despite billions of dollars in aid, forty-five thousand Western troops and the deaths of thousands of people. On the other hand the American public became increasingly impatient with its Afghanistan adventure (especially at a time when the country was encountering hiccups on its economic front) and with its 2012 elections on the charts, and dead Osama bin Laden to their credit, the US declared it would withdraw troops from the country by 2014, while many set targets remain out of reach and fundamental questions remain elusive.

The disturbing preview of incoherence that was visible after the initiation of *Operation Enduring Freedom* (OEF), lacked both clarity and consistency. The initial success of ousting Taliban from power turned out to be short lived. The turn of events that followed, gave the Taliban an ideal situation to regroup and reorganise themselves only to emerge as a groovier nightmare after ten years. As the world would later see, the “running with the hare and hunting with the hound” kind of policy played by Pakistan (one of the foremost allies of the US in the war on terror), had immensely contributed to the chaotic state it is in. Today the future of Afghanistan and its neighbour Pakistan is so very suffused with uncertainty—and yet are seen as so inextricably linked—that commentators have started referring to them as “Af-Pak theatre” with despair. With such developments in its immediate neighbourhood and its stakes involved in Afghanistan, one country that could not isolate itself from the turn of events in the “theatre” was India.

India, as one of the strong allies in America’s “Global War on Terror” (a powerful rhetoric constructed in 2001 and rarely heard now), shared the firm commitment and collective responsibility of the international community to help Afghanistan in its struggle to be a stable state. With the escalation of the number of undesirable events in Afghanistan, India was one of the few countries that tried to convince the West in favour of a “condition-bound” withdrawal from Afghanistan as opposed to its “time-bound” approach which it was adopting. The April 2012 Spring Offensive by the Taliban gave a preview of a likely scenario that the world can expect beyond 2014 considering the weak central authority in Kabul and rampant corruption visible in every possible sphere of governance. The overall sense today is that Afghanistan has perhaps missed the unexpected opportunity it got to reconnect with the wider world after 2001.

The process initiated by the Bonn Agreement faced challenges of political, economic and social dimensions. Certain challenges included the widespread destruction of infrastructure, low social indicators, prevalence of drug and arms, delicate, uncertain and factionalised politics, a legacy of a thirty-year drought and extremely weak administrative capacity. The poor infrastructure of the country, the continuing drought, the high number of internally displaced persons and refugees in the neighbouring countries, the gender inequality—all adding to the enormity of the transitional challenges. The unsettled military and political environment along with the competing regional and international interests further threatened to influence the process and outcome. Issues such as societal cleavages, international reaction to reconstruction, regional networks, the low development indicators, the

fragile security, absence of government institutions and socio-economic devastation posed serious threats. With Taliban insurgency on the rise since 2006, increasing concerns about the security situation among ordinary Afghans about the safety of their families was justified. Levels of fear for personal safety are at the highest in the South-East, East, West and South-West Afghanistan, according to Asia Foundation Report of Afghanistan 2011. The proportion of people saying they fear to participate in a range of public activities is rising over time and is highest in the same regions that highlight poor security as a reason for pessimism.⁶

When it occurred, *Operation Enduring Freedom* was “not” particularly controversial especially if compared with the 2003 invasion of Iraq. As Afghanistan expert and political scientist Barnett R. Rubin puts it, “The military intervention to defeat the Taliban and Al Qaeda enjoyed broad legitimacy both internationally and domestically in Afghanistan.”⁷ The events that followed since then have been translated in a number of ways. One such rendition is “humanitarian intervention,”⁸ where military power is forcibly deployed on a territory of a state without the consent of government, with the dominant purpose of realising humanitarian objectives.⁹ Though, broadly speaking, this interpretation did not fit this model of international community for two reasons: First, their objective of assisting the Afghan people was secondary to the objective of obliterating a concrete threat from terrorists. Moreover the Afghans were suffering much before the US felt the need to do something about it. Second, the Taliban had failed to secure recognition as a “government” at large (only Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and UAE ever recognised the government) and Afghanistan’s United Nations seat remained in the hands of the anti-Taliban “Rabbani Government,”¹⁰ which was happy to see international assistance finally materialise. However Afghanistan’s problems were so serious and to some extent unusual that rescuing the country from those was never meant to be a decade’s business.

Understanding the Nature of Afghanistan’s Problems

Therefore, to understand what rescuing Afghanistan entails, it would be interesting to identify some key challenges. The problems Afghanistan is facing after more than thirty years of conflict (or even decades before that) are enormous. The volumes of literature concerning this phase of Afghanistan over the last few years have reached such a critical mass that it may now be possible to identify structural factors in Afghanistan’s history that contributed to the situation it is in today. The state-building model borrowed from the neighbouring British and Tsarist empires in the late nineteenth century contained the seeds of trouble, essentially in the form

of rural-urban divide that gained significant force with the spread of modernity in the 1950s. The starting point of virtually all discussion of Afghanistan's problems is the disruption of the Afghan state. Apart from its geographical location at the "crossroad of empires," the rugged topography isolated it internationally and magnified the distance between people and state and was also partially responsible for the lack of economic development. The population has been divided by deep and multifaceted segmentation along ethnic, linguistic and also sectarian, tribal and racial lines. Apart from these factors, Afghanistan's location among meddling neighbours has contributed to the problems it faces.

During the 1980s, Soviet heavy-handedness, combined with local dynamics of violence and massive external support, compounded and entrenched the existing conflict within Afghanistan. New social groups emerged with vested interests. Communities everywhere armed themselves to protect against roaming bandits and rogue insurgents, eventually dismantling the monopolisation of violence that Amir Abdur Rahman had started to marshal from 1880 onwards.¹¹ In the 1990s, during the civil war, the national army, police and security services were disbanded. Armed insurgent groups during that time became semi-regular militias with weak command, little discipline and weak command from political leadership. As a result, while most countries in the world were making their journey forward, Afghanistan reverted to pre-Abdur Rahman state of rival and semi-autonomous strongmen, with central government having to negotiate for their allegiance. The rise of the Taliban, under these circumstances, can be attributed to the disorder and chaos that existed during 1992-94.

In 2001, the new interim government took power and inherited a heavily compromised situation. Rather than mobilising scarce human resources and reactivating as much of the state administration as possible, the government instead emphasised patronage distribution, in the process surrendering virtually all levers of central control to strongmen and warlords associated with the victorious anti-Taliban coalition.¹² This, combined with other pertinent issues, undermined the state's legitimacy and pushed some communities towards revolt. The predominant social, cultural and economic trends of the post 2001 period abetted the spread of the Taliban's enlisting base. The concentration of economic growth in the cities (which was much more conveniently accessible for the international community), the arrival of mass media disrespectful of the village conservative social mores and the affirmation of capitalist attitudes at the expense of established redistributionist attitude among the wealthy classes, all contributed to the polarisation.¹³

The premature reading of the Taliban’s “demise” was undoubtedly a blunder that came to haunt the international community very soon. The Taliban were often depicted as forces relying on poverty and social marginalisation as spurs to the recruitment of village youth, although little evidence of that can be cited. The Taliban have also been seen as a Pashtun revanchist movement, aiming to redress the imbalance that emerged after 2001 when most non-Pashtuns seized power of state apparatus.¹⁴ The diversion of international attention to Iraq at a critical juncture and the subsequent intensification of international military presence from 2006 onward, meant to contain insurgency, had an opposite effect. In part this was also because of regional powers increasing their support as a particular reaction to the growing American presence. Talking about regional powers, Pakistan’s long-term strategy from the time of Soviet intervention has been to identify and promote pliable Afghan client of Islamic, rather than nationalist, disposition. The ease with which the Taliban continued to operate in the post 2001 period suggests that Pakistan’s long-term strategy has remained in place and this has been a matter of very serious concern for not only Kabul but also New Delhi. Despite the geographical distance, India could never keep itself isolated from the developments within Afghanistan. Therefore when an opportunity came for her to contribute in shaping the future of Afghanistan, in the aftermath of OEF, India wanted to play a significant role not only as an emergent regional player but also in the capacity of a rising global power. India’s participation was also shaped by its century old relations with Afghanistan.

The India Angle

For most of their independent history, India and Afghanistan have shared traditionally friendly relations and have maintained significant cultural and economic links. As some scholars argue, no study of Indo-Afghan relations is complete without a cursory look at the century old common cultural and economic heritage of the people of India, Afghanistan and Central Asia.¹⁵ However issues of terrorism, security, extremism have compelled India to consider Afghanistan from a contemporary viewpoint rather than one from the point of view of our shared history.¹⁶ India has never involved itself militarily in Afghanistan. India was the only South-Asian nation to recognise the Soviet backed Democratic Republic of Afghanistan and to provided humanitarian aid to the country. Following Soviet withdrawal, the international community supported the coalition government that took control, but relations hit troubled waters as the Taliban came to power and ultimately India decided to scrap its

relations with Afghanistan following the violent assassination of Dr. Najibullah by the Taliban. The Taliban was considered to be an Islamist militia supported by Pakistan, and their coming to power led to the rise of Islamism in Afghanistan and the proliferation of terrorists in the militancy in Indian-administered Kashmir, thereby turning Afghanistan into a security threat for India. India had welcomed the emergence of post 9/11 Afghanistan and appreciated the efforts of international community in helping Afghanistan build itself into a progressive country. India since then has been one of the fore-runners in the reconstruction process, helping Afghanistan in areas where it seeks India's assistance.

Aims and Objectives of the Study

Though this study primarily aims to look at the events in Afghanistan starting from the initiation of *Operation Enduring Freedom* in 2001 and concentrates on the dynamics of development that occurred in the decade that followed, however it would like to engage in the complex task of identifying the nature of Afghanistan's problems in order to understand the course of events that shaped developments from 2001 to 2011. While studying the course of Afghanistan's history, it has been identified that many of the challenges the country is facing today relate to its regional position. In analysing the conflict in Afghanistan, one would find that the circumstances in which the conflict is waged, and the dynamics of its development and sustenance, significantly revolve around the external factors in the process. The motivation, involvement and ethnic connections of other regional actors in Afghan affairs have encouraged them to interfere. However the one country whose attempts to determine the course of events in Afghanistan have been most haunting, happens to be Pakistan. Two areas—North-West Frontier Province and Baluchistan—have long been complicating Afghanistan's relations with Pakistan. This research, therefore, gives considerable attention to the role played by Pakistan in Afghanistan during the above-mentioned time-frame. Pakistan's role, as always, was very crucial for Afghanistan to either transform into a viable and stable state or remain as a critical state. Thus it would be interesting to understand the geopolitical perception of the role played by Pakistan in Afghanistan post 2001. Another extremely important aspect of this study would be to analyse the implications of the decade-long "developments" in Afghanistan for another regional power, that is, India. India, in the changed environment after 2001, played a crucial role in reconstructing Afghanistan. This was also a time when India's politico-economic standing as a regional power had increased to a considerable extent.

This propelled India to follow a multi-pronged Afghanistan Policy in the last decade, as it was conscious about the necessity of a stable Afghanistan which does not have an anti-India posture. India, from the very outset, had maintained a soft power presence, with major thrust of assistance directed towards humanitarian and institution creation activities as opposed to military assistance, and had managed to earn considerable goodwill from the people. However with the rapidly changing situation within the country, with the resurgence of the Taliban, the question remains as to what implications these developments will have for India and India's projects in the country. The following sections would try to understand the significance of a deteriorating situation in Afghanistan for India. Though certain positive changes can be observed in some spheres, the underlying hypothesis of this study is that the situation in Afghanistan, since the onset of *Enduring Freedom* in 2001 up to 2011, had deteriorated significantly, and the state it currently is in, can be summed up as *Enduring Chaos*.

The structure of this study is explicitly chronological, so as to provide a clear and accessible narrative that provides a scope to assess the convoluted course of the intervention and its impact on Afghanistan from 2001 to 2011. The purpose of this book would be to understand the impact of turn of events in Afghanistan in the mentioned time span, what role was played by the international community and regional powers, especially Pakistan, to escort Afghanistan to the path it is in today and what implications they had or will have for India in future. *Section 1*, attempts to revisit the major developments that have occurred in Afghanistan after the September 11 attacks on the United States. Starting with *Operation Enduring Freedom*, it evaluates the major occurrences that Afghanistan saw along the past ten years. It tries to understand the role played by regional powers. With regional power the study moves to its *Section 2*, which intends to focus on the geopolitical role played by Pakistan in the mentioned span of study. It tries to understand the correlation between Pakistani geopolitics and “terrorism,” the balancing act that the Pakistani establishment continued doing to accommodate “terrorism” as its foreign policy tool. Considerable attention has been given to its border region which emerged as the hub of terrorist activities in the past decade and how the developments there eventually led to disconnect and distrust between Pakistan and the United States. *Section 3* looks at the implications of such developments for India and Indian initiatives in Afghanistan. Considering that India followed a multi-pronged strategy in Afghanistan post 2001, it becomes very important for India to watch and evaluate the changing dynamics of events in Afghanistan carefully and formulate its future policies accordingly. *Concluding Section* looks

into the current phase of development in Afghanistan especially in the light of renewed Taliban activities. This section also tries to understand the criticality of the security situation at the time of the withdrawal of international forces. Finally, this book aspires to understand to what extent the chaotic situation can impact the future course of relations between India and Afghanistan.

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2. STOCKTAKING IN AFGHANISTAN

If the Central Asian Society exists and is meeting in fifty or a hundred years hence, Afghanistan will be as vital and important a question as it is now.

— Lord Curzon, speaking at the annual dinner of the
Royal Asiatic Society, London, 1908

Afghanistan stands as an “excellent case” with which to explore “weak state syndrome.”¹ The country by the early twenty-first century was in scuffles. Historical, geopolitical, economic, political, ethnographic are a few among many factors that are responsible for making Afghanistan a weak and conflict prone state. The history of Afghanistan is replete with instances of bloody rivalries between tribes and regions as also between a region and a central government in Kabul.² The situation worsened on account of the countless external interventions that occurred in the country throughout its history. All these factors have led to an indelible imprint on its territorial identity and marked social and demographic transformation. All these are largely because of its geographic location, since it is situated at the “crossroads of empires.”³ Apart from the geopolitical location, the rugged topography isolates it internationally and magnifies the distance between people and the state, which can be held partially responsible for its lack of economic development. The heterogeneity in Afghanistan’s population has been a result of the deep cleavages that exist in the country along ethnic, linguistic and also sectarian, tribal and racial lines. In addition to these factors, her interfering neighbours and the Cold War rivalry have all conduced in making Afghanistan what it is today.

