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AFGHANISTAN SPECIAL

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AND DEVELOPMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

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Mirwais K. Balkhi

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Editor's Page

Located at the crossroads of Central, South and West Asia and sharing its borders with Central Asian Republics of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan on the north, Chinese province of Xinjiang in the east, Iran on the west and south west, and Pakistan and Pak-occupied Kashmir on the south and south east, Afghanistan occupies a unique geo-strategic placement in the region. In the post-Cold War period, which witnessed the demise of USSR, establishment of an Islamic state and the rise of Taliban, Afghanistan remained at the centre stage of regional and international politics. The takeover of Afghanistan and imposition of an extremist and totalitarian social order by the Taliban in 1996 posed a serious challenge to peace and security in South Asia, Central Asia, China, Russia and also in the west. And after 9/11, the international community led by USA launched the Global War on Terror, in which the Taliban were severely mauled and much of their military equipment, bases, training camps etc. destroyed. New hope dawned in Afghanistan for building accountable national institutions and infrastructure that were destroyed during the decades of war and fighting.

Even though war against terror in Afghanistan was launched over ten years ago, many basic freedoms – from insecurity, fear and poverty are yet to be achieved. The battle between the forces of democratisation and those of destabilisation in post-Taliban Afghanistan is still continuing. Kidnappings, ambushes, killings, rocket attacks and bomb explosions have been occurring in Afghanistan almost daily. In the year 2009, 2,412 civilian casualties were recorded which represented an increase of 14 per cent over the year 2008. In the following year in 2010, the number of civilians killed surged to 2,777, with more than half occurring in south Afghanistan, where more than 100 Afghan civilians including teachers, nurses, doctors, tribal leaders, community elders, government officials, children, civilians working for international organisations were killed. And during the first six months of the year 2011, 1,462 civilians have been killed.

Ten years after 9/11, the situation in Afghanistan remains unstable due to increasing insecurity, waning influence of the Karzai government and rise in deadly attacks by the Taliban. The Taliban movement has not only regrouped and strengthened but has been operating both from Afghanistan and Pakistan. The original Taliban led by Mullah Omar

now known as Quetta Shura are dominant in the south and east of Afghanistan. Haqqani network run by Sirajuddin Haqqani from Waziristan in Pakistan operates in Khost, Paktika, Paktia and Jalalabad provinces of Afghanistan. *Hizb-e-Islami* of Gulbadin Hikmatyar has strongholds in Mohmand and Bayour tribal districts. Pakistan Taliban – the *Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan* (TTP) is active in the NWFP and FATA areas of Pakistan. Killing of Osama bin Laden has not deterred the Taliban in their insurgent attacks. It is largely because Pakistan continues with its policy of preserving and using its strategic assets in the form of Taliban and other radical groups, who are seen to be its allies in any new government that takes shape in Afghanistan after the US and ISAF troops withdraw. The US announcement of withdrawal from Afghanistan has only boosted the Taliban which operate from its sanctuaries in Pakistan. The Taliban seek to return to power either through force or through a negotiated process in the name of reconciliation with the active Pak support. Due to its obsession with a pro-Pak regime in Kabul, Pakistan continues its links and manipulation of the Taliban and allied groups, whether in the field or in the negotiation process between Kabul, US and the Taliban. Waning popularity, incompetence and corruption of the Karzai government and ruling elite, predatory warlords and inability of the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police in dealing with the insurgents, is only helping the Taliban on the ground. Besides, the weak resolve of international community, disjointed efforts of European countries and different national priorities have only resulted in lowering the morale of anti-Taliban elements in Afghanistan. UK's policy favoring negotiations with the Taliban and recruitment of militias also has had destabilizing impact on the ground.

Recent deadly attacks on high profile targets in Kabul – the Intercontinental Hotel in June 2011, the British Council in August 2011 and the US embassy and NATO headquarters in September 2011, have exposed the extreme fragility of security in Afghanistan. These attacks also reinforce doubts about the western strategy of negotiating with the Taliban, particularly so after the US has held the Pakistan based Haqqani network responsible for the attack on US embassy and NATO headquarters in Kabul. Non-Pashtun Afghans are also worried over the prospects of the Taliban coming to power through such negotiations. While they retain bitter memories of Taliban's atrocities during the 1990s, they also fear the loss of economic and political influence. The resurgence of Taliban poses a direct threat to regional security in South and Central Asia.

So ensuring sustainable security and peace in Afghanistan is a great challenge facing the international community. This can be achieved only by total destruction of Taliban and Al Qaeda network and their infrastructure still existent and operational in various parts of the world. International community needs to evolve a concerted strategy to curb terrorism and extremism in and around Afghanistan by stopping their sources of funds, arms, logistics and training and ideological motivation. A stable, peaceful and democratic Afghanistan can emerge only after the dark forces of extremism and terrorism represented by the Taliban and their network are defeated and obliterated.

The future of Afghanistan with guarantees of peace, security and well being of its people hinges upon the success of the de-Talibanisation process, the success of reconciliation between rival ethnic/regional Afghan political groups and commanders, emergence of a balanced and broad-based stable government representing diverse ethnic, regional and minority interests, the setting up and effective functioning of law enforcement agencies, on the speedy implementation of reconstruction of social, economic and education infrastructure, and on elimination of drugs and arms trafficking from Afghanistan. There is need to build strong institutions rather than pander to individual Afghan elite and their network. Whereas the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) need to be turned into a dependable, modern fighting force ready to take on the militants, the Taliban and other militant cadres need to be disarmed and neutralised. Improving the local governance and curtailing cash/aid flows to individuals, power brokers, politicians etc. can help in reducing corruption among the Afghan politicians, bureaucracy and power brokers. Indeed the process is complex and arduous, demanding continued international attention and assistance.

K. Warikoo

REGIONAL INITIATIVES TO PROMOTE STABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

SHIRIN AKINER

Ambiguous, often contradictory, assessments of the achievements of NATO/ISAF operations in Afghanistan make it difficult to form a clear picture of the situation on the ground.¹ However, there is a strong perception that the coalition troops are floundering in a quagmire. What began as a campaign with a fairly precise set of objectives soon escalated into a grandiose attempt to re-form an entire society. Today, despite the rhetoric of politicians and military leaders who speak of 'sticking it out' till the job is done, there are unmistakable signals that, as Lord Ashdown commented in November 2010, the endgame has started.² Whether or not a workable strategy has finally been put in place is uncertain, what is clear is that electorates back home have lost patience with the mission. Thus the emphasis now is to fashion an exit strategy that will provide a façade of success, justifying, albeit weakly, the claim of 'mission accomplished'.

It is ironic that it is only at this stage, with the dawning awareness that 'a victor's peace is impossible',³ that the importance of involving the regional states is finally being recognised. With the exception of Pakistan, which from the outset played a strategic role in Western-led operations, there was an implicit reluctance, amounting to a virtual ban, on cooperating with these states as equal partners. China, Russia and Iran were largely ignored, while the Central Asian states were regarded mainly as transit routes. India and other regional states that did not actually have a border with Afghanistan scarcely figured in strategic considerations at this time. Yet by geography, history, ethnic ties and culture, Afghanistan is an integral part of the wider region. The 'neighbourhood' states are neither unaware nor indifferent to what

happens there. Before and since 2001 there have been regional initiatives aimed at promoting stability and development in Afghanistan. The main initiatives are reviewed below.

1991-2001: AN EMERGING THREAT

Soviet troops withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989. Two years later, the Soviet Union disintegrated. This short but momentous sequence of events left the newly independent Central Asian states – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – in a highly exposed position. Not only were they suddenly confronted with massive domestic challenges, they also faced a growing security threat along their southern rim as Afghanistan descended into anarchy. It became a haven for drug traffickers and terrorists; in the mid-1990s, al-Qaeda established training camps there. Meanwhile, a brutal civil war was raging between the Tajik-led Northern Alliance, and the predominantly Pashtun Taliban. The latter group forged bonds with al-Qaeda, thereby gaining a tactical advantage over their rivals. The partnership was underpinned by a shared ultra-conservative interpretation of Islam.

All the regional states were concerned by the security threats posed by the deepening crisis. The three Central Asian states that shared borders with Afghanistan (Tajikistan – 1,206 km, Turkmenistan – 744 km, Uzbekistan – 137 km) were particularly at risk. Their newly-formed national defence and security forces were still weak and under-equipped. Their populations, disoriented by the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union, were vulnerable to criminal and/or ideological manipulation. On several occasions the leaders of the Central Asian states tried to alert the international community to the danger of the situation, which was not only destroying Afghanistan, but generating a destructive momentum that could spread far beyond its frontiers.⁴ Their warnings were not heeded. Outside the region there seemed to be little awareness of either the scale or the urgency of the problem.

CENTRAL ASIAN INITIATIVES: PRE-2001

In the latter half of the 1990s two Central Asian initiatives were instigated to address the Afghan issue. Both were rooted in the conviction that the conflict could not be resolved by military means. Instead, they sought to facilitate a peaceful political dialogue, with the ultimate objective of

establishing an inclusive Afghan national government. One initiative, put forward by Uzbek President Islam Karimov, envisaged the creation of a dedicated multilateral forum to serve as a mechanism through which to seek a peaceful settlement of the conflict. The innovative aspect was that it recognised the need to engage the neighbouring states as well as the major extra-territorial actors – Russia and the United States – in the peace process. In August 1997, following discussions with President Karimov, the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Afghanistan, Lakhdar Brahimi, endorsed the project. Uzbekistan then launched a series of diplomatic consultations to lay the groundwork for the formation of what came to be known as the 'Six plus Two' Contact Group, comprising the six states that neighbour Afghanistan – China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – together with Russia and the United States.⁵ In July 1999, under the aegis of the UN, the Tashkent Declaration 'On Fundamental Principles for a Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict in Afghanistan', was signed.⁶ Over the next couple of years high-level meetings were held to coordinate policy approaches.

The second regional initiative was conducted by Turkmenistan. It was not directly linked to the Uzbek project, but ran parallel to it and in some ways served as a counterpart. Unlike the 'Six plus Two' Group, which focused on external actors, the Turkmen government's efforts were directed towards the promotion of peaceful dialogue between the Afghan leaders. Contacts between the various parties, discreet and low profile, were held on Afghan or Turkmen territory, as dictated by circumstances. The process was eased by the good offices of the Afghan Turkmen community located in the border area.⁷ The objective was to create an enabling environment for friendly exchanges. Thus, meetings were exploratory in nature rather than structured according to a set agenda. Turkmenistan had adopted a similar approach during the Tajik civil war, hosting leaders of the warring factions for long periods in order to provide them with the opportunity to work through their differences.⁸ This had made a significant contribution to the peaceful resolution of that conflict, achieved in June 1997. It was largely in recognition of Turkmenistan's positive role in this process that the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy was later established in Ashgabat (see below).

By the turn of the millennium neither the Uzbek nor the Turkmen initiative had produced dramatic results, but they had established channels of communication that were beginning to yield some degree of mutual understanding and cooperation. How useful it would have been

to continue to explore these avenues it is impossible to say, since both processes were brought to an abrupt halt in the autumn of 2001.

2001: A NEW DYNAMIC

In September 2001, Central Asian warnings about the terrorist threat in Afghanistan were realised with dramatic intensity. By this time the Taliban, with al-Qaeda support, had gained control of most parts of Afghanistan. On 9 September, the ethnic Tajik Ahmad Shah Masoud, leader of the Northern Alliance, was killed in a suicide bomb attack, allegedly master-minded by al-Qaeda. Two days later, air strikes were carried out against US cities. Washington held al-Qaeda responsible. When the Taliban refused to hand over its leader, Osama bin Laden, the United States, with British support, launched a devastating air and ground assault on Afghanistan. The objective was clear-cut: to destroy Taliban and al-Qaeda bases and to rid the country of terrorists. Pakistan was the main US ally in this campaign, but the Central Asian states also played a role, providing transit facilities. This was not unexpected, since all five states were members of NATO's Partnership for Peace Programme (PfP). Uzbekistan, which had had bilateral military ties with the United States since 1995,⁹ agreed to host a US base at Karshi-Khanabad, close to the Afghan border; it also granted basing rights to Germany in the same vicinity. Kyrgyzstan likewise gave permission for a US base at Manas, the international civilian airport close to the capital, Bishkek, and some 500 km from the Chinese border.

By the end of November most of the Taliban had been routed and the leadership had fled the country. On 5 December 2001, the leaders of the main political Afghan factions met in Bonn to sign an agreement whereby an Interim Administration was created, headed by Hamid Karzai. Two weeks later, the UN Security Council unanimously passed a resolution establishing the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). This coalition, formed of US and allied troops, was charged with the task of securing Kabul and its environs against terrorist insurgencies; it was also required to work closely with the Interim Administration.¹⁰ 'Victory', it seemed, had been achieved swiftly and surprisingly easily. It was anticipated that the military phase would now merge seamlessly into a programme to deliver aid and development to the shattered country.

In Central Asia these developments were viewed with optimism,

especially in official circles. In India, too, there was relief that comprehensive action was being taken to address the multiple security threats posed by Afghanistan. Thus, Delhi swiftly provided the coalition forces with intelligence and logistical support. In China, Russia and Iran, Western 'boots on the ground' could not but cause dismay. However, there was nothing they could do to prevent this. Moreover, it was tacitly acknowledged there were advantages in this development, since the situation in Afghanistan would now be resolved with no effort on their part. For Iran in particular, home to some 2.4 million Afghan refugees, this was an important consideration. Moreover, Tehran had been firmly opposed to the Taliban since their first appearance on the scene and as early as 1996 had accused them of defaming Islam. Thus, whatever concerns Iran may have had about the increased presence of Western forces within the region, it was nevertheless prepared to offer quiet, but active, support.¹¹

The speed with which the Bonn Agreement was concluded seemed to validate the confidence that was felt throughout the region in the ability of the Western powers to impose order and stability. Afghanistan, it was believed, was firmly set on the road to recovery. These expectations were premature. The new Afghan administration was by no means fully in control of the situation. A regional/factional power struggle was still in progress and the fighting continued. There was a growing humanitarian crisis, as a million or more new refugees fled Afghanistan. Most tried to enter Pakistan or Iran, but thousands headed northwards, to Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Drug-production, which had diminished significantly in 2000-2001, increased at an alarming rate. Moreover, cross-border terrorist activities, temporarily disrupted by the coalition raids on Afghanistan, were resumed as the *Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan* and other Central Asian militant groups that had set up bases in Afghanistan rallied their forces and re-established their positions.

NATO-ISAF OPERATIONS: REGIONAL RESPONSES

In 2003, NATO took command of ISAF. Initially, 5,000 troops were deployed, but this number steadily increased as the mission expanded to encompass ever more of the country. The original aims – securing Kabul – were overlaid by a multi-faceted project of nation-building and state-building. Two years later there was no sign of the Western military presence coming to an end: rather, there were rumours that the US bases

might become permanent.¹² Meanwhile, in Central Asia there was growing disillusionment with the NATO-ISAF mission. The political and economic rewards for the support provided by the Central Asian states were not as significant as had been anticipated. In particular, there was dissatisfaction over the terms and conditions for the use of basing facilities. Originally, rent had been set at a low level, as a gesture of support for what was expected to be a short engagement. It soon became clear that this was not the case. Uzbek President Karimov was openly critical of US policies, which he believed were exacerbating, not resolving, regional security problems. In 2004 the Uzbek government began sending official notes to Washington, requesting clarification of issues relating to the presence of US troops on its territory. This was not forthcoming and, to the Uzbek side, it appeared that their concerns were not being taken seriously.¹³

It was against this background of deteriorating relations that in May 2005 there was an outbreak of violence in the Uzbek town of Andijan. In Europe and the USA the predominant view of this incident was that the Uzbek security forces had massacred thousands of innocent civilians. This was adamantly denied by the Uzbek authorities, who insisted that there had been an armed insurgency. Moreover, there was a suspicion (not confined to Uzbekistan) that there had been covert Western involvement in the affair, aimed at toppling the recalcitrant Karimov government and replacing it with a friendlier regime.¹⁴ This view was given credence by the fact that a few months earlier, Kyrgyz President Akayev, who was also becoming disenchanted with Western policies, had been ousted by a 'coloured revolution' that was supported and encouraged by some Western-funded non-governmental organizations. Western governments and organizations introduced various punitive restrictions in their dealings with Uzbekistan; the European Union went furthest, imposing sanctions.

Regional dissatisfaction with the Western-led coalition came to a head at the summit meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in Astana in July 2005 that year. Although still very young, the Organization had already established itself as a significant regional structure (see below). The final statement of this summit meeting included the request that, in the light of 'the completion of the active military stage of antiterrorist operations in Afghanistan ... respective members of the antiterrorist coalition set a final timeline for their temporary use of the above mentioned objects of infrastructure and stay

of their military contingents on the territories of the SCO member states.¹⁵ This was interpreted by many Western commentators as a belligerent demand for an instant US/NATO withdrawal from the region. This it certainly was not, but it did reflect a concern that the Western-led mission in Afghanistan was losing focus and developing into an open-ended commitment. Shortly after the summit, Tashkent served notice on the US base at Karshi-Khanabad, demanding that it be vacated within six months.¹⁶ This decision reflected the deterioration in US-Uzbek relations and was not linked to SCO policy. It is noteworthy that the Germans were allowed to retain the use of their base in Uzbekistan, and in Kyrgyzstan the US base at Manas continued to function as before, albeit in return for a better financial package.

NINE YEARS ON

Nine years after the launch of operations against Afghanistan, the NATO-ISAF mission encompassed the whole of Afghanistan; the force now numbered some 130,400 troops, from 48 countries.¹⁷ This escalation was not surprising. As time passed, the complexities of the undertaking became evident. Concrete goals gave way to vague aspirations, blurred by cross-cutting priorities and demands. The challenges multiplied, not least because the Taliban and allied groups had regrouped and were expanding their power base. Drug-related crimes rose alarmingly. Security was patchy and while some areas were fairly stable, others were not. Hundreds of civilians were still being killed or seriously injured, victims of assaults by the Taliban as well as by foreign forces. The coalition's problems were compounded by such factors as distrustful relations between foreign representatives and senior Afghan officials, endemic corruption on a massive scale, a mismatch in expectations and a general lack of mutual understanding. This created tensions and frustration on all sides (as evidenced by the WikiLeaks exposure of classified material in November 2010).

