

Afghanistan Imbroglio

An Appraisal

Evidently, the Afghanistan imbroglio is far from being settled down. Obama's announcement of withdrawal plan; the initiative of London Conference that gave Kabul a green signal to carry out negotiations with the fighting groups; bilateral and multilateral initiatives, involving scores of countries having stakes in Afghanistan, for finding a workable solution to Afghan crisis; the surge in coalition troops and active military campaign for subduing the resistance movement; the diverging approaches of regional countries and their struggle of vying with others for achieving their own 'national interests' in Afghanistan; and rising confusion among the coalition forces led by the United States and even among different departments of US administration and establishment, have made the whole issue rather complex. After the dramatic shift in the US Congress and Senate following the 2010 midterm elections and the review of NATO's Afghan policy in Lisbon Conference, the coalition strategy in Afghanistan seems to be garbing even more doubts and uncertainties.

Considering the imminent implications of any future dispensation in Afghanistan for the region and the world at large, it is pertinent to analyze the positions, policies, roles, interests and objectives of different forces active in the situation of Afghanistan, the current and probable future scenario, and options and choices available to different stakeholders in the war-torn country. A few important themes to analyze are: the current US-NATO objectives in Afghanistan; their short-term and long-term strategies; Pak-India endeavors; regional and global politics; and the current status of resistance movement.

To analyze and understand these critical factors, interviews with eminent scholars, foreign policy experts, and political thinkers were conducted to bring out analyses that could provide the policy makers and individuals at the helm of affairs with different perspectives and relevant input for future strategies regarding the issue at hand.

Foreign Interests in Afghanistan

*Günter Knabe**

Just to recall why and how it all started, it was on Oct. 7, 2001 that the first bombs were dropped by US planes in Afghanistan, supporting mainly the anti-Taliban Tajik Northern Alliance. With this part of 'Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)' in retaliation for 9/11, the Americans, together with their NATO allies, wanted to get Osama bin Laden "dead or alive" as President George W. Bush demanded, to wipe out Al Qaeda, and to defeat the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Two months later, Mullah Omar and his men lost their stronghold Kandahar and finally Kabul. Parallel to the fighting, an international conference on Afghanistan, commonly known as Bonn Conference, at Petersberg (close to Bonn/Germany) outlined the country's political future. As a result, a provisional government under Hamid Karzai was installed on Dec. 22, 2001. One aim of OEF had been achieved: victory over the Taliban in Afghanistan. However, Osama bin Laden slipped away reportedly into the Tribal Areas on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border and vanished into

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the 'unknown', up to now while the Taliban had not been defeated forever, as the world came to realize later.

One other major aim of the United States concerning Afghanistan was not even mentioned any more: opening Afghanistan as a gateway to the enormous gas resources in Turkmenistan, though US companies had dealt with the Taliban leadership about construction of a pipeline through Western Afghanistan until summer 2001.

As early as Dec. 21, 2001, the stationing of foreign troops in Afghanistan was put on a much broader legal base by UN Security Council Resolution 1386, mandating an International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to support the newly established Karzai government. The aims and objectives of foreign, predominantly Western, engagement in Afghanistan beyond the on-going military OEF actions and ISAF activities instantly became much broader, larger and bigger: introducing (Western style) democracy based on a new constitution, parliamentary elections, reforming and or re-establishing the administration, judiciary, police and armed forces, education, health etc. and of course economic reconstruction.

It sounded more like creating a completely new more or less Westernized Afghanistan, including women's emancipation. The latter, a highly sensitive issue, was asking particularly for trouble in a tribal society with customs and laws based on Pushtoonwali—the code of life followed by Pushtoon people. The Germans put the liberalization of women and schools for girls to the forefront of Germany's substantial development aid for Afghanistan.

Strangely enough, the very serious problem of poppy growing, drug production and trafficking was left rather un-tackled. Now, after ten years of battles and fights, with 150,000 foreign soldiers stationed on Afghan soil, so many Afghan civilians and soldiers, foreign troops and Taliban killed, billions of Dollars and Euros spent or wasted through corruption, what did the US, NATO, and the European countries achieve in Afghanistan? What are they aiming at in the present situation? What are they striving for in future? What does all that mean for two other big players in world politics and in the region: Russia and China?

The grand scheme of creating a new Afghanistan has shrunk to a miniature issue and the big aims and objectives have been scaled down considerably for the time being. If they are ever to be reached in Afghanistan at all, it will take much more time than the Western politicians and military thought in the beginning. At least they have learned this.

President Obama stated publicly in July 2009 that victory was not the necessary goal for the United States in Afghanistan. In October 2010, Richard Holbrooke, the then US Special Envoy to Pakistan and Afghanistan, said very clearly in a CNN Interview: "We are not trying to win this war militarily...Military victory is not possible." Since then, NATO, governments and military of all countries that contributed soldiers to ISAF are occupied with one aim regarding their Afghanistan engagement: Exit.

They are searching for and working on face-saving strategies to withdraw their contingents as soon as possible. NATO's future hinges on how the war in Afghanistan will end. They seem convinced of the simple logic: if you can't defeat the enemy, you need to talk to with them. This is exactly what Hamid Karzai has been trying for quite some time. He got green light for these steps from NATO, but the question arises: why should the Taliban talk about any political solution or compromise 'now' that their foreign foes announced that they will eventually leave?

ISAF-Commander in Chief, General David Petraeus, wants to shatter this attitude. His strategy is to weaken the enemy thoroughly before any talks and for this reason, he asked President Obama for 30,000 more troops. This surge looks like a copy of the General's strategy in Iraq, but Afghanistan is different from Iraq and not a copy of that country at all. General Petraeus did agree in an interview with "Sueddeutsche Zeitung" of Germany that military actions are necessary but not sufficient and that politics must go along with them.