At the best of times the tribal structure of the country prevented the functioning of a strong central government. Soviet intervention and contested occupation from 1979 to 1989 considerably destroyed whatever political and economic structures were in place prior to that. This struggle left an estimated 1.3 million Afghans dead or missing and created approximately 5.5 million refugees. The United States, the Cold War rival of the Soviet Union, was drawn into the region during that time and, to counter Soviet influence, covertly supplied arms and money to the Afghan *Mujahideen*, or holy warriors (through Pakistan). The US even provided training in some highly sophisticated arms,

such as the very effective Stinger shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missile. With the departure of the Soviets in 1989 and the collapse of the puppet regime they had left behind, American interest in Afghanistan went down considerably and the country lapsed into near anarchy. The increase in open factional fighting in 1992 continued Afghanistan’s time of troubles, leading to the rise of the *Taliban* group beginning in 1996. Most of Afghanistan was under Taliban control by 2001, except for some small areas held by Northern Alliance forces in the Panjshir Valley North-East of Kabul and a few scattered pockets of resistance in the North-West of the country. It recaptured international attention after supporters of the Islamic fundamentalist organisation, Al Qaeda, who were sheltered and supported by the Taliban, attacked World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. The US has considered its actions against Osama bin Laden and his supporters and operatives in Afghanistan to be acts of legitimate self-defence, directed not against the territorial integrity of any State, rather against terrorists operating out of Afghanistan against the US.⁴ This was however not the first occasion when the United States had attempted to attack terrorists in Afghanistan. In 1998 the Clinton administration had launched cruise missiles against known or suspected terrorist training camps after terrorists attacked several US embassies in Africa. However that did not have any significant effect.⁵

September 11 and the Afghan Connection

After the attacks on America in September 2001, the authorities quickly uncovered clues as to the identity and organisational affiliation of the suicide terrorists who crashed planes into the World Trade Centre towers and the Pentagon. Al Qaeda and their Taliban hosts brought Afghanistan to the centre of US foreign policy and subsequently transformed national security priorities of the Administration of President Bush of America. Throughout the history of Afghanistan, the nation has only been of marginal interest within the broad framework of US foreign and security policy. Until the September 11 attacks, this covert support was the peak manifestation for US interest in Afghanistan. Support for the Mujahideen revealed a dichotomy in the nation’s foreign policy. Washington supported extremist Islamic groups as a means to undermine the Soviet regime in Afghanistan, but it was also engaged in a variety of efforts to counter radical groups elsewhere in the world, especially state-sponsored groups which receive support from states such as Iran, Libya and Syria.⁶ The end of the Cold War and the results of the Persian Gulf War reinforced the preference of

most states which sponsored terrorist groups to manage their support in such a fashion as to de-emphasise armed attacks against the West, particularly the United States, and concentrate their efforts on the Palestine-Israeli conflict.⁷ The trend was strengthened even more by US actions in the Balkans and support for Muslim communities in Bosnia and Kosovo. Meanwhile the Taliban was able to over-throw the post-Soviet regime and install its brand of radical Islam in Afghanistan. The Taliban was able to establish control on over 90 percent of Afghanistan in a remarkably short span of time by isolating its main enemy, the Northern Alliance. The regime then welcomed Osama bin Laden and allowed him to develop training bases in the country. The Al Qaeda network utilised its base in Afghanistan to plan and conduct a variety of terrorist attacks against the West, especially US interests. It also was able to develop a global network with active cells in approximately 60 states, principally in South and South-East Asia. India could feel the heat of such developments in the backyard quite easily when the Afghanistan trained terrorists started pouring into Kashmir and other parts of India. A direct correlation of the network at work became evident during the high-jacking of an Indian Airlines flight in Kandahar. Quite obviously these occurrences failed to draw adequate attention from the world, which remained oblivious to the developments within Afghanistan. This scenario changed quite drastically after September 11, 2001, the chief accused bin Laden himself explicitly admitting that he was responsible for the terrorist suicide attacks in the US and justified the action as attacks against “legitimate targets.”⁸ The 2001 incidents shook America to an extent that the Administration, within a month of the September 11 attacks, decided to deploy the US Army in Central Asia to confront the terrorists on their own ground in the form of *Operation Enduring Freedom* (OEF).

Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Perspective

The Bush Administration assembled a broad-based military coalition (though selective) which included forces from states ranging from the United Kingdom to Canada and from Australia to France. Seeking the consent of Moscow was essential in order to establish a presence in the former Soviet republics in the region. India, as a victim itself, provided unstinted support to America’s “War on Terror.” Pakistan’s position was most critical since it was one of the supporters of the Taliban and was indirectly strengthening Al Qaeda in Afghanistan all this while. Pakistani militants were providing manpower for both the Taliban and Al Qaeda and running the vast logistics, communication and training networks

in Pakistan on behalf of Al Qaeda.⁹ Post 2001, when the Taliban was becoming more of a strategic liability for Pakistan than an asset, it did try to insist that Washington misunderstood the Taliban, but with statements coming from President George W. Bush of America, such as, “Either you are with us or with the terrorists,”¹⁰ they had to take a call in favour of joining America and her allies.

During initial combat operations in northern Afghanistan as part of OEF, army Special Forces (SF) was tested to a degree not seen since the Vietnam War.¹¹ With little time to prepare for this mission, Special Forces teams were to land by helicopter deep in hostile territory, contact members of the Northern Alliance, coordinate their activities in a series of offensives, bring the entire might of US air power to bear on the Taliban and Al Qaeda forces, and change the government of Afghanistan so that the country was no longer a safe haven for terrorists. While the details of many of their operations remain classified, the general outline is clear. Army operations in Afghanistan focused first on obtaining a suitable operational base outside the country but close enough to infiltrate Special Forces teams into their targeted areas of operations.¹² It must be remembered that although by 2001 the Taliban were in control of most of the national territory, they were still at war in the northern and eastern regions. As a result, when Operation Enduring Freedom was launched, there were basically two wars going on in parallel. The ground war was fought between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance boosted with Special Forces and fresh supplies. The air support, epitomising the “Revolution in Military Affairs,” marked the short-run addition to the conduct of this long-drawn conflict.¹³ While Special Operations Forces fought alongside the Northern Alliance, the US Central Command (CENTCOM) established the theatre architecture to command and control a sustained land campaign.¹⁴ When later backed up by the conventional power of US air assets and the air assault and infantry assets of the army, the mix proved decisive.

Having achieved that, the US had to develop a series of internal alliances within Afghanistan to bring together the different anti-Taliban ethnic groups and also to gather pro-Taliban groups as the military campaign began. The Pentagon ventured the codename operation “Infinite Justice,” believing that it captured just the right mix of steely resolve and legitimate intention. However, when it was gently pointed out that Muslims tended to see “infinite” variety as more appropriately dispensed by *Allah* than by CENTCOM, the name was quickly changed to operation “Enduring Freedom.”¹⁵ The US-led military campaign

toppled the Taliban and significantly weakened Al Qaeda through a combination of multinational air and cruise missile attacks, and both conventional ground combat by the Northern Alliance factions and covert missions conducted by coalition Special Operations Forces. With this the war on Afghanistan began in October 2001, within a month of the attack on WTC. During this military campaign against the Taliban, the US repeated its earlier pattern of security assistance and worked to provide weapons and military equipment for the anti-Taliban faction.¹⁶ The initial military action after 9/11 seemed to many like a justifiable response to the killing of nearly 3,000 Americans. There was an exertion to justify the act as self-defence and an attempt to prevent future attacks. Taking the international community on board was not half as difficult as was the case during the war on Iraq. However things started going out of hand in Afghanistan soon after it all began there. The initial blow to the Taliban was prematurely interpreted as “victory,” which gave the Bush Administration the pretext to divert its attention to other “evils”—then came Iraq.

The Bonn Process to Address Afghanistan’s Problems

The US and international policy-makers realised the pressing need for a consensus government which would aim to bring together all the factions and tribes of Afghanistan. Accordingly, the international community announced its plan to build a “stable Afghanistan” and installed an interim administration led by Hamid Karzai, a Pashtun. The UN Security Council by its resolution 1386 (2001) authorised the deployment of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Kabul and the surrounding areas. The Bonn Agreement, a blueprint of the political, social and economic reconstruction designed by the international community, brought forth several critical issues and dilemmas. It would have been difficult to find a more incongruous setting to bring together Afghan factions. The Northern Alliance was represented by Interior Minister Yoonis Qanooni and was dominated to the intense irritation of General Dostum and Ismail Khan (neither of whom were present), by Tajiks.¹⁷ The “Rome Group,” made up of Pashtun loyalists of former King Zahir Shah, was the group Karzai was associated with. The “Cyprus Group,” so called because it had held a number of meetings on the island, contained the pro-Iran segment.¹⁸ The final faction was the “Peshawar Group” consisting of Pashtun exiles who had congregated in the Pakistani city of Peshawar.¹⁹ The most important delegations in terms of influence were the Americans, the Russians, Iranians, Indians and Pakistanis. However it must be remembered that securing a place for India at the Conference that was about

to determine the future of Afghanistan was anything but easy. There had been considerable opposition; however, for India, this occasion provided an ideal opportunity to play its role in the developments in Afghanistan. For the entire period since the advent of the Taliban, India was compelled to scrap its relations with the country, and the Bonn Conference gave India the required platform to re-establish its connections and therefore India was not ready to let that go. There were a number of significant absentees, the Taliban being the most prominent one. Four Afghan factions decided to establish an interim government to be followed by the convening of a Loya Jirga and the establishment of a broad-based transitional government for two years, followed by the adoption of a constitution and then elections. The Loya Jirga was to appoint a Transitional Authority and a Constitutional Jirga to prepare the Afghan Constitution and hold elections within two years. Hamid Karzai was thereby appointed the head of the six-month Transitional Authority, who was extensively supported by the US and international community at large. For the first time in the history of Afghanistan all the important portfolios starting from Interior Ministry, Defence, Intelligence etc., went to Northern Alliance leaders, essentially Tajiks from Panjshir Valley. Later, Karzai expressed his dissatisfaction with the choice of transitional cabinet, saying that it was the product of a “back-room” deal.²⁰ In an overtly politicised environment, reconstruction could contribute to the creation of “politically neutral” space for the civil society to thrive and mature and contribute positively to any on-going peace-building.²¹ The concept of peace-building was increasingly used in order to reflect the overlapping activities in the fields of conflict and peace. This term has been loosely used to connote activities that go beyond crisis intervention such as long-term development, building of governance structures and institutions. Following the Bonn Agreement, had Afghanistan received focused world attention and an intensive economic and political engagement on part of the Agreement’s sponsors, the country could have been on the path of political stabilisation and economic recovery, which go hand in hand.²² But George W. Bush was distracted by another fatal temptation in the form of Saddam Hussain.

Instability and Shift in United States Focus

Once the Bonn Process was put on course and the first Donor’s conference in Tokyo in January 2002 had committed over \$3 billion for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Afghanistan, the western coalition, in particular the United States, became complacent. Perhaps the initial success was taken a bit seriously

and the threat appeared to be receding. By late 2002 and early 2003, it was not Afghanistan but Iraq that became the focal point of the Bush Administration's attention.²³ With time it was realised that the promised assistance was far short of meeting the challenge of rebuilding Afghanistan's economy, shattered by decades of warfare. The Taliban, the main adversary, was still far from being destroyed. The top leadership was all intact and only needed time to revive and reorganise itself. Meanwhile the old warlords who accepted the Karzai government, especially General Dostum, Ismail Khan, Fahim and Abdur Rassool Sayyaf, became more concerned in consolidating their power in their respective areas than strengthening the Karzai government at the centre, and the democratic institutions, as the Bonn Process intended. While these were happening on one end, Taliban insurgency had entered a dangerous phase and was on the rise as they could regroup themselves in the intermediary period, when American attention had shifted to Iraq. A substantial part of the Afghan territory was already engulfed by the fundamentalist militia and its footprint was visible in the rest of the country less than four years of *Operation Enduring Freedom*. The gun-toting terrorists by that time were knocking at the very door-step of the country's capital city, Kabul. Countless lives and property had been lost since the 2001 US intervention, and the country was increasingly witnessing a Hobbesian state of nature. While the Taliban insurgency was on the rise and American public opinion was going against its wars, and Western allies becoming impatient to leave the "bleeding wound"-Afghanistan, coupled with the recession hit economy, a rising China and still untraceable Osama bin Laden, the situation for America was turning grimmer.

As the US prepared its ill-fated war of choice, for the next few years the world remained fixated on Iraq, organising protests, vigils against occupation, reacting with horror as insurgency and civil war engulfed the country. A limited military mission to drive out Al Qaeda and the Taliban morphed into a prolonged occupation, but with US forces starved of resources to feed the folly of Iraq.²⁴ As insurgency began to spread, violence and destruction increased in Afghanistan. While war in Iraq was slowly coming to an end, the armed conflict in Afghanistan was spiralling out of control. A perception that the security of external actors was again threatened by policy decisions made in Kabul, compelled outside powers to study the developments in Afghanistan carefully. Year 2005 saw the formal end of the Bonn Process with the completion of the parliamentary and provincial elections, but Afghanistan was far from being stable. The promise of Afghanistan's economic revival had not materialised. The realisation that greater

cohesion was needed between the efforts of the Afghan government and the international community, resulted in a new strategy in the form of Afghanistan Compact.

The Afghanistan Compact for a Comprehensive Approach

The document was produced by the United Nations experts who met at a Conference (co-chaired by Afghanistan and the United Nations) in London held between January 31 and February 1, 2006. Fifty-one countries participated in it and also a number of financial and political organisations.²⁵ The Compact identified critical areas of activity for the ensuing five years—security, governance, rule of law and human rights, economic and social development and elimination of narcotics. It also outlined elaborate principles of cooperation between participating international community and Afghanistan.²⁶ UNAMA established an elaborate structure with over a dozen regional offices in selected provincial headquarters.²⁷ The extended role of the United Nations in political matters detracted from the authority of Afghan government and gave them limited room for operating in conformity with the Afghan realities on the ground, and a strong UN presence in Kabul restricted the authority of Karzai Government. Therefore despite expectations the economic reconstruction and recovery remained grim. Compared to the US Department of Defence’s \$173 billion funding for *Operation Enduring Freedom* between 2001 and 2009,²⁸ the total amount pledged for reconstruction in Afghanistan made at Donor’s Conference in Tokyo (2002), Berlin (2003), London (2006), Rome (2007), for the period 2002-2011 have been \$23.5 billion.²⁹ It has been widely alleged that as much as half of the committed assistance was siphoned back to the donor countries in the form of consultancies, expensive training programmes and inflated contracts.³⁰ The concentration was on immediate alteration of the situation instead of addressing the core issues. The importance of a long-term view was recognised only by a few actors like India, whose endeavours were significantly directed in building human resources within Afghanistan, so that after a sufficient period of time they are not required to depend on external assistance for managing their internal affairs.

The Surge and After

The resources and oversight needed to transform Afghanistan and restore normalcy required resolution and efforts in multiple economic, political and military dimensions. US attention unfortunately was divided from the very

beginning and complacency set in with the easy exit of the Taliban. The professed US objective was to establish democracy in Afghanistan, even at that end a real progress was yet to be seen. Meanwhile Al Qaeda and the Taliban had established a new safe haven in the tribal areas of Pakistan, where it was defended by a new organisation called *Pakistani Taliban*.³¹ The new US President Barack Obama had rightly observed that the future of Afghanistan was inextricably linked to the future of its neighbour, Pakistan, and called Pakistan's North-West Frontier Region "an international security challenge of the highest order" and the "most dangerous place in the world."³² This was undoubtedly a belated realisation. America all this while felt it convenient to "rely" on their foremost ally Pakistan, based on the belief that without taking Pakistan on board, the Afghanistan mission would not be possible. The new Administration in Washington seemed to have a new plan (though not devoid of cosmetic challenges): The Iraq Model, which has been often been described as "surge first, then negotiate" formula.³³ Accordingly the US deployed some 30,000 more troops in Afghanistan, in addition to the existing troops and the Afghan National Army with the vision of turning the tide of war in favour of the allied forces. Simultaneously, American Generals hoped to negotiate with the warlords, local commanders and tribal chieftains—the backbone of the Taliban.

The idea of a "surge" policy in Afghanistan goes back to the closing months of the former Bush Administration. With the "military success" in Iraq, some officials were tempted to apply the same formula in Afghanistan. Therefore on February 17, 2009, President Obama ordered 17,000 more American troops to Afghanistan saying the increase was "necessary to stabilise a deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, which has not received attention, direction and resources it urgently requires."³⁴ However, America's Iraq Policy was not meant to work in Afghanistan for a variety of factors such as the Pashtun tradition of Jihad, the porous Pak-Afghan border, Afghanistan's complex patterns of shifting tribal and ethnic loyalties, Pakistani strategic obsession etc. It was important for the US to act against its own past policies in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, which created a Frankenstein under the complete protection of the Pakistani intelligence agency, the ISI.

President Obama expressed that, as the US Commander-in-Chief, he wanted to make sure that he had a well-thought-out strategy, clear goals and that they were achievable. He summarised the US Strategy as: "the key, though, is to understand that we are not going to win in Afghanistan or get acceptable outcome if we are only dependent upon military"... "If we do not

have an Afghan Government that can deliver for its people, if we do not have an economic development strategy where farmers do not have to grow heroin poppy but instead can grow other crops so that they are not feeding narco-terrorism...then this isn't going to work.”³⁵ President Obama was determined to address the Afghan war with a regional approach, recognising that the stability of neighbouring Pakistan was increasingly at risk. He was trying to fashion an efficient counter-insurgency strategy, as in Iraq, with a comprehensive surge of military and civilian reinforcement. Pakistan by then had emerged as the focus of the “Obama Doctrine” (The Obama Doctrine is a term frequently used to describe one or several unifying principles of the foreign policy of US President Barack Obama), although the heart of the strategy was the idea of treating both sides of the Afghanistan–Pakistan border as a “single theatre.” The US administration had declared Pakistan as being a safe haven for Al Qaeda and its leadership, but at the same time it supported the people and government of Afghanistan. Therefore it can be said that as the pace of military events on the ground quickened, Washington turned its attention to what post-conflict Afghanistan would look like. It was realised that involving the regional powers into the process would be important and accordingly Washington's efforts tried to mend fences with different regional powers.