Nevertheless, despite the difficulties, progress had been made towards the normalisation of life in Afghanistan. One of the most important achievements was the re-creation of the state. During the civil war in the 1990s, institutions of governance and state management had all but ceased to exist. During the 2000s, a functioning political and administrative apparatus was re-instated. Admittedly, it was flawed and fragile, but it did provide a framework within which to plan and

implement policy. It also provided formal, structured channels through which the country could interact with foreign partners. Another significant development was that a shared sense of national identity, shattered by the civil war, re-emerged, strengthening social cohesion.¹⁸ Welfare and development programmes, campaigns for women's rights, the provision of education and training facilities and other such initiatives also had a beneficial effect. However, it was an open question whether these successes were real and sustainable, rooted in local society, or whether they were illusory, dependent on external support.

This was the dilemma: NATO-ISAF had made some headway towards accomplishing its goals, but the achievements were frangible. If the coalition left too soon, it was very possible that whatever progress had been made would be lost. According to some assessments, there would be a complete collapse of the Kabul government, putting the country and the entire region at risk.¹⁹ Yet it was not feasible to contemplate a commitment that would stretch into the distant future, with no guarantee of eventual success (however that might be defined). In coalition countries, support for the war had, from the outset, been equivocal. As the nature of the project metamorphosed from a surgical strike against terrorist bases into a grand scheme to 're-construct' the nation, public opinion became increasingly antagonistic. Not only was it regarded as an 'unwinnable war', but the human and financial cost of the operation was deeply unpopular. Many countries were experiencing severe economic hardship owing to the global financial crisis. Faced with harsh austerity measures at home, it was difficult to justify support for an ill-defined foreign mission. Moreover, al-Qaeda and other terrorist networks had not been destroyed; they had merely re-located elsewhere and continued to pose a transnational security threat. It was time for a new strategy.

NATO-ISAF AND REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT

A shift in the coalition's approach to Afghanistan was signalled by a gradual acceptance of the need to collaborate with regional players. Initially, it took the form of requests for additional transit facilities. This was necessary partly because of the increased volume of supplies for Afghanistan, partly because of the deteriorating security situation in Pakistan. The Manas airbase in Kyrgyzstan was still an important transit hub, but its future was constantly threatened by corruption scandals

and political pressures. It was in response to these pressures that the concept of the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) was formulated. A trans-Eurasian complex of supply routes, stretching from the Baltic Sea and the Caucasus to Afghanistan, was launched in 2009. The key regional states were Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. At first, they only permitted the transport of non-lethal cargoes such as food and construction materials across their territories, but in late 2010 the possibility of military supplies was under consideration. Russia, and later Kazakhstan, formally agreed to this in 2011.²⁰ During this same period, US-sponsored conferences and publications underlined the point that the NDN would not only serve the interests of the coalition forces, but would benefit the regional states by expanding – or more accurately, reviving – transport and trade links.²¹

However, the primary concern for the neighbouring states was not trade, but security. In some respects the situation was worse than it had been pre-2001. Terrorism and militant religious extremism were resurgent, organised crime had spiralled out of control.²² These problems were exacerbated by the massive increase in the drug trade. Opium cultivation in Afghanistan in 2001 covered 8,000 hectares, but by 2007 had risen to 193,000 hectares; in the same period, drug production rose from 185 metric tons to 8,200 tons.²³ Over the next two years both cultivation and production decreased somewhat. This was only partly owing to counter-narcotics operations. An important factor was that there had been major overproduction in the preceding years. Consequently, there were huge stockpiles along trafficking routes. They were possibly regarded as a hedge against falling prices in the future, but they could also be used to fund terrorist activities.²⁴ All the neighbouring countries were used as transit routes for drug-trafficking, with final destinations across the world. An estimated 75-80 tons of Afghan heroin ended up in Russia each year, fuelling a catastrophic level of addiction, drug-related crimes and social problems. Iran, a border state and one of the main transit routes, was even more vulnerable.²⁵ The situation was similar in other regional states, including Afghanistan.²⁶

This, then, was the dilemma for the region: the NATO-ISAF intervention had brought a degree of internal order to Afghanistan, yet it had not reduced the security threat for the 'neighbourhood' but instead had heightened it. Nevertheless, there was still the hope that if the coalition remained long enough, and was adequately resourced, it would eradicate, or at least reduce the level of danger. More pertinently, there

was no obvious alternative to NATO. The armed forces of the regional states varied considerably in strength and ability; moreover, their primary concern was national defence. As for regional security structures, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) were, in their present configurations, less than a decade old. They had skilled troops and invaluable local knowledge, but in terms of numbers, resources and collective experience they were not in the same league as NATO. Consequently, if the coalition forces were withdrawn from Afghanistan, they could not be replaced by regional counterparts. Even if there was the political will to undertake such a mission – which was by no means certain – there was not the military capability. Thus, there would be a security vacuum.

The regional ‘solution’ was to encourage NATO-ISAF to remain engaged in Afghanistan by offering vital operational support. However, this support also served a local agenda, enabling the ‘neighbourhood’ players to strengthen their role in the mission. This in turn could provide the leverage to allow them to become equal partners, and ultimately to assume ownership. This was a more subtle approach than the 2005 Astana Declaration (see above), but the goal was the same: to re-assert regional control.

2010: BEGINNING OF THE ENDGAME FOR NATO-ISAF?

The combination of mounting economic problems and strong anti-war lobbies made it imperative for the coalition to devise an exit strategy. After months of rumour and speculation, a timetable for withdrawal was formally announced at the NATO summit in Lisbon in November 2010. The stated goal was a phased transfer of security responsibility to the Afghan government within four years. However, the seeming clarity of this plan was immediately overshadowed by qualifications and conditionality. Comments by senior NATO officials, including Secretary-General Rasmussen, stressed that the date was not a deadline but an ‘aspiration’. The emphasis would shift to the training of Afghan forces and the provision of military aid, but NATO-ISAF combat operations could continue beyond 2014.²⁷ The widely reported shortcomings of the Afghan army and police (including high levels of desertion, rampant drug addiction and infiltration by insurgents),²⁸ suggested that despite the political pressures to reduce the coalition’s role, in practical terms it would be difficult to accomplish this without severely compromising security.

There were two other strands to the NATO 'winding down' strategy. One was to engage with the Taliban. This was easier to propose than to implement. Firstly, the Taliban were re-gaining power and popular support²⁹ and hence were in no hurry to come to the negotiating table. Secondly, they were not a unified group and it was difficult to identify a common political platform. Thirdly, the leaders were elusive and making physical contact was difficult. This was neatly illustrated by an episode in 2010, when a taxi driver from Quetta persuaded Western intelligence agents that he was a senior Taliban figure; after several high-level meetings he disappeared with booty of hundreds of thousands of dollars – just as he was about to be unmasked as an imposter.³⁰

The other strand was closer collaboration with regional states and institutions. As mentioned above, this process had already been set in motion with the inauguration of the Northern Distribution Network. The initiative was underpinned by bilateral contacts between senior NATO representatives and government officials in the respective countries. In Central Asia, particular attention was paid to Kazakhstan, the most active participant in the PfP programme. In May 2010, Astana agreed to send four non-combat officers to Afghanistan as a token gesture of support for the mission, but a few weeks later reversed this decision. Meanwhile, the relationship with Uzbekistan, derailed by the violence in Andijan in 2005, was now back on track and steadily gaining in importance. In 2009, a number of security-sector agreements were concluded between the two countries, among them an outline programme of military-to-military contacts, signed by the Uzbek Defence Minister and the then CENTCOM Commander, General Petraeus.³¹ Developments such as these suggested that Uzbekistan had now regained its position as the lead US partner in the region.³² Prospects for Russian-NATO cooperation were also improving. Russian, US and Afghan counter-narcotics agencies carried out their first joint operation in Afghanistan in October 2010, destroying drug supplies with a street value of over US \$250 million. In November, Russian President Medvedev participated in the Lisbon summit and reiterated the need for cooperation between NATO and CSTO, particularly with regard to counter-narcotics operations. Fortuitously, in July 2010 a Russian diplomat, Yuri Fedotov, was appointed to head the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).³³

There was one other development that attracted attention at this time. Despite the frequent emphasis on NATO's intention to wind down

combat operations and eventually to hand over responsibility for security issues to the Afghan authorities, it was noticeable that US airbases in Afghanistan were being upgraded. The scale of the multi-million construction projects at Bagram, Kandahar, Mazar-i-Sharif and Shindand suggested that far from withdrawing, the US forces were planning to stay for many more years.³⁴ The location of these facilities, near the borders with Iran, Pakistan and the Central Asian states, prompted speculation that there was a wider political agenda.³⁵ It was not inconceivable that the US might seek to secure 'sovereign status' for these bases, similar to that of the British bases in Cyprus. This would extend the US reach into the heart of Eurasia.

REGIONAL INITIATIVES: POST-2001

As the momentum for a NATO-ISAF withdrawal (or at least a scaling down of operations) increased so, too, did calls for the regional states to become more involved. At times the tone was almost accusatory, as though the regional states were idle bystanders, benefitting from the sacrifices made by others while contributing nothing themselves. Yet the regional states had not instigated the war in Afghanistan and had not been consulted as to the strategy. Moreover, in the first years of coalition operations the regional states were either ignored or regarded as potential 'spoilers' – part of the problem, not the solution.³⁶ Consequently, they were deliberately excluded from reconstruction and development projects, despite the fact that they had relevant professional skills and experience. Instead, contracts were awarded predominantly to Western companies and consultants. Trade between Afghanistan and its neighbours, previously quite extensive, plummeted after the Western intervention.³⁷ Educational and academic exchanges were likewise halted. The result was that Afghanistan became isolated from its neighbours.

This process is now being reversed as existing links with regional bodies are reinvigorated and new initiatives are launched. One channel of interaction is Afghanistan's membership of broad-based regional organizations such as the Economic Cooperation Organization, South-Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, Organization of the Islamic Conference and Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia. These bodies play a valuable role in re-integrating Afghanistan into the wider region, giving it visibility in regional debates

and creating opportunities for collaboration in regional projects. This in turn leads to 'enhanced coordination of Afghanistan's regional engagement'.³⁸

A more specific role is played by Afghanistan's neighbours and near neighbours. Their proximity creates physical and cultural ties, shared vulnerabilities and shared opportunities. One aspect of their involvement is participation with international agencies that deal with issues relating to Afghanistan. Of particular importance are those that combat drug trafficking and other forms of organised crime, notably UNODC and affiliated institutions such as the Central Asia Regional Information and Coordination Centre. Another form of cooperation is represented by regional initiatives involving sets of neighbouring and near-neighbouring states. These take different forms and vary considerably in scope and effectiveness. Some are small-scale and operate on an ad hoc basis. Others are larger and institutionally more developed, thus have a wider impact. These 'neighbourhood' initiatives are discussed below.

Humanitarian, Cultural and Economic Initiatives

Humanitarian assistance and development aid is mostly rendered on a bilateral basis, according to the capabilities and policies of individual states. In sum total, their input has been significant, including the construction of roads, communication units, hospitals and schools. Education and training courses have also been provided, as well as assistance with mine clearance and other security-related activities. Private sector commercial ties, too, are developing. These are mostly related to cross-border trade, but there has also been some investment in the development of Afghanistan's natural resources. To date, the largest venture is a Chinese project, estimated to be worth around US \$3.5 billion, to develop one of the world's biggest copper deposits.

Iran is one of the main donors to Afghanistan. In addition to humanitarian projects worth over US\$500 million, it has made a major contribution to reconstruction projects, particularly in western Afghanistan. . It has likewise provided substantial economic support. Trade between the two countries is facilitated by improved road and rail links, as well as a massive discount on Afghan imports; turnover in 2008 amounted to almost US\$1 billion and has the potential to grow further.³⁹ India is another generous regional donor to Afghanistan. The two countries do not share a common border, but have long had close

links. Even in the 1980s (the period of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan), India was giving humanitarian assistance to Kabul. Since the overthrow of the Taliban, it has become the largest regional, and internationally the sixth largest, provider of aid to Afghanistan, contributing US\$1.5 billion in the period 2001-2011 (with pledges of more to come).⁴⁰ The assistance programme includes the construction of roads, power plants, and major public buildings, as well as a large number of education and training projects.

The Central Asian states have also made important contributions. Kazakhstan, though it does not share a border with Afghanistan, has made been particularly active, both on a bilateral basis as well as in its capacity as chairman of the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe ((2010), and of the Organization of Islamic Conference (2011). It has a dedicated Assistance Programme for the Reconstruction of Afghanistan, and has allocated some US\$5 million in assistance for 2009-2011 for projects related to water supply, infrastructure development and the delivery of grains and other commodities. It is also providing a range of grants for education.⁴¹ The bordering states of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have likewise provided humanitarian aid, as well as assisting with Afghanistan's economic development through projects that include the provision of electricity, construction of road and railway links, and other large building projects.

Multilateral projects involve various sets of regional states. Some of these draw on a common cultural heritage. In 2007, for example, an 'alliance' of the Persian-speaking countries of Afghanistan, Iran and Tajikistan was inaugurated. This encourages collaboration in cultural projects as well as in such areas such as water management, agriculture, trade and finance. Another grouping brings together Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Russia and Pakistan. Launched in Dushanbe in July 2009, this quadrilateral structure aims to strengthen regional security, as well as social and economic cooperation, with a particular emphasis on transport, communications and energy networks. All four states are involved in the construction of a high voltage power transmission line from Central Asia to South Asia (CASA-1000). Supported by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and other international financial institutions, this project will enable Tajikistan to export electricity to Pakistan via Afghanistan. It will also benefit other regional states, such as Kyrgyzstan.

Projects to construct oil and gas pipelines from Turkmenistan's eastern gas fields to Pakistan, via Afghanistan to India (TAPI) have been

under discussion since 1997. The difficult physical geography of the region, as well as chronic political instability, delayed the implementation of these projects. Nevertheless, negotiations on the TAPI gas pipeline have gradually made progress. When completed, the pipeline will deliver 90 million cubic metres of gas a day; most of this will be divided equally between India and Pakistan, but Afghanistan will have a share of approximately 10 per cent. The boost to the local economies will be enormous. The project is supported by the ADB and has high level political backing from the participating states. In December 2010, Intergovernmental Agreements on the construction of the gas pipeline were concluded and by August 2011 pricing, transit fees and gas specification issues were being finalised, opening the way to the realisation of the project in the near future.

Multilateral Economic Structures

The Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) programme is a key mobilizing force for infrastructural projects. An ADB initiative, it was founded in 1997 with the aim of promoting regional economic cooperation, thereby to improve living standards and reduce poverty. Partnerships have been established with numerous international financial institutions and agencies, also with regional organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Current membership includes Afghanistan, the five Central Asian states, China, Russia, Mongolia, and Azerbaijan. CAREC has become a platform for marshalling the financial resources required for the implementation of large-scale projects in transport, energy, trade policy, and trade facilitation. Several of these involve Afghanistan, notably the CASA-1000 power transmission line and the TAPI pipeline mentioned above. Other projects include the construction of road, rail and power transmission links between Afghanistan and neighbouring states such as Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.⁴²

A second multilateral initiative is the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA). It was inaugurated by the government of Afghanistan in 2005, with the support of international partners. Participants are drawn from a wide range of regional and international partners. However, the RECCA rationale is grounded in the concept that "regional cooperation with Afghanistan begins with the support of regional neighbours, bears great potential and is effective when it is regionally owned, steered and governed in a sincere, transparent and constructive manner."⁴³ Key agenda items

include project-based cooperation in trade, border management, energy, mining, private sector development, education and vocational training. Four major meetings have been held: in Kabul (2005), Delhi (2006), Islamabad (2009) and Istanbul (2010). In May 2010, the Center for Regional Cooperation was created at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kabul to serve as the RECCA Secretariat. A Core Group to facilitate the coordination of Afghanistan's regional engagement was inaugurated in November in 2010.

Regional Dialogue-Building Projects

The initiatives discussed above are of a practical nature. Some are easier to implement than others, but in most cases the objectives are defined and the steps that need to be taken to bring them to fruition are apparent. Dialogue-building projects are more complex. They require skilful diplomacy, patience, persistence and commitment from all concerned. Such projects may sometimes seem overly idealistic, but they are surely worth pursuing since dialogue is a prerequisite for confidence-building. As mentioned previously, in the 1990s, in the midst of the civil war, there were two regional attempts to promote an 'Afghan dialogue'. One was the Turkmen initiative to facilitate an intra-Afghan dialogue, the other the Uzbek 'Six plus Two' initiative to create a contact group for the main external players. Currently, both concepts are being revived in an updated format.

The Turkmen proposal is still firmly focused on confidence-building and dialogue between the different factions within Afghanistan. The new element is that it seeks to pursue this in partnership with UN agencies. One of these is the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA), inaugurated in Ashgabat in December 2007, and the other is the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). The geographic remit of the former covers the five Central Asian states but does not extend to Afghanistan, hence the need to coordinate the proposed Turkmen initiative with both bodies. This creates an additional layer of complication since each agency has its own geographical mandate as well as a separate political mandate. Thus, it is not always easy to coordinate their participation. However, growing recognition of the need to involve the Taliban in peace talks begins to make the Turkmen proposal seem a real possibility. In May 2011, Mullah Jora Akhund, a member of the Afghan High Peace Council, described Turkmenistan as 'one of the most promising' locations for such meetings

on account of its status of neutrality and its history of cordial relations with all the Afghan factions.⁴⁴

The Uzbek proposal likewise builds on its previous experience. The idea, as before, is to create a forum in which the external players that are most directly involved in Afghanistan can meet to discuss issues of concern, but the original format has been expanded to include NATO, thus becoming 'Six plus Three'. The updated project was presented by President Karimov at the Bucharest NATO summit in 2008⁴⁵ and has since been strongly advocated by Uzbek diplomats and academics at international conferences and seminars. The concept has been well received but to date it has scarcely progressed beyond the discussion stage. This is not entirely surprising, because although it is a constructive and imaginative initiative, in its present form there is a lack of clarity and definition.