The General is well aware that ultimately it is not the military but the politicians and parliaments in Washington and elsewhere who would decide about how to proceed in Afghanistan. The politicians in Western countries take other aspects into their account as well than just the military necessities. They want to be elected and therefore have to listen to their people. The war in Afghanistan is growingly unpopular in the USA. In Germany too, a majority of the people (60-70 %) is against the military engagement of the Bundeswehr (German Federal Defense Force) in Afghanistan. This is precisely why the dates of elections (presidential in US and parliamentary in Germany) will have a decisive impact upon the dates of any recalling of troops from Afghanistan, not the real military or political situation there or any backlash or success of ISAF.

In Germany, 2011 is the year of elections of "Laender-Parlamente" (state-parliaments). There are reasons enough for the government in Berlin to announce that German Bundeswehr will begin to withdraw by end of this year. President Obama is talking about a similar schedule—starting withdrawal in the summer of 2011 and finishing it in 2014—as polls in USA show how unpopular the war in Afghanistan is among Americans. The huge amounts of money spent on it are an extra heavy burden to be carried by the American taxpayers in a time when money is bitterly scarce. That is another reason to get rid of this war in Asia.

The traditional bonds between the British and the Americans are still strong enough that UK's ISAF-contingent is the second largest with roughly 10,000 troops (followed by Germany with 4,500 soldiers plus 850 reserve). Great Britain's solidarity out of tradition as well as the solidarity of NATO countries is an asset for Washington, even if some of them may have been squeezed into that solidarity.

It is an essential part of ISAF's exit strategy that the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan Police are to be trained and equipped in such numbers and to such an extent that they can take over security step by step from the foreigners (150,000 soldiers and 120,000 police presently).

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When completed, ANA will number 260,000 men, according to plans. That looks good on paper and sounds good in public in USA and European countries, but what about the level of training given that 65% (officers) – 90% (ordinary men) of the police are illiterate? What about loyalty of ANA soldiers and the police, once the ISAF has gone, in a society like the Afghan where loyalty belongs primarily to one's family, clan and tribe, and then maybe to a government?

A great impediment to any positive development is mentioned again and again: the immense level of corruption which is spread throughout the country and in all governmental and other official institutions and private companies. President Karzai was urged by the international community to diminish it, seemingly to no avail yet. Hamid Karzai in some of his recent statements about NATO and US forces in Afghanistan sounded more like 'Ami – go home', but keep sending me money.

Talking about military exit, the coalition partners are reassuring the Afghan people that they will not leave them alone afterwards and that they will continue and strengthen their assistance to reconstruct Afghanistan. Germans have generally been considered as friends by the Afghans: this is not totally forgotten on either side. German government has pledged 430 million Euros civilian aid yearly from 2010 to 2013 for reconstruction. The number of aid personnel will be doubled to 2500 persons. Washington is obviously eager to stay in Afghanistan after 2014. The huge new building of the American embassy in Kabul is reflective of this very aspiration. Most Afghans and their neighbors in the region may also have second thoughts about America's strong commitment and its desire to keep a limited number of military personnel in Afghanistan even after the war. Such a base close to Iran, in neighborhood of the warily observed ally, Pakistan, and straddled right on the road to Central Asia with its vast resources would be of great strategic advantages.

Afghanistan is a gateway to the Silk Route of present times, promising fat bounty. The Americans want to keep open that gateway for them. The pipeline scheme is still ready in the drawers of US's oil and gas companies. That opens another scenario: If, some time from now, the Taliban become part of a future Afghan government or even finally govern the country alone; if they rule more moderately than first time, and if they are confined to Afghanistan, who guarantees that American oil and gas entrepreneurs would not deal with them again? That would be 'back to square one' in the 'Great Game' in Central Asia.

However, the "ifs" are very crucial. Two other big players in that game—Russia and China—will act anyway, possibly to prevent a permanent US and NATO presence in their neighborhood.

China's priority seems to be further economic expansion. It is looking for raw material and energy resources. Therefore, it will avoid any armed conflict and will favor a stable neighborhood. Parallel to its growing economic power, Beijing is getting stronger militarily and politically. Nevertheless, it is not involved in the war in Afghanistan at all. Verily, it is suspicious of the Muslim extremists there because of the unrest among the

Muslim population in its Western province Xinjiang, and it is afraid that the extremists in Afghanistan might instigate or encourage the Muslim resistance within its own borders or provide training for guerilla fighters.

However, with its typical pragmatic policy, China has left the fighting against the extremists in Afghanistan to ISAF and the Afghans themselves. It, instead, acquired from the Karzai government the world's second largest yet to be explored copper mine, which is located West of Kabul. The Chinese are developing it now, protected by NATO and Afghan forces. Due to the long standing friendly and close relations between Beijing and Islamabad, the Chinese may consider Pakistan as a cordon sanitaire between them and Afghanistan.

For actions against terrorism or Muslim extremists (often only allegedly) as well as for fighting drugs, there is another mechanism at China's disposal: The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), in which Afghanistan has now got the observer status. Moreover SCO is quite undisguisedly opposing military presence of the USA in Central Asia or any kind of permanent American political influence over the region. This was stated back in 2006 jointly by both leading members of the Organization, China and Russia. It is not to forget that both the countries are rather often competing with each other within SCO regarding influence, resources and security in Central Asia.

Probably one of the reasons of this rivalry is Russia's phantom pain caused by 'the Empire lost' in Central Asia. Moscow considers the former Central Asian Soviet Republics as an area of its special interest. Indeed, they have many things in common: Russian as lingua franca (still), decades of history, and joint experiences in various forms—education and training of generations. On the other hand, the young Central Asian Republics (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan) are eagerly guarding their newly won independence, balancing relations and cooperation carefully with Russia and China and, in several instances, with Washington and EU countries.