Engaging Regional Players

Afghanistan is seen as a bridge linking India, Central Asia and Iran. From a security point of view, Afghanistan is critical to the rest of South Asia. Issues such as continued food insecurity, the displacement of approximately six million people, the crippling of another three million, severe inadequacy in social services, are some of the problems that not only grip Afghanistan but also have their effect on the region at large. Promoting national reconciliation, ushering in lasting peace, stability and respect for human rights in the country can only remain a distant dream, if the regional actors who have a stake in the stability and prosperity of Afghanistan are not involved. Pakistan perhaps is one neighbour of Afghanistan which has affected its course of history the most. Pakistan on the other hand has been repeatedly impacted by the developments in Afghanistan. This continuous influence on each other's existence has negatively impacted another country in the region, namely, India. If one studies the rise of violence in Afghanistan's history and the deterioration of our own internal security environment, a strong positive correlation between the two occurring will be noticed. India, because of several factors, has been sucked into Afghanistan more

out of geostrategic needs. It is common knowledge that Pakistani actions in the region are related to balancing its security fears vis-à-vis India. Seth Jones says, Pakistan government's strategy in Afghanistan has for decades been "to balance India and keep foothold in Afghanistan."³⁶ Retired Lt. General Matinuddin, after years of denial, accepted that the change in General Pervez Musharraf's Taliban policy came because of India. To quote him, "(Musharraf) did so because he wanted Pakistan to get back into mainstream and frustrate Indian eagerness to get Pakistan declared a terrorist state. He was afraid that India might seek assistance of the United States to crush the freedom movement in Kashmir."³⁷ He apparently was also concerned about the safety of the strategic assets, which could come under attack if he refused to cooperate with the United States. The following chapter would try to throw light on the role played by Pakistan in the post 2001 period. It was a country that was embraced by the United States and the international actors as a foremost ally in the war against terrorism. In view of its geographic location it was meant to play an extremely important role in shaping the future of Afghanistan. The intent of the following section would be to analyse whether it had performed the expected role of a responsible power, or a spoiler and added to the "chaos" in Afghanistan.

Notes

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3. GEOPOLITICAL PERCEPTION OF PAKISTAN'S ROLE IN AFGHANISTAN

Few other countries are closer to Pakistan in culture and history than Afghanistan. (Yet), the hope for friendly operation was however, vitiated at the start.

— Abdul Sattar¹

Relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have essentially remained estranged, despite their shared geography, ethnicity and faith. The only departure perhaps would be the four years of Taliban rule. While the principal historical cause of this attitude has been the unresolved issue of the Durand Line, tensions and suspicion between Pakistan and Afghanistan have also emanated from their divergent strategic outlook and dissimilar national ethos. It is important to note that Afghanistan was the only country to oppose Pakistan's admission to the United Nations, conditioning its recognition upon the provision that the right of self-determination be given to the people of Pakistan's NWFP.² Afghanistan can be seen as a "hyphen" between the South and Central Asian security networks. With India in the East, Pakistan can ill-afford an irredentist neighbour in the West. Since 1947 both countries have interfered in each other's domestic affairs. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan gave Pakistan a suitable opportunity to wage a proxy war in Afghanistan, garnering the support of Western and Arab allies. Since the end of the Cold War, Pakistan was even more conscious and proactive about maintaining her influence and control over Afghanistan, the result being the creation and support of the Taliban. Post 9/11 terrorist attacks, Pakistan had to make an uneasy choice of abandoning the Taliban and then joined the US-led coalition to destroy Al Qaeda and terrorism. Developments, such as, more than a decade of war in Afghanistan, Al Qaeda supremo Osama bin Laden's killing in the Pakistani heartland and "unintended" NATO strikes of 2012 subsequently deteriorated the relations between the two allies.

Though inextricably tied on the basis of commonalities—namely, religion (Islam), several ethnic groups (Pashtun and Baluch), a thousand-mile border and

also a border region that has never come under the control of any government—yet divergent approaches have been a marked feature in the dealings of these issues. While commenting on one such common factor between the two neighbours, that is, the shared faith, Marvin Weinbaum perceptively noted: “The ideal and rationale of Pakistani state is an Islamic consensus that is expected to transcend geographic and ethnic divisions. [In contrast] the Afghan state has found its legitimacy in satisfying and balancing the interests of competitive ethnic and tribal communities. [As a result] the relationship between ethnicity and politics has been virtually reversed from one state to the other.”³ Dissimilarities in their levels of socio-political structure, socio-economic development, and Pakistan’s repeated interference in the internal issues of Afghanistan have contributed in causing irritation in relations between the two countries. The dynamics of continuity and change have marked Pakistan’s interaction with Afghanistan, and the character of these ties has been decisively shaped by Islamabad’s quest for a friendly regime in Kabul which would allow Pakistan to escape the nightmare of being sandwiched between a hostile India in the East and an irredentist Afghanistan in the West.⁴

The geopolitical perceptions of Pakistan in Afghanistan should be examined in the light of the developing situation and Pakistan’s persistent efforts to establish a pliable and subservient regime in Afghanistan. For years, Pakistan has been projecting Afghanistan in terms of an entity that can provide “strategic depth” vis-à-vis India. However many strategists, including many in Pakistan, today find this concept of strategic depth outdated in the nuclear environment and in the absence of any threat to Pakistan across Afghan territory. Some Indian analysts have however seen the necessity of Pakistan’s advocacy of strategic depth in Afghanistan in terms of territorial ambitions and its aim of expanding its strategic frontiers towards the West and Central Asian region. Secure western borders and a subservient regime will enable Pakistan to deploy most of its armed forces against India.⁵ Pakistan’s policy of gaining strategic space is not a new phenomenon, but lately it has been directly related to carving out a larger Islamic entity jointly with the global Islamic *Jihad* movement.⁶ Many observers believe that a proxy war is already developing between India and Pakistan in Afghanistan. Pakistan’s concerns about the Afghan Army developing the potential to take on Pakistan comes in the context of increasing influence in Afghanistan. Even today the Kashmir dispute continues to be a key factor in the intense rivalries that erupted between India and Pakistan after 9/11. Islamabad has viewed its Afghan policy through the prism of denying India any advantage

in Kabul, and for nearly a decade had successfully blocked Indian presence in Kabul through India-hating Taliban.⁷ The ISI saw the Northern Alliance supported by Americans, with all of Pakistan's regional rivals—India, Iran and Russia—as claiming victory in Kabul. This, for Pakistan's military regime, was a strategic disaster, and prompted the ISI to give refuge to the escaping Taliban, while denying full support to Hamid Karzai.⁸ This chapter would try to look into the complex role played by Pakistan in the period after 2001 in Afghanistan, and how that has contributed in adding to the “chaos” in Afghanistan and the region at large.

Pakistan Factor in Afghanistan (Post Intervention)

The future of Afghanistan is inextricably linked to the future of its neighbour, Pakistan. In the nearly eight years since 9/11, Al Qaeda and its extremist allies have moved across the border to remote areas of Pakistan frontier...For American people, this border region has become the most dangerous place in the world.

— President Barack Obama, March 27, 2009

Throughout the intervention, the West has had inordinate difficulty in deciding whether Pakistan is an ally or an obstacle in the search of solutions to Western security concerns in Afghanistan. The US mood towards the country had oscillated sharply between warm words backed by fiscal largesse (in which Pakistan is fated as the anti-terrorist “anvil” in counterpoint to the NATO “hammer”) and outbursts of anger over the perceived duplicity of Pakistan's Afghan policy.⁹ The fragile domestic situation of Pakistan added to the concern. This was alarming considering Western policy-makers have been treating Pakistan as an indispensable contributor to any lasting solution in Afghanistan. A growing number of voices have argued that the stability of Pakistan is of greater importance for Western security than that of Afghanistan itself, and that Western policy in Afghanistan should reflect this.¹⁰

The paradox perhaps is rooted in the country's ambiguous and complex attitude to Islamist militancy, which can only be comprehended in the context of remarkably consistent and deeply embedded beliefs regarding the nature of Pakistan's security interests. The country has two great fears: the first, the fragmentation and, potentially disintegration, and the second, the looming presence of India—a fear not far short of paranoia.¹¹ The combination of these two factors is the basis of Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan and the militant

group in the tribal border regions, that was the subject of Obama’s concern in the quote above. There is hardly any doubt that crafting an effective strategy for Afghanistan demands an understanding of the strategic vision across the border.

Pakistani Geopolitics and Terrorism

Ahmed Rashid writes about a November 2001 incident in Kunduz, which resulted in the leaders of the Taliban and Al Qaeda escaping. For Pakistan, he writes, the stalemate in Kunduz was turning into a disaster as hundreds of ISI officers and soldiers from the Frontier Corps aiding the Taliban were trapped there.¹² They had been ordered to quit Afghanistan after 9/11 and had two months to escape, but instead they had stayed back to fight with the Taliban. Musharraf at that time called President Bush and asked for a “huge favour,” and he was not let down.¹³ As a result the US bombing paused and an air corridor was opened so that Pakistani aircraft could ferry his officers from Kunduz. This was however a secret operation and most of the cabinet members were kept in the dark. Apparently those who were air lifted were not only Pakistanis but Arabs as well. The “Great Escape,” as one Pakistani retired army officer dubbed it, would have enormous implications in the subsequent US-led war on terrorism.¹⁴ It is believed that more foreign terrorists escaped during that incident and from Tora Bora in the later period. In both cases these terrorists were hosted in South and North Waziristan, the wildest of Pakistani tribal areas.¹⁵

Just a few weeks after the Taliban’s final abandonment of Kandahar in the face of combined American and Northern Alliance offensives in December 2001 in Afghanistan, India experienced its near iconic terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament building in New Delhi. In the wake of this shocking incident, the Indian government initially accused two of the best known terrorist organisations on the subcontinent, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), of being involved in planning and executing this attack. Both groups were noted for their ties to Pakistan, while LeT was connected to Afghanistan, having been initially established to help carry on the war against the Najibullah regime in Kabul after 1989.¹⁶ JeM, though almost exclusively a Kashmir focused terrorist organisation, shared with LeT a strong ideological affiliation to Afghan Taliban: the major JeM leader until 2002, Hafiz Mohammad Saeed, fully endorsed the Taliban’s own injunctions against music and photography as un-Islamic.¹⁷ Like the Taliban both the mentioned terrorist organisations enjoyed benign tolerance

from the Pakistani ISI. For Pakistani army, the insurgency was a successful strategic ploy to tie down hundreds of thousands of Indian troops who would otherwise have been deployed on the border and possibly threatened Pakistan. The army carefully calibrated the kinds of weapons and level of funds it provided Kashmiri militants, and at times reined in the ISI so as not to provoke Indian military retaliation against Pakistan. The level of support was kept just below what India might use to justify an attack on Pakistan.¹⁸ This “strategic restraint” by the army also prevented Western governments from coming down too hard on Pakistan.

General Musharraf of Pakistan continued to pursue an aggressive line with India especially after the 1999 hijacking of an Indian Airlines plane bound for Delhi. After several landings the hijackers finally put the plane down in Taliban-controlled Kandahar on Christmas Day. All the hijackers were subsequently discovered to be Pakistani, members of Harkat-ul-Ansar (HuA), a group linked to Al Qaeda and the Taliban.¹⁹ The demand was \$200 million and release of thirty-five Kashmiri militants from Indian jails, including Harkat leaders Maulana Masud Azhar and Ahmed Omar Sheikh. Masun Azhar continued to preach even after 9/11, when the militant Islamic group had been officially declared terrorist by Musharraf and banned. The Pakistani army officers are of the belief that the more unpredictable the Pakistani actions were, the more notice the Kashmir cause would receive abroad. This attitude, according to Ahmed Rashid, had led Musharraf and his generals to take major risks after 9/11.²⁰

A few years down the line, the 2008 attacks on India's economic capital, Mumbai, by terrorists from Pakistan was an absolute shocker. While the world saw it live on television, it was soon found out that the terrorists within several landmark points in Mumbai (which they captured in groups) were constantly in touch with their “bosses” in Pakistan who were instructing them on their course of action. Like every other previous occasion, a war of words started immediately between the two countries. Though the only survivor militant, Ajmal Kasab, testified in favour of the Pakistan and Islamic militancy nexus, Pakistan as usual went into a denial mode citing the proofs provided to be insufficient to take action against the accused.

All these have to be understood against the backdrop of long-standing India-Pakistan tensions, the history of which also reflects Pakistan's self-image as a nation. Apart from the Kashmir issue which has been there since independence in 1947, the wars of 1965 and 1971 (the latter entailing the

secession of Bangladesh, formerly East Pakistan) marked individual peaks of tension against the backdrop of this long-standing mutual antagonism. Pakistan’s relationship with its immediate neighbours was accordingly shaped by successive governments “zero-sum” view of regional geopolitics.²¹ Hence it was seen that Pakistan and particularly the ISI perceived Afghanistan as a potentially vital source of “strategic depth” against India, if only a pro-Islamabad regime could successfully be assembled and entrenched in Kabul.

Pakistan’s foreign policy has always reflected a deep sense of internal insecurity. The secession of Bangladesh inflicted a permanent psychological trauma on successive governments, both military and civilian, which feared ever since that the entire Pakistani state might split asunder.²² The Punjab province of Pakistan hosts 60 percent of the country’s population. The Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) and North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) border Afghanistan, and are the source of bilateral dispute between the two countries. The NWFP (renamed Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2010) with approximately 20 million inhabitants and FATA another 5.7 million people, remain underdeveloped, rugged, and inaccessible.²³ This region could never be brought under complete control of either of the governments. Meanwhile to the West is the vast desert province of Baluchistan, bordering Iran. It is believed to be the most mineral and energy rich part and has a very low density of population. The Pakistani government has always been afraid that it might secede or come under Iranian (Pakistan is predominantly Sunni) Shi’a influence, considering Baluchis have borne resentment for years at the lack of benefit they derive from Islamabad’s exploitation of local minerals, coal and gas reserves. A separatist insurgency has consequently raised its head in the region since the 1970s and Pakistan has repeatedly seen India’s role in it, believing that India might seek to exploit these internal fault lines within the Pakistan state—either by funding Baluch insurgents or by carving out its own countervailing sphere of Pashtun influence in Afghanistan. These older tensions did not disappear after the outbreak of the “war on terror.”

Musharraf’s Balancing Act

From the very beginning Pakistan’s role in the US-led Afghan strategy conveyed mixed messages. From the end of 2001 itself Musharraf granted American OEF forces both over-flight and landing rights in Pakistan and also deployed regular army units, Pakistani Special Forces, ISI and Frontier Corps personnel

along the Pakistan-Afghan border.²⁴ Many including India were amazed at how easily and promptly the US embraced Pakistan as a strategic ally. Musharraf responded by replacing the ISI Chief General Mahmood Ahmed (believed to be a Taliban sympathiser by Washington) by Ehsan ul Haq. Over the course of the next few years Pakistan became the logistic heart for the United States, and by 2008 up to 80 percent of the containerised cargos and approximately 40 percent of all fuel to support the US and the coalition forces operation in Afghanistan transited through Pakistan.²⁵ Musharraf also announced the banning of the most significant sectarian Islamist organisations operating in Pakistan including JeM, Sipah Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), Lashkar-e-Jhanvi (LeJ), Sipah Mohammad (SM) and the foremost Lashkar-e-Taiba as well as FATA and NWFP based Tehreek-e-Nifaze Shariate Mohammadi (TNSM) and Kashmir oriented Hartak-ul-Mijahedin.²⁶ These actions encouraged Washington to grant seemingly moderate Musharraf the benefit of doubt. However American forces on the ground in Afghanistan remained dissatisfied with the full extent of Pakistani cooperation at the time. In practice most of these banned organisations were permitted to reorganise and re-emerge some months later.²⁷ Even his proclamation in January 2002 that private madrassas networks in Pakistan would be subject to a tighter process of state regulation proved to be short-lived. After OEF, there was genuine hope that the Pakistani army would have no choice but to break free its nexus with the extremists, but the military and ISI thought otherwise. Instead of helping the US overthrow the Taliban regime, Pakistan, according to Ahmed Rashid, felt, since the US was dependent on Pakistan for conducting war on Afghanistan, it could force India to the negotiation table by stepping up attacks—the same logic that had prompted the 1999 war in Kargil.²⁸ Musharraf after 9/11 declared that by siding with the United States he had “saved” the Kashmir issue, which was his way of indicating to the militants that nothing would change.