One drawback is that the proposed group does not include Afghanistan. The reasoning is that the exclusion of official Afghan representation will provide flexibility, allowing different Afghan factions to be invited to take part in discussions as circumstances dictate. There is a logic in this argument. However, by contrast with the 1990s, there is now an internationally recognised Afghan government in place. To deny it representation implies that the present constitutional arrangements in Afghanistan are already moribund. This is a dubious assumption on which to base a diplomatic enterprise.

The second problem is tension between some members of the proposed group and in particular, between Iran and the United States. Certainly the Western-led coalition views Iran with suspicion and there are frequent accusations/allegations that Tehran is aiding the insurgency. Nevertheless, at the 2006 NATO summit in Riga, French President Jacques Chirac called for Iran to be included in 'contact group' discussions on Afghanistan.⁴⁶ The proposal was not endorsed by other NATO members at that time, but in October 2010 Tehran was for the first time officially represented at a meeting of the EU-NATO sponsored international contact group. As US special representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke commented on this occasion: "We recognise that Iran, with its long, almost completely open border with Afghanistan and with a huge drug problem ... has a role to play in the peaceful settlement of this situation in Afghanistan ... So for the United States there is no problem with their presence."⁴⁷ In fact, this was merely a public acknowledgement of the informal, confidential contacts between

the two states that were already taking place.⁴⁸

In the light of these developments, the 'Six plus Three' Group could provide a useful mechanism for deepening such a dialogue, but in order to do so it would have to engender an atmosphere of trust and openness. Yet the initiative was compromised from the outset by the asymmetry of the membership structure. The United States, in effect, would have double representation: in its own right and through its dominant role in NATO. In view of the extreme sensitivities in regional relations this could not but be regarded with suspicion. Thus, it undermined the objective of providing a neutral forum for debate. Moreover, the perceived bias in favour of the US cast doubt on Uzbekistan's role as an independent actor by creating the impression, however mistakenly, that it was acting as an agent for the projection of US influence.

Finally, the membership of the proposed group appears to be too limited for current needs. In the 1990s, it was reasonable to restrict regional participation to the states that shared a border with Afghanistan. Today, more states are involved in Afghanistan and arguably, there are some strong candidates for membership of the group. India is the most obvious example. A near neighbour, it suffers from the same security threats as the border states.⁴⁹ Moreover, as previously mentioned, it is one of the largest donors of aid to Afghanistan. The main argument against its inclusion is that Pakistan would object to it, but as with the Iran-US relationship, this is a problem that needs to be resolved rather than avoided. India and Pakistan are members of several other organizations, and both participate in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Admittedly, Afghanistan is a particularly contentious issue for these two states, but that is all the more reason for both to be included in a Contact Group. As for extra-regional players, there is no intrinsic reason why countries such as Japan – another major donor of aid to Afghanistan – should not be allowed to join. Criticisms such as these do not negate the value of a regional forum. Rather, they suggest that the thinking behind the 'Six plus Three' initiative is sound, but that it requires further refinement and consultation with partner states if it is to form the basis for a truly effective mechanism.

THE SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION AND AFGHANISTAN

The chief regional institution is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). As mentioned above, it was formally established in June 2001.

As of June 2011, it comprised six full Member States – China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan – also Observer States (Mongolia, Iran, India and Pakistan) and Dialogue Partners (Belarus and Sri Lanka). It had concluded agreements on cooperation and partnership with several other regional groupings such as the Association of South East Asian Nations, the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Eurasian Economic Community. A Joint Declaration on Cooperation between the UN and SCO Secretariats was signed in April 2010.

The primary goal of the SCO is to improve regional security and stability. It espouses a holistic approach to these issues, setting 'soft' spheres of interaction such as culture and education on a par with security and defence. Operational responses to specific security threats, such as drug trafficking, organised crime and terrorist attacks, are the remit of the SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS), based in Tashkent.⁵⁰

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization's engagement with Afghanistan began in 2004, when President Karzai attended that year's summit meeting, held in Tashkent. The following year, the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group was created to provide a formal mechanism through which to channel the relationship. Nevertheless, Afghan engagement with the SCO remained at a low level, in large part a reflection of US antipathy to this body. This began to change in March 2009, when a major SCO conference on Afghanistan was held in Moscow. Participants included the UN Secretary-General and senior representatives from the United States, European Union and other international bodies. The political significance of the event was that it gave formal recognition to the role of the SCO in Afghanistan.⁵¹ The practical outcome was the *SCO-Afghanistan Action Plan on Combating Terrorism, Illicit Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime*, which set out the tasks to be undertaken by the signatories. Importantly, the document stressed the SCO's willingness to cooperate with other international and regional bodies and specifically, it supported the extension of the ISAF mandate with regard to these issues.⁵² This marked a decisive shift from the position set out in the Astana Declaration in 2005 (see above).

In assessing the role that the SCO is likely to play in Afghanistan, it is important to bear in mind that one of its fundamental principles is non-interference in the internal affairs of any country. Its international relations are based on formal agreements with the legitimately

constituted state authority. The SCO will implement measures to combat terrorism and other criminal activities in Afghanistan, but it is unlikely that it will assume an active role in conflict resolution. It does, however, have other benefits to offer. Firstly, it provides a forum within which relations with other regional powers can be cemented. Issues of common interest are discussed in plenary sessions, but also in private meetings on the margins of such gatherings. Thus, for example, the SCO cannot resolve the tangle of grievances between Pakistan and Afghanistan, but it does create additional channels of communication and cooperation, thereby exerting a discreetly mediating influence. Secondly, the SCO facilitates Afghanistan's re-integration into the regional economy. This is critical to the country's long-term development. Specifically, it provides a framework for involving Afghanistan in the pan-continental infrastructural projects – roads, railways and pipelines – that are now taking shape. An indication of the Organization's increasing importance for Afghanistan was Kabul's decision to request Observer status in the SCO.⁵³

CONCLUSIONS

The first and most important conclusion from the survey of regional initiatives is that the 'neighbourhood' states are inextricably bound to Afghanistan and directly affected by developments there. They do not have to be persuaded that they have an important role to play in promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan. However, the way in which they engage will be determined by national capabilities and priorities. There is no unified regional strategy, but there is multi-layered engagement, with different sets of members pursuing a variety of initiatives. The risk of duplication is largely offset by the sheer enormity of the tasks that need to be undertaken. The emphasis is on building partnerships and seeking complementarity, rather than competition.

Taken as a whole, the pattern of overlapping activities reveals an implicit consensus on basic principles. There is general agreement that there can be no military solution to the conflict in Afghanistan. However, this does not mean that security threats will be ignored. On the contrary, the fight against terrorism, drug trafficking and other forms of organised crime is a priority for all the regional states, jointly and individually, and is being vigorously pursued. A third point of agreement is that Afghanistan's development must go hand in hand with regional re-

integration. Infrastructural projects and projects to improve trade and transit links are the crucial underpinnings of such an endeavour and, as discussed above, a large number of initiatives are being implemented in this sphere. Restoring and strengthening cultural, educational and academic ties is also intrinsic to the realisation of the vision of regional re-integration. Resources are being devoted to such projects, but at present they are limited by security concerns as well as economic constraints. This will no doubt change as (and if) the regional states become more stable and prosperous.

The situation within Afghanistan is in flux and it is impossible to predict developments in the immediate future, let alone a few years ahead. The killing of Osama Bin Laden by US special forces on 2 May 2011 opened up new uncertainties. To some, it offered a convenient excuse to wind down the operation. This was especially attractive as it became increasingly obvious that the exorbitant cost of the mission in Afghanistan would be difficult, if not impossible, for the US to sustain (estimated bill for the 2011 fiscal year was US\$113 billion).⁵⁴ On the other hand, the military establishment in the US, as in other NATO member states, was adamantly opposed to a premature weakening of counterinsurgency operations.⁵⁵ At the time of writing the most likely outcome was that there would be a formal reduction of US and other coalition forces in Afghanistan, but that a significant presence would be retained under different labels, such as 'trainers', 'advisers,' and security guards.

The wider region, too, is volatile, with numerous potential flashpoints. As suggested above, it is not inconceivable that the United States, with or without NATO support, might find it expedient to retain a strategic foothold in the region. This would enable the US to continue to play a role in Eurasian power politics. By its very proximity it would exert pressure on states such as Iran, China and Russia, likewise on Pakistan. This would undoubtedly increase the potential for friction, and even conflict. It would also create a dilemma for the Central Asian states. To date, each of them has maintained a multi-vectored foreign policy, refusing to be drawn into exclusive security-political relationships. If there were to be an East-West standoff in the region, they might find it hard to remain unaligned. Thus, the promised NATO-ISAF draw down might be the end of a chapter, but surely not the end of geopolitical tensions in the region.

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THE REBUILDING OF AFGHANISTAN *IS THE WORLD GROWING DISENCHANTED?*

APRATIM MUKARJI

Ten years on since its deliverance from the vicious clutch of the obscurantist Taliban, Afghanistan today is beset by problems created and compounded by a largely unsuccessful US-led military campaign. The civilian population is largely alienated by wanton deaths of innocents in misdirected NATO ground assaults, aerial bombardments, and drone attacks. Also saddled with a decade-old regime largely confined to urban centres, President Hamid Karzai is demoralized not only by his failure to build a domestic support base but also by his complete disenchantment with the United States and other Western allies, which has led to his subsequent and desperate search for allies among the Taliban themselves. Meanwhile, both Pakistan on the eastern front and Iran on the western front brazenly continue to play their own games by promoting proxies within the indigenous fundamentalist forces. Besides, drug trafficking and corruption, among a host of other problems, continue to defy solutions. By no means, a beguiling picture that the South Asian country today presents to the world.

Contrarily, however, it is important to note that this is not the only picture of Afghanistan available to the world today. For, in these ten years many positive developments have also taken place, which encourage the minority but no less truthful view that the hard-earned positive gains (and these are by no means meager, considered in the correct perspective) must be consolidated, enlarged, and carried to their logical conclusions.

Just as the world takes note of the anxiety of the United States and its NATO allies to get out of their military commitments in Afghanistan which have largely turned out to be counter-productive, it should also

take care to ensure that the socio-economic sectors of the country like health care, education, infrastructure, trade and industry, employment, and social welfare schemes and political (democratic) institutions continue to consolidate the gains obtained so far and are developed further.

Those who wish Afghanistan well, however, are dismayed by the fact that the Western donor countries in particular - which are also among the constituents of the US-NATO military alliance - are already betraying a certain kind of dishonesty by clearly putting their emphasis and priority on the schedule of withdrawing their forces by 2014. It is already evident that due to this unwelcome shift in their interests and programmes, the task of reconstructing and developing the country has begun to suffer.¹

Looking at the war-ravaged country from this particular perspective of urgent needs of reconstruction and development, the indications of a Western withdrawal syndrome from a so-called thankless job are certainly disquieting. Ten years since the country entered a period of freedom and development, Afghanistan today is once again experiencing a gradual weakening of the focus of rich countries, led by the USA. This is the second time that this is happening. The first instance occurred at the time Iraq was invaded by Western governments in 2003 seeking the ouster of the Saddam Hussein regime.²

However, there are vital differences between the situation then and now in Afghanistan. Most significantly, however insufficient they may be, there is no gainsaying that substantial progress has been made in several key socio-economic sectors of the country during the decade. To take a look at a few statistics, A brand new Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police have been created, are under constant training and deployment, and are graduating towards the final takeover of the responsibility of maintaining and securing national security. They are presently in the intermediate stage of sharing the on-going military and police campaigns against the Taliban, and are generally considered well-trained and well-equipped for the job. The October 2010 target of 134,000 personnel for the army was exceeded in August 2010 as was the target 109,000 personnel for the police. A significant aspect of the building up of national institutions for security forces is that for the first time, and especially after the last few decades of internecine inter-ethnic enmities deepened by the civil war and the Taliban-Northern Alliance war, the different ethnic communities have been brought under a common point of allegiance and discipline. However, reports say that there is an average

20 per cent defection annually from the forces, and that many of the defectors turn up in Taliban ranks. This is apparently a major blemish in the security apparatus.

The economy, devastated as it was first by the war against the Soviet occupation (1979-89), thereafter by the civil war among the various *mujahideen* (liberation fighters) groups (1990-92), and then the long-drawn Taliban-Northern Alliance war (1996-2001), is being rebuilt from the scratch. As the basic economic structure was virtually missing and as the country's internal resources were meager to the extreme, it is essentially a liberal and continuing infusion of international assistance in funds, personnel, equipment, training, etc. that is sustaining and developing the economy. The available statistics, such as the Gross Domestic Product (purchasing power parity) which stood at US \$ 29.81 billion (estimated) in 2010 and GDP per capita at US \$ 1,000 do not tell the real story due to the extensive propping up of the economy by international aid. Similarly, the figure of 36 per cent of the population living below the poverty line in 2008-09 does not reflect the grinding poverty either. In short, the country is far from addressing adequately such fundamental challenges as low revenue collection, anaemic job creation, high levels of widespread corruption, weak governmental capacity, and poor public infrastructure.³

On the other hand, more than 62,00,000 students attend school in grades 1-12 today, the largest figure in the history of Afghanistan. The number of girls in education has risen from 5,000 in 2001 (at the time the Taliban rule ended) to 24,00,000 at the beginning of 2011, again a figure never before recorded in the Afghan history. All this has been achieved in the last ten years.⁴

Many hospitals and clinics have been built in the last decade, with the most advanced treatments being available in Kabul. The Indira Gandhi Children's Hospital, funded by the Government of India (which also treats women), and the French Medical Institute for Children, both situated in Kabul, are the leading children's hospitals in Afghanistan, with the Jinnah Hospital (funded by the Government of Pakistan) coming up. There are also a number of well-equipped regional hospitals across the country built by the United States Army Corps of Engineers and run by the Afghan National Army.

The US Agency for International Development runs DOTS (directly observed therapy, short course) treatments for tuberculosis as well as TB awareness and prevention programmes. The WHO and UNICEF are

assisting the Afghan Ministry of Public Health in a campaign to eliminate polio in the country. Reported cases of poliovirus are on the decline, from 63 in 1999 to 17 in 2007, though the figure rose to 20 during the first nine months of 2009 due to impeded vaccination efforts in the face of increase violence in the previous year. It is estimated that compared to a 10 per cent coverage of the population in 2001 as many as 85 per cent of the people today obtain basic health services.

As many as 39,000 community-based infrastructure projects, such as wells, clinics and roads, in over 22,000 communities spread across the country have been identified and are being managed through the Afghan-led National Solidarity Programme. Almost 10,000 km of rural roads, supporting the employment of hundreds of thousands of local workers, have been rehabilitated under the National Rural Access Programme. Nearly 100,000 jobs have been created in the telecommunication sector in the last ten years.

India's role in the rebuilding of Afghanistan typifies the international community's commitment to help the country emerge from the mess in which it finds itself. One of the largest donors, India is engaged in building up infrastructure, communications, education, health care, social welfare, training of officers including diplomats and policemen, economic development, and institution-building. Nearly 4,000 Indians are working in various public and private sector projects. A major project is the 220 km-long strategic road running from the Delaram town in Herat province on the Kandahar-Herat highway to Zaranj town on the Afghanistan-Iran border, built by the Border Roads Organization of India six months ahead of the schedule and handed over to Afghanistan on 22 January 2009. The road link with Iran gives access to sea-ports in that country to Afghanistan and also facilitates trade with India and the Persian Gulf countries. Indian exports to Afghanistan now travel to the Chahbahar port in Iran en route to the importing country. Hitherto, Afghanistan's only access to the sea was through the Karachi port in Pakistan.

Symptomatic of the kind of risk that any donor country undertakes while contributing to the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan was the otherwise unacceptable death toll involved in the Delaram-Zaranj project: Eleven Indian workers and 126 Afghan soldiers and policemen who were providing security while the construction was going on were killed in Taliban attacks. India's External Affairs Minister at the time Pranab Mukherjee put the death toll in the right perspective when he

told the inauguration ceremony, "In fact, for the construction of (every) 1.5 km (1 mile) of road, one human life was sacrificed."⁵

Among a host of other infrastructure projects, India has also been involved in the building of the Salma Dam power project in the Herat province and in the construction of a 220 kv double circuit transmission line from Pul-e-Kumri to Kabul and a 220/110/20 kv power substation in Kabul including 600 transmission towers, all of these to help augment electricity generation and distribution in the country.⁶

While the task of rebuilding Afghanistan progresses in jerks and jolts, the country is definitely building on and adding to its assets. Right now and certainly in the decades to come, its liabilities are likely to outweigh and overshadow its assets, but it is reasonable to argue that Afghanistan will emerge out of its shadows of destruction, depravity and poverty. Since 2010 the world has learned that there are untapped mineral deposits worth about US\$ 1 trillion (according to a series of surveys by the United States Geological Survey) and worth about \$ 3 trillion (according to a survey by the Afghan Ministry of Mines) in the country making Afghanistan potentially a very rich country indeed. Rare earth deposits samples collected from the Khanneshin area of the Helmand province are being analyzed by the US Geological Survey to determine their exact quantum. The Afghan Government, however, says that there are rare earth deposits elsewhere in the country as well. Thus the prospects for collecting enormous amounts of royalties alone by way of leasing out such deposits to developed and developing countries with proven capabilities and resources obviously exist, but as a skeptical British geologist told the news agency AP (dispatch on 16 February 2011), "There's been quite a lot of hype about mineral resources in Afghanistan. But just having the minerals is not enough. Mines need roads and railroads, no easy proposition in a war-wracked country."