Afghanistan is a trouble-spot for all them. It causes direct threats and dangers for bordering Uzbekistan and Tajikistan through terrorism and drug-trafficking. Both countries and Russia have these problems in common. Moscow is afraid that extremism in the name of Islam could spill over from Afghanistan into its own territory and is suspicious of alleged connections between Taliban and Chechens.

Russian people are also suffering immensely from the drug smuggled from Afghanistan. The bulk of heroin is consumed in Russia; the other portion goes on to west European countries. Two million Russians are addicted to opium and heroin. Every year around 30,000 of them are dying from heroin. This is why Kremlin has been urging NATO and ISAF for a long time to act seriously and effectively against poppy-growing and drug-trafficking in Afghanistan, apparently to no avail. A joint NATO-Russian raid near the Pakistani border in October 2010 resulted in destruction of heroin that Russia said was worth 250 million dollars, a move criticized by Karzai for having not been informed. According to Victor Ivanov, Chairman of the

Russian State Anti-Narcotics Committee, 200 Afghans were trained by his organization as counternarcotics agents.

A stable state of Afghanistan, preferably an independent and a neutral one, without extremists and terrorists and with no poppy-growing on its soil, is of vital interest for Moscow and there are reasons enough for Putin and Medvedev to support ISAF-operations in Afghanistan on a limited scale by providing transit routes for NATO's non-military goods.

The Russians know very well that pacifying Afghanistan is something like a 'mission impossible'. After all, they encountered them under various circumstances from the Tsarist era on to the invasion and occupation of the country in the time of Soviet Union (1979-89). With regard to politics, strategy, economy and global rivalry, Afghanistan is as important for Russia today as ever before. It is maneuvering to get a foothold again at the Hindukush.

Consequently, Moscow is courting Hamid Karzai. During his visit, second in six months, to Kremlin in January 2011, he was offered help with reconstruction and all the experience and knowledge Russian technicians and engineers gained in civil projects that were started during Soviet times in the early sixties. As to the costs of such projects, which are not yet calculated, the Russians shrewdly set the condition that the 'international community' pays for it.

The trip to Moscow was only one of Hamid Karzai's many travels and meetings to foster old connections and establish new ones with the obvious purpose to secure his own position for an eventual lack of the ISAF shield. Karzai's future aside, there is probably a long time of darkness, war and bloodshed, misery and hardship for his countrymen ahead.

Pakistan's stakes and the importance of the role it can play in Afghanistan can not be over-emphasized. Having wide ranging linkages and interests of its own, Pakistan can contribute more than all other neighbors of Afghanistan. However, as the Pakistani people have themselves suffered heavily from the lingering conflict next door in Afghanistan, that is a very heavy burden Pakistan has to carry. In this scenario, it would be a daunting test of Pakistan's leadership as to how it addresses its own stakes and the concerns of international community.

US-NATO Engagement in Afghanistan and Pakistan's Role as non-NATO Ally

*Tariq Fatemi**

US invasion of Afghanistan took place in very peculiar circumstances. Afghanistan was punished for the actions of the people who had nothing to do with that country. In fact, not a single one of the alleged perpetrators of the 9/11 crime could be associated with it. Nevertheless, a new administration had come to power in the US which believed very strongly in

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American right to determine what was good or bad, not only for itself but for the rest of the world as well. The Bush administration's philosophical underpinning was derived from Zionist and Christian rightists, who believed that it was the manifest destiny of the US to recast the globe in a manner that would preserve American interests. The 9/11 was a horrible tragedy that deservedly was condemned by all, but it was eagerly accepted by important elements in the Bush administration as well as by extremist Christians and Jews, as an opportunity to promote the agenda that had already been prepared and adopted by them even before the administration had stepped into the White House. Therefore, it was not purely an invasion that resulted from the desire of the US to seek revenge from a country which the popular American imagination came to associate with terrorism, but also as a stepping stone in America's desire to dominate the globe.

All the subsequent speeches, statements, policy pronouncements, even US global strategy reflect the fulfillment of that political philosophy, which was based on contempt and was distinct from the views of the international community. It was self-righteousness, disregarding completely the international organizations, primarily the UN, and a declaration to the world that they would have to choose either to be with the US or if any country fails to comply, it would be taken as evidence of its opposition, even enmity, to the only superpower. So, 'you are with us or against us' was actually an ultimatum to the international community to lay itself up along with the US and whatever it wished to do. Because of the horror of the 9/11 and the perception that Afghanistan was the refuge for the perpetrators and master mind of the event, Afghanistan came to become the target.

Afghanistan was invaded also in the expectation that it would be a very simple, cost free demonstration of US supremacy. Afghan history, traditions, culture, beliefs, ethnic composition were all set aside in firm belief that American military superiority, coupled with the superiority of its world view, would be so overwhelming that the Afghans would initially be taken over and then willingly accept America as a benefactor and a well-wisher.

After a decade of war and violence, the American occupation of Afghanistan has become longer than that of the USSR. The USSR casualties were high as compared to those of the United States, but the money that America has poured down in the hills of Afghanistan has been enormous and certainly, combined with the enormous money spent on Iraq, it is adversely impacting American economy. Yet, the most disturbing part is that even after these many years of occupation and the support of a large number of countries, primarily from Europe, the American presence in Afghanistan has neither been successful nor is any success in sight. This is precisely because the occupation of Afghanistan is becoming extremely unpopular, both in the US and EU. In latter, the political and public pressure regarding occupation is even more intense than in the former, but the extension of July 2011 dateline to 2014 at the recently held NATO summit in November, has demonstrated that how the powerful lobbies in America influence the decision making process even of powerful Western European States.