The next master-stroke that came from Pakistan was in respect of the discriminatory military operation against insurgents in the FATA and NWFP. A new theory was devised that made a distinction between *good Jihadis* with the *bad/foreign insurgents*. FATA by then had become a multi-layered terrorist cake. At the base were Pakistani Pashtun tribesmen, who provided logistical support and hideouts. Above them were the Afghan Taliban who had settled after 9/11 followed by militants from Central Asia, Chechnya, Africa, China and Kashmir and topped by Arabs who forged a protective ring around bin Laden—FATA had become “terrorism central.”²⁹ Distinction was made

between the foreign insurgents, predominantly Uzbeks, Arabs and Chechens and Taliban-aligned Pashtun fighters—the so called “good jihadis,” who could still potentially serve Pakistan’s strategic interests.³⁰ Consequently over 200 of the more than 450 terrorists captured by Pakistani forces by late 2003 were Yemenis and Saudis.³¹

Pakistan also traded prominent foreign fighters to gain prestige with the US in the global “war on terror.” Abu Zubaydeh, the alleged head of the Al Qaeda overseas operations, and Khalid Sheikh Mohamed (the main planner of 9/11 attacks) were captured by Pakistani security forces and handed over to the Bush Administration.³² In his memoirs, Musharraf mentions the significant bounties, or prize money, paid out by the Americans for the handover of foreign fighters.³³ America showered generous financial and military aid on Pakistan accordingly. The US provided \$1.5 billion loan write-off and lifted an arms embargo previously imposed as punishment for Pakistan’s semi covert nuclear programme. Between 2002 and 2008, the United States supplied Pakistan with \$6.6 billion in military aid to help fight extremists—over \$1 billion a year.³⁴ When taken alongside the rescheduling of about 90 percent of Pakistan’s debt obligations (a staggering 58 percent of GDP in 1999) and official grants of nearly \$2.5 billion across 2002 and 2003 combined, this new financial climate gave early Musharraf’s rule the impression of healthy economic growth. IMF reported FDI inflow to Pakistan encapsulating a period of economic optimism.³⁵ The Pakistani armed forces, however, spent most of this money on acquiring or upgrading various conventional weapon systems. The vast majority of them were tools of more use in deterring India than in combating the Taliban or Al Qaeda. Later investigation uncovered the fact that over half of the total funds provided by the US (approximately 54.9 percent) were spent on fighter aircraft, weapons, 26.6 percent on support and maintenance of aircraft and 10 percent on weapons systems.³⁶ By contrast, in the critical border region where the Taliban insurgency was actually happening, one American investigator as late as 2007 uncovered men of the paramilitary Frontier Corps still deployed in the First World War era pith helmets, sandals in the snow and carrying barely functioning Kalashnikov assault rifles—and this against opponents armed with mortars, machine guns, satellite telephones, rocket launchers and RPGs.³⁷ For many years the US had simply ignored the clear evidence that Pakistani military was not spending the funds to further US foreign Policy objectives, despite the US effectively subsidising a quarter of Pakistan’s military budget by 2007.³⁸ The highly significant trigger came in the form of the so-called “Laal Masjid” siege

between January and July 2007 in Islamabad. Seven Chinese nationals were taken hostage, whom the mosque students accused of being sex-shop workers. Following failed negotiations and rising international pressure, the mosque was stormed in which approximately 150 people died.

Addressing the Border Region

Seven tribal agencies—Khyber, Kurram, Orakzai, Mohamad, Bajaur and North and South Waziristan—are populated by just over three million tribesmen, adding to twenty-eight million Pashtuns who live in Pakistan and fifteen million in Afghanistan. The tribes on both sides of the border intermarry, trade, feud and celebrate with one another. They adhere to *Pashtunwali*, the tribal code of honour and behaviour, which includes *melmastia* or hospitality, *nanawatia*, the notion of hospitality can never be denied to a fugitive and *badal*, the right of revenge. What makes the FATA tribes more rigid and conservative is that they lived under a unique oppressive administrative system inherited from the British Raj and still maintained by Pakistan.³⁹ The “political agents” adhere to a rule book called “Frontier Crimes Regulation” (FCR) part of a century-old legal system introduced by the British in 1901.⁴⁰ Even as late as 1996, under the FCR, Pakistani political parties were banned from operating in the area thereby giving the mullahs and religious parties monopoly of influence under the guise of religion. Zia-ul-Haq’s vision on Pakistani influences region extended to Central Asia depended on an undefined border with Afghanistan. As long as there was no defined border there was no international law to break if Pakistani forces were to support Afghan regimes such as the Taliban.⁴¹

After 9/11 FATA became the escape hatch for Al Qaeda and the Taliban. Between 2002 and 2006, Pakistani military operations allowed the Taliban to consolidate themselves in the FATA and NWFP territories, which in turn enabled them to re-establish their power across the borders in South Afghanistan. A veteran Pashtun nationalist politician, Afrasiab Khattak observed, “safe passages were provided to Al Qaeda by not deploying Pakistani forces on the border in South and North Waziristan, although troops were deployed in Khyber and Khurram Agencies.”⁴² Thousands of Al Qaeda and Taliban were allowed to settle in Waziristan, create bases and restart military operations. Rashid mentions the role of Jalaluddin Hakkani, the former Taliban minister who was in charge of organising the FATA tribesmen to provide sanctuary and passage to these terrorists. Al Qaeda’s first sanctuary was the South Waziristan agency. With its high mountains, steep slopes and deep ravines littered with

broken rock and shale, and its thick forests, it was an ideal hideout. Ahmed Rashid has pointed out on several occasions how the US military officers in Bagram told him that they failed to understand why ISI was turning a blind eye to 3,500 foreign militants in the region. Meanwhile Pakistan’s army conducted a massive public information campaign, denying there were any terrorist camps in FATA, even though the Pakistani media was reporting to the contrary. ISI’s internal debates included subjects such as officer’s intention to create a broad “Talibanised belt” in FATA that would keep the pressure on Karzai to bend to Pakistani wishes, keep US forces under threat while maintaining their dependence on Pakistani goodwill, and create a buffer zone between Afghan and Pakistani Pashtuns.⁴³

Pakistan’s proposals in 2006 to construct a massive security fence and mine-field along the joint Afghan-Pakistan frontier were dismissed by many as Islamabad’s lack of seriousness when it came to combating cross-border terrorism, while President Musharraf was a prominent absentee from Karzai’s 2007 “Peace Jirga” which intended to bring together Pashtun tribal elders from Southern Afghanistan and Northern Pakistan to address the shared problem of Islamist extremism.⁴⁴ The Taliban, after successful regrouping, consistently attacked both government and non-government bases within FATA creating a power vacuum, within which they then substantially increased their own authority. Having been fought to a standstill in the field, by early 2006, Pakistani army garrisons in the region found themselves increasingly isolated and under attack as Taliban activities escalated.

Friction Increased between Pakistan and Afghanistan

Following the 2001 US operation in Afghanistan and the fall of the Taliban, Pakistan recognised the transitional administration led by Hamid Karzai and offered significant amount of aid and continued relief to Afghan refugees living in Pakistan. However Afghanistan’s new administration remained suspicious as Pakistan’s past role in supporting the Taliban remained the source of most ill-feeling.⁴⁵ Afghanistan has consistently provided Pakistan with evidence of the support that the Taliban enjoys within its territory only to be categorically rebuffed by the Pakistani military regime, which seems to be keeping its Taliban option alive. Riaz Mohammad Khan, former Foreign Secretary of Pakistan, writes in his book that Afghanistan provided a list of four names including Mullah Omar, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and two high-profile political personalities from Pakistan known for their views against US intervention in Afghanistan, and Musharraf

publicly dismissed it as the “nonsense list.”⁴⁶ Pakistan hardly eliminated any high-profile Afghan Taliban personalities except for Mullah Daddullah in 2007. However in the case of Al Qaeda, Khan feels that Pakistan cannot be accused of “running with the hare and hunting with the hound,” and if Afghanistan was doing that, it was inspired by hostility from within the Afghan Government and by the pervasive suspicion and prejudice developed over many years against Pakistan and its ISI.⁴⁷ Tension between Islamabad and Kabul was also attributed to the lack of chemistry between Musharraf and Karzai who carried certain baggages.⁴⁸ While Islamabad stated that the real problem lay inside Afghanistan and that the heart of all issues was reconciliation, Kabul argued that the real problem was located in Pakistan.

It was only in 2011, after the Abbottabad “reality check” that the US decided to cut down on its aid to Pakistan. US-Pakistan relations were in crisis even before the circumstances of the killing of Osama bin Laden became known. Amid a rapid unravelling of ties between Washington and Islamabad, the principal architect of the US military partnership with Pakistan, US Joint Chief of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen, had accused the country of using terrorism as a policy weapon and said it had “lost the bet” to be a regional player of consequence because of it.⁴⁹ While addressing the Senate in September 2011, Mullen said “the government of Pakistan, and most especially the Pakistani army and ISI, jeopardises not only the prospect of US strategic partnership but Pakistan’s opportunity to be a respected nation with legitimate regional influence.”⁵⁰ Tension seemed to increase between the two countries in the recent past when, while reacting to Mullen’s views, the Pakistani Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar hinted at the possibility of the US losing an ally. But analysts say that the US would continue to lean on Pakistani army operationally and support civilian government though the relationship is expected to remain uneasy amid efforts to avoid a complete breakdown.

The Erosion of Trust between the United States and Pakistan

The Pakistan-US military relationship has hardly ever been based on mutual trust with lurking suspicion about each other’s objectives even at the best of times.⁵¹ As early as 2005, US army personnel complained that Pakistanis could not be trusted with intelligence, as in many cases that target would escape once information was passed on to the Pakistan side. The US and ISAF forces were interested in targeting Al Qaeda and Afghan Taliban and their supporters, while Pakistani government including army and ISI were still adjusting their thinking

to the new realities created after 9/11. Though a U-turn on Afghan Taliban had become stated policy, yet on the ground a change could not be made.⁵² The divergence in coalition and Pakistani priorities came into sharp relief in Waziristan. Coalition felt Pakistani military operations were soft there. Similar operational level differences had been causing mistrust between the two sides. However tracking down of Osama bin Laden in a protective environment within Pakistan, and unilateral attack on targets without informing Pakistan, was a clear testimony of the level of distrust between the two allies. It was indeed a matter of embarrassment for Pakistan, while it faced questions from all over the world, its ties with America were hitting rock bottom.

Relations between Pakistan and the United States almost collapsed when the US-led NATO forces opened fire on two Pakistani border check-posts stationed near the Afghanistan-Pakistan border on November 26, 2011. The check-posts were apparently located 200 metres (660 ft.) to 2.5 kilometres (1.6 miles) inside Pakistan from the border with Afghanistan in the Salala area of the Baizai subdivision of the Mohmand tribal region in FATA, Pakistan. The attack apparently claimed the life of 24 Pakistani soldiers; both sides claimed that they were attacked first. The incident sparked outrage and controversy in Pakistan which termed the attack an “unprovoked and indiscriminate firing,” an “irresponsible act” and a “stark violation” of its sovereignty.⁵³ Pakistan as a result closed all NATO supplies to Afghanistan leaving trucks vulnerable to attack. In late March 2012, a US military official stated that the United States would have to use routes through India and the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) for supplies to Afghanistan if Pakistan refused to reopen its supply lines. However, considering the expensiveness of these routes, the possibility of negotiation with Pakistan on opening of the supply routes was not ruled out. Pakistan’s reaction has to be evaluated by taking into account the past incident of killing of Osama bin Laden in Pakistani territory with unilateral action from the US. This was also a gross violation of its sovereignty, but since it exposed the duplicity of Pakistani claims, the reaction at that time was reasonably restrained.

“Af-Pak” Follow-up for Pakistan

While by coining the term “Af-Pak,” the Obama Administration has formally linked Afghanistan and Pakistan in the overall strategy for the region, the Bush Administration had also attached importance to Pakistan and its role in achieving the objectives of *Operation Enduring Freedom*. The importance of

Pakistan for the US is quite evident in the expeditious moves by the United States to help Pakistan and removal of sanctions immediately after 9/11. At the same time, US-Pakistan interactions, especially at the working levels in the context of *Operation Enduring Freedom*, reflected distrust. Today, the Taliban remains a constant “irritant” in the Pakistan-Afghanistan relationship, narco-trafficking and smuggling along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border also remains a serious problem. Afghanistan has emerged as the world’s leading source of opiates, supplying three-quarters of the global market in 2003. UN estimates indicate that nearly 80 percent of the income from narcotics did not go to the farmers but rather to the traffickers themselves, some of whose profits supported armed groups and warlords.⁵⁴ In addition to covert state support, armed groups including the Taliban-Al Qaeda have relied on a combination of cross-border ethnic ties, the parallel economy, and the drug trade, where this has resulted in an unending vicious cycle of conflict.

Afghanistan is clearly a part of the dominant conflict in South Asia. “Afghanistan . . . in many ways has replaced Kashmir as the main arena of the still-unsolved struggle between Pakistan and India.”⁵⁵ From Pakistan’s perspective, its own support for the Taliban government was essentially helpful in two ways. Firstly, it relieved the pressure arising from Afghan-Pakistani border dispute and Pashtun Nationalism, and secondly, it helped her gain long sought “strategic depth” vis-à-vis India. Though, certain arguments have been forwarded based on the huge Afghan refugee influx into Pakistani territory, starting from the period of Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and the grave consequences it faced as a result of such developments, as strong factors that might have propelled Pakistan to take such a move. Recent academic work in Pakistan indicates that they feel too much undue attention has been accorded to the “strategic depth” theory and realise the need to move away from that obsession. However in the post 9/11 era, Pakistan suffered heavy losses on every conceivable field after the exit of the Taliban and entry of the Karzai administration, whose foreign policy agenda is pro-Indian and at least rhetorically fixed on conflicts in its relationship with Pakistan.⁵⁶ An unstable Afghanistan could mean refugee influx into Pakistan, into Pashtun-dominated FATA and NWFP, yet Pakistan’s interests are so very linked with Afghanistan’s instability that it opposed Indian involvement in Afghanistan from the very beginning.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Pakistan sees India’s growing influence in Afghanistan as a threat. Pakistan cannot afford a situation when the devil of Durand line and other issues will be raised. Conversely, the Indian government’s

sustained support for perceptibly anti-Pakistani forces in Afghanistan has been interpreted by Pakistan as “strategic encirclement.”⁵⁷ Presently, India is heavily investing in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. To demonstrate its assistance, it is spending millions of dollars in various projects as a goodwill gesture. These developments have caused enough worry for Pakistan despite Karzai’s categorisation of India as a “good friend” and that of Pakistan as a “twin brother...we are conjoined twins, there’s no separation” in his March 2010 address.⁵⁸ Reiterating a similar thought during his last visit to India in October 2011, Karzai mentioned that “Pakistan is a twin brother, India is a great friend. The agreement we signed with our friend will not affect our brother.”

While the Obama Administration’s strategy on the Afghan war and US engagement in the region were unfolding, American public sentiment had pared the objectives in Afghanistan and set the direction towards gradual military disengagement. The US military exit on the horizon will have far-reaching consequences just like those that flowed from its intervention more than a decade back. With the announcement of the US intention of gradually withdrawing troops from the soil of Afghanistan and handing over the responsibility to Afghan forces by 2014, the role of neighbouring countries in filling in the expected political vacuum has again gained momentum. India, as the foremost regional player in the developmental process in Afghanistan and a rising global power, has enough stakes in the current phase of developments within Afghanistan. Despite the geographical distance, India could never remain insulated from the developments there. Considering India has adopted a multi-pronged foreign policy vis-à-vis Afghanistan in the period after 2001 and has invested billions of dollars in the development initiatives within the country, its stakes considerably rest upon the stability of Afghanistan. India has maintained that under no circumstances is it prepared to allow the Taliban to resurface and it wants the new Afghan security structure to be free from anti-India elements. Having attempted to review the role played by Pakistan in Afghanistan in the last decade, an attempt will be made in the following chapter to look at what has been the implications of developments that took place in Afghanistan after 2001. Highlighting the pattern of Indian engagement in Afghanistan would be interesting in order to see how far it has contributed in taking forward the commitment of the international community in the post *Operation Enduring Freedom* environment. Finally, the chapter would try to understand what role India could eventually play in the rapidly changing scenario in Afghanistan.