The slip between the scope, resources, and opportunities for development, and the actual deliverance of a reconstructed and progressive country is thus enormous. However, the most crucial step towards an establishment of normality over the entire country - which will act as a facilitator for development - is controlling and maintaining a suitable security environment, and in this very task the international community, which took upon itself that job right through the last ten years, has faltered quite badly.

Ten years after the Taliban were driven out of the country, the security situation has turned so brazenly upside down that the Islamist

group is being officially courted to be partners with the democratically elected government. Instead of counting the dead among the Taliban rank and file and leadership, the entire attention today is on the number of innocent civilians killed in aerial bombardments, ground assaults and drone attacks. Clearly, there is something very seriously wrong with the military strategy being pursued by the United States-led International Security Assistance Force (AISF) and NATO forces in combating the Taliban and al-Qaeda.

On 26 January 2011, the world was presented with the latest civilian death count in Afghanistan, over 2,400 in the first nine months of 2010. Early in March 2011, there was a shocker even for President Hamid Karzai, one of whose cousins was shot down in his Kandahar village in an operation. Human Rights Watch (HRW) warned about the deteriorating security situation in the country “despite the presence of 150,000 foreign troops.” The HRW commented, “Security has deteriorated in some areas of Afghanistan, irrespective of additional US troops (inducted) last year. Two US operations in the Kandahar and Helmand provinces in 2010 made thousands of Afghan civilians displaced and (increased) militancy in the two provinces.. Apart from the thousands of deaths and injuries to many more, Afghan properties worth over \$ 100 million were damaged in southern Afghanistan.”

But even more worrying for the international community was the following pessimistic assessment by a senior US officer. The special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction retired Marine Gen. Arnold Fields was quoted saying that billions of dollars in US tax money used to train, equip, and support the Afghan security forces would probably end up in vain. “The issue is endangering the entire US investment worth 11.4 billion dollars in building the Afghan National Security Forces facility for not meeting the needs or objectives (of Afghanistan) and (ending) in vain.” According to the officer, the development of the Afghan army and police, which was a key element in the US administration’s plans to withdraw US forces incrementally between 2011 and 2014, was “in danger.”⁷

The question, therefore, is if the western nations’ move to effect gradual disengagement from war duties in Afghanistan is timed rightly. As we have noted, there are already prominent signs of a shift in the interest and commitment to development programmes in favour of presenting a relatively improved security situation so that uncomfortable questions about the advisability of withdrawing in the next few years

could be glossed over. But the situation would be far more worrying for the Afghans and the region if it is transpired that even the improved security situation is in reality a dressed-up and largely falsified picture.

A review of the war in Afghanistan by US President Barack Obama in December 2010 said that “notable operational gains” had been achieved and the Taliban’s momentum arrested in much of the country and reversed in some areas, though the gains were fragile and reversible. These findings were echoed by military commanders on the ground. Gen. David Paetreaus, the commander of the US and NATO-led forces, said in the course of an assessment of 2010 in a message to foreign troops and civilians. “Throughout the past year, you and our Afghan partners worked together to halt a downward security spiral in much of the country and to reverse it in some areas of great importance.”

American think-tanks also chipped in with similarly positive assessments of the situation. An example was a report by the American Enterprise Institute and the Institute for the Study of War. It said that the security situation in the southern part of Afghanistan was fundamentally different than a year ago. The Taliban had lost “almost all of its safe havens” in the south and the momentum of the insurgency there had been arrested and probably reversed. The report, written by Frederick Kagan, a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute who spent 150 days in the region assessing the situation in 2010, said that the ISAF and NATO forces had never before conducted multiple, large-scale, simultaneous clear and hold operations in Helmand and Kandahar, continuing to hold in an area that they had cleared while also clearing other areas. This report also averred that the insurgency was not gaining ground in northern Afghanistan.

However, a major contrary assessment was made available by a non-governmental organization Afghanistan NGO Safety Office (ANSO) which advises NGOs working in Afghanistan. According to it, “strategic communications” messages were only aimed at preparing the way for troop withdrawals scheduled to start in 2011. “No matter how authoritative the source of any such claim, messages of this nature are solely intended to influence American and European public opinion ahead of the withdrawal. (The messages) are not intended to offer an accurate portrayal of the situation for those who live and work here.” The ANSO found that Taliban attacks had increased in the year 2010 by 64 per cent compared to the attacks in 2009, and an average of 33 incidents had occurred every day. While violence may have decreased in some

areas, it had dramatically increased elsewhere. "If losses are taken in one area, they are simply compensated for in another as has been the dynamic since this conflict started," it pointed out. Casualty numbers on all sides were at record levels, with a total of 711 foreign troops killed during 2010, by far the bloodiest year of the war and up from 521 in 2009.

More significantly, and this is noted in the beginning of this article, civilians bore the brunt of casualties. The United Nations estimated that 2,412 civilians were killed and 3,803 injured in the first ten months of the year 2010, 20 per cent more than in 2009. More areas of Afghanistan are falling prey to Taliban activities. The ANSO said that the insurgency had been "rapidly" spreading out of its traditional strongholds in the south and east of the country into previously peaceful areas in the north and west. Militant attacks in six northern provinces increased faster than the average for all of Afghanistan, more than doubling in five provinces, and tripling in Sar-e-Pol. In the south, where foreign and Afghan forces had stepped up offensives during 2010, the increase in Taliban attacks suggested that the latter's capacity to conduct raids had "improved substantially." The Helmand province, by all means one of the worst affected areas, saw a 124 per cent increase in Taliban attacks while in the Kandahar province the rise was by 20 per cent. There was a relative decline in attacks from August onwards, but December 2010 witnessed a 47 per cent increase in attacks compared to December 2009.⁸

In the midst of all these negative and contradictory developments and inter-play of mutually clashing interests of a host of countries, it is Afghanistan and its people, including President Karzai, who appear to be increasingly drifting away from the objectives of the international community. Ahmed Rashid, the Pakistani journalist, says that judging by his extensive interaction with Karzai in early November 2010, the President is a dramatically changed person in his perceptions of the West, the USA, the Taliban, and the future of his country. "His single overriding aim now is making peace with the Taliban and ending the war—and he is convinced it will help resolve all the other problems he faces, such as corruption, bad governance, and the lack of an administration. He no longer supports the war on terrorism as defined by Washington and says that the current military surge in the south by the United States and its NATO allies is unhelpful because it relies on body counts of dead Taliban as a measure of progress against the insurgency, which to many would be a throwback to Vietnam and a contradiction of (Gen.) Petraeus's

new counterinsurgency theory to win over the people." Apart from the limited military gains, if any, achieved by the US, Karzai is also highly critical of Washington's failure to rein in Pakistan in not providing sanctuary and support to the Taliban. "Karzai is desperately tired and angry at the mixed and multiple messages he has received for the past nine years, first from Washington, and now from the NATO," Rashid says. He still is irked by the fact that President (George) Bush refused to provide anything close to adequate resources or troops for securing Afghanistan for four years after 2001...Karzai and the US will not part ways but there is clearly a fundamental and growing tension between them that does not augur well for either the US or Afghanistan."⁹

This article ends with a brief note on what is clearly the most vulnerable section of Afghan society and which will definitely be the most helpless victim if the Taliban ever decide to share power with the government in Afghanistan. Just as there is growing concern in the country and in the international community about increasing signs of Western governments preparing to wash their hands off Afghanistan, the women are the most disturbed lot. For in such a scenario, whatever little gains women have made in the last decade will be snatched away. Malalai Joya, that marvelously daring woman, said recently that the situation that women faced was a disaster. Men and women were being squashed between three enemies - the Taliban, the warlords, and the occupation forces who are bombing from the skies and killing civilians, women and children. "Now the Taliban are being invited into the government - there is no question the situation of women will be more disastrous and more bloody."¹⁰

One major surprise in the post-9/11 Afghanistan has been the complete absence of any meaningful role for any of the regional countries, Iran, Pakistan, India, Russia, and China. Pakistan by the virtue of its long-standing policy has carved out a vital though largely illegitimate role for itself by, first, nursing and sustaining and then sheltering the Taliban, and now hopes to derive benefits if its proxy in the Taliban manoeuvre to get into the Afghan government. Iran is also playing its game of nurturing its own proxy in the Taliban. Despite their legitimate interests and stakes in the establishment of a peaceful and progressive Afghanistan, the threesome of India, Russia and China remain out of any calculations of the West-driven search for an end of war in the country.

And yet, as the Western powers try to extricate themselves from

the shame of an eventual betrayal of the goal of establishing Afghanistan as a responsible member of the international community, the long-ignored concept of an internationally guaranteed neutrality for the country is being revived. In her testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 23 June, 2011, the United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, when asked if the 200-year-old precedent of the Congress of Vienna of 1814-15 could offer a model for today's Afghanistan, said, "(The) Congress of Vienna is an interesting historical example because there was a pact among regional powers that in effect left the Benelux countries as a free zone, so to speak...Afghanistan is a part of a much larger diplomatic pattern and set of relationships, comparable to the Congress of Vienna." She added, "This (Afghanistan) is a regional problem that is going to have that kind of a rather broad diplomatic solution. Certainly, if we could get to the point with the regional powers in South Asia that would be a very worthy outcome."

Mrs. Clinton's positive response to the issue raised by Senator Richard Lugar implied that the question was anticipated. Even more interestingly, however, she added the name of Iran to those regional players mentioned by the Senator, India, Russia, and Saudi Arabia, saying that "you cannot ignore Iran. Iran is a big player in the region and has a long border with Afghanistan and Pakistan." She concluded her response by saying, "The only way we are going to get a political solution is through this kind of diplomatic outreach and that is what we are engaged in."¹¹

The Secretary of State thus indicated that the United States had already extended pursuing the feasibility of a regional cooperation in taking care of the future of Afghanistan. If ever the concept of an internationally guaranteed neutral Afghanistan comes true, it is obvious that the pivotal role in such an exercise would be played by the badly mauled country itself. Significantly, the US Secretary of State's comments were soon followed by a statement made by the Defence Ministry of Afghanistan to the effect that, "The government of Afghanistan welcomes the idea of Ms. Clinton to turn Afghanistan into a neutral zone country and the Ministry of Defence believes that that idea will help the peace process a lot. Bringing peace to Afghanistan without the cooperation of regional countries is impossible as they play a major role in conflicts in Afghanistan."¹²

For the regional powers, such a solution will obviously be an ideal and workable one, since each of these countries will be held responsible

for the role they play while the scope for making mischief would be conceivably minimized. However, all exercises in exploring and settling for a comprehensively satisfactory solution will have to be completed by the time the Western powers get ready to end their currently decisive role in Afghanistan.

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2. Within a few months of forcing the Taliban out of Afghanistan (November 2001) and the installation of the Interim administration (22 December 2001) the Bush government began a surreptitious and systematic withdrawal of vital military and intelligence personnel and resources and assets from the country in order to facilitate their redeployment in Iraq. The *Atlantic Magazine* reported, "By the beginning of 2002, the US and Northern Alliance forces had beaten the Taliban but lost (Osama) bin Laden. At that point the United States faced a consequential choice: to bear down even harder in Afghanistan, or to shift the emphasis in the global war on terror somewhere else...Implicitly at the beginning of 2002 and as a matter of formal policy by the end, it placed all other considerations second to regime change in Iraq." (Fallows 10/2004) In February 2002, Gen. Tommy Franks allegedly told Sen. Bob Graham (D), "Senator, we have stopped fighting the war on terror in Afghanistan. We are moving military and intelligence personnel and resources out of Afghanistan to get ready for a future war in Iraq." (19 February 2002) The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) reduced its operations and personnel in Afghanistan around the late-2002 and early 2003. The majority of predator drones were withdrawn from Afghanistan and were not replaced by new ones around April 2002. The all-too-vital equipment to intercept al-Qaeda communication in the Afghanistan arena were sent to Iraq around May 2002, and more "talented" US personnel were withdrawn from Afghanistan for redeployment in Iraq during the late-2002-early 2003 period. The Bush administration took care to accomplish this gradual and well-planned withdrawal

from Afghanistan keeping all its allies in the so-called war on terror in the dark as long as it could and slowly owned up only after the Taliban and al-Qaeda were rejuvenated and became active once again inside Afghanistan. It was increasingly clear to the world at large that this deliberate US act was premised on a very inept and inadequate reading of the security situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan at the time. The campaign against the Islamist forces never recovered its vitality and effectiveness in the following years.

3. A large number of donor countries participate in providing assistance to the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan, the largest donor being the USA with nearly US \$ 8 billion (since 2001 under the USAID Afghanistan mission), Japan pledging \$ 5 b., the European Union donating \$ 1.4 b., India pledging \$ 1.3 b., and the UK \$ 1 b. among some other countries. As many as seventeen UN organizations, such as, Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan, Office of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN Children's Fund, UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UN Development Programme, UN Population Fund, UN Office on Drugs and Crime, UN World Food Programme, and UN World Health Organization, are active in the country. Besides, the World Bank with \$ 707 million pledged since 2002, International Monetary Fund coordinating \$ 1.6 b. in debt relief for 2010, Asian Development Fund over \$ 1.8 b. since 2002, International Labour Organization, and International Red Crescent contributing to health care of over 660,000 Afghans in 2009 are major partners in the international community's developmental programmes. For details, see <http://www.theodora.com>.
4. A coalition of sixteen aid agencies warned on 24 February 2011 that the hard-earned progress made on ensuring that Afghan girls obtained school education was at risk as foreign countries prepared to withdraw from the country. According to the coalition, the number of girls in education had risen from 5,000 in 2001 (at the end of the Taliban rule) to 24,00,000 although attendance in school was at times irregular and was even terminated due to factors like family apathy, security environment and poverty. The agencies were disquieted by their realization that many donor countries were increasingly focusing on counter-insurgency projects rather than on education as the date for the Afghan army and security forces taking control of security, 2014, drew nearer. Oxfam's country programme manager in Afghanistan Neeti Bhargava was quoted saying, "The education system is facing its greatest challenge since 2001. We're seeing a rollback of some recent gains made in getting young, motivated Afghan girls into school. This is an appalling waste of talent and potential." Abdul Wahid Hamidy of the Afghan NGO Coordination for Humanitarian Assistance said, "It's crucial that donor governments sustain their support for development, especially education, even once their troops leave the country." <http://www.rawa.org/temp/runews/2011/02/24/threat-to-girls-education-in-afghanistan-repo...>
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RULE OF LAW AND GOVERNANCE DEVELOPMENT IN AFGHANISTAN*

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Transition stability, democratic governance and economic development in Afghanistan require the effective and successful incorporation and prioritization of rule of law programming.¹ The governments of Afghanistan and the United States have both been proactive in the last years in developing programs and projects to enhance good governance while including rule of law elements in national strategies. This paper is a reflection on the context of the governance components that are being addressed in major policies, programs and positions of the governments of Afghanistan and the United States and other major international organizations and actors active in the building of a new Afghanistan. Specifically, this paper also places in the political and international development context the growing emphasis in Afghanistan on rule of law and democratic governance. At the same time, for security reasons, the United States continues to be focused on governance and development concerns throughout the region surrounding Afghanistan, thereby requiring that evaluation of the governance and rule of law development priorities be placed in both regional as well as security contexts.

The pursuit of peace, democracy and the rule of law are now conceptually and programmatically linked in Afghanistan. Although legal, sustainable and competitive economic growth (including poverty reduction as a whole) generally overshadow the picture of the growing movement to support rule of law programming, it is now a priority to include funding concepts on governance and rule of law. The one

* This paper represents the personal view of the author.

question that explicitly surrounds the evaluation of progress in Afghanistan is the determination of government programmatic impact. Indeed, without an evaluation of impact on major benchmarks and baselines, progress can neither be calculated nor secured. As the war in Afghanistan became more refined over the last decade, so did “the policy rhetoric of international development agencies”² become clearer in the area of the rule of law. This has led to not only increased and more targeted funding but also more focused programs with longer-term expected objectives and outcomes. Nevertheless, positions have been shifting towards the idea that nation building was a required element³ of peace and rule of law in the new Afghanistan. This is despite the reluctance to see nation-building and reconciliation as linked to sound governance development policies.

Making progress on the ‘security-related Afghanistan Benchmarks,’⁴ has required addressing the increasingly complex (and arguably deteriorating) environment of the Afghanistan conflict. Not only do attacks - both conventional and suicide bombings - continue with regular pace and are increasing over 2010,⁵ but the ongoing clashes for the last half decade have worsened the overall human security situation. Recently, for example, fighting between government forces and the Taliban in the remote northwestern province of Faryab led to the displacement of more than 12,000 people.⁶ Fighting in remote regions of Afghanistan has led to consistent problems in promoting improved governance and instituting rule of law through reliable local community practices (informal and customary justice mechanisms⁷). The figures of security breaches and terrorist incidents are astounding: “Last year, no fewer than 14,461 improvised explosive devices were used in Afghanistan.”⁸ At this stage, the reasons for the turn to this level of violence are hard to understand. It cannot be purely a response to foreign troops or a sense that there is “an occupying power” that should be removed by force or acts of terrorism.⁹ There must be a wider and more profound sense throughout segments of society and in different regions that the institutionalization of ‘representative’ democracy and transparent economic practices have failed, are merely for show, or are covers for political corruption. The minister of the economy, for example, was quoted in a BBC Monitoring Report as saying that “the system of open-market economy has been misinterpreted in Afghanistan and some people think that there is no control in the system of open-market economy. In fact, we cannot find any country around the world which

follows the same system of open-market economy as Afghanistan.”¹⁰ Economic and social injustice – elements of human insecurity – have increased the resistance of average citizens to governance development programs.