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It also shows that NATO is nothing more than an instrument of American foreign policy: it is meaningless without the US. In fact, NATO was created by the US in the aftermath of the Second World War primarily for two purposes: to deter USSR from expanding its influence in western Europe, and to keep the US domination on the Western Europe through the instrument of a military alliance. This is why after the collapse of the USSR, many Europeans were of the view that NATO was now irrelevant because there was no longer a threat to the Eastern Europe. The USSR had disintegrated, Eastern and Central Europe had regained freedom, and the boundaries, in fact, had been pushed back into Russia. Still, the American administration did not agree to this proposal. It rather took specific measures to expand and enhance NATO presence and influence in Eastern and Central Europe, much against the wishes of Russia. Resultantly, all the countries on the border of Russia are members of NATO at present. Going beyond Western Europe into central and Eastern Europe is one thing; it is even becoming a global force to promote American interests, which explains why NATO is so active in Afghanistan and present in Pakistan as well. This military alliance would do exactly what the US wants.

And, what the US actually wants is quite vague because of the push and pull of strong lobbies in the country including the defense lobby, the intelligence community, and the security oriented think tanks. Therefore, even an extremely intelligent president of the US, Barack Obama, does not enjoy absolute freedom to do what he wishes to do. As a politician, he has to consider the fact that the Republicans are already extremely critical of him. Having faced the consequences in the midterm polls, he cannot provide the Republicans with the pretext of accusing him of being soft on national security issues. In America, this is the worst crime and strategic blunder that a politician can commit. When it comes to politicians, they all want to outbid each other in proclaiming a very robust, assertive, even aggressive posture on international issues.

Pakistan's Domestic Politics and Afghan War

How Pakistan bogged down in the unnatural and unpopular war in Afghanistan is a story of sad occurrences. When 9/11 took place, the country had a military dictator in power, a person who had absolutely no understanding of the delicacies of foreign policy. He was leading in his own world, convinced of his own intelligence, and totally oblivious of what was good or bad for the country. Also, being a military dictator, he neither had the requirement nor the inclination to discuss or consult with his military colleagues, the political allies or even media persons and intellectuals. More so because being an illegitimate ruler, attaining the legitimacy from the US was his most cherished goal. Therefore, without considering in detail the pros and cons of Pakistan's support and cooperation with the US in its design in Afghanistan and the region, and without taking into account the terms and conditions, he offered the country's services generously.

Pakistan is now paying the price of the self-committed crimes of that time. The American occupation of Afghanistan just like the USSR occupation of it has had a deep impact on Pakistan, albeit with a major qualitative difference: the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan was opposed not only by

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the people and government of Pakistan alike but virtually by the international community in general. Pakistan's offer to accept the Afghan refugees was lauded and praised by the world. Even so, the international community encouraged Pakistan to provide the facility to the resistance fighters, who came to be known as the *Mujahideen*, to use Pakistan for training purposes and other related requirements. So Pakistan's role both uplifted the nation and brought Pakistan to the world stage as a country that was willing to shoulder huge responsibility, lay sacrifice many of its own interests and uphold the cause of freedom and independence of a fellow Muslim country that also happen to be its neighbor.

However, in case of the US occupation of Afghanistan majority of the people of Pakistan and major political parties do not condone country's support to occupiers of the present times. The people are convinced that their government has decided to side with the aggressor either for the purpose of receiving money or under duress from the United State. More importantly, it has created a tremendous backlash in the country, as more and more Pakistanis are convinced that Pakistan's support for the American occupation is primarily responsible for the growth of the militancy and extremism in Pakistan.

On the one hand, Pakistan is a frontline state in the global war on terror and a non-NATO ally, but on the other hand, its major ally, the US, believes that it has been playing a double game, showing a clear lack of confidence. The people of Pakistan think that the government is also engaged in this game with the US which is costing the people of Pakistan a great deal. Even though this is an elected government, it has come about as a result of a political negotiation between Musharraf and his successor which was in fact brokered by the US. Hence, there is no change whatsoever in the government's policy. The recent disclosures of American documents confirm that both the president and prime minister are willing to accept the drone attacks and other American efforts which amount to severe encroachments on Pakistan's sovereignty.

The lesson that all the countries caught up in Afghanistan need to learn from their current adventure is that military occupation is no longer sustainable. The resistance will get stronger whether the coalition forces stayed there for another fifteen years. Afghans history, culture and traditions suggest that they do not permit outsiders to come and occupy their land. So, the US and coalition partners should sit back and actually do a bit of soul searching and reach decisions that may be unpopular but are, nevertheless, essential. President Obama will have to convince his administration, American Congress and his supporters that the US has to take the hard decision of withdrawal. A broad-based government is needed in Afghanistan that includes all the ethnic groups and political parties. America, thereafter, needs to offer a massive economic assistance for the economic growth and development of the country, and use its influence to bring all the stakeholders in Afghan peace and stability to consensus, so that an international agreement can be reached either through an international conference or through the mechanism of the UN. Such an agreement should guarantee Afghan independence and clip the interference of any external player in the country's internal affairs.

Considering the historical relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan, the former can help the international community a lot in this particular enterprise. It is in Pakistan's interest to have a peaceful and stable neighbor as its own economic growth will remain deeply impacted and all opportunities of investment, trade, economic ties and energy pipelines from central Asia will remain unfulfilled, unless peace is restored in Afghanistan. There is no other country that would gain more from the restoration of peace and stability in Afghanistan than Pakistan. Hence, Islamabad's efforts should lead to urge the US to work on a strategy that would create an independent, neutral and sovereign Afghanistan.

US-NATO Strategic Gambits and Implications for Pakistan

*Aisha Ahmad**

Withdraw or not to withdraw?