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4. GEOPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF INDIA'S ENGAGEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

Ever since India's independence, we have grown closer to each other, for a variety of reasons. The long memory of our past was there, and the moment it was possible to renew them, we renewed them. And then came mutual interest, which is a powerful factor.

— Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru¹

India and Afghanistan have shared century old relations and linkages. The perception about Afghanistan in the present situation however can hardly be seen as identifiable or remotely nostalgic. Contemporary Afghanistan is hardly a scene of shared history of our common past. More than the historical connections, issues such as terrorism, security, extremism have compelled India to consider Afghanistan from a modern-day view-point. The location of Afghanistan at the junction of South, Central and West Asian security networks has made the country critical from security point of view. As we have seen in the previous chapters, the US-led war in Afghanistan after 9/11 brought the world community together, pledging support towards assisting the war-devastated Afghanistan in its reconstruction process. India, itself being a victim of grievous development in its neighbourhood, found a suitable opportunity to address the evil of terrorism and religious extremism in the period since the initiation of Operation Enduring Freedom to wipe out the safe havens of terrorists in Afghanistan. Post Taliban, India came out in a big way providing aid and participating in the reconstruction efforts. India since then has showed its commitment to help the Afghan government in its attempt to transform Afghanistan into a “stable country.” India has been one of the front runners in the reconstruction process, and has contributed in every possible sector on which its assistance was required by the Afghan government. Compared to the needs of the Afghan people and the Afghan government, India's contribution may not appear to be significant, however the fact remains that India so far has contributed more than \$2 billion and is one of the top five donor countries participating in the reconstruction process in Afghanistan.² It has entered into partnership with the Afghan government in

a wide range of sectors such as hydroelectricity, road construction, agriculture, industry, telecommunication, information, broadcast, education, health and capacity building.³ India, in the recent past, has also involved itself in small community development projects in various provinces of Afghanistan, to touch the lives of the common Afghan. Indian help to Afghanistan in the post 2001 phase has been reported to include helping political candidates (during 2004, 2005 elections, parliamentary elections), construction of the new parliament building and road construction, including in the border, evoking Pakistan's concern to a considerable extent.⁴ To understand the reasons for Pakistan's insecurities towards New Delhi's closeness with Kabul, it would be important to glance through their past engagements.

Glancing through India-Afghanistan Relations over the Years

During British rule in India, Afghanistan became a buffer between the British Empire and the Tsarist Russia. The present configuration of Afghanistan was determined in the nineteenth century through negotiations between Russia and the British Empire. In centuries past, forces from Afghanistan had shaped the history of northern India, while trade routes originating in Delhi headed east through Kabul and Kandahar to reach the markets of Central and West Asia. It was the British who weakened somewhat Afghanistan's ties with the subcontinent, propping it up as a buffer to keep the expansionist Tsarist empire at bay. They tried to shape Afghanistan politically for their imperial needs. India's direct contiguity with Afghanistan almost ended with the creation of Pakistan. India and Afghanistan drew apart geographically even though there was a sense of contiguity courtesy the Wakkhan Corridor, based on which India has considered Afghanistan to be one of its immediate neighbours (even though India practically never had any access because of the dispute pertaining to Azad Kashmir). The creation of Pakistan increased the geographical distance, and India ceased to be a factor in governance and its external choices.⁵ The tensions that existed between British India and Afghanistan were transferred to Pakistan-Afghanistan relations, with the Durrand Line and the management of Pashtun tribes straddling both sides of the unsettled frontier, at their centre. This troublesome imperial legacy is at the centre of conflict in Afghanistan. Without being direct neighbours any more, India was by no means insulated from the fall-out of development in Afghanistan.

The Cold War also forced India and Afghanistan to accept roughly similar foreign policy positions. While India was one of the founding members of

the Non-Aligned Movement, Afghanistan also tried to adopt an independent foreign policy—and for some time at least was able to efficaciously play one superpower against the other, thereby garnering economic aid from both sides. But given America's close ties with Pakistan and the Soviet Union's generosity in providing extensive military and economic aid, Afghanistan gradually fell into the Soviet orbit of influence, resulting in the Soviet intervention in 1979.⁶ The Non-Aligned Movement was divided on this issue, and India was one of the few nations to support Soviet intervention and occupation of Afghanistan, thereby damaging severely its prestige and credibility in the international community.⁷ Pakistan's membership of US-led anti-Soviet alliances had, as it is, brought the Cold War rivalry to the subcontinent, with the US supplying military hardware and political support to Pakistan on Kashmir.⁸ Because Pakistan was causing trouble for India in Jammu and Kashmir, India decided to support Pakistan's adversaries and ended up supporting whoever was in power in Kabul until the victory of Pakistan-based mujahideen in 1992.⁹

The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan aggravated this rivalry further, with the US pressing into service not only Pakistan but the pan-Islamist ideology of *jihad* to combat the atheist Communists. The US disregarded the consequences of such a policy for the larger region, especially India, whose secularism remains a ceaseless challenge to Pakistan's notion of itself and the ground for its creation. With Pakistan promoting Kashmir as an Islamic cause and the US choosing to promote the same factor in Afghanistan, the forces summoned for these two causes in the same region could not but lead to the use of terror as a political instrument against India. The grievous fall-out for India was the renewed utility of Pakistan to combat the Soviets, which made the US ignore Pakistan's clandestine efforts to acquire nuclear and missile technology.

Because of its geostrategic location, neighbouring Iran, Pakistan and Central Asian states (after the disintegration of the Soviet Union), Afghanistan has remained the focus of Indian regional policy. India has enjoyed cordial relations with Afghanistan since 1947, and these were strengthened by the signing of the "Friendship Treaty" in 1950. India signed various agreements and protocols with pro-Soviet regimes in Afghanistan to promote cooperation and to enhance Indian influence. The Soviet intervention of Afghanistan in 1979 provided another opportunity for India to further strengthen its relations with Afghanistan. During this period (1979-99), India increased its investments in developing activities in Afghanistan by cooperating in industrial, irrigational and hydroelectric projects.

Even after Zahir Shah’s overthrow in 1973, India managed to maintain close ties with the communist regime that followed. Contrary to popular belief, India was less than pleased with Soviet intervention and occupation of Afghanistan.¹⁰ However after failing to engage Pakistan with the prospect of regional solution to Soviet intervention and faced with substantial American military and economic assistance to Pakistan (\$3.1 billion for six years), India avoided any public censure of Soviet occupation.¹¹ India chose to work instead with the successive Soviet puppet regimes in Afghanistan because it cared little for the Islamist ideological orientation shared by the bulk of the Afghan mujahideen groups that Pakistan was supporting on behalf of the United States.¹² India was also loath to cede its military superiority over Pakistan and relied on the Soviets to provide advanced weaponry at bargain-basement prices.¹³ During the course of the Afghan war, India’s support for Ahmed Shah Massoud and the Northern Alliance became a predictable move considering his hostilities towards the Pakistani-backed Mujahideen group.

India had active linkages with the country during the time of the puppet regimes backed by the Soviet Union, which got shaken due to factors such as, the rise of the Afghan mujahideen against the Soviet intervention (with Pakistani, Saudi and US support), the withdrawal of Soviet troops, the disintegration of Soviet Union in 1991 and the formation of a government by the Mujahideen after the overthrow of Dr. Najibullah’s government in April 1992. However in 1992, when Burhanuddin Rabbani established a predominantly non-Pashtun government, India again became active in Afghanistan and provided humanitarian and technical assistance to the Afghan Government.

Over the years India’s stint with Afghanistan, especially in the fields of economy and culture, had continued effectively except for the brief Taliban interregnum (1996-2001), when it closed down its embassy and consulates. India was one of the countries which never recognised Taliban as a “legitimate” power and closed her Embassy in Kabul after the infamous assassination of President Dr. Najibullah. The rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the removal of the Rabbani Government in September 1996 again marginalised Indian presence in Afghanistan. India’s ability to maintain good relations with Afghanistan drew to a close with the Pakistani-aided and abetted Taliban victory in 1996.¹⁴ India, like many other countries, did not recognise the Taliban government. At that time, the non-Pashtun groups opposing the Taliban regime formed the Northern Alliance and controlled areas in the north of Afghanistan, bordering the Central Asian States of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In her efforts to maintain her influence in

Afghanistan and counter Pakistan's support to Taliban regime, India maintained links with the Northern Alliance and contributed in strengthening its defence by providing high-altitude warfare equipment worth \$10 million through its Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) and Indian defence advisors provided technical advice to the Northern Alliance.¹⁵ Moreover, India had established a hospital in Farkhor on the Afghan-Tajik border and Indian doctors provided medical assistance to the Alliance. It is also believed that India supported anti-Taliban attacks from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.¹⁶ While discussing relations between India and Afghanistan during the Taliban period, Mr. M. H. Ansari, India's former Ambassador to Afghanistan, observed, "A relationship with the Taliban was not attempted...as a result of the treatment meted out to the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs. Much more serious in Indian eyes were the Taliban pronouncements on Kashmir, the training of Kashmiris, Pakistanis and foreign militants in camps of Afghanistan...these touched the core of India's vital interest and compelled New Delhi to strengthen its support and assistance to the predominantly non-Pashtun Rabbani forces."¹⁷ The situation further deteriorated during the course of the hijack of the Indian Airlines Flight IC 814 to Kandahar. On that occasion the Taliban pressed for recognition from the Indian Government, however it was not acted upon from India's end. After the fall of the Taliban in 2001, India resumed her ties and actively got involved in the developmental and humanitarian activities within the country. At the same time Indian efforts were directed towards forging a closer relation with countries like Iran and Russia, which had an anti-Taliban approach, and also Central Asian States. Mr. J. N. Dixit in his book defined, "India in cooperation with all like-minded countries, should resist the coercive propagation of any kind of religious, social or ethnic extremism which can profoundly destabilise Afghanistan's Asian neighbours... An early solution to the Afghanistan crisis is critical for realising the enormous opportunities for energy and economic cooperation in the Eurasian region."¹⁸

Given Pakistan's close ties to the Taliban regime, India did not abandon its links with the Northern Alliance. India reportedly provided Massoud's forces with high-altitude warfare equipment, defence advisors and helicopter technicians.¹⁹ Despite Massoud's assassination on the eve of the development of 9/11, India did not sever its ties to the Northern Alliance. The launch of *Operation Enduring Freedom* in Afghanistan as a result of the terrorist attack in America on September 11, 2001 and the subsequent US campaign for international war against terrorism, gave India an opportunity to pursue its foreign policy goals of attaining a much stronger position in the region. Since then India has

developed an arsenal of economic, diplomatic and military tools in its pursuit of a more coordinated strategy in the region in order to re-establish its influence in Afghanistan, which had been marginalised with the establishment of a Taliban-led government in 1996. India secured a place during the Bonn Conference and found it advantageous that the US chose to throw in its lot with Hamid Karzai and his supporters at Bonn. The Taliban had assassinated Karzai's father in Pakistan and Karzai had long lived in India and had even obtained an undergraduate degree from Himachal Pradesh University. India has enough reasons to be pleased with his emergence as both the consensus and the US supported candidate for president of Afghanistan. It was during the same time that India's support for the Northern Alliance in the 1990s was beginning to pay dividends as, in the new political environment, post Bonn, all major portfolios went to these Northern Alliance leaders which gave a remarkable boost to Indo-Afghan relations.

Before the international intervention of the US and its allies with UN mandate, India envisaged that the country's Taliban regime and Al Qaeda's access to Central Asia, as well as to the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir (backed by Pakistan), as a clear threat to its security. It was nervous about the fall-out of a Taliban success on the internal security situation in Jammu and Kashmir where the number of Afghan war veterans from different parts of the world has increased dramatically.²⁰ All this while India made many futile efforts to draw International attention to the developments in India's backyard. Things changed drastically in favour of India after the September 11 attacks after which India asserted that its stand against the Taliban regime, Pakistan and Al Qaeda as key promoters of international terrorism was vindicated. To Pakistan's annoyance, India's post 9/11 policy seems to have paid some dividends and helped New Delhi regain a bit of lost ground.

Having the unpleasant experience of the Taliban regime, when India was compelled to scrap all its relations with the political authority in Afghanistan, India was much more careful while formulating new policies towards Afghanistan in the changed environment. Therefore stress was given to “people-to-people” contact between the two countries. India strived to take up new ventures in Afghanistan by which they could touch the lives of ordinary Afghan people. Since such bondings are not developed by focusing on political linkages, it was believed that this would also not be affected or impacted by change in the political atmosphere in the country. As Mr. S. K. Lambah, P.M.'s Special Envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan and one of the foremost persons to reach

Afghanistan with assistance on the eve of US attack on the country, argued that Indian investment in Afghanistan in post 2001 was more of a “long-term” investment, where the dividends were supposed to come not immediately, however the results were expected to be more lasting.²¹ Compared to the needs of the Afghan people and the Afghan government, India's contribution may be considered miniscule, but India has been able to restore full diplomatic relations, and has provided approximately US \$2 billion in aid to Afghanistan's reconstruction and development efforts so far.

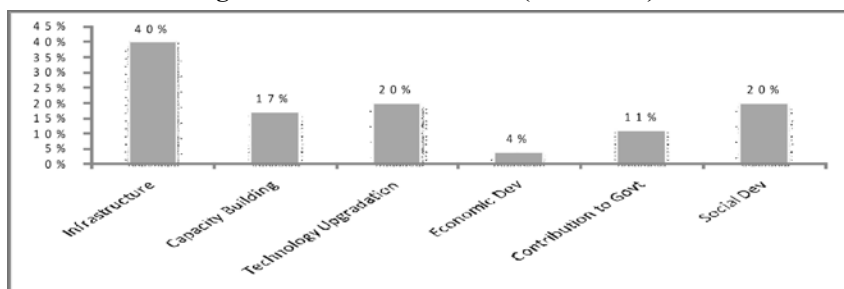
Indo-Afghan Relationship after the Fall of Taliban

In the post 9/11 situation, India has played an active role and has been part of every international conference and international initiative to advance the Bonn Process and reconstruction efforts. India's assistance activities and development partnership with Afghanistan covers *four* broad areas, namely, humanitarian assistance, major infrastructural projects, small and community-based development projects, and education and capacity building initiatives.

India is the sixth largest donor and the largest OECD donor to Afghanistan. Humanitarian assistance includes food assistance, sending of winter clothing, gifting of vehicles for mass transport as well as for the Afghan National Army, among other things. It has medical missions in Kabul, Kandahar and Herat but following the Kabul attack and worsening security situation some of the medical missions were closed but those missions have been resumed now. Over three hundred thousand patients have been treated by these medical missions and have been provided with free medicines.²² Major infrastructural projects undertaken by India in the country include building the Parliament building, transport and communication network. The Border Road Organisation has completed building the 218-kilometre Delaram-Zaranj road links to facilitate movement of goods and services from Afghanistan to the Iranian border and onwards, to Chahbahar Port. This would link to Iran's Chahbahar port which consequently gives Afghanistan another outlet to a nearby port, and this would also facilitate India's trade with Afghanistan and Iran bypassing Pakistan and reducing Afghanistan's dependence on Pakistan for trade. India is committed to development and infrastructure projects in various sectors in Afghanistan. She is helping Afghanistan to build Salma dam power project in Herat province. India has built a transmission 220 KV line from Pul-e-Khumri to Kabul to provide it with 24 hours electricity supply under North-East Power System project. Apart from this India is providing US \$100 million under food

assistance for school feeding programme to be administered through the World Food Programme. It is constructing a hospital in Kabul, reconstructing Habiba school, has dug 26 tube wells in North-West Afghanistan, it has built telephone exchanges in 11 provinces connecting to Kabul, it is expanding National TV network by providing uplink from Kabul and downlinks in all 34 provinces. Eighty-four small projects are under different stages of implementation in 19 provinces of Afghanistan. A road, built by an Indian company with aid from the Asian Development Bank (ADB), connects Kandahar with Spin Boldak. Total aid of India for developmental activities in Afghanistan at present stands at approximately US \$2 billion. Figure 1 indicates India’s contribution towards Afghanistan’s reconstruction in the first half of intervention, that is, from 2002 to 2007. India has sent about four thousand Indian workers to Afghanistan, who are protected by Indian paramilitary and police forces. In terms of soft power, India’s assets like music, movies and television shows in Afghanistan are remarkably popular, these also contribute positively in bringing the two countries closer. A unique characteristic of India’s assistance is that most of its projects are grounded on Afghanistan’s requirement rather than what India thinks would be good for Afghanistan.