In the most insecure areas of the country, the judicial reforms and legal development programs have been implemented very slowly, if at all. In areas where there is heavy fighting, massive displacement has been the natural result and governance programs have consequently taken second stage to recovery and securitization efforts. Moreover, the institutionalization of good governance and the legitimization of rule of law programs in Afghanistan have been further confounded by localized political terror in regions besieged by heavy violence. Recently, for example, the body of a politician from Bamyan was found beheaded in Parwan – a neighboring province.¹¹ These terrorizing incidents should not be under-estimated when evaluating the long-term trends and successes of democracy institutionalization and public perception and acceptance of centralized legal norms.

Afghanistan remains a country at war with a process of transition to democracy that has been overshadowed by serious security concerns. In the first half of 2011, there have been major terrorist attacks in Afghanistan and incidents that showed the extent of the poor security climate. Recently, on 28 June 2011, there was a coordinated attack by the Taliban on the Intercontinental Hotel. The half brother to President Karzai, Ahmed Wali Karzai, who was the head of the elected provincial council was also killed in early July 2011.¹² The Taliban in Afghanistan are able to use complex tactics and strategies that lead to highly lethal attacks¹³ targeting the direct security of Afghanistan’s central and local governing bodies and also threatening the human security of the most vulnerable of Afghanistan’s citizens. In April 2011, 476 Taliban prisoners were even able to break out of the Sarposa prison in Kandahar. The prison break had been planned for five months.¹⁴ These devastating incidents are occurring in a context of government plans to promote peace, reconciliation, and dialogue with some Taliban leaders, who have committed to putting down their arms and cooperating. There are reports now that even the Americans are engaging in secret talks with representatives of the Taliban¹⁵ in order to make real progress on the transition to peace. President Karzai went so far as to confirm publicly the pardon or general amnesty for war crimes and human rights abuses.¹⁶ The National Stability and Reconciliation Law was enacted after a long

time even after it was passed by parliament in 2007. One side of the argument on the amnesty is that conflict and civil war could be fueled if there were prosecutions of human rights abusers. According to Human Rights Watch, the “law says that those engaged in current hostilities will be granted immunity if they agree to reconciliation with the government, effectively providing amnesty for future crimes.”¹⁷ Without complete peace, the Afghan commitment to democracy-building appears to be mostly rhetoric for the sake of the international donor and assistance community.

Democratic transition throughout all of Afghanistan is a complex process on account of the geographically shifting security concerns to different regions of the country. In 2009 and 2010, for example, Kunduz became a centre for insurgent activity despite its higher levels of past stability. Implementing international projects as well as enforcing international standards on democracy and the rule of law requires that developments towards peace occur simultaneously in many areas at the same time. Strengthening of democracy also requires that there are programmatic linkages on economic and social issues. For example, improving the school attendance and literacy rate (a long-term project) throughout the country is essential for Afghanistan’s citizens to know their rights and understand the introduction of new laws, including the new 2004 Constitution.¹⁸ Literacy of democracy and human rights norms will determine the long term success of governance projects.

The overall political situation surrounding the development of democratic governance and rule of law in Afghanistan requires continual reflection on the bilateral relations of Afghanistan and the United States. Although the support of the United States for the Karzai government has been consistently strong, there have been repeated points of contention since the United States and the international community started focusing on allegations of Afghanistan’s high levels of corruption and executive decisions that directly affect the observance of international human rights standards and the rule of law. Afghanistan’s president on the other hand has accused foreign officials of “seeking to weaken him and his government”¹⁹ after the White House started to address the corruption issue, particularly with respect to the 2009 electoral fraud concerns. Tensions between the two governments over governance issues and the strength of the executive affect not only the speed of reforms but also the room for maneuver of anti-government Taliban.

In 2010, the pressure on Karzai to support democratic institutions

and increased accountability of governing structures - specifically through and by the Parliament - led to ongoing negotiations and contention over the special court that Karzai formed to determine whether the parliamentary elections were legitimate and the allegations of election fraud were true.²⁰ President Karzai on the other hand appeared to be more focused on the strength of his government and executive control and, therefore, the percentage of ethnic groups in the Parliament. The possible over-representation of certain minorities (Tajiks and Hazaras for example) in the parliament could disturb the perceived legitimacy of parliament and Karzai's government as a whole. In late June 2011, the Supreme Court of Afghanistan issued a position that the lower house of parliament lacked the legal basis to be in operation because 62 members had votes that were invalidated,²¹ while even more MPs voted in response to disqualify members of the Supreme Court and declare that the special court (formed by President Karzai) had no authority over parliament.²² The level of confidence in governance institutions is at serious risk as the Supreme Court announced publicly that "...as long as 62 invalidated individuals are among the approved MPs and as long as they take part in decisions made by the lower house of parliament, any decisions by the lower house of parliament lack legal credibility and that it does not deem to be enforced as 62 members of the lower house of parliament have been disqualified."²³ The extent of impunity and the ability to hold onto power despite firm allegations of past abuses and wrongdoing has been a major criticism of Afghanistan's government formation and its ability to move forward towards real peace and reconciliation. The expectations that Afghanistan can build up its democratic institutions "cannot be divorced from the political environment where impunity from legal consequences benefits those with political power."²⁴ Impunity is further encouraged when former (as well as current) warlords and commanders have access to both local levels of power and national authorities and institutions. In short, there is a strong incoherence in the governing laws and institutions which has diminished the power of the Karzai government. This has conversely also encouraged Karzai to take non-democratic approaches to controlling the other levers of power - particularly the Parliament,²⁵ which was evident in his approach to the special court and its disqualification of MPs and the entire Parliament.

Karzai's attempts to limit executive clashes with the other branches of government, decrease ethnic tensions as a source of violence, and

improve the security situation have meant an emphasis on the supreme role of the executive and central government. Individual candidates in elections that have the backing of the executive are encouraged. The focus, therefore, has not been on the development of governance platforms and political parties. For the promotion of security, “the Government of Afghanistan (GoA) and the international community have focused on the technical formation and development of these democratic institutions (parliament), but others, such as political parties, have been sidelined.”²⁶ For this reason, it is particularly significant that the parliament has become a center of vocal opposition to the Karzai government, which is certainly the requisite function of a parliament for effective representation and input into government decision-making. The recent political crisis over the legitimacy of parliament has demonstrated that Parliament does have a role to play in checking the power of the executive authority. According to the news reports, the other side of the story has been that the disqualified MPs were “bent on provoking a clash among Afghanistan’s weak democratic institutions just when the Karzai administration needs to show it can effectively govern and protect the nation as U.S. forces and aid programs begin a three-year withdrawal.”²⁷

The Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS), which includes a long-term vision for 2020, refers specifically to goals in the area of governance. The document puts forward a vision of Afghanistan in 2020 as a “stable Islamic constitutional democracy”²⁸ with pluralism and prosperity. In the area of governance and the rule of law, the ANDS looks specifically at the areas of justice, corruption, legislative reforms, gender equality and public administration.²⁹ At the same time, the ANDS recognizes in its key objectives for justice sector reform, that there must be “adequate institutional organization structures capable of addressing cross-cutting issues in rule of law.”³⁰ This contrasts with the general and growing international perception that Afghanistan has not become a democratic state. Rather, democratization and promotion of the rule of law have been seen as a threat to the Afghan elite, who “resist pressure for democratic reform.”³¹ Specifically, the development of transparent and accountable governance and the strengthening of the rule of law are “predicated on the existence of an Afghan state that is both capable - and, importantly, willing - to implement (the ANDS).”³² The legal and political system of Afghanistan has to be legitimate, accessible, credible, representative, and comprehensible to all of the country’s citizens.³³ The deficiencies in all of these five characteristics of good governance reflect

on real quality of democratization and justice processes in Afghanistan. The disparities in control over state authority resources may lead to a permanently uneven playing field that violates democratic principles.³⁴

The contradictory signals coming from President Karzai about the role of international assistance in Afghanistan were a major focus of media attention throughout 2010. The electoral fraud was even attributed by the Afghan President to “foreigners,”³⁵ demonstrating the internal conflicts, power struggle and fight for legitimacy taking place inside Afghanistan. President Karzai has a demonstrated need to preserve political legitimacy in the face of growing dissent at the regional level. There is also increasing concern over the security transition to the Afghan government in the run up to the 2014 complete withdrawal of US forces. The extent of Afghan ownership over development processes, however, is currently minimal. For example, “an estimated 97 percent of Afghanistan’s gross domestic product (GDP) is derived from spending related to the international military and donor community presence.”³⁶ For this reason, the US government and the international assistance community are questioning what steps can be put in place now so that by 2014 there are real successes for both stability and governance - particularly in the area of anti-corruption. As 33,000 US troops leave Afghanistan by September 2012, with the majority of the remainder of troops leaving by 2014, the independence and strength of Afghanistan’s economy and governing structure is going to have a large effect on security calculations and the consequences of international forces departure. The Finance Minister of Afghanistan, Hazrat Omar Zakhelwal, has said that the economy of Afghanistan is currently “unstable because it is dependent on foreign aid.”³⁷ Afghanistan also has limited capacity to take control of its own reconstruction particularly as the Kabul Bank scandal has actually led to international aid being scaled back and even more concerns about the actual extent of corruption.³⁸ The decline in foreign assistance is further complicated by “the continued lack of an IMF programme,” which according to the UN will have consequences “for the continued implementation of national programmes.”³⁹

As the US has been spending more aid in Afghanistan than anywhere else, the need to see sustainable and effective programs in place is very high. At the same time, there is an underlying contradiction in the US outlook: On the one hand, the US government is still holding on to the principle that it is providing civilian resources but “without engaging in long-term nation-building.”⁴⁰ Meanwhile, the emphasis for

planning and aid disbursement is allegedly on “creating the conditions for a more stable, democratic government.”⁴¹ The possibility of successfully building democracy without input into long-term nation-building and reconciliation is unrealistic. Although the term nation-building does not appear in the ANDS, the emphasis on concerns about how to engage in reconstruction given the climate of insecurity shows that project implementation, strategic design for the future of Afghanistan, and conflict mitigation are all intertwined and should, therefore, be evaluated simultaneously from a nation-building perspective. The avoidance of the term nation-building is a telling sign but should not be deceiving: the capacity of state bodies and regional institutions to bring rule of law, effective justice, and democracy to the regions should be promoted as part of a wider strategy of nation-building.

The increase of public support for the peace process, particularly at the local and community levels, has been one of the main indicators of progress included by the United Nations and the international assistance forces.⁴² However, the rise of the Taliban insurgency and the weak rule of law throughout the regions have been impediments to the full engagement of the central government in Kabul with the local communities and their leaders.⁴³ The weakness of Afghanistan’s government in Kabul and the pervasiveness of corruption have also been major roadblocks for improvements in overall security and stability. Some of the main substantive rule of law issues that have been on the agenda include local-level access to justice, corruption at all levels of government, impunity for high-level Afghans for criminal activity, and the informal competing justice mechanisms at the local levels.⁴⁴ However, as with all societies in the midst of conflict, the priority has been placed on ending attacks by insurgents, terrorists, and the opposition and not on promoting anti-corruption measures and effective justice institutions. The international community, which is working on Afghanistan’s reconstruction, need to better understand how current and pressing issues of political corruption will determine the success of the whole range of democracy and rule of law assistance programs. The political corruption taking place in Afghanistan today has been described in general terms; the project implementation on the ground is not requiring from the outset that specific political corruption in Afghanistan be delineated and used as a tool for the scoping and assessment of potential governance and rule of law projects. Political corruption “takes place at the highest levels of the political system” and occurs when “officials,

who make and enforce the laws in the name of the people, are themselves corrupt.”⁴⁵ For these reasons, the partners working in Afghanistan should first look at how the power preservation calculations underpinning political corruption are shaping the effective implementation of good governance strategies.

The increasing insecurity in Afghanistan that developed after 2006 and the resurgence of the Taliban are long term problems that have consequences for good governance. These negative consequences will not appear all at once or in the short run. The consequences will also effectively occur and surface in wave-like patterns throughout a period of low opposition to the current ruling elite and minimal democratic activity. Without checks from the international assistance community, the accountability of the governing authorities to citizens will continue to decline. Moreover, the human insecurity that the citizens of Afghanistan face on a daily basis will directly affect the success of rule of law program implementations; improving human security cannot be addressed through quick projects that do not take account of nation building and reconciliation. Regardless of some of the apparent advances made by the Afghan National Police and Army and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), long-term governance projects need to be the priority. It has been widely discussed in the past couple of years that the violence Afghanistan has been facing is not as critical compared to the “lingering doubt about the legitimacy of the Afghan government.”⁴⁶ It is indeed the perceived legitimacy of the Afghan government and genuine democratization efforts taken by central authorities that will determine the success of good governance and rule of law assistance programming. On the other hand, and unfortunately, the legitimacy of Afghanistan’s government will be determined by how successful the international community can be in providing assistance that builds up democratic institutions, while understanding and implementing in practice a re-definition of nation-building. While the high levels of political and economic corruption have been lowering political will, that elusive concept, to institute governance and rule of law reform, resolve to improve governance systems will be a prerequisite for all development plans. As it has been clear for some time now that the Afghans are assuming increasing control and responsibility over their country, with all security and governance elements included, the United States is starting its “coordination-based reduction”⁴⁷ of forces and trying to place more emphasis on civilian expertise for the development of

Afghanistan. Civilian-military rule of law coordination has been improved but has been on the priority listing of areas for better strategic coordination since 2007-2008.⁴⁸ Real priority should now be placed on how civilian expertise can promote the development of Afghanistan's democratic institutions, focusing on programs⁴⁹ on governance, justice, and rule of law. As the UN Assistance Mission has continuously reiterated, "Afghanistan's peaceful future lies in the building up of robust democratic institutions based on the rule of law and the clear respect for the separation of powers."⁵⁰

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THE NEED FOR NEW POLICIES IN AFGHANISTAN

A EUROPEAN'S PERSPECTIVE

MICHAEL FREDHOLM

A decade has passed since the defeat of the Taliban government in Afghanistan, and it is hardly surprising that several member-states of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) wish to pull out their military forces from Afghanistan, or have already decided to do so. Yet, at first glance not even one of Afghanistan's multiple problems appears to have been resolved. The Taliban insurgents remain a viable force, and violence regularly occurs throughout the country. The casual observer may well wonder whether the security assistance provided by the international coalition has been of any use at all.

Indeed, the ISAF members in many ways appear to have followed contradictory and self-defeating policies in their valiant attempt to remake war-torn Afghanistan into a Western democracy overnight. While not all their efforts have been in vain, more could have been achieved if the realities of Afghanistan had been better understood by those who formulated ISAF policy. The reason for this failure in understanding the Afghan human landscape would seem to depend on two factors: first, an emphasis on do-good policies that included the immediate introduction of democracy under a strong, central government - which appealed to Western voters but had already been proven futile or outright misguided in almost a century of Afghan attempts at state and nation-building; second, the lack of a properly focused intelligence effort in Afghanistan, with sufficient resources and the goal to monitor conditions in the country instead of a single-minded focus on targeting in support of actions against individual terrorists ("the War on Terror"). Or, put in different terms: while Western military might initially was successfully brought to bear on the Taliban movement, the brain of the military was

distracted by the political demand that it focus solely on the hunt for individuals, at the same time that policies for reconstruction were chosen primarily to appeal to Western voters.

As a result of these policies, Afghanistan still faces a number of problems, each of which has the potential to destroy the Afghan government after the eventual pull-out of international military forces. This does not mean that all hope is lost, and that the Afghan people are doomed to self-destruction. Even after a decade, misguided policies can be reversed and there is still time to correct mistakes. In fact, the process is already underway among donor countries, which is evident from the carefully worded language of the European Union's Action Plan for Afghanistan and Pakistan, adopted during the Swedish Presidency of the European Union in 2009, which among the customary references to human rights, the importance of democratic elections, and the necessity to strengthen the rule of law not only concludes that the conflict in Afghanistan cannot be solved without addressing the situation in Pakistan but also notes the need for concerted efforts at the sub-national level of Afghanistan.¹ However, a successful implementation of new policies requires a clear analysis on the various problems facing Afghanistan. Let us examine each one by one.

THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, IDEA OF AFGHANISTAN AND ROLE OF FOREIGN AID

Modern Afghanistan was always, since its creation from 1880 by Abdul Rahman Khan (1844-1901, r. 1880-1901) with weapons and funding from Britain, a rentier state, that is, a state dependent on foreign aid from sponsors who wished to use it for their own strategic reasons. As Britain resigned its role in Afghanistan, the sponsorship was after the Second World War taken up by a not very enthusiastic United States and the considerably more eager Soviet Union. During the period 1979-89, the two superpowers fought a war of proxies on the territory of Afghanistan, with the Soviet Union supporting the central government and the United States supporting various Islamic groups opposed to the secular Afghan government. However, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991, the bipolar strategic conflict ended. So did most of the foreign aid. The aid that remained came exclusively from Arab sources. Through this, the subsequent Taliban regime, which regarded itself as another central government, was yet another rentier government.²

Afghanistan has a long history of dependence on foreign support. The early kings lived well on British subsidies. During the period 1956-1973, when the United States and the Soviet Union competed in offering development aid, foreign subsidies accounted for eighty per cent of Afghanistan's investment and development expenditure. The Afghan government could hardly pay for even the remaining twenty per cent. During the period, the share of domestic revenue in total government expenditure fell. Land and livestock taxes, which accounted for 18 per cent of domestic revenue in 1953, decreased to less than 2 per cent during the 1970s. This did not matter for the central government, since the foreign subsidies grew steadily during almost the entire period. Of the tax revenues that in fact were collected during the 1960s, no less than 80 per cent was derived from foreign trade. Land and livestock taxes were regarded as of little value compared to the income derived from abroad. The foreign subsidies primarily resulted in the strengthening of the national military and police forces. Any money that remained went to the construction of strategically important infrastructure such as highways and airports.³

The subsidies were paid out to strengthen the central government. Since both the early kings and the later national governments feared domestic rivals more than foreign great powers such as Britain and Russia, the subsidies were seldom used to develop remote parts of the country such as border regions and minority areas. Instead almost all resources were devoted to the strengthening of the central power: the military, strategic infrastructure, the security service, and so on. The ambition was to make the central government safe from local leaders.