After nearly a decade of political and military engagement, hundreds of billions of dollars in expenditure, and the loss of tens of thousands of lives, the United States and its NATO partners are ready to conclude their nation-building adventure in Afghanistan. As the cost of fighting continues to drain the coffers of an already stressed US economy, war weariness and frustration have shifted American public sentiment about the mission in Afghanistan. Relations between the US and the Afghan government have soured, as the Afghan President, Hamid Karzai, continues to grapple with damning corruption allegations and a serious crisis in leadership legitimacy. It is becoming painfully apparent that the international community has invested billions of dollars into creating a corrupt, mafia-like government, which it can no longer effectively control or reign in. The majority of Americans now feel that the war in Afghanistan is a futile effort.

Faced with these realities, the policy discourse has quickly shifted to reframing the Afghan mission to "transition to Afghan rule", and devising an exit strategy. But the fact of the matter is that despite desperately wanting to get out of Afghanistan, there is no consensus among analysts or decision-makers on *how* to leave. The recent NATO Lisbon Conference has set a target date of 2014 for the complete withdrawal of foreign forces, while the US plans to reduce its forces beginning in just a few short months.

With building the momentum for troop withdrawal, the US has struggled to find a set of objectives that are achievable within this relatively short timeframe. In a striking change of tone, the idea of a negotiated settlement with the Taliban has gone from taboo to mainstream.

Importantly, American foreign policy is not made by a single mind, and should not necessarily be interpreted as a coherent rational calculation of state interest. Rather, it is determined by the push and pull of many interests within a large bureaucratic machine, which is well known for being slow to change course and wrought with contradictory objectives. Foreign

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policy decisions are the product of reconciling disparate ideas and institutions, multiple and competing foreign and domestic policy priorities, and a gamut of misinformation, confusion, and bias.

As the new Congress prepares to take control of the House of Representatives, there is concern that a stronger Republican presence in government may delay or frustrate the process of troop withdrawal, thus prolonging the US commitment. However, even with a noisier and more bellicose House, it is highly unlikely that Afghanistan will remain a priority for longer than the scheduled US and NATO withdrawal dates. The Afghan war has surpassed Vietnam as the longest war in US history, and the conflict has no foreseeable conclusion in the near future. Partisanship is also more likely to result in policy stalemate rather than in decisive action, as decision-makers get bogged down in the debate and the filibuster. Regardless of this partisan bickering, the US priority over the next four years will be to withdraw troops, cut a deal, and find a way to appear triumphant.

Under no circumstances is the US willing to admit military defeat; however, the current discourse suggests that Democrats and Republicans alike are actively searching for a new definition of "victory". The necessity to save face has challenged decision-makers to reframe the mission on less challenging terms, so that the Americans don't appear to be withdrawing under duress. More modest objectives – goals that can be achieved within a 2-4 year timeline – are now under consideration.

Despite this shortened timeframe, international security and counter-terrorism remain a top priority in the US. President Barack Obama has recently re-focused the war effort on disrupting and destroying terrorist networks in the mountainous region at the Pak-Afghan border, which are suspected to provide a safe haven for transnational terrorists that pose a threat to the international community. These are the security concerns that the US cannot effectively ignore, despite the calls for withdrawal.

Nonetheless, the US government is becoming increasingly aware that securing these ungoverned spaces from transnational terrorists will require a negotiated peace settlement with local Taliban groups. However, due to the Taliban's ongoing success on the battlefield, the US has perceived its current bargaining position in a prospective settlement to be relatively weak.

Implications for Pakistan

The recent surge, the targeted assassinations of Taliban leaders using unmanned predator drones, and the pressure on Pakistan to engage in direct military action against local insurgents in FATA are all designed to reduce Taliban's bargaining position in future peace talks. The goal of these actions is to beat Taliban into compromise and undermine their relationship with Pakistan in a future political arrangement. If these strategies are successful, Pakistan will lose its credibility with the Taliban, and the Taliban will have less negotiating power vis-à-vis the Afghan government. Without

a sponsor state or ally, the Taliban will have far less bargaining power in a potential settlement. Pakistan, too, would have fewer cards at the table.

Pakistan's inclination to move against the Haqqani network in North Waziristan is the latest in a series of military engagements against FATA-based insurgents, each of which has stretched Pakistan Army and threatened the country with protracted civil war. This new phase of military intervention threatens to push Pakistan to the brink, and it fails to resolve the deep and lasting security problems in Afghanistan, which will linger on long after the American withdrawal. Most significantly, if Pakistan agrees to wage another war in FATA, it must be prepared to deal with the consequences of these choices in the future negotiation process.

The political future of Afghanistan remains highly uncertain, and the choices Pakistan makes will have a decisive impact on the outcome. If Pakistan acquiesces to American pressure and engages in a military offensive in North Waziristan, it risks triggering a much more enduring civil conflict, which could plague the region for decades after the US troop withdrawal is complete. The US foreign policy apparatus has demonstrated that it is neither equipped nor qualified to responsibly determine the future of Afghanistan and its neighbors. If Pakistan becomes embroiled in a new civil war in the FATA, it will not only risk losing its hand in the forthcoming negotiated process, but it also gambles with its very survival. However, if the Pakistani Army and intelligence community can draw upon its diplomatic talents, rather than just brute military force, it has the opportunity to take a lead role in a meaningful peace settlement, which is considerate of the long-term security of Afghanistan and the region as a whole.