Figure 1: India’s Contribution towards Afghanistan Reconstruction (2002-2007)²³



Several visits that took place after 2001 gave a new lease of life to the bilateral relations between the two countries. Both the countries signed bilateral preferential trade Agreement in 2003 when Karzai visited India. This gives tariff concession to Afghan goods. India hopes her investment in the Iranian port at Chahbahar will allow her to gain trading access to Afghanistan, bypassing Pakistan. Pakistan currently allows Afghanistan transit rights for its exports to India but does not allow Indian goods to move to Afghanistan. During Prime

Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh's visit to Kabul in 2005, he assured Karzai of New Delhi's continued cooperation and assistance in stabilising the country's security and democracy. India pledged to construct the Parliament house at US \$200 million. In April 2006, Karzai made his fourth visit to India since he became the Afghan leader in 2001. On this occasion he led a 110-strong delegation made up of cabinet ministers, members of the Afghan National Assembly and business people.²⁴ These high-level visits have led to a better understanding between the two countries.

The Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) signed in 2011, has been seen as a significant step in taking the relationship between the two countries further. In a statement to the media during the visit of Afghan President Karzai, the Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh explicitly stated, "Our cooperation with Afghanistan is an open book. We have civilisational links, and we are both here to stay."²⁵ Formalisation of the SPA made a tremendous impact in terms of strategic communication. It has sent a strong message to the Afghans, the region and the international community. Being the first to sign such an agreement, India has demonstrated its independence and commitment to rebuilding Afghanistan.²⁶ Coming ahead of the US-Afghan strategic partnership deal, which is embroiled in differences and conditionalities,²⁷ the India-Afghan agreement was a demonstration of India's willingness to help a neighbour in need. Given that the agreement was based on requests and conditions set by the Afghans through a series of consultative meetings and deliberations, there were little hiccups in finalising the deal.

SPA was seen as a much needed demonstration of India's risk-taking ability and maturing of India's foreign policy. As India built its relationship in the neighbourhood and moved ahead with several path-breaking initiatives in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Myanmar, the first strategic partnership with distant Afghanistan signalled that India was ready to partner with countries even in adverse and difficult conditions. Thus, Afghanistan's "Support for the reform and expansion of the United Nations Security Council, including a permanent seat for India in the Council"²⁸ as stated in the SPA, was thus more than symbolic.

The capacity building and educational initiatives included in the Strategic Partnership Agreement were signs of India's commitment to invest in the future leadership of the country, which is in sync with India's long-term vision of helping to build a stable democratic Afghanistan. The Agreement read: "In response to Afghanistan's need to strengthen its administration and governance at national and sub-national levels, India offers its experience of governance

at the national, state, district and local body levels, and technical assistance in setting up a permanent, career-based civil service suitable for Afghan realities.”²⁹ India’s efforts to accommodate Afghans in its educational institutions, facilitating entry, financial and local support, language training, and good mentoring services could now enable a whole generation of Afghans to acquire skills and professional qualifications in Indian institutions, thereby building lasting bonds and intellectual connectivity between the people of the two countries. The Agreement’s provision relating to India’s role in training and equipping Afghan National Security Force had attracted the greatest attention.³⁰ As discussed earlier, India was already training Afghan Army and police personnel in small batches since 2003, such trainings were to be stepped up, especially after Pentagon spokesperson had endorsed higher Indian effort. However, when Mr. S. K. Lambah was asked about the prospect of a more proactive Indian military presence in Afghan soil post 2014, he cited the geographical distance between the two countries which might not make that possible, however hinted at stepping up military presence in a different form (i.e., through training and capacity building of security forces).³¹

Drivers to Indian Role

When a suicide bomber struck the Indian Embassy in Kabul in July 2008, not only were more than 40 people killed in one of the deadliest attacks in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban in late 2001,³² but it also challenged the very fundamentals of India’s Afghanistan policy—a policy that many in India see as a test case of India’s rising regional and global prominence.³³ This was repeated again in October 2008 when a suicide bomber attempted another attack on the Indian Embassy compound and subsequent attacks on the Indian Border Road Organisation convoy in Afghanistan’s Nimroz province. These were seen as a reaction to India’s growing influence in Afghanistan.³⁴ Condemning such terrorist activities, Prime Minister Singh said during the visit of the Afghan President Hamid Karzai to New Delhi in 2008, “We have agreed that we will not allow terrorism to stand in our way. We will fight it unitedly and with full determination...and reaffirmed India’s abiding commitment to Afghanistan’s efforts to build a democratic, pluralistic and stable polity.”³⁵ The question that crops up at this juncture is—*which are the factors that are propelling India towards this unusually proactive policy in Afghanistan?*

The post-Taliban Indian engagement with Afghanistan can be said to be prompted by a few specific interests on the part of India. Given that a politically

and economically stable Afghanistan is a strategic priority for India, it maintains that the ongoing effort to help Afghanistan emerge from war, strife and deprivation is its duty as a regional power. Consolidation of the hard-won gains which came India's way after the fall of the Taliban is also a strategic objective for Indian Foreign Policy. India has strong reasons and interests in Afghanistan that it would like to preserve and enhance, and with these visions in mind it has expanded its diplomatic energy in the past decade.

Forestalling Pakistan

To a great extent, India's foremost objective has been to pre-empt the return of Pakistan's embedment in Afghanistan's strategic and political firmament. It is important for India to ensure that Pakistan does not get a foothold in Afghanistan and so, historically, India has attempted to prevent Pakistan from dominating Afghanistan.³⁶ Pakistan, on the other hand, has viewed Afghanistan as a good means of balancing out India's preponderance in South Asia.³⁷ India's success in Afghanistan is said to have driven Pakistan's security establishment into a panic mode with a perception gaining ground that India is taking over Afghanistan. What makes the issue of Indian and Pakistani actions in Afghanistan so thorny is that, to some observers, all three parties have overriding national interests in the situation.³⁸ Barnett Rubin has commented, "Pakistan's military establishment has always approached the various wars in and around Afghanistan as a function of its main institutional and national security interests: first and foremost, balancing India..."³⁹ In order to keep Islamabad in good humour, Washington insisted on New Delhi limiting its role in Afghanistan, having apparently bought the argument that a substantial Indian presence in the country threatened Pakistan and made it difficult for it to cooperate fully with the international community in the fight against Al Qaeda and the Taliban. Under such circumstances, the Indian government's traditional stance has been that while it is happy to help the Afghan government in its reconstruction efforts, it will not be directly engaged in security operations within the country.

While Pakistan along with Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates were the main supporters of the Taliban, India, along with Russia and Iran, threw its weight behind United Front fighters. As a consequence, Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan peaked with the coming to power of the Taliban in 1996. Pakistan has long believed that it can gain "strategic depth" vis-à-vis India by influencing the domestic politics of Afghanistan, something Islamabad felt it achieved during the 1980s and 1990s, it is also keen to prevent its "strategic encirclement"

as a result of close Delhi-Kabul ties.⁴⁰ Pakistan’s frustrations at the loss of political influence after the ouster of the Taliban have been compounded by the welcoming attitude of the Karzai Government towards India. India opened consulates in Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif, Kandahar and Jalalabad in addition to its Embassy in Kabul. The presence of Indians so close to its borders provoked Pakistan’s sensitivities. It has accused India’s Kabul Embassy of spreading anti-Pak propaganda and views the establishment of the consulate as a way for Delhi to improve intelligence gathering against it. Pakistan has seen India’s rapid insertion of material support in Afghanistan as a strategic loss and the rolling back of a decade’s efforts to establish an Islamic alliance between Islamabad and Kabul.⁴¹ Pakistan claims that much of the funding and arms for the Baluch tribal leaders, grouped under the umbrella of Baluchistan Liberation Army, are funnelled through the Indian consulates in Jalalabad and Kandahar.⁴² Barnett Rubin sees Pakistan’s concerns over India’s involvement in Afghanistan as one of its “legitimate interest.”⁴³ Richard Holbrook, President Obama’s special envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, however had clarified at an interview that “there is no evidence at all that Indians are supporting miscreants.”⁴⁴ Some have even equated Holbrook’s statements to an explicit “bail out” of New Delhi by the United States.⁴⁵

Despite his status as a Western ally in the “war on terror,” Musharraf refused to univocally renounce the terrorist option as far as Kashmir and Afghanistan were concerned,⁴⁶ and his successor is yet to give any indication of his intention to change that policy. There has been enough evidence to suggest that militant training camps continue to operate in different parts of Pakistan. Indian National Security Advisor and now the Hon’ble Governor of West Bengal, H. E. M. K. Narayanan, had accused ISI of instigating the July 2008 suicide attack near the Indian Embassy in Kabul.⁴⁷ In 2006, before the Mumbai train blasts, the composite dialogue between Pakistan and India had proceeded relatively smoothly with the Indian side suggesting that the countries should cooperate in helping Afghanistan to settle down. This, according to former Foreign Secretary of Pakistan, evoked an “ephemeral interest” in Islamabad that was soon lost in the downturn of relations.⁴⁸ The 2008 Mumbai terror attacks, and Pakistan’s subsequent response, further established that Pakistani political and military establishments have no interest in disowning terrorism as an instrument of their foreign policy. The recent resurgence of the Taliban and Pakistan’s ambivalent approach towards a growing menace remains a major headache for India.⁴⁹ Turkey’s condemnation of the destabilising role Pakistan’s Intelligence Agency,

the ISI, plays in Kabul at the Istanbul Conference held in 2011, has helped in the development of a general consensus outside Islamabad that Pakistan must refrain from interfering in Afghan politics.⁵⁰ Pakistani policy circles, on the contrary, have tried to establish that Pakistan's interests are best served by a relatively stable and an inclusive government in Kabul that is not hostile towards Pakistan, and realise that persistent instability in Afghanistan will have numerous fall-outs that Pakistan is ill-prepared to tackle.⁵¹ Yet the politico-military establishments there are yet to clear the cobwebs in their minds—in thinking through, and operationalising, a policy of no tolerance towards the jihadis.⁵² The ISI's support for the resurgence of the Taliban is not because they are under the spell of the forces of radical Islam but perhaps because of their entrenched belief that the jihadist movement allows them to exert greater influence on Pakistan's vulnerable western borders.

The strategy of keeping the Kashmir terrorist group active while clamping down on outfits operating in Afghanistan was never going to work, for the simple reason there was no question of those who believed they were fighting a holy war of terror accepting a diktat that they should cross only one national border or fight only one enemy.⁵³ India therefore would be compelled to respond more aggressively if the Islamist forces continued to gain momentum in and around Afghanistan. Evidence is clear now that the terrorists who attacked Mumbai got training in Pakistan and were members of LeT, a militant body that operates from the tribal areas of Pakistan. If Pakistani security establishment had any role to play in it, then it underlines Pakistan's unwillingness to abstain from using terrorism as a tool of state policy, and if these attacks happened without their knowledge, then that signifies their inability to control the groups they created in the first place. India has started demanding a fundamental restructuring of Pakistan's security organisations given their culpability in the mess that is unfolding in Afghanistan and in the continuing menace of terrorism confronting India.⁵⁴ However it is not clear whether it has the capabilities and the willingness to undertake policy that India is demanding in respect to Pakistan. The conclusion of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Trade and Transit Agreement is a major shot in the arm for Islamabad since it explicitly affirms that India will not be allowed to export goods to Afghanistan through the Wagah border.⁵⁵ Pakistan's policy circle in the recent past has been extremely vocal about the fact that Pakistan seeks to downscale Indian presence in Afghanistan to development activities and they perceive American-Afghanistan strategy to be largely inconsistent with Pakistani interest.⁵⁶

Entry Point to Central Asia

Afghanistan is viewed as a gateway to the Central Asian region. Being located in the middle of three super civilisations—the Islamic, the Christian and the Buddhist, this region is seen by many experts as one of the most vulnerable areas of instability.⁵⁷ It can become a natural, historically formed buffer zone as well as form the hub of Islamic extremism. Being placed in the middle of the Eurasian Continent, it is also one of the most convenient routes of transit. It is rich in minerals, especially hydrocarbons. As a consumer market, it still remains to be exploited. All these factors lead to increasing interest in Central Asian Republics (CARs) by various countries.

India as an extended neighbour of CARs has major geostrategic and economic interests in this region. The geopolitical importance of Central Asia has increased in recent years, all of the leading and emerging powers, including India, have got interested in expanding their influence in the region. As indicated by the late J. N. Dixit, “An early solution to Afghanistan crisis is critical for realising the enormous opportunities for energy and economic cooperation in the Eurasian region.”⁵⁸ India shares many of the interests of other major powers like the United States, China and Russia vis-à-vis Central Asia, namely, access to energy resources, controlling the spread of radical Islam, ensuring political stability and strengthening of regional economies. Regional actors view Afghanistan as a potential source of instability even as their geopolitical rivalry remains a major cause of Afghanistan’s troubles.⁵⁹

India was pushed to increase its military profile in Central Asia after the 1999 Indian Airlines hijack by Pakistan-based terrorists. India had to negotiate a deal with the Taliban that involved release of the aircraft along with the passengers in exchange for three hard-line terrorists held by India. After this debacle India decided to set up its first military base abroad in Farkhor in Tajikistan, close to Afghan borders, which was later used to provide assistance to the post Taliban government in Kabul.⁶⁰ India’s base in Ayni in Tajikistan represents a major element in India’s effort to promote stability in Afghanistan and to enhance New Delhi’s ability to contain Islamic terrorism both in South and Central Asia.⁶¹ Based from Tajikistan, India supplied the Northern Alliance (NA) with high-altitude warfare equipment (worth nearly \$8 million), and also dispatched several “defence advisors,” including an army officer of brigadier rank to provide operational guidance to the NA in their anti-Taliban operations. Indian helicopter technicians from India’s Aviation Research Centre (ARC) affiliated with India’s external intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis

Wing (RAW), helped maintain the Soviet made Mi-17 and Mi-35 attack helicopters.⁶² India's interest in the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline was also predicated on stability and security in Afghanistan.

For India Central Asia is crucial in so far as its strategic capabilities vis-à-vis China are concerned and India's aggressive foreign policy in Central Asia is an attempt to outflank Chinese influence in South Asia.⁶³ Some see India's attempt to build roads linking Afghanistan and CAS and Iranian Ports as a response to China's building up of a deep-water port in Gwadar as a gateway to global markets from Central Asian resources.⁶⁴ India has tried to revive the trilateral cooperation with Russia and Iran, hoping to develop a countervailing force to the Pakistan-based Taliban and Pashtun leadership.⁶⁵ This will force some tough diplomatic calls on India as US-Iran ties get tense and competition increases between Russia and United States to increase their influence in the region. At the wake of deteriorating US-Pakistan relations, the US has cut down substantial aid and has also attempted to decrease its near complete logistical dependence on Pakistan by diversifying—a move that has been welcomed by India.