Since the assumption of power by Hamid Karzai's interim government on 22 December 2001, generous foreign aid from the West has again become available. This leaves Afghanistan essentially where it started a century ago: a rentier state unable, and to some extent unwilling, to depend on its own resources. In striking similarity to the various Afghan governments before the civil war (most recently, the Soviet-supported *People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan*, PDPA), the Afghan government at the time of writing presides over a state whose finances seem to be becoming ever more dependent on external support. In addition, the activities of the government seem increasingly concentrated on maintaining its own security. The implications for the reconstruction of Afghanistan could be serious, since such a policy easily leads to irresponsible management and concentrates resources to what

benefits the central government rather than the whole country.

Indeed, the central government has in the minds of many foreign analysts become inseparable from the very idea of the Afghan state. Since all the kings of the 1747-1973 monarchy, except one, were ethnic Pashtuns, it is often argued that the Afghan national identity is based on Pashtun domination over other ethnic groups like Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, and several others.⁴ In 2001, President George W. Bush appeared to reach the same conclusion, a view also held by the fallen Taliban government's main sponsor, Pakistan. However, after more than two decades of civil war and a Soviet intervention that came to pitch Afghan government forces as well as Soviet troops against opposition *mujahideen* forces, very little appears to remain of Afghan national identity, at least within Afghanistan itself. Indeed, ethnic divisions became more divisive with the disappearance of the threat from the Soviet Union. First, the Soviet-inspired nationalities policy of the then ruling PDPA government reinforced ethnic identities. Second, an increased assertiveness grew among the minorities due to their military successes against the Soviets as well as their ability to survive in a war increasingly perceived to be against the Pashtun majority. This new political awareness made the traditional Pashtun political dominance in national politics unsustainable, especially as the new political and military organisations of many minorities facilitated protests.⁵ The collapse of the Afghan state accordingly devalued the national identity and instead reinforced ethnic identities. The defeat of the Taliban movement and its replacement by an interim government did little to change this situation. Nor did the fact that the Afghan diaspora in exile tends to cling to a dated, romanticised vision of what the Afghan national identity should be like, but possibly never was.

At present, generous foreign aid to reinforce the central government remains the one solution on which all donors still can agree. Unfortunately, this policy was tried, and failed, during the period of Soviet domination. Indeed, this policy led to the 1979 civil war that directly caused all subsequent problems in Afghanistan. The same policy has again been attempted since late 2001, with no more success than last time.

Recently, donors have begun to modify foreign aid policies so that they will continue to reinforce the central government but re-direct foreign aid from the Afghan national security forces to agriculture, welfare, and similar worthy causes. The Council of the European Union

in its 2009 Action Plan for Afghanistan and Pakistan indeed stressed the need to concentrate efforts on strengthening state capacity and institutions to promote good governance at the sub-national level in Afghanistan.⁶ While this policy change sounds worthwhile to Western ears and may well cause some good in Afghanistan, it will not in itself enhance security, which is a prerequisite for such a policy to work, and will not defeat the Taliban.

In other words, policies have been pursued that never worked in the past and thus were doomed from the start. Instead, Afghanistan would have stood a far better chance of developing if a federal solution had been implemented. A century of state- and nation-building never once managed to create a central government acceptable to all groups that constitute the population of Afghanistan. The superficial introduction of democratic practices will not change the situation. To believe that a credible and popular central government will be a possibility now, after decades of civil war and with a recent history of less than fair democratic elections, would seem naive, yet this is what the current constitution of Afghanistan mandates. This, however, also militates against the lack of trust between different ethnic and social groups within the country. For these reasons, a federal system would be far more suitable for Afghanistan and, it would seem, far more acceptable to the country's inhabitants. Naturally, foreign aid should then be distributed where it can be used in the most beneficial way, which is not necessarily the safeguarding of the central government.

**AFGHAN NATIONAL ARMY, NATIONAL POLICE,
AND THE ISSUE OF AUXILIARY MILITIAS**

Although a reasonably efficient Afghan National Army (ANA) and a somewhat less effective Afghan National Police (ANP) have been formed, neither is sufficient to maintain security throughout the country. In addition, neither can be expected to reach a sufficient strength in the immediate future to assure security in the entire country without the support of substantial international military forces. Besides, as an instrument for the central government, the ANA and in particular the ANP, with its reputation for corruption, are not being seen as an impartial force in many parts of the country.

So what can be done?

One recurring idea is to form local militias to prop up the Afghan

national security forces in the war against the Taliban. ISAF has indicated that a plan to form auxiliary police units to support the ANP in remote areas is led by the Afghan Interior Ministry.⁷ Such units, under the control of the Interior Ministry and known as *Polis-e Mahal* or Afghan Local Police (ALP), consist of militiamen who are given guns, ammunition, a khaki uniform, and a monthly wage which is about eighty per cent of what a police recruit earns.⁸ The introduction of local militias also forms a key component of the counterinsurgency plan of General David Petraeus, the commander of ISAF and U.S. forces in Afghanistan since June 2010. According to General Petraeus, by February 2011 the ALP programme was underway in 17 locations, with a total of more than 3,100 paid recruits. More than 40 additional locations were awaiting Afghan government approval, with a planned number of another 4,500 recruits.⁹

The Petraeus plan to form local militias under the control of the Interior Ministry is reminiscent on the *operatifi* system established during the 1979-1989 war between the Soviet-supported PDPA government and the *mujahideen*. The PDPA government increasingly came to rely on tribal-based militias known, among others, as *watanparast* (patriots) and *operatifi*. These, nominally under the Interior Ministry, were to all extent identical to the irregular forces that earlier Afghan governments had relied upon. The militias were exempted from any government programmes they did not choose to join and were primarily supposed to keep their own areas free of enemy fighters and to keep the major roads open. The most important of the *operatifi* became the Jowzjani Uzbek militia, led by Abdul Rashid Dostum. The strongest militia strength, however, was in Paktia, then as now. In areas where no tribal structure remained, pro-government militias were organised around factories, collective farms, or villages.¹⁰ As the *operatifi* system became increasingly important for the survival of the Afghan state, in particular following the Soviet withdrawal, the identity of Afghan state power obviously became less clear. The central government soon found itself unable to assert its power in remote regions. This scenario for obvious reasons does not appeal to the proponents of a strong central government.

Human rights groups, inclined towards the ideal of a strong central government in Afghanistan, have argued that the plan to arm local militias is reckless. They warn that empowering militia commanders will cause the same kind of internecine fighting that devastated Afghanistan during the 1990s. President Karzai has at times voiced

similar concerns, suggesting that the plan to form local militias could weaken his government.¹¹

Indeed, there have been reports that irresponsible ALP militias have committed murders and worse. One such case involved a group of former insurgents, fighters from the *Hezb-e Islami* of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, which surrendered to the government to be reformed into a militia force with orders to fight the Taliban. Yet, regardless of whether this group is called ALP or something else, it is clear that it was not a *local* militia, with roots in the community. At least in this particular case, the ALP leader and his men can better be described as mercenaries. Besides, as Pashtuns in an area dominated by Tajiks, this particular militia would in any case be unlikely to function as a genuine community militia, with a feeling of responsibility towards the local population.¹²

Yet, the case for the formation of genuine community militias can easily be argued. Traditionally known as *Arbakai* or (in its plural form) *Arbaki* militias, tribal self-defence forces tasked with the protection of and maintenance of order within their own areas was once a feature of Pashtun tribal culture. In recent years, they existed mainly in Loya Paktia. *Arbakai* members are traditionally unpaid, thus not under the control of an individual (although the *Arbakai* is led by an amir), a commercial company, or the government.¹³ In the post-Taliban period, *Arbaki* militias were formed as early as in 2002.¹⁴ In 2005/2006, the governor of Paktia made an agreement with the main tribes of the area to appoint *Arbaki* paid from his operational funds. However, the system failed when payments were suspended.¹⁵ There have also been attempts by Afghan government officers to recruit auxiliary police to the ANP from *Arbaki* groups, at times even under the disputed presumption that the name *Arbakai* could be retained.¹⁶ *Arbakai* groups financed by the government have also been formed elsewhere, such as in Kunar province.¹⁷

The continued attempts to rely on *Arbaki* in Loya Paktia exposed the dilemma of the *Arbakai* as an institution. In 2007, a tribal elder explained that “in the King’s time” it was an honour to be a member of an *Arbakai*, and that its members were provided with rations, weapons, and ammunition by the local *jirga*, with no payments from the government or any individual leader.¹⁸ This common understanding of the term *Arbakai* has made some contemporary observers emphasise that the *Arbakai* cannot be referred to as a militia, since the *Arbakai* is fundamentally more embedded in the community than a militia - a lingering reaction to the negative aspects of the various armed groups

referred to as militias in the turbulent 1990s. One specialist concludes: "In Southeast Afghanistan, people are very clear about the distinction: being an *Arbakai* member is considered an honour while belonging to a militia is considered shameful."¹⁹ While this description of the *Arbakai* may seem overly rose-tinted, the perceptions of ordinary Afghans will obviously be a key factor in how they respond to any institutionalisation of armed local security forces. Yet, as shown by the attempts in Loya Paktia, no *Arbakai* can function unless funds are provided at least for weapons, ammunition, and to support the daily life of its members and their dependents.

Even so, it would seem that the existence of genuine community-based *Arbaki* units, rooted in the local population, would seem the best choice for maintaining law and order in remote areas. Co-ordination between *Arbaki* could be achieved through, for instance, monthly meetings moderated by a government representative. However, at present, such militias, if formed, would operate beyond any existing legal framework. They would also, no doubt, to at least some extent operate outside the central government's control. However, this does not necessarily mean that they would be a negative factor, or a force for evil, as some would say. As guarantors for local autonomy, they might indeed serve a key function, if a federal system was to be introduced in Afghanistan. Local communities would become share-holders in the new Afghan state to be built. In effect, the formation of such units would become part of the creation of a genuine civil society in Afghanistan. An armed civil society, but civil nonetheless.

This does not mean that the creation of local militias would be without dangers. It could easily be argued that the existence of local militias, regardless of kind, not under the control of the national security forces will make the activities of international military forces more dangerous and difficult. Naturally, the existence of formations of unknown, armed men in civilian dress may easily lead to accidents in the form of friendly fire and will surely complicate military operations. Yet, a system should be found that can survive the Afghan realities even after the withdrawal of international military forces.

WARLORDS, GOOD AND BAD

Warlords and their influence are often identified as a key problem in rebuilding Afghanistan. The term warlord has acquired a pejorative

meaning, so can safely be used in state-building discourse when describing one's rivals or indeed people one does not like. Yet, few define what a warlord is, which makes most discussions on the deleterious effects of the warlords somewhat insubstantial.²⁰

This does not mean that no problems exist with regard to certain warlords, that is, those strongmen, commanders, and militia leaders who use violence to compete with each other and the Afghan central government for power and authority. This includes those who nominally operate under private security companies licensed by the Afghan Interior Ministry to provide protection services for the Coalition supply chain. Their power is derivative of their business function, not their political or ethnic influence, and some of their kick-backs and bribes may directly benefit the Taliban and other insurgents, since it is plausible that the Taliban would attempt to extort protection payments from any Coalition supply chain that runs through territory in which they freely operate.²¹

Yet, there is a significant difference between such strongmen of dubious loyalty, who in effect function as hired mercenaries, and those former or present commanders who in their native region enjoy a certain level of prestige among their supporters for ethnic or historical reasons. Indeed, the security realities in Afghanistan early on led to the adoption of a pragmatic approach that allowed a number of former warlords to remain in power because of their ability to provide security and assist in reconstruction through their informal power and personal networks, with which they managed to preserve control over their respective provinces.

Some have argued that the political importance of actors whose power does not derive exclusively from formal institutions is far from unique to Afghanistan, and that the experience of Afghanistan with its limited resources for state-building suggests that for historically weak states a hybrid model of governance that relies on a combination of formal institutions and informal power may be the only viable one. Such a model can deliver the necessary goods and services to the population, at the same time that it provides a fair amount of revenues to the central government.²²

This certainly holds true at the provincial level. An example of a so-called warlord who has succeeded in this respect is Atta Mohammed Noor, the governor of Balkh province. A Tajik and native of Balkh, he has successfully installed his followers throughout the provincial administration in what some refer to as a racketeering arrangement. However, there is little doubt that this arrangement is the main cause

for the relative security and stability in Balkh as compared to other provinces. By ensuring security within his domain, Governor Atta has succeeded in attracting an exceptionally high degree of investment and reconstruction in the provincial capital, Mazar-e Sharif. And in doing so, he has shown that warlords in Afghanistan, when enjoying a certain level of prestige and when given the opportunity to enrich themselves through ensuring security and stability instead of serving as hired guns, constitute what can easily be seen an emerging group of major landowners. Such a development would not be greeted by those who want a Western-style democracy overnight in Afghanistan, nor would it necessarily be beneficial at the national level. However, when provincial warlords and local strongmen begin to invest in local construction instead of moving revenues abroad, they quickly find an interest in stability. They thus begin to play a constructive role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan - unlike hired mercenaries such as those who during the 2001-2002 war rapidly signed up as auxiliary commanders or at present fight over the control of highways so as to be able to claim protection money without re-investing any of it in local development.

Any discussion of the role played by warlords, whether beneficial or destructive, needs to address the issue of narcotics trafficking. However, while this certainly remains a problem, the question remains how big a problem narcotics trafficking currently constitutes. Different estimates are available from various agencies; yet, nobody knows for sure the amount of revenues collected through narcotics trafficking.²³ While the total turnover of the narcotics trade no doubt is huge, it remains unknown how much of the revenues actually ends up in Afghanistan, or indeed with the insurgents. Besides, at present synthetic drugs, the production of which is not limited to any specific country, are becoming increasingly common, which may indicate that although a narcotics problem persists in Afghanistan, it might in time become less connected to conditions inside the country and thus of less importance for its development.

ROLE OF THE PASHTUNS

What role should the Pashtuns, the largest ethnic group in the country, play in Afghanistan? As noted, since all the kings of the 1747-1973 monarchy, except one, were ethnic Pashtuns, it is often argued that the Afghan national identity is based on Pashtun domination over other

ethnic groups. This view was strongly upheld by the various Afghan governments since the time of Abdul Rahman Khan, and the foreign sponsors of these governments were not eager to contradict them. Among Western academics too this argument has often been repeated. For good or bad, policy-makers have listened to these calls, in particular since the Iranian revolution of 1979, which caused lasting tensions between Iran and in particular the United States. In fact, the preoccupation with Iran has consistently bedevilled the attempts of American policy-makers to formulate policy with regard to Afghanistan. This was most recently seen during the 2001-2002 invasion of Afghanistan. What appears to have been an instinctive rather than reasoned belief that the Persian-speaking Tajiks and Hazaras, some of whom were Shias, must be the bad guys, while the Pashtuns, who opposed them, accordingly had to be good, remains prevalent also among many American academics.²⁴ That most Taliban were Pashtuns was disregarded, even though it was against the Taliban one had gone to war.

The belief that only Pashtuns could be counted upon remained prevalent for the first month of war. From the outset, several mutually antagonistic Pashtuns bickered for the honour of leading the so-called Afghan peace process. Yet, by late October 2001 the American military - but clearly not the State Department - had given up on their ability to deliver a Pashtun victory. A more substantial Afghan force had to be found. However, the only serious anti-Taliban force within the country was the predominantly non-Pashtun Northern Alliance. Having failed to find a credible Pashtun opposition to the Taliban, General Tommy Franks, the American commander in charge of operations in Afghanistan, on 30 October met General Mohammed Fahim Khan, commander of the Northern Alliance, in the Tajikistan capital Dushanbe for secret talks on closer co-operation between American and Alliance forces.²⁵ American distrust of the Northern Alliance remained, however, and Pakistan took the opportunity to spread some anti-Northern Alliance propaganda, swiftly (and falsely) claiming that Fahim Khan had been the KGB-trained head of the Soviet-supported Afghan communist intelligence service during the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan (wrong, as he had been the intelligence chief of the Northern Alliance under its leader Ahmad Shah Masud). Apparently some American officials, and numerous journalists, believed the Pakistani claims, as the false information was widely although briefly publicised. When asked on American television the following day whether the Northern Alliance could be trusted,

General Franks replied, "Well, we're not sure."²⁶

However, on 31 October 2001, the United States acknowledged that the policy not to target front-line Taliban troops in order to favour what some had hoped to be a Pashtun alternative (in the words of the administration: "not to favor rebels of the Northern Alliance, who are rivals of other potential members of a post-Taliban government") to the Northern Alliance had finally been abandoned, and that air raids were currently directed against Taliban troops along the front-line.²⁷ Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld later explained that the first month of air strikes had made little apparent impact on the Taliban, as most strikes had been directed against conventional targets such as airfields and anti-aircraft facilities. Rumsfeld pointed out that the turning point came only when, upon his personal insistence, special operations target spotters in early November 2001 began to work with the Northern Alliance.²⁸ Finally supported by Coalition air power, the Northern Alliance quickly broke through the Taliban lines. On 13 November 2001, Alliance units moved into Afghanistan's capital Kabul.²⁹

The Coalition military had then accepted the realities on the ground and began to work with the Northern Alliance. Although political commentators and academics for some time still held on to the view that only Pashtuns could be counted upon, eventually their views changed as well. Suddenly the Pashtuns were seen as a problem, not the solution. The process accelerated when, a few years later, the level of attacks and other violence again began to escalate in Afghanistan, with renewed Taliban activity. Since most Taliban attacks occurred in ethnic Pashtun areas, and since it soon became clear that Pashtuns there often, willingly or not, supported the Taliban against the Coalition, the Pashtuns themselves came to be regarded as the key problem in Afghanistan. At present, it is no longer easy to find serious arguments in favour of exclusive Pashtun domination of Afghanistan. Yet, for short-term tactical reasons most development aid goes to Pashtun provinces to woo their inhabitants away from the Taliban.³⁰

The vilification of Pashtuns would seem to be just as ridiculous as their previous glorification. The many conflicts in Afghanistan cannot be resolved by betting solely on one ethnic group. All ethnic groups in the country tend to be fragmented and the Pashtuns are no exception. Besides, it would be foolhardy to believe that the individual members of an ethnic group all subscribe to the same views. While it was a mistake to regard the Pashtuns as the only solution back in 2001, it is just as

erroneous to see them as the key problem a decade later. Pashtuns can, if given the chance, play a useful role in Afghanistan. Today most troublesome provinces in the south and east could easily be given local autonomy within a federal system. Granted, these provinces may then fall under the control of former Taliban leaders, who would be eager to re-introduce harsh Taliban-style rule. This would not be beneficial for the population as a whole, and it might be particularly negative for the rights of women, but as a short-term solution, this may be a worthwhile trade-off for a termination of hostilities. Besides, if forced to operate within a federal system, these Taliban leaders would in time no doubt see many of those who live under their rule “defecting” to less rigorously governed parts of a federal Afghanistan. In the long term, there is little reason to believe that harsh rule of the Taliban kind would survive as a permanent feature of any Afghan province within a federal system.