Indo-Pak Controversy in Afghanistan

*Pervez Iqbal Cheema**

Although Indian presence in Afghanistan is not new, it is playing a rather active role there for the last few years. Besides an embassy, there are four Indian consulates two of which are near Pakistani border—in Jalalabad and Qandahar. It is feared that Pakistan's arch-rival, India, can easily monitor its infamous intelligence agency Research and Analysis Wing's (RAW) illegal activities in Pakistan from these consulates. Indians are aware that the US would eventually have to pull out its forces from Afghanistan. Keeping this scenario in view, it has adopted the policy of influencing public opinion of Afghanistan in the presence of coalition forces through investing a great deal in public sector, such as building schools, colleges and universities. Around 1000 Indian soldiers are present in Afghanistan under the pretext that their presence is necessary to defend Indian workers from Taliban attacks. It is also trying to strengthen its presence in Afghanistan through trade of one billion dollars. Moreover, Indian military is training Afghan Army and Police. If Indian trained Afghan Army equipped with the US weapons operates in Afghanistan, it will certainly create a strategic anxiety

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for Pakistan. For long, India has been projecting the notion that Pakistan seeks strategic depth in Afghanistan. In this context, Indian endeavor towards expanding and consolidating its influence in Afghan areas reflects its policy of denying Pakistan any leverage there and sandwiching it between Eastern and Western neighbors.

To counter these schemes of India, Pakistan needs to take proactive measures for safeguarding its own national interests, particularly consolidating its historical ethnic linkages with Afghan people; maintaining stronger ties with the Central Asian states through Afghanistan to fulfill its energy requirements; reviving the historical Silk Route for trade and economic activities in the region; and thwarting the challenges and threats emanating from external forces in the region to Pak-China relations. Islamabad may offer Kabul its services to train the Afghan forces that would later be deployed on Pak-Afghan border and it should ask guarantee from Afghan government that its forces trained by India would not be deployed in the areas bordering Pakistan. Investing in public sectors like education, health, reconstruction, rehabilitation etc could help win the hearts and minds of Afghan people. It is not in the interest of Pakistan to have India-friendly and Pakistan-hostile government in its backyard.

Although there are doubts that US would withdraw its forces from Afghanistan by 2014 as it has economic as well as geopolitical interests there, even if it has to withdraw, it would prefer to leave India as its successor. However, contrary to the US aspirations, it is more likely that the pro-Pakistan Taliban or Haqqani group would take over. Probably to avoid this scenario, the US is pressurizing Pakistan to attack North Waziristan and eliminate the Haqqani group which is alleged to be using the bordering region on Pakistan side as bases to launch its attack against coalition forces in Afghanistan. Instead of fighting the pro-Pakistan group, Pakistan needs to play its cards wisely and adopt the strategy of having good relations with all important players in Afghanistan including both of these groups for the sake of having friendly neighborhood after US withdrawal.

Internally, there must be a consensus and long term planning in Pakistan regarding Afghanistan. To achieve its objectives, Islamabad should trim down the lack of unity among the political parties, especially the religious streams, which can play positive and constructive role in boosting relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

On the external front, Pakistan needs to emphasize on a regional solution to the problem. There should be regular meetings among all the bordering countries of Afghanistan namely Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Iran and Pakistan which should make a concerted effort in finding a peaceful solution to Afghan problem with special reference to the scenario of US withdrawal. In the second stage, other regional and extra regional players such as India, Russia, US and China should be taken into confidence to give strength to their efforts. In a nutshell, only peaceful and stable Afghanistan is in the interest of all the stakeholders.

Politics of Afghanistan: Forces Within and Without

*Rustam Shah Mohmand**

Although weak and rootless, the Karzai regime is an important player in the country and will probably remain so until the withdrawal of coalition forces. More often than not, the question is raised whether Karzai government is capable of surviving its rule against all odds. There are reasons to predict that it would survive as long as it is supported by a large number of coalition forces backed by all sorts of modern, sophisticated and lethal weapons which they have used indiscriminately and liberally against the population, causing untold casualties of all types in all regions and areas of Afghanistan. Putting in another way, he and his government will continue to exist as long as the American military and political support is patting his back.

The Americans may not be completely happy with Hamid Karzai but amidst the circumstances when the central Afghanistan is in the grip of the raging resistance, spreading out to northern and western Afghanistan, removing him would change the American scheme of things in the area. The coalition partners would bear with the corruption, lack of governance and institutional growth, but would not go to the extent of uprooting the current regime. For an easy understanding, it may be called an unholy alliance, a marriage of convenience which is likely to continue till the time the foreign forces decide to pack up and leave. However, in the post-withdrawal Afghanistan, the current regime would not be a major force to reckon with.

In the backdrop of imminent withdrawal of coalition troops and absence of powerful central government, some analysts and opinion makers draw a frightening scenario of Afghanistan plunging into factional fighting. However, the claimants of this hypothesis are not aware of the changed power dynamics within Afghanistan. The ground reality is that there are only three actual forces in Afghanistan: coalition forces, Afghan National Army and police, and forces of resistance. After the withdrawal of coalition forces, the Afghan National Army and the resistance would be major actors. Regarding the Afghan National Army, there is a fear that there would, inevitably, be a disintegration coming from within. The current ratio of attrition is 20% and in the aftermath of withdrawal, the attrition rate would be 50-60% which would trigger the disintegration of Afghan National Army from within.

It is also important to underscore that the former Jihadi leaders are wrongly considered a viable force in Afghanistan. As a matter of fact, they are part of the US team in Kabul, enjoying all the facilities and privileges. They have made a good amount of money, grown into fabulous businessmen, and have their own enterprises both inside and outside of Afghanistan. So, they no longer enjoy armed support once available to them during Afghan Jihad in 1980s. Therefore, the possibility of factional fighting after the withdrawal of the coalition forces does not simply arise

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and most probably, the resistance would just sweep in these areas very peacefully like they did in 1995-96.

Taliban are aware of these realities and that is probably the reason for their very clear and firm stand that they would not negotiate directly or indirectly, covertly or overtly unless the coalition forces withdraw from Afghanistan. Despite some gestures and initiatives, there has never been any real meeting between the resistance and the government or the invaders. So it can safely deduce from the situation on ground that there are no negotiations underway either with Haqani network or the main resistance party of Mullah Umar. This also means that future of Afghanistan and many forces within depends largely on 'when' and 'how' the coalition forces withdraw. However, it is also naïve to think that the coalition forces would bequeath voluntarily, and resultantly it will be a long drawn out affair in which there will be no victors and the people of Afghanistan will continue to suffer.