The US unveiled its vision of regional economic integration through this New Silk Road initiative at the Istanbul Conference, 2011. Currently, it suits US interests perfectly if some of the regional countries volunteer to share some of her responsibilities in the country, therefore it pushed for the New Silk Route concept which is an international network of trade, commerce and energy corridors that would link Central and South Asia with Afghanistan at the centre, and might provide significant incentives for the regional players to get on board.⁶⁶ This Conference on the future of Afghanistan, stressed on a vision, where Kabul should be at the crossroads of global commerce rather than global terrorism. Though trade has a great power to transcend barriers, yet it is important to keep in mind that there is hardly any region more complicated than this. At stake are mineral and hydrocarbon resources of Central Asia (and Afghanistan). There are very few exit points and every major power has a different vision about regional economic cooperation.⁶⁷ With uneasy dynamics between countries like Afghanistan-Pakistan, Pakistan-India or even the all-time low equation between Pakistan and the US—how that could possibly materialise is a different question altogether.⁶⁸

Containing Islamist Extremism

Another major interest of India is to make sure that Islamist extremism remains under check in its neighbourhood. Its battle against Islamist extremism is also

closely interlaced with the rise of extremism in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pakistan has long backed separatists in Jammu and Kashmir in the name of self-determination and India has been a major victim of radicalisation of Islamist forces in Kashmir.⁶⁹ Ahmed Rashid has argued that the road to Kabul is partly through Kashmir. The rise of Islamist militancy on both sides of the Durand Line also correlates strongly with the rise of militant capabilities in Kashmir and across the Line of Control. The Islamist militant groups supported by Pakistan, at least its clients such as, inter alia, the Lashkar-e-Taiba and Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, are well-known to contribute training, resource allocation and logistical support with groups operating out of North-West Pakistan.⁷⁰ Thus, as long as central control and legitimacy continues to elude Kabul, the conflagration in Kashmir will have a ready supply of tinder.⁷¹

After the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, a gradual growth in the number of Salafists around the world has been observed. India, with a 170-million strong Muslim populace, provided the required environment to preach and operate a radical version of Islam especially under the condition of rising Hindu nationalism. The Salafist ideology was nurtured in ultra-conservative environments of Saudi Arabia and was exported to the rest of the world ever since the boom in Saudi oil revenues in the 1970s.⁷² A combination of factors in the 1970s made it possible for the Saudis to promote their radical version of Islam around the world. This included the hike in oil prices that provided the resources necessary to penetrate globally, the coming to power in Pakistan of General Zia-ul-Haq, who put his weight behind the Islamist political parties and their madrassas, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, which brought thousands of volunteers into the country to fight the “infidels.”⁷³ It was during this time that the volatility of Kashmir reached its peak, since Pakistan could channel a significant part of the aid which it was receiving to fight the battle in Afghanistan from the United States to Kashmir. By the time the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan, there was an army of young radicals who had been converted to the cause of jihadist movement. An ideology of violence predicated on the distortion of Islamic tenets spread insidiously across the crescent from West Asia through Afghanistan-Pakistan and was remarkably successful in attracting converts.⁷⁴ India has been a major victim of radicalisation of Islamist forces in Kashmir; therefore any breeding ground of radical Islamists under Pakistani protection has a direct bearing on India’s security. It is extremely essential for both India and Afghanistan that the latter should not emerge as a safe haven for terrorism and extremism.

Broadening Regional Influence

A significant factor behind India's proactive Afghanistan Policy has been its attempt to carve out for itself a larger role in regional affairs, keeping parity with its rising economic and military profile. As the world increasingly acknowledges India's rising power status, India is adapting its foreign policy to meet the international challenges of the twenty-first century and to increase its global influence and status. For many years, India took pride in its role as leader of the Non-Aligned Movement and viewed itself as the primary defender of the rights of the less developed countries.⁷⁵ In the past few years, New Delhi has expanded its strategic vision, most noticeably in South Asia, and has broadened the definition of its security interests. By emerging as a major donor in Afghanistan, India is trying to project itself as a significant economic power that provides necessary aid to the weak states in its neighbourhood. The Indo-Afghan Strategic Partnership Agreement signified India's willingness to take responsibility for ensuring stability around the periphery.

Ambassador Jayant Prasad, the erstwhile Indian Ambassador, stated, "You know well, Indian leaders led by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh have a vision of inter-linked destinies in South Asia. The sooner governments of the region realise it, the better it will be for the people of South Asia. Afghanistan is very much part of South Asia as it has become the newest member of SAARC."⁷⁶

Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, indicated similar views at the Washington Foreign Press Centre, "I think that—when I talk about a regional approach, I include Pakistan, Iran as well as India." He also highlighted the Indian role in Afghanistan thus, "So I think the strategic leadership and views, opinions and support provided by India will be very clear. India has taken significant positive steps to invent in Afghanistan—has, for some period of time."⁷⁷ However such sentiments are often contradicted by other American thinkers, for example General McChrystal had serious reservations of the impact of a greater Indian presence in Afghanistan, given Pakistan's antagonism towards it. Such sentiment has been time and again reflected by US leaders both civil and military. However President Obama during his India visit in 2010 recognised India's positive role in Afghanistan. He said: "India's investment in the development of Afghanistan is appreciated...I do think that there are lessons that India has to show to not just countries like Afghanistan but countries in sub-Saharan Africa."⁷⁸

Indian diplomacy faced a major setback at the Afghanistan Conference in London in January 2010 where Indian concerns were purely ignored. In one

stroke, Pakistan rendered New Delhi irrelevant in the evolving security dynamic in Afghanistan. New Delhi seemed completely out of sync with the general mood of the conference and kept on stressing on the folly of making distinction between “good” and “bad” Taliban at a time when the West was interested to know when and how to exit Afghanistan, which was rapidly becoming a quagmire for the leaders in Washington and London. So, instead of devising plans to “win” the war, the conference leaders decided that the time was apt to woo the “moderate” section of the Taliban to share power in Kabul. On the other hand, the Indian diplomatic debacle at the London Conference reportedly forced India to rethink Delhi’s Af-Pak policy.⁷⁹ However after the killing of Osama bin Laden in Pakistani’s heartland, Abbottabad, and the subsequent deterioration of US-Pakistan relations, there has been a significant attitudinal change towards India which is also being asked and encouraged to take a more active role in Afghanistan. Pakistan has reacted to its own embarrassment with a heady cocktail of victimhood, nationalism and anti-Americanism, and has reposed faith in the two aces it has up its sleeves: its nuclear assets and its firm alliance with China.⁸⁰ To preserve its strategic milieu India is likely to step up the training of Afghan forces, coordinate with states like Russia and Iran and most importantly reach out to all sections of Afghan society.

Defining Parameters of India’s Present and the Future Role

India has been involved in a wide array of developmental projects that have widely covered all sectors of economy and Afghan lives. Today India is increasingly looked upon as a friend by young Afghans. In consonance with the priorities put forward by the Karzai Government, Indian assistance has focused on building human capital and physical infrastructure, improving security and helping the country’s economy thereby touching the lives of ordinary Afghans. As a consequence, New Delhi has come to enjoy favourable response from Afghans. According to ABC poll conducted between December 30, 2008 and January 12, 2009 in Afghanistan, 74 percent of Afghans hold favourable opinion towards India, while 8 percent hold favourable opinion towards Pakistan.⁸¹ Be it an Afghan student who is undertaking higher education in an Indian University, or a young girl studying in Kabul University; be it a doctor from Mazar-e-Sharif or a young businessman from Herat or the young group of Afghans in front of the *Afghan Fried Chicken Shop* (*AFC* is the Afghan version of Kentucky Fried Chicken) in Shahr-e-Naw, Kabul, all seemed to be univocal about the positive role played by India in their country. Former Member of Parliament, Mr. Mir

Ahmed Joyenda, said, "Afghanistan has very few genuine friends and India surely tops the list, we are grateful to India for the support it has given us."⁸² Role of India's soft power, especially Bollywood, music and television serials in bringing the common Afghans closer to India, can hardly be exaggerated. Every second song playing on the FM stations in Kabul is a Hindi movie song and the popularity of Indian fashion is evident from the growing demand of Indian attire in the shopping markets in Afghanistan. As one businessman from Gulbahar Centre (Kabul) said, "These days if you go to any wedding ceremony here, you would be surprised to see the number of sari clad women there... people here are extremely fond of things that are 'Indian,' be it people or things of daily use."⁸³ Similar sentiment was reflected by Mr. Shyamlal Bhatija,⁸⁴ Senior Advisor for Economic Affairs to the President of Afghanistan, who acknowledged the constructive role played by India in Afghanistan and was hopeful that the bond between India and Afghanistan would continue and take his country from insecurity to stability and poverty to prosperity. Mr. Janan Mosazai, Spokesperson of Afghanistan Foreign Ministry, said, "Afghanistan has benefited a lot from India's active role in the post 2001 period, especially in terms of human resource development. This will play a key role in transformation of Afghanistan."⁸⁵ Without a shadow of doubt, India is much closer to Afghanistan today, despite hurdles.

India needs to build on the strong approval of Indian presence in Afghanistan by the indigenous population in the country, as denoted by Ambassador Jayant Prasad, who rated it as higher than 90 percent thus: "Over 90 percent of Afghans either approve or strongly approve India's presence in Afghanistan because they believe India is making a contribution to their development. Our relations are with the people of Afghanistan and the government of Afghanistan."⁸⁶ He defined India's role as that of institution-building in Afghanistan. "We are trying to build the capacity of Afghanistan government to develop a credible state system. We are helping Afghans to stand on their feet, whatever we were doing, we will continue to do."⁸⁷ Gundu and Schaffer call it an influence of the country's soft power thus: "India's role in the reconstruction has thus acted as an exertion of its soft power."⁸⁸ India has clearly adopted a long-term approach vis-à-vis Afghanistan, where progress would have to be measured by small steps rather than giant leaps in transformation. India's assistance and activities are supposed to contribute to long-term political, economic, trade, social and military relationship. India has recently expressed interest in the mineral reserves of Afghanistan and has been shortlisted for negotiations of three out of four blocks

at the Hajigak ore deposit in Afghanistan. If this works out, it is likely to add a multi-billion dollar mining project to its existing aid programme, and India will jump into the arena as one of Afghanistan’s main foreign investors. Needless to say that such a huge investment would trigger off a series of activities in order to extract the iron ore and maximise the utilisation of the mining investment.⁸⁹ The Indian group’s bid included an offer to build a power plant and invest \$1 billion on a railroad to export the ore. India has said it is exploring a rail line from Hajigak to the Iranian port of Chahbahar. However the latest turn of events might encourage the authorities in India to rethink about a venture like this.

Resurgence of Taliban: Can India Continue to Protect Its Interest?

As the euphoria generated by the onset of *Operation Enduring Freedom* gradually subsided, the grim reality of the resurgence of the Taliban in Southern and Eastern Afghanistan, FATA of Pakistan, which had virtually become a mini-Taliban state with Pakistan almost losing its control over it, started alarming the world. Though there have been insurgent activities throughout the country, the overall feel was that the major cities in Afghanistan could be kept out of the strongholds of the insurgents. However, that supposition today is very much under question especially after the major Taliban assaults in Kabul and three other provinces in mid-April 2012. That major assault was followed by another set of bombing in the country’s capital, as a response to US President Obama’s visit to the country in early May. Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid also said the attack was in response to Obama’s signing of a strategic pact with President Hamid Karzai’s government.⁹⁰ However, even after these incidents the US had declared that its objectives are on the verge of being achieved and it remains firm on the 2014 deadline of withdrawal. India has tried to convince the international players in favour of a condition-bound withdrawal from Afghanistan as opposed to a time-bound one, which happens to be the popular choice among the major Western powers. Under such circumstances a pertinent question remains: *How far can India protect its interests in Afghanistan?*

Gaurav Shreshth, Development Counsellor, India Mission in Afghanistan, commenting on this, expressed, “Yes, we are keeping a close tab on the unfolding situation in the country, undoubtedly the situation is not too bright, however we are not looking at downscaling our activities in the country.”⁹¹ India has vowed to maintain and expand India’s role in Afghanistan even after the US ends its military presence in Afghanistan by 2014. India’s Afghanistan policy is often viewed from the prism of India’s regional and global rise and therefore has

been perceived as a test case for India's rising ambitions. The present turmoil in Afghanistan is not a good news for India, which views a stable, democratic and prosperous Afghanistan as necessary for its own as well as the region's security. India does not have a choice but to accept the unfolding situation and keep its promise of support to Afghans and Afghanistan in its endeavours. Under the given circumstances, the policy of shift from infrastructure building to service delivery and capacity building appears to be most justified and reasonable. The problems which grip Afghanistan today have a history behind them and were not created in a short span of time. India therefore feels that there can never be a short-cut solution for the problems of Afghanistan. May be decades of commitment and effort by the international community and the people of Afghanistan that will actually bring a sustainable betterment of situation in the country and the world at large.

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5. CONCLUSION

“The international community has failed to get its act together on a clear plan that we pursue through unity and speaking with a single voice. The British think Afghanistan as Helmand, the Canadians think it’s Kandahar, the Dutch think it’s Uruzgan, the Germans think it’s the Panjshir Valley and the US thinks it’s chasing Osama bin Laden.”¹

Eleven years have passed since *Operation Enduring Freedom* was launched and US-led military operations removed the Taliban from Afghanistan and began its journey of helping Afghanistan to transform itself from a “failed state” to a “viable state.” Even after more than decade-long efforts, opinion differs as to whether the mission adopted by the international community is approaching success or tragic failure. In 2006, the annual Failed States Index was published in the influential magazine, *Foreign Policy*.² The countries analysed were divided into three categories namely “critical,” “in danger” and “border line.” Afghanistan found its place in the “critical” category despite years of intervention. While Afghanistan can take some comfort in the fact that it was not rated as poorly as some other troubled countries such as Liberia, Burundi etc., it is evident that the country still faces huge difficulties that make its future trajectory very hard to forecast.

Afghanistan, after decades of turmoil, is a volatile state that has witnessed watershed elections and important infrastructure rebuilding in its post 2001 phase. While much work remains to be done, significant progress has been achieved. Although, a number of disturbing and counterbalancing trends are evident, the actual influence and control of Hamid Karzai extends only weakly beyond the outskirts of Kabul. Ethno-linguistic fragmentation is on a rise, and an increasingly sophisticated Taliban insurgency threatens the stability of the country. Large areas of Afghanistan are still controlled by warlords and drug lords, and this seems to many as the most formidable challenge for the long-term stability of the country. The most alarming of the current trends is the increasing opium production because of which the country is fast approaching the “narco-state” status. The persistence of identity politics in the seemingly new Afghan context is no less a challenge. In spite of everything, it would be erroneous to

imagine that there has not been noteworthy progress in the past few years. The amount of growth and improvement achieved in the spheres of health, education, economy and women’s participation and position, among others, in the last ten years, would not have been possible without the support of international and regional actors. The progress made should not be underestimated considering the country had been ravaged by decades of war, which had left it with deep challenges and vulnerabilities.

Some scholars of Afghan Studies argue that Afghanistan’s transition would not have taken place were it not for the September 11 Al Qaeda attack on USA. The process that was triggered with *Operation Enduring Freedom* and the subsequent Bonn Agreement faced challenges of political, social and economic dimensions. Some of those challenges included the widespread destruction of infrastructure, low social indicators, prevalence of drugs and arms, delicate, uncertain and factionalised politics, legacy of three years’ drought and extremely weak administrative capacity.³ The poor infrastructure of the country, high number of internally displaced persons and refugees in neighbouring countries, the gender inequality—all added to the enormity of the current challenge. The unsettled military and political environment along with competing regional and international interests further threatened to influence the process and outcome.⁴ Amidst these daunting challenges, it is important to underscore the developments made in recent years. The political and democratic infrastructure mandated by the Bonn Agreement has been put in place. In the later part of the decade, the struggle to assert power and define roles within the new political system was found to be energetic. Substantial refugee repatriation (more than 2 million returnees), infrastructure building (school, road, hospitals have been rebuilt), child immunisation and women empowerment programmes have also gained momentum, according to the Asia Foundation Country Report of 2011. There have been significant technological advancements, for example, with internet and telecommunications and improved banking quality and accessibility which is at least benefitting the urban population. Private media, despite criticism about the content, currently is dynamic. Popular programmes of music, drama, sports are being revived.