THE INSURGENTS: TALIBAN AND FOREIGN FIGHTERS

The Taliban movement at present consists of several semi-autonomous organisations, in theory united under Mullah Omar and the Quetta Shura, and several similarly autonomous groups of foreign fighters, including the remnants of the original Al-Qaeda as well as groups in Waziristan such as the Uzbek-led *Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan* (IMU) and *Islamic Jihad Union* (IJU).³¹ Not one of these various groups are solely based on Afghan territory. After the initial euphoria of defeating the Taliban movement and thus gaining what was perceived as an opportunity to introduce democracy, human rights, and raise the status of women in Afghanistan, public opinion in the West has changed. It has now become a commonplace that there can be no military solution to the problem of Taliban and foreign fighters. In the words of the Council of the European Union: “Insecurity in Afghanistan cannot be addressed by military means alone.”³² History abounds in cases in which guerrilla groups could not be defeated, as long as they were granted sanctuaries in neighbouring countries. A military solution could certainly be found—if the Coalition was prepared to follow the enemy into their sanctuaries in Pakistan. However, this is unlikely to happen since the countries that constitute ISAF would not be willing to do so without Pakistani co-operation, and such would not be forthcoming since Pakistan is sensitive about its territorial inviolability and integrity.

The problem of the inviolability of the Pakistani sanctuaries of the

Taliban became evident already when American conventional troops launched the only major ground offensive in the 2001-2002 war against the Taliban. This was Operation Anaconda, commanded by Major General Franklin Hagenbeck and commenced on 1 March 2002 against what was reported to be a concentration of several hundred Taliban and Al-Qaeda troops south of Gardez in Paktia province.³³ This was the first time when American and Coalition conventional forces were at the forefront of ground combat. Operation Anaconda was declared over on 18 March 2002.³⁴ As before, the Taliban and Al-Qaeda fighters simply dispersed and withdrew, many of them into Pakistan, when the battle turned against them. Major General Hagenbeck after the operation indicated the need to engage in hot pursuits into Pakistan, but he was on 25 March 2002 overruled by Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, who claimed that he was satisfied with Pakistani border security and that American troops would not pursue the enemy across the border.³⁵

Pakistan appears to be less concerned with the violation of its territory when it comes to the one method that, so far, has killed significant numbers of foreign fighters in Waziristan. This is the CIA's clandestine Predator armed drone programme, which has inflicted significant losses on the insurgents.³⁶ Important reasons for this acquiescence may be that the drone programme is clandestine since it is being run by the CIA, and that the drones being unmanned, no troops actually cross the border.

As long as sanctuaries remain available in Pakistan, and these remain out of bounds for the Coalition (with the single exception of the CIA programme), the Taliban and their foreign fighters cannot be defeated. Cross-border insurgency cannot then be prevented. This is also the conclusion of the Council of the European Union, which has noted: "The conflict in Afghanistan cannot be solved without addressing the complex situation in Pakistan. . . Regional integration and economic cooperation must be developed while borders must be better managed and the cross-border flow of insurgents, drugs, weapons and illegal goods stopped."³⁷ In this, the commonplace assessment of the war in Afghanistan is undoubtedly correct. The war cannot be won by military means alone, as long as these are limited to operations on Afghan soil. Arguably, Pakistan is part of the problem. Yet, Pakistan is already in so poor shape that support to the country hardly matters now; no amounts of international aid or outspoken support will legitimise any Pakistani government in the eyes of the most violence-prone segments of the

country's own citizens. For them, foreign and in particular American support to the government may indeed discredit it further.

The conclusion would seem to be that in this respect at least, all that so far can be done has been done. To defeat the Taliban and their foreign fighters by military means, the war must, sooner or later, be taken to the Pakistani sanctuaries—but this is unlikely to happen since such a solution would destabilise Pakistan yet further. On the other hand, the continued presence on Pakistani soil of foreign fighters, and their numerous allies among Pakistani militants, will ultimately doom Pakistan as a modern, sovereign state. It may be significant that Pakistan is no nation-state and from the outset never had an ethnic identity, only a religious one. General Muhammad Zia ul-Haq (1924-1988) built further on this foundation, arguing that it was Sunni Islam itself which was the unifying principle of the country. It was also he who probably first saw the possibilities in using *jihad* to unite his religious as well as strategic objectives.³⁸ As a result, Pakistan is the home of many home-grown, armed Islamic extremist groups. But as a state, Pakistan never achieved stability. Many Pakistanis resist the perceived Punjabi domination of Pakistani politics. Baluchi nationalists have revolted on numerous occasions, beginning already in 1948, the year after Pakistan became independent, and others have revolted elsewhere. Lacking any unifying principle but a devotion to Sunni Islam, Pakistan seems even less viable as a united country and a modern, sovereign state than Afghanistan. It is quite possible that Afghanistan, eventually, will emerge from its present conflict in far better shape than nuclear-armed Pakistan.

THE COUNTERINSURGENCY STRATEGY AND THE INTELLIGENCE EFFORT

The war effort in Afghanistan has long focused almost exclusively on kinetic targeting. This has been particularly true for the intelligence effort. Since an insurgent operation may involve no more than a dozen fighters, and the insurgent leadership consists of geographically separated networks of individuals, some of whom are based in another country (Pakistan) outside the area of operations, it was hardly surprising that from an intelligence point of view, the operation rapidly took on most of the trappings of counterterrorism. It became a war against enemy individuals instead of enemy formations. Indeed, many operations have resembled policing more than warfare, and not only because some participating nations early on imposed rules of engagement that were

more suited to law enforcement than the conditions of war. The focus of the intelligence operation became to identify and locate the perpetrators, individuals engaged in the insurgency, so that they could be targeted individually - an almost impossible task.³⁹

The war in Afghanistan became focused on counterterrorism not only because that was how it was labeled (“the War on Terror”), but because there soon remained no easily recognizable enemy to fight. With American air supremacy, Northern Alliance units rapidly advanced into Kabul. Taliban fighters were overwhelmed, dispersed, and if they survived, soon ended up in sanctuaries on the Pakistani side of the border. The conventional phase of the war was over—before most Coalition troops ever set foot upon Afghan soil. The first conventional American ground forces (a platoon from the 10th Mountain Division) entered Afghanistan only after the fall of Kabul.⁴⁰ The war was, in most respects, won before the troops arrived.

Without formations of enemy forces on the ground in Afghanistan, there was no longer any scope for conventional warfare. Accordingly, there was also no time to build up conventional intelligence on the area of operations. The war was accordingly re-invented as a counterterrorism and counterinsurgency (COIN) operation. Available intelligence assets were tasked to identify the insurgent support networks and, most importantly, the individual enemy leaders and the fighters still loyal to them.

The insurgents were relatively few in number. They were hard to locate, often hiding among the civilian population. Intelligence efforts accordingly became increasingly geared towards providing data for kinetic targeting, that is, the identification and location of individuals suspected of militant activities so that they could be targeted by air strikes, Special Forces operations, or drones such as the Predator armed with Hellfire missiles. The acquisition of targeting data on individual insurgents became an overriding concern and most of the finite number of intelligence professionals and assets were allocated to such tasks. Few of either remained available for conventional intelligence work.

With the extension of ISAF responsibilities to a wider geographical area, ISAF units too began to focus their intelligence efforts along the same lines, although with sometimes conflicting national agendas and caveats. In most cases, the goal became to identify and arrest perpetrators who then could be handed over to Afghan security forces.

From 2002 until 2009, the operation ongoing in Afghanistan can

probably best be described as counterterrorism, pure and simple. Special teams such as the now much-publicised Task Force 373 engaged in “capture/kill” operations against named individuals.⁴¹ Insufficient efforts were made to clarify the “human terrain” and its associated relationships. Airpower was extensively used to hit enemy fighters. When intelligence was poorly evaluated, or mistakes happened, or bad luck struck, the application of such firepower often ended up killing civilians.

In 2009, General Stanley McChrystal began to champion a doctrine of counterinsurgency instead of counterterrorism, with the aim to win over the Afghan population by assuring security, creating conditions for stability, and isolating the insurgents.⁴² Although these goals remain, it is clear that success would entail a long presence and large numbers of Coalition troops. However, for political reasons neither sufficient troops nor enough time would seem to be available. Besides, kinetic targeting appears to remain the most commonly applied means of assuring security in Afghanistan.⁴³ The inherent clash between two doctrines—counterinsurgency (protecting the Afghan people) and counterterrorism (killing terrorists)—has been noted by many observers. The media has generally drawn the conclusion that although lip service has been paid to the former, the latter has been, and continues to be, the driving doctrine in Afghanistan.⁴⁴

However, it has become increasingly clear that although the elimination of insurgents and terrorists remains important ultimately to win the war and create security in the country, an intelligence effort focused on individuals is not enough. Conventional intelligence collection and analysis in support of ISAF’s day-to-day relations with Afghan communities and leaders have not been sufficient to allow intelligence-driven operations to build relationships with and gain the support of the locals against the insurgents.

This has been known for some time, as evidenced by General McChrystal’s August 2009 assessment of the war in Afghanistan: “The complex social landscape of Afghanistan is in many ways much more difficult to understand than Afghanistan’s enemies. Insurgent groups have been the focus of U.S. and allied intelligence for many years; however, ISAF has not sufficiently studied Afghanistan’s peoples whose needs, identities and grievances vary from province to province and from valley to valley. This complex environment is challenging to understand, particularly for foreigners. . . . A focus by ISAF intelligence on kinetic targeting and a failure to bring together what is known about

the political and social realm have hindered ISAF's comprehension of the critical aspects of Afghan society."⁴⁵

Professional intelligence officers have realized the need for sweeping changes in the way the intelligence effort is focused in Afghanistan. As one such officer noted, "because the United States has focused the overwhelming majority of collection efforts and analytical brainpower on insurgent groups, our intelligence apparatus still finds itself unable to answer fundamental questions about the environment in which we operate and the people we are trying to protect and persuade."⁴⁶

The intelligence effort in Afghanistan must shift from a counterterrorism mode of intelligence collection and analysis into a monitoring mode. While kinetic operations against individual insurgents will remain important in Afghanistan, the Coalition intelligence effort must not lose sight of the overall situation of the "human terrain" of Afghanistan and the affected neighbouring countries. It will be necessary to monitor the social fabric of Afghanistan, relations between different communities and ethnic groups, and the actions of influential Afghan leaders and officials. Corrupt leaders will have to be identified so that the errors of their ways can be explained to them in no uncertain terms. Reintegration efforts to assimilate low to mid-level insurgents and leaders peacefully into their communities must be monitored, to verify that former insurgents behave, but also to prevent dissatisfied rivals already within the Afghan government structures from manipulating the process to take revenge on the reintegrated insurgents, thus scaring off others from joining the process.

To expand the intelligence effort into monitoring will be daunting and additional resources may be needed. There may also be political repercussions. While the monitoring of former insurgents may not raise too many eyebrows, them in effect being on probation, some would balk at the monitoring of officials of the Government of Afghanistan, or elders and clergy in certain districts. However, only a compulsive optimist would be likely to term the current state of affairs, with daily killings and violence, a better situation for the population of Afghanistan. Besides, without a more comprehensive intelligence effort that goes beyond the acquisition of data for kinetic targeting, the challenges of the Afghan ethnic and political mosaic may well prove to be beyond the ability of the international community to comprehend and nurture in a positive direction.

CONCLUSIONS

All is not doom and gloom with regard to developments in Afghanistan. Much has changed to the better for the Afghan population since the days of violent civil war and the harsh rule of the Taliban. Yet, more remains to be done. This paper primarily argues that Afghanistan would be better off under a federal system of government, the insurgent bases in Pakistan will have to be dealt with, and the Coalition intelligence effort should be re-focused.

The fallacy of placing all bets on, and handing over most foreign aid to, the central government should be rectified. A century of state- and nation-building never once managed to create a central government acceptable to all groups that constitute the population of Afghanistan. The superficial introduction of democratic practices will not change the situation. To believe that a credible and popular central government is a real possibility now, after decades of civil war and with a recent history of less than fair democratic elections, would seem naive. Such a view would also militate against the lack of trust between different ethnic and social groups within the country. For these reasons, a federal system would be far more suitable for Afghanistan and, it would seem, far more acceptable to the country's inhabitants. Naturally, foreign aid should then be distributed where it can be used in the most beneficial way, which is not necessarily the safeguarding of the central government.

For the same reason, the formation of genuine community-based *Arbaki* units, rooted in the local population, would seem the best choice for maintaining law and order in remote areas. Not only would this enable the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Afghan National Police (ANP) to take the time needed to develop into efficient forces for good in the country, it would also ensure that local communities become shareholders in the new Afghan state to be rebuilt. In effect, the formation of such units would become part of the creation of a genuine civil society in Afghanistan.

This leads on to the question on what to do with warlords in Afghanistan and how to deal with narcotics trafficking. When enjoying a certain level of prestige among their supporters for ethnic or historical reasons and when given the opportunity to enrich themselves through ensuring security and stability instead of serving as hired guns, some so-called warlords constitute what can easily be seen as an emerging group of major landowners. Such a development would not be greeted

by those who want a Western-style democracy overnight in Afghanistan. However, when provincial warlords and local strongmen begin to invest in local construction instead of moving revenues abroad, they quickly find an interest in stability. They thus begin to play a constructive role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. At the provincial level, warlords can be seen as part of the solution, and not only a problem.

The present vilification of the Pashtuns would seem to be just as ridiculous as their previous glorification. While it was a mistake to regard the Pashtuns as the only solution back in 2001, it is just as erroneous to see them as the key problem a decade later. The Pashtun-dominated, today most troublesome provinces in the south and east could easily be given local autonomy within a federal system. If falling under harsh Taliban-style rule, this would not be beneficial for the population as a whole, and it might be particularly negative for the rights of women, but as a short-term solution, this may be a worthwhile trade-off for a termination of hostilities. An end to the fighting would benefit everybody. In the long term, there is little reason to believe that harsh rule of the Taliban kind would survive as a permanent feature of any Afghan province within a federal system.

With regard to the insurgents, Taliban and foreign fighters, and their sanctuaries in Pakistan, the conclusion would seem to be that in this respect at least, all that so far can be done has been done. To defeat the Taliban and their foreign fighters by military means, the war must, sooner or later, be taken to the Pakistani sanctuaries—but this is unlikely to happen since such a solution would destabilise Pakistan yet further. On the other hand, the continued presence on Pakistani soil of foreign fighters, and their numerous allies among Pakistani militants, will ultimately doom Pakistan as a modern, sovereign state. This would cause further problems for Afghanistan, but the situation cannot be resolved on Afghan territory.

Finally, the intelligence effort in Afghanistan should shift from a counterterrorism mode of intelligence collection and analysis into a monitoring mode. Monitoring implies the type of conventional intelligence effort relied upon for most of the twentieth century when the opponent typically was a state and not dispersed networks of insurgents. While lethal or kinetic operations against individual insurgents will remain important in Afghanistan, the Coalition intelligence effort must not lose sight of the overall situation of the “human terrain” of Afghanistan and the affected neighbouring countries.

Without a properly focused intelligence effort, no counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy will be able to resolve the conflict in Afghanistan.

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THE COMING SUMMER IN AFGHANISTAN

WHAT TO EXPECT

RAMTANU MAITRA

*I hate this City, seated on the Plain,
The clang and clamour of the hot Bazaar,
Knowing, amid the pauses of my pain,
This month the Almonds bloom in Kandahar.*

(From an unknown Indian poet, translated into English by Laurence Hope in 1906)

Almonds are not the only flowers in bloom; the provinces of Kandahar and Helmand are awash with opium sap-producing poppies, as well. After two years of steady decline, the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) predicts a significant growth in opium production in Afghanistan this year. This means one thing, and one thing only: all the international forces - from the offshore bankers to the dollar-a-trip drug mules - who benefit from the multi-billion dollar opium/heroin business that flourishes under the cover of the ongoing war in Afghanistan are alive and kicking and the insurgents are assured that their financing will remain undisturbed.

INTRODUCTION

The summer of 2011 in Afghanistan is by no means a decisive one, but by the end of it we may well have a window through which to evaluate how much longer this conflict will continue. That, however, will depend on the outcome of two separate events. First, Washington and NATO, with their 150,000 or so troops on the ground, will do their best this summer to blunt the Afghan Taliban's and other insurgents' efforts to extend their dominion over the country. The outcome of that tussle could

be an eye-opener for the foreign troops. If they fail to prevent the spread of Taliban control, both Washington and Brussels will come under intense pressure from their respective populations, who have been deeply affected economically by the recent global financial meltdown. More strident voices demanding an end to this mindless conflict and a return of the troops are expected to resonate throughout the western world in particular under such circumstances. Many legislators in the United States and Europe may even suggest reducing the Afghan war budget and bringing a halt to this endless war. From that perspective, the summer of 2011 could be a crucial one for the foreign troops.

If, on the other hand, the foreign troops prevail, and the Taliban fail to achieve their objective, they will not roll over and surrender. They will fade away to fight the fight another day. But it is likely that distinct splits will develop within their ranks. Some of the insurgents at that point in time could move toward seeking serious negotiations with the foreign occupiers to end the strife. It is too early to predict what terms they might demand and what they would eventually settle for, but what is certain is that the Afghans will demand a deadline for the withdrawal of foreign troops.

The other major agenda item during this coming restless summer centers on the maneuvering of the various outside forces to set the table for negotiations with the Afghans. The process has already begun, but the uncertainties over what may actually occur this summer and fractious views among the western powers that have troops on Afghan ground have held it back. No voice of unity has emerged on this score. It is not clear which of the many Taliban factions will be the preferred ones for negotiations. There have been attempts by both Washington and London to define the "good" and "bad" Taliban, but that has not gone anywhere as of this writing.

Moreover, the regional powers, such as Russia, Iran, Pakistan, the Central Asian nations, and China have not made their intent clear on the resolution of the Afghan conflict. In Kabul, President Hamid Karzai has called for total withdrawal of foreign troops by 2014. Although his voice is strong, his arms remain weak. It is evident that he will have to depend heavily on what the Washington-Brussels duo come up with in their talks with one or the other variety of Afghan Taliban. Considering the ground condition that exists today, it is unlikely that Karzai will be able to develop the necessary muscle to present "his" Pashtuns as the deal-clinchers. It is expected that India will watch the developments from the

sidelines, rooting for Washington and Brussels to succeed. New Delhi has neither the will nor the leadership to play any major role in the forthcoming developments, but will continue to appeal to the Washington-Brussels duo to sneak India into the post-war resolution. India's rooting for the outside forces stems from New Delhi's absurd hope that any settlement by Washington and Brussels will exclude Pakistan and the Islamic fundamentalist variety of Afghans as power players in a future Afghanistan. New Delhi does not, of course, have a clue how Washington and Brussels could perform that magic trick.

MILITARY OPTION IS DEAD, BUT...

In mid-March General David Petraus, the current commander of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and commander of U.S. Forces Afghanistan (USFOR-A), made his first visit to Washington after assuming his duties last June. During this visit, he met with President Barack Obama and Defense Secretary Robert Gates and testified before the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee. It was evident from the outset that his visit was directly associated with the upcoming fighting season in Afghanistan, and his discussions indicated that he believes that ISAF, which consists of U.S. and NATO forces, can still make significant gains, particularly in southern Afghanistan, during the summer of 2011. In testimony before the Armed Services Committee on 15 March 2011, Gen. Petraus, who was the senior military commander in Iraq during the "surge" that brutally suppressed militant opposition to the U.S. occupation between 2007 and 2008, made plenty clear that, on some levels, the war is going better than ever. General Petraus illustrated his presentation with a battery of graphs and charts.

The American Senators were told that the Taliban forces are being pushed back, that more of their weapons caches are being found with the help of intelligence and cooperation offered by the locals, that the Afghan army is not only strong in numbers but is now doing better as a force, that local government is improving in more districts, that more children are in school, and that at least one former arms bazaar is now a thriving commercial market. However, Petraus, limited the rosiness in the picture by pointing out that "while the security progress achieved over the past year is significant, it is also fragile and reversible," noting that the insurgents "are already striving to regain lost momentum and lost safe havens as we enter the spring fighting season."

Gen. Petraeus made clear to the Senators that he is not comfortable with President Obama's earlier decision to draw down troops from Afghanistan beginning in July 2011. He said: "We need to focus not just on the year ahead, but increasingly on the goal agreed to at Lisbon of having Afghan forces in the lead throughout Afghanistan by the end of 2014." He also indicated that he does not endorse ending the presence in Afghanistan, stating: "We are now also beginning to look beyond 2014, as well, as the United States and Afghanistan, and NATO and Afghanistan, discuss possible strategic partnerships.... There will be an enduring commitment of some form by the international community to Afghanistan."

What Gen. Petraeus was making clear is that "surge" of troops in Afghanistan was not a failure and there is no reason to believe that the Taliban will be able to sustain the military pressure now exerted by the large force he commands. He did not go to the extent of saying that the Taliban can be militarily defeated, but he certainly gave the impression that the Taliban can be contained, if not pushed back. It is evident that the Obama administration does not contest Gen. Petraeus on that score. U.S. Under Secretary of Defense Michèle Flournoy, in her testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee on March 15, said the fundamental shift in the coalition's approach to the war in Afghanistan "has been extremely successful." She stated: "Compared to a year ago, Afghans today report they are far more optimistic about the future and have far more confidence in our ability to prevail over the Taliban and other violent extremists." "Our adversaries are cunning, they are adaptable, they are tenacious, and we will need to continually reaffirm our commitment and refine our tactics in response", Flournoy told the lawmakers. "I don't want to suggest that achieving success will be simple or easy - far from it - we have many challenges as we move forward. We need to prepare for the possibility that things may get harder before they get better."

A still less rosy picture of what is on the ground in southern Afghanistan came across in the testimony of General Ronald Burgess, head of the Defense Intelligence Agency. He told the Senate Armed Services Committee the same day that "the Taliban in the south has shown resilience and still influences much of the population, particularly outside urban areas" and there had been "no apparent degradation in their capacity to fight." From what Gen. Petraeus pointed out that day to the U.S. Senators, and the daily reports available from southern

Afghanistan, it is fair to assume that the Taliban and other insurgent forces functioning in that area were pushed back by the surging ISAF during the winter. However, as Burgess pointed out, and Petraeus also mentioned, the insurgents' capacity to fight back remains virtually intact.

NON-MILITARY GAINS?

In addition to Gen. Petraeus' proclamation of military successes, which could very well be of a temporary nature, there are also reports based on polls that found that an increasing number of Afghans think the presence of foreign troops provides Afghanistan a better future.

In an article in the *Washington Post* on 31 March 2011, "Change Afghans Can Believe In," Craig Charney, president of Charney Research, and James Dobbins, director of the International Security and Defense Policy Center at Rand Corp. and U.S. special envoy to Afghanistan from 2001 to 2002, said: "Nearly two-thirds of Americans think the war in Afghanistan is not worth fighting, according to the latest Washington Post-ABC News poll. Behind this figure is a prevalent pessimism that the war is unwinnable." "Curiously, most Afghans have a very different view," Charney and Dobbins continue. "In fact, Afghans in general are much more optimistic about their future than we Americans are about ours. Fully 59 percent of Afghans think their country is moving in the right direction, the most recent published poll found in November. 28 percent of Americans who feel that way now about the United States. Asked a version of Ronald Reagan's classic question - Are you better off today than five years ago? - 63 percent of Afghans say yes. In America, consumer confidence has edged up in recent months but is still down 40 points since 2007."

In explaining this optimism on part of the Afghan population, Charney, who has been conducting polls in Afghanistan since 2003, reeled off the following details:

Since 2001, when U.S. troops overthrew the Taliban, Afghanistan's gross domestic product has tripled. This puts Afghanistan on a par with China in its double-digit economic growth rate, though from a much lower base.

In 2001 there were 1 million Afghan children in school - almost all boys. This year more than 8 million children will attend school - a third of them girls. Afghanistan's dismal literacy rate will triple over the next decade as these children complete their education.

Now, 80 percent of Afghans have access to basic health-care facilities, almost twice as many as in 2005. Infant mortality has dropped by a third, and adult longevity is rising.

Perhaps most remarkable, half of Afghan families now have telephones, thanks to the cell phone explosion since 2001. Almost no one had a phone a decade ago.

Charney and Dobbins acknowledge that the polls showed that Afghans are disturbed by official corruption, but noted that when Afghans look abroad or at their neighbors - Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, China, Pakistan, and Iran - they see systems generally far less accountable than their own. Moreover, as Charney and Dobbins also point out, this positive view is also evident in the areas where NATO and Afghan forces have been most active: "In Helmand province, killings attributed to the Taliban dropped by half between January 2009 and November 2010. As violence declined in Helmand, normalcy began returning and markets reopened. Three in five residents reported good economic opportunities in November; only one in five did before the surge..."

NOT EVERYONE BELIEVES IT

Despite the positive report cards presented by Gen. Petraeus, Charney, and Dobbins, it is taken for granted that the war in Afghanistan is unwinnable. The United States and NATO have been in Afghanistan for ten years; the foreign troops decisively defeated the ruling Taliban regime and got control of Kabul in early 2002. But since then they have lost ground steadily, if not rapidly. Today the ISAF strongholds remain tentative. In recent months, Fortress Kabul has been breached repeatedly, and the Taliban has gained strength significantly in northern Afghanistan, where they were virtually non-existent before.

As Masood-Ur-Rehman Khattak, a research fellow at the South Asian Strategic Stability Institute (SASSI) Islamabad, pointed out recently in an op-ed, "U.S. Failure In Afghanistan: Possible Way Out," in *Eurasia Review*: "After 10 years of war in Afghanistan, the United States has no credible plan or strategy to make its way out." Although NATO announced at a summit in Lisbon that it would finish its military operations by 2014, it is uncertain to achieve any considerable gains in Afghanistan in such a short span of time, Khattak says. "The U.S.-led alliance has failed in Afghanistan," he continues. "In the last nine years

they could not achieve any considerable success in Afghanistan. The security situation is worse than ever before, drug trafficking has touched record levels, civilian casualties have soared in the recent past, and there has been a rise in attacks on the U.S.-led alliance that has deteriorated the security situation in Afghanistan.”

What is interesting to note is that while Petraeus, Flournoy, Charney, and Dobbins were neither wrong nor exaggerating reality, Khattak was also very much on the mark. Significantly, Khattak’s view was echoed in an op-ed in the *New York Times* on 22 March 2011, “Settling the Afghan War.” There Lakhdar Brahimi, a former UN Special Representative for Afghanistan, and Thomas R. Pickering, a former US ambassador and Under Secretary of State, pointed out that “despite the American-led counterinsurgency in Afghanistan, the Taliban resistance endures. It is not realistic to think it can be eradicated. Efforts by the Afghan government, the United States, and their allies to win over insurgents and co-opt Taliban leaders into joining the Kabul regime are unlikely to end the conflict.”

As chairmen of an Afghanistan task force with 15 members from nine countries, organized by the Century Foundation, a non-partisan American research institution, Brahimi and Pickering “had confidential conversations for nearly a year with dozens of people from almost every side of the conflict.” Their observation: “The current strategy of ‘reintegration’ may peel away some fighters and small units, but it does not provide the political resolution that peace will require.” Brahimi and Pickering continue: “Neither side of the conflict can hope to vanquish the other through force. Meanwhile, public support in Western countries for keeping troops in Afghanistan has fallen. The Afghan people are weary of a long and debilitating war. For their part, the Taliban have encountered resistance from Afghans who are not part of their dedicated base when they have tried to impose their stern moral code. International aid has improved living standards among Afghans in areas not under Taliban control. That has placed new pressure on the Taliban, as has an increasing ambivalence toward the Taliban in Pakistan.” In reality, Washington and its allies are looking for a respectable way out of the Afghan impasse. Brahimi and Pickering conclude: “The stalemate can be resolved only with a negotiated political settlement involving President Hamid Karzai’s government and its allies, the Taliban and its supporters in Pakistan, and other regional and international parties...”

FROM WASHINGTON AND BRUSSELS: A GAGGLE OF PLANS

In chess and chess-like games, the endgame refers to the stage of the game when there are few pieces left on the board. As of now, in the corridors of power in Washington and Brussels, two and a half plans, are under consideration: Plan A, a variation on Plan A, and Plan B. Briefly, they are as follows.

Plan A: President Obama presented this plan on 1 December 2009 at the United States Military Academy in West Point, New York. He pointed out on that occasion that “our overarching goal remains the same: to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and to prevent its capacity to threaten America and our allies in the future.”

President Obama spelled out the objectives: “To meet that goal, we will pursue the following objectives within Afghanistan. We must deny al Qaeda a safe haven. We must reverse the Taliban’s momentum and deny it the ability to overthrow the government. And we must strengthen the capacity of Afghanistan’s security forces and government so that they can take lead responsibility for Afghanistan’s future.”

Then he explained the three-step plan to achieve these objectives: “First, we will pursue a military strategy that will break the Taliban’s momentum and increase Afghanistan’s capacity over the next 18 months. The 30,000 additional troops that I’m announcing tonight will deploy in the first part of 2010 - the fastest possible pace - so that they can target the insurgency and secure key population centers. They’ll increase our ability to train competent Afghan security forces, and to partner with them so that more Afghans can get into the fight. And they will help create the conditions for the United States to transfer responsibility to the Afghans. “Second, we will work with our partners, the United Nations, and the Afghan people to pursue a more effective civilian strategy, so that the government can take advantage of improved security. This effort must be based on performance. The days of providing a blank check are over. President Karzai’s inauguration speech sent the right message about moving in a new direction. And going forward, we will be clear about what we expect from those who receive our assistance. We’ll support Afghan ministries, governors, and local leaders that combat corruption and deliver for the people. We expect those who are ineffective or corrupt to be held accountable. And we will also focus our assistance in areas - such as agriculture - that can make an immediate impact in the

lives of the Afghan people.

“Third, we will act with the full recognition that our success in Afghanistan is inextricably linked to our partnership with Pakistan. We’re in Afghanistan to prevent a cancer from once again spreading through that country. But this same cancer has also taken root in the border region of Pakistan. That’s why we need a strategy that works on both sides of the border. In the past, there have been those in Pakistan who’ve argued that the struggle against extremism is not their fight, and that Pakistan is better off doing little or seeking accommodation with those who use violence. But in recent years, as innocents have been killed from Karachi to Islamabad, it has become clear that it is the Pakistani people who are the most endangered by extremism. Public opinion has turned. The Pakistani army has waged an offensive in Swat and South Waziristan. And there is no doubt that the United States and Pakistan share a common enemy. Obama elaborated on this third step: “In the past, we too often defined our relationship with Pakistan narrowly. Those days are over. Moving forward, we are committed to a partnership with Pakistan that is built on a foundation of mutual interest, mutual respect, and mutual trust. We will strengthen Pakistan’s capacity to target those groups that threaten our countries, and have made it clear that we cannot tolerate a safe haven for terrorists whose location is known and whose intentions are clear. America is also providing substantial resources to support Pakistan’s democracy and development. We are the largest international supporter for those Pakistanis displaced by the fighting. And going forward, the Pakistan people must know America will remain a strong supporter of Pakistan’s security and prosperity long after the guns have fallen silent, so that the great potential of its people can be unleashed.”

In announcing this plan, which I call Plan A, President Obama said: “These are the three core elements of our strategy: a military effort to create the conditions for a transition; a civilian surge that reinforces positive action; and an effective partnership with Pakistan.”

Plan B: Robert D. Blackwill - U.S. ambassador to India in 2001-2003, U.S. deputy national security adviser for strategic planning in 2003-2004, and now the Henry A. Kissinger Senior Fellow for U.S. Foreign Policy at the Council on Foreign Relations - named and articulated this option in the January /February 2011 issue of *Foreign Affairs*. Blackwill developed his Plan B in collaboration with Britain and other members of the NATO ensemble. Its most striking feature is the call for a de-facto partition of Afghanistan. Blackwill states the problem as he sees it: “The United States

and its allies are not on course to defeating the Taliban militarily. There are now about 150,000 U.S.-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) troops in Afghanistan. This is 30,000 more troops than the Soviet Union deployed in the 1980s, but less than half the number required for some chance of pacifying the country, according to standard counterinsurgency doctrine." Expressing little hope of an improved performance from the Karzai administration in the coming days, Blackwill also makes clear why he does not consider Plan A viable. He states: "With an occupying army largely ignorant of local history, tribal structures, language, customs, politics and values, the United States cannot, through social engineering, win over, in the foreseeable future, sufficient numbers of the Afghan Pashtun on whom COIN depends." Blackwill explains Plan B as follows:

"Announcing that we will retain an active combat role in Afghanistan for years to come, and that we do not accept permanent Taliban control of the south, the United States and its allies could withdraw combat forces from most of Pashtun Afghanistan (about half the country), including Kandahar, over several months."

"We would stop fighting and dying in the mountains, valleys, and urban areas of southern Afghanistan - where 102 coalition soldiers were killed in June, the most in any month of the war and almost three times as many as a year ago. But we could be ready to assist tribal leaders on the Pashtun periphery, who may decide to resist the Taliban. "We would then focus on defending the northern and western regions - containing roughly 60 percent of the population. These areas, including Kabul, are not Pashtun-dominated, and locals are largely sympathetic to U.S. efforts."

"We would offer the Afghan Taliban an agreement in which neither side seeks to enlarge its territory - if the Taliban stopped supporting terrorism, a proposal that they would almost certainly reject."

"We would then make it clear that we would rely heavily on U.S. air power and Special Forces to target any al Qaeda base in Afghanistan, as well as Afghan Taliban leaders who aided them. We would also target Afghan Taliban encroachments across the de facto partition lines and terrorist sanctuaries along the Pakistan border."

"Though careful analysis is needed, this might mean a longtime residual U.S. military force in Afghanistan of about 40,000 to 50,000 troops. We would enlist Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, and supportive Pashtun in this endeavour, as well as our NATO allies, Russia, India, Iran, perhaps China, the Central Asian nations and, one hopes, the U.N. Security Council."

"We would continue accelerating our Afghan army training. We would devote

nation-building efforts to the northern and western regions, where, unlike the Pashtun areas, people are not conflicted about accepting U.S. help and not systematically coerced by the Taliban.”

“There might even come a time when a stronger Afghan National Army could take control of the Pashtun areas.”

“Such fundamentally changed U.S. objectives and strategies regarding Afghanistan would dramatically reduce U.S. military casualties and thus minimize domestic political pressure for hasty withdrawal. It would substantially lower our budget-breaking military expenditures on Afghanistan - now nearly \$7 billion per month.”

“In addition, it would allow Washington to focus on four issues more