This situation could be avoided provided the US and its partners at war carry out a comprehensive assessment of domestic compulsions and the results they are getting from their war in Afghanistan. It is awe striking to note that the US is spending approx. USD 7.5 billion a month on an unwinnable war in Afghanistan and burdening its dwindling economy with 1.5 trillion dollars deficit. A review of the policy can compel the Americans to reach out to the forces of resistance for genuine negotiations and to agree on the complete withdrawal of the coalition forces. However, the statements of headstrong team of military commanders and members of political establishment, particularly General Petraeus and deceased Richard Holbrook, hint at American plan of staying in Afghanistan for another 10-20 years. The symbolic withdrawal might start in 2011 but the military operations would most probably continue. Even after reducing the boots on ground, it is very unlikely that the US will abandon Bagram, Shindand and Mazar-e-sharif air bases.

Even in improbable scenario of an emergency exit, the US would still condition its complete withdrawal with the purging of Al-Qaida from Afghanistan and a guarantee of no use of Afghan soil against any country. These conditions would be acceptable to the resistance.

Anticipating the failure of coalition troops in Afghanistan, Robert Blackwell, former deputy national security adviser and US Ambassador to India, presented a plan of dividing Afghanistan on ethnic lines. However feasible his devious plan be on papers, division of Afghanistan is highly improbable mainly because every Turkman, Tajik, Uzbek, Pashtun, Pashai, Baluch, and Barohi is primarily an Afghan and then something else. Nevertheless, if the foreign forces take up the mission of this misadventure, Afghanistan would remain intact but bleed and devastate.

Afghanistan is already going through a very dark phase of its history and will difficult to recover for so many years. This is a very frightening scenario. In the last few months, Gen. Petraeus has unleashed a disgusting tactic of decimating whole of the villages, annihilating population, destroying houses, markets and shops in Kandahar province. An aimless

war is taking so many precious lives, apparently for satisfying the decaying prestige of the superpower. Under the guise of destroying Usama bin Ladin and his network, the US real objectives remained: to dismantle an Islamic government, to establish military bases there, to access Central Asian energy resources, to intimidate Iran, and to force a change in Pakistan's policy. During this course, they did achieve some short-term objectives but lost the American prestige as liberators of the oppressed nation. If the US does not change its policy of misadventures, it would continue to face anger, acrimony and hostility amongst Muslims around the world for years on end.

Understanding the Resistance in Afghanistan

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Current status of resistance in Afghanistan

The strength of the resistance can be gauged from the disparity of force in terms of number of troops, weapons, arms and ammunition, equipment and mobility of the parties involved in fighting. On one side, the number of American troops has increased to around 100,000 now from 15,000 in late 2001, along with another 50,000 foreign troops mainly from some of the world's richest and most powerful European countries. Besides, there are almost 150,000 soldiers in the Afghan National Army and 120,000 in Afghan National Police, who have been supported by the border police, Arabaki, the local village militia which have been armed and supported by the US and the Afghan government. In addition, there are more than 100,000 private security guards who are deployed to secure convoys at the NATO bases. In total, the fighting force available to coalition partners and Afghan government is approximately half a million troops. The coalition countries have recently added 38,000 fresh troops to the already giant-size coalition forces, sent tanks to Afghanistan for the first time along with more sophisticated weapons such as long range sniper rifles and more dangerous bombs, and increased the use of riper drones which are more dangerous than the earlier employed predators.

On the other side, the number of Taliban fighters, according to the American estimates, is only around 25,000. This shows that the battle is characterized by great disparity i.e. a very resourceful coalition led by the US state of the art military against a very small, ill-equipped and much less organized Taliban militias. In this background, it is, undoubtedly, remarkable that the Taliban have survived this battle for so long. Their regime was defeated, but they could not be destroyed. Their main weapons in this war are IEDs (improvised explosive devices), shocked bombings, rocket attacks, ambushes, and sniper shootings. Occasionally, they also launch massive attacks in their strongholds like Helmond, Farah, and Kandahar.

To counter such operations, the coalition forces employ airpower with gunship helicopters, jet fighters, and laser guided missiles that sometimes

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inflict heavy losses upon Taliban. This is one of the reasons why the resistance groups have reduced the use of attacks, involving huge number of fighters. For the last two years, they have also been launching spectacular attacks with a number of suicide bombers, albeit a little less successful in causing any huge damage to the coalition forces. The US-led forces admit that the hidden IEDs are the biggest threat to them. The more the coalition forces add to their power, the more IEDs are used by the Taliban.

The ground reality is that despite all the disparity between fighting parties, the resistance is at its peak at present. Since the majority of Taliban are Pashtuns, with their majority in the south and east of Afghanistan, they could never develop their strongholds in the provinces of north and west even when they were in power. That was the reason why the resistance was initially confined to the southern and eastern provinces. However, Taliban are now launching attacks in northern and western provinces like Faryab, Baghlan, Jozjan, Samangan, Kunduz, Balakh, Takhar, Badakhshan, and even in the Bamyan province, which is actually a Hazara majority region. Getting lead from Taliban strength, Hizb-e-Islami of Gulbadin Hikmatyar is also becoming active. In short, the resistance has now spread to almost every district of Afghanistan. One can, therefore, infer that Taliban have been able to win over some recruits from non-Pukhtuns as well, and it seems that they are supported by local population in those areas, because of which they are able to launch attacks in non-Pashtun areas as well.

At the same time, it is a matter of fact that they have not been able to capture any town or district, and even if they have, they cannot hold it for long because of the coalition aerial bombing. They do not physically control any major highway, airport or border, yet they can influence events all over the country through their presence. So, the war is spreading in terms of death and destruction, but neither the coalition forces can conquer Taliban nor can the Taliban defeat them.

As it usually happens in a situation of huge challenges, defeats and failures of achieving objectives, a great power starts looking for scapegoats to mask its humiliation and disgrace at international level. The same has been witnessed in case of American failure of 'defeating, dismantling and destroying' Taliban and their strongholds in the country. For instance, the US expressed its fury against the British forces for their inability to achieve war objectives in the battlefield of Helmand and took over the control of Sangin district from the British forces. In this same vein, the US-NATO coalition forces are blaming ISI for their alleged support to resistance movement in Afghanistan. It is true that Pakistan has been engaged on its western border for decades: it was the headquarter of then Afghan *Mujahideen* and later of Taliban in the 1980s and 1990s. It is also a fact that many Taliban leaders used to live in Pakistan and a few of them have been captured from its side of the border. Yet, it does not imply that they are managing the large scale resistance in Afghanistan from the tribal areas of Pakistan. The experts on Afghanistan affairs know the fact that real battle is in Afghanistan and has been fought by the common Afghans. Historically, the long porous border between the two countries could never

be blocked completely and it cannot be controlled even today. The people on both sides of the border enjoy easement rights: they are allowed to cross the border without visa and their movement cannot be stopped.

In fact, the ISI does maintain its links with Taliban in order to perform better intelligence services and to enable the country to play its role in the reconciliation process in future. However, it is neither in a position nor does it have enough resources to provide so much support to Taliban as it is necessary to defeat a superpower the way they are doing. It can be said that Pakistan has been supporting the Taliban indirectly by not taking action against their commanders who stay in Pakistan for the time being, but this kind of support cannot give them a military edge over one hundred and fifty thousand well-equipped and well-trained forces of the world's most powerful nations.

Instead of understanding the power centers of Afghan Taliban, the US administration is forcing Pakistan to launch a massive operation in North Waziristan, the tribal agency bordering Afghanistan, just like the offensives carried out in Swat, Malakand, and South Waziristan. These military adventures were called the steamroller operations, in which each village and road came under occupation. North Waziristan has already witnessed two military operations, taking many lives and displacing a large population. Yet, the military could not achieve a decisive victory and it had to opt for peace accords with the fighters through the help of Jirgas. The commanders survived and did not suffer heavy casualties while the fighters simply escaped from the area under operation. The same happened in Bajour where operations were conducted three times but the situation is still unstable. Therefore, the US administration and Pakistan government need to understand that the real problem is the occupation of Afghanistan and the situation in Pakistan is actually its consequence. If the US-NATO alliance admits its failures and recognize the importance of Pakistan in the quagmire they have entangled themselves, Islamabad can provide them a breakthrough both in initiating and reaching a comprehensive solution to the complex problem of Afghanistan.

Talking with the Enemy

Since the London Conference in early 2010, the Afghan government has been tasked to reach out to fighting groups for peace talks. The coalition and Karzai put forward three conditions for Taliban: lay down arms and renounce militancy; accept Afghan constitution; and purge Al-Qaeda from Afghanistan. These rigid conditions will never be acceptable to Taliban as they believe that if they lay down arms, they will lose everything whatever has been achieved so far. Moreover, instead of accepting the constitution, Taliban demand the implementation of Shariah. In case of Al-Qaeda, they will not like to be accused of betraying Al-Qaida and its leadership after having sacrificed their power on precisely the same issue.

So, there has been no significant achievement so far, except watershed meetings between President Karzai and a delegation of Hizb-e-Islami in March 2010. During these meetings, the delegation, led by Qutbuddin Hilal, presented its demands including the timetable for coalition

troop withdrawal and fresh elections which were rejected by the coalition forces and Karzai and the talks failed. The group was again invited for talks in the High Council for Peace, established by President Karzai and headed by former President Burhanuddin Rabbani, but it reiterated its previous demands and got the same response.

Taliban, the real power in resistance movement, uphold a tougher stance towards peace talks as compared to Hizb-e-Islami of Gulbadin Hikmatyar: 'no negotiations until the withdrawal of coalition forces'. Taliban are not ready to negotiate the issues with Karzai mainly because they believe he is an American stooge and has no power to decide anything on his own. Although they have not officially come forward with any demands, some sources close to Taliban are saying that they may have following conditions for the solution:

- All foreign troops should leave Afghanistan within two months (this timeframe seems to be negotiable);
- All prisoners held in Guantanamo Bay prison should be released;
- All political prisoners in Afghanistan should be released;
- Shariah should be enforced in the country;
- There must be a cease-fire and end of military action by all sides;
- Most importantly, Taliban should be accepted as a political movement;

These conditions are very tough for the US-led coalition to accept. This is the reasons that up till now, no substantial peace talks have taken place.

The issue of Al-Qaida presence has not been stated in the above mentioned unofficial demands of Taliban but there is a strong possibility of this particular issue becoming one of the major contentious elements in the negotiations. The US and its allies demand a commitment from Taliban that Al-Qaida would not be allowed to return to Afghanistan, but Taliban are aware that if they lose the support of Al-Qaida, their financial support might dwindle. However, they may agree to keep a check on the activities of Al-Qaida members in Afghanistan.

At present, no one is certain whether the Afghan issue is settled through peace talks or dies its natural death as a result of exhaustion of resources, both human and financial, but seems quite obvious that the miseries of Afghanistan as a nation are far from being over. The coalition forces are likely to continue an unwinnable war for its prestige and honor, and the people of Afghanistan will keep fighting the invaders until their motherland is liberated. However, major responsibility of bringing peace and stability in the country through peaceful means lies on the shoulders of US-NATO alliance which took hasty decisions in a fury and arrogance and threw the already fractured state into this complex imbroglia.