The Asia Foundation Report suggest that nearly 46 percent of the people interviewed across Afghanistan in 2011,⁵ say that things in the country are slowly moving in the right direction. There has been an 8 percent increase in the ration, from the response of the people in 2010.⁶ However insecurity (including attacks, violence and terrorism) has been identified as the biggest

problem in Afghanistan by over one-third of the respondents (38%) followed by unemployment (cited by 23%). Corruption features third in the list of problems that Afghanistan is facing currently. Poverty (12%), poor economy (10%), lack of education (10%), the presence of the Taliban (8%) and interference of foreign countries (7%) also continue to be identified amongst Afghanistan's biggest problems.⁷ The 2011 survey shows a marked rise since 2010 in the proportion of respondents reporting direct experience of violence or crime, reaching the highest level recorded since 2008. It is in the same year though, for the first time, that reconstruction and rebuilding have been cited as the main reasons for optimism in urban, rather than rural, areas. Until 2011, Taliban insurgency was believed to be primarily restricted to non-urban centres. The latest turn of events in Afghanistan indicate the growing reach of the Taliban in urban centres as well. Kabul, which has largely remained immune from the kind of terror strikes that have hit cities and towns in the south, was minor (when compared to the blitz launched by Hezb-e-Islami between 1992 and 1995). However since the row of Koran that hit the country early in 2012, there have been many blasts and Taliban insurgency in Kabul. The "Spring Offensive," which was a series of coordinated attacks in Kabul, Logar, Paktia and Nagarhar provinces in 2012, followed by car bomb blasts during President Obama's visit to the country, has alarmed people. This escalation of attacks in the capital is likely to have detrimental effects on the political atmosphere.⁸

Today there is an absolute sense of distrust and suspicion among the common Afghans about the US and Western forces, which was absent during the initial days of intervention. When the Taliban were overthrown, there was widespread relief and considerable willingness to work with new authorities. In Northern Afghanistan, particularly, a certain degree of progress was witnessed. By 2006 the situation in Kunar, Ghazni, Paktika, Zabul, Kandahar, Uruzgan etc. provinces indicated a marked deterioration. Ironically these were Pashtun dominated areas, which may have voted for Karzai (a fellow Pashtun), but these areas by the end of the decade had become major areas of threat for the government. Some of the local Afghans interviewed in Kabul expressed that, in 2001, the overall mood among the people was positive and they saw Western intervention as a "opportunity" that would help them and their country to move forward. As days progressed they realised the changes that were being brought were mostly imposed from above and in the process, the nuances of Afghan society, culture and tradition were given less value. As a result the gaps between the aspirations of the common people and the implementers of "change"

increased. A young Kabuli asked: “Did you notice the high walls rather ‘forts’ in which these officials of international agencies live?”... “they are here to improve lives of ordinary Afghans, but how can they know our problems if they don’t come near us?”⁹ The question was pertinent, perhaps as important as the questions about evolving security situation in the country. Shah Mahmood Miakhel, the Country Head, United States Institute of Peace (USIP) identified that “approximately 50 percent of the country’s security goes in protecting the *Very Very Important Persons* (like ministers, M. P.s, warlords etc.) of the country and the remaining 50 percent is insufficient to protect its people.”¹⁰ Security was one of the things that the people of the country thought would improve when the international forces came to Afghanistan in the changed environment. Things however started deteriorating soon after. “We trusted them and hoped that things would change for better...as always we were proved wrong”—was what a senior member of National Security Council of Afghanistan said on condition of anonymity.¹¹ When the international forces intervened in Afghanistan, it was important for them to achieve changes by winning the hearts of the people. As things stand today, they perhaps failed in that.

Current Problems: Internal and External Dimensions

After decades of civil war and conflict, the Afghan people were as receptive as they have ever been to the prospect of the international assistance, support and the idea of effective government. However, at this point and almost inevitably given the overall conduct of intervention, little was done in this regard.¹² First, international community looked for quick fixes in Afghanistan. Hence mistakes were made: firstly, the objectives were short-term; secondly, there was premature announcement that the Taliban was defeated and the war was won in Afghanistan. The international community did not examine very well the complexity and history of the problems in Afghanistan. Then much-needed resources and attention were not provided to Afghanistan by all stakeholders. The Iraq war created a big diversion of attention and resources. The next point was that the military became involved with political, governance and reconstruction activities in Afghanistan while little involvement of the civilian actors was ensured. Finally, the government of Afghanistan was not able to take the lead in aligning international assistance according to the need of the Afghan people.

Another major problem that Afghanistan faces today pertains to its economy. The revenue generated within the country is nothing in comparison to

its requirement. Over the first five years of intervention, Afghanistan required US \$18.865 billion to cover development needs but domestic revenue was anticipated to amount to US \$4.489 billion, not enough even to cover the non-development recurrent costs of US \$5.453 billion. According to a World Bank Report published in November 2011, Afghanistan is likely to suffer a recession in 2014 after foreign troops leave and aid dwindles, and if the security situation gets worse, the country could face complete economic collapse.¹³ The same report suggests the country's near-total dependence on aid—more than 90 percent of the \$17.1 billion national budget comes from foreign donations—puts it in the company of Gaza, the West Bank and Liberia as one of the most aid-reliant places in the world. Most of the Afghan government's revenue is derived from American military and civilian spending. "Transition will have a profound impact on the economy and political landscape well after 2014," said Josie Bassinette, the acting country director for the World Bank, referring to the shift of responsibility for running every aspect of Afghan affairs to the Afghan government. World Bank forecasts a US \$7 billion deficit in the Afghan budget annually through 2021.¹⁴

Regional Meddling: Benefactor or Spoiler

In the previous sections of this study, it has been mentioned how the geographical location of Afghanistan at the crossroads of security networks have further added to the complexities in most cases. Afghanistan is a part of the Asian regional conflict complex which includes the neighbouring countries of Pakistan and Iran and five Central Asian States. All these states have strong transnational linkages with Afghanistan developed during the course of the conflict of the late 1990s, primarily as a result of drug trade.¹⁵ Beyond this core, China, India, the Caucasus and the Middle East, particularly Saudi Arabia, have been significant players. Most of the neighbours of Afghanistan continue to pursue political, economic and other interests in Afghanistan that are antithetical to the consolidation of stability and peace. While efforts have been made to develop "friendly neighbour agreements and practices," significant challenges and contradictions remain. The Pakistan factor is by far the most complex and important one. The insinuation of the Taliban from Pakistan has been a crucial factor (as discussed in Section Two), but poor governance has given them a fertile soil in which to plant their messages. To secure Afghanistan, it is crucial to develop a plan to align neighbouring countries politically and economically.

Closeness of ties that could be achieved in the last decade or so was

practicable because of the changed international outlook and environment after the 9/11 attacks in America. The mission that was initiated with the triggering of *Operation Enduring Freedom* in Afghanistan, provided opportunities to the world to address the “mess” that was created after years of war, destruction and instability in Afghanistan. Because of that unfortunate event of 9/11, a consciousness was generated among the international community and they realised the urgent need to address the situation in Afghanistan, which by then had become an epicentre of terrorist activities. For India, it was a natural choice to be drawn into the collective endeavour as it has been a victim itself. India for one had tried to play a constructive role and avoided a quick fix approach to Afghanistan’s problems and had instead adopted a long-term approach in dealing with the problems of Afghanistan.

Indian endeavours in Afghanistan had a few specific attributes that might be absent in most other donors. Since India itself was a donor recipient country not too long back and still receives aid in a few limited sectors, its experiences are fresh and can therefore be utilised in Afghanistan. There are many similarities between the Indian situation (particularly in the Muslim majority rural India) and that of Afghanistan today. India has been dealing with such issues for years now and is in a position to share its constraints and benefits of its experiences with Afghanistan. In certain cases only minor alterations are needed to make a project suitable for Afghanistan’s context. With skill, development and capacity building being identified as the key areas of priority, the Indian initiatives may lead the way in tackling the massive challenges of institution building in Afghanistan.¹⁶ The Indian initiatives have tried to be in conformity with the local government priorities, and importance has been given to coordination with other donors so that there is no unnecessary replication of projects. Speaking on India’s involvement in Afghanistan, Y. K. Sinha, Joint Secretary (PAI), Ministry of External Affairs, mentioned about the “non-intrusive nature” of India’s Assistance Programme where India does not dictate priorities, does not give unsolicited advice.¹⁷ Efforts have also been given to maximum utilisation of the locally available sub-contractors and materials, as far as possible, and reducing the budget on security and salaries to only a miniscule proportion (unlike the case of other donor agencies/countries where these components constitute as high as 65 to 85 percent of the overall budget).¹⁸

To conclude, India’s role in Afghanistan should not be viewed through the eyes of Western observers who have dubbed it proactive or through the eyes of Pakistanis, who have long resented the increasing Indian influence; rather New

Delhi's involvement should be considered through the eyes of the Afghan people who, arguably, benefited from the use of its neighbour's soft power, whatever be its ultimate motivation. After almost a decade of involvement in Afghanistan, India is increasingly being looked upon as a "friend" of Afghanistan not only by the political authority there but also by the common people. An obvious question that one from South Asian origin encounters in the streets of Kabul is that "Are you Hindustani or Pakistani?" and different reactions can be observed based on the response. If it is the former, the reaction is generally very cordial and there is this instant connect between the two. The common people in Afghanistan are mostly appreciative of India's engagement in Afghanistan and almost unanimously feel that it is one country that is not "exploiting" Afghanistan and is genuinely helping it in its efforts to fight back. Close cultural ties between the two nations, no doubt, has played its role in bringing the two countries together. This would be at the cost of India being perceived as a threat for the separatists in the tribal regions and Baluchistan. It is thus quite understandable that such developments will be under constant attack in order to curtail the increasing Indian influence.¹⁹ The Indian influence could also be perceived as a threat to sever ties between Afghanistan and Pakistan, resulting in serious implications for Pakistan.²⁰ There is a significant anti-Pakistani sentiment in Afghanistan because of the perception of strong Pakistani encumbrance in Afghan domestic politics. In contrast, their posture towards India and Indian initiatives in Afghanistan is reasonably positive in Afghanistan. Therefore it would not be wrong to say that despite the hurdles, India is much closer to Afghanistan today.

The period between Bonn 1 to Bonn 2 has been momentous. The world did change for the better since 9/11 with international community finally realising the importance of looking into the Af-Pak region, where the situation had turned "lamentable" in the post Soviet withdrawal period when the seeds of the current problem were actually planted. It took years for the US to understand what they were up against. Unfortunately, in the crucial last decade neither the international community nor Afghan Government could sufficiently address the fundamental problem—terrorism, which was fundamental to ensuring security and stability in Afghanistan and the region at large. Two most crucial aspects—safe haven for terrorists beyond the Afghanistan border and capacity building of Afghan Army—remained almost unaddressed. International community made futile efforts to make Pakistan cooperate but there has not been much progress. The situation unfolding in the country suggests that Afghanistan is spiralling down the abyss of collapse yet again and the West simply cannot abdicate at a time

when the country is in a mess. International community, after years of effort, has established a regional process that needs to be followed up as Afghanistan needs resources and technical assistance beyond 2014. The recent Taliban attacks in Afghanistan in April indicate that the efforts and investments made for Qatar Process have actually been futile. Unfortunately all that has been achieved in all these years can also turn out to be equally futile if the political scenario goes out of control after 2014. Every step forward has been a result of lots of investment, commitment and hard work, and under no circumstances should they be allowed to go in vain. The commitment of supporting the government in Afghanistan has to be strong and that should not come with any time-line. If only the socio-political and economic structures survive, there would be chances to take the journey forward. India's position on withdrawal is that it should have been condition-bound and not time-bound. India for the first time tried to shed its inward looking strategic insularity by following an ambitious foreign policy agenda towards Afghanistan. Therefore its success, or lack of it, will have serious ramifications for India's stature in the region and international system at large. India has a huge stake in the turn of events in Afghanistan not only until 2014 but beyond, and it will be interesting to watch how the dynamics of the relationship alters with the altering situation.

Today the resurgence of the Taliban happens to be just one of the many formidable challenges to the process that was initiated after 2001. It seems the Afghan government efforts from 2010 to promote a negotiated settlement with the Taliban and Hezb-e-Islami has not been fruitful. The armed conflict remains most acute in the South and South-East, with a marked deterioration in security in the north and even the capital. In the first nine months of 2010 the United Nations documented an increase of more than 10 percent civilian deaths compared to the same period in 2009, largely due to increased insurgent attacks that took the form of drive-by shootings or suicide bombings. In January 2010 it emerged that a law had been quietly brought into effect in late 2009 that provides amnesty to perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity, despite earlier pledges by President Hamid Karzai that the National Stability and Reconciliation law would not be promulgated. After a fraud-ravaged election in September 2010 the country's newly seated Parliament almost ground to a halt in its wrangling over who to elect the speaker. As the system lurches from one crisis to another, many observers have raised concerns that Afghanistan's democratic system is haemorrhaging legitimacy at an unsustainable rate, putting a big “question mark” on one of the fundamental objectives of international

intervention in 2001. The infrastructure building activities started too late and progressed slowly and have mostly been concentrated in the urban centres. Infrastructure building in Afghanistan was never meant to be an easy task considering the challenges the terrain poses. Though the progress that has been made is significant, the task is far from complete. Threats, violence, and intimidation have been regularly used to silence opposition politicians, journalists, and civil society activists, particularly those who speak out on impunity, war crimes, corruption in governmental machinery, powerful local figures and on issues pertaining to women's rights.

Women's rights defenders have been regularly threatened and intimidated in the country. Government failure to bring perpetrators to justice compounds fear among common people. Journalists in the conflict areas face severe pressures. Insurgent groups use arson, kidnapping, and intimidation to try to stop reporting they see as unsympathetic. The condition of women is seriously under threat particularly after the Taliban gained strength. They continued to target schools, particularly for girls. Women in de facto Taliban-controlled areas face "night letters"—threatening missives often delivered at night—and death threats by phone. In recent years several high profile women have been assassinated; their killers have not faced justice. While men in Taliban-controlled areas are also threatened and attacked, there is an additional gender-related dimension to the pressures on women connected to the Taliban's interpretation of Sharia law, which is used to justify harsh punishments for women seen to be mixing with men outside their immediate families. Under these circumstances, running away from these harsh realities is the last thing the international community can afford to do. Afghanistan's enduring chaos was not created in a few years, and decades of assistance and support will be required to bring it out of the state it is in now. Afghanistan was once described as a "bleeding wound," hence, it should be remembered by all parties involved in this power game within and outside Afghanistan that if a wound is not treated, it becomes infected and infectious.²¹ It is very important for the world at large to match rhetoric with commitment; if Afghanistan descends into enduring "chaos," it would speak less about Afghans and more about the international community.

Notes

1. Paddy Ashdown letter to Special US Envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Richard Holbrook, *The Times*, February 3, 2009.
2. "The Failed States Index," *Foreign Policy*, May-June 2006, pp. 50-58.

3. Arpita Basu Roy, *Contemporary Afghanistan, Conflict and Peace Building* (New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 2010).
4. Ibid.
5. “A Survey of the Afghan People in 2011,” *The Asia Foundation Report*, Kabul, Afghanistan, 2011.
6. “A Survey of the Afghan People in 2010,” *The Asia Foundation Report*, Kabul, Afghanistan, 2010.
7. “A Survey of the Afghan People in 2011,” *The Asia Foundation Report*, Kabul, Afghanistan, 2011.
8. “Taliban Strike Across Afghanistan in ‘Spring Offensive.’” *BBC News Asia*, April 16, 2012. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-17719956>.
9. Interview was conducted with Abdullah Safi in Kabul, Afghanistan on April 6, 2012.
10. Interview with Mr. Shah Mahmood Miakhel, Country Head USIP, Afghanistan was conducted by the author in Kabul on April 4, 2012.
11. Interview with the Hon’ble Member of National Security Council of Afghanistan was conducted by the author in Kabul, Afghanistan, April 5, 2012.
12. Tim Bird & Alex Marshall, op. cit.
- 130 “World Bank Issues Alert on Afghan Economy,” *The New York Times*, November 22, 2011.
14. Ibid.
15. Arpita Basu Roy, op. cit.
16. Mondira Dutta, op. cit.
17. Y. K. Sinha, Joint Secretary (PAI), Ministry of External Affairs, was the Keynote Speaker at the International Conference, “Bonn 1 to Bonn 1: Debating Afghanistan’s Political Future,” organised by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies on February 8-9, New Delhi 2012.
18. Mondira Dutta, op. cit.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Arpita Basu Roy, *Contemporary Afghanistan: Conflict and Peace-building* (New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 2010).

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(Snapshots-Afghanistan)



Dar-ul-Aman Palace in Kabul



Life Goes On...Kabul City (2012)



Kabul University, Afghanistan



Kabul University Campus



The new Parliament Building in Afghanistan is being constructed by Government of India



A road in Kabul City, named after former Indian Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi



Indian Officials sharing best practices of Distance Learning with Afghan Counterparts at a Workshop at Serena Hotel, Kabul, April 2012



Afghan girls receiving livelihood training from Indian NGO SEWA at Bagh-e-Zanana, Kabul



Habibia High School Building has been renovated and reconstructed by Indian Government



Habibia High School was jointly inaugurated by Indian Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh and President of Afghanistan, Mr. Hamid Karzai in 2005



Indian Films, Music are extremely popular in Afghanistan. A road-side video parlour selling Indian film DVDs, in Kabul



Indian Films are being shown at Cinema Park, Kabul



Kabul City



One of the compounds of International Security Forces in Kabul



One of the many houses in Kabul city reflecting the insecurities of its residents



Bullet-ridden Shah Jahan Mosque at Bagh-e-Babur, Afghanistan



Afghan girls going to school in Kabul



Kids playing in the streets of Kabul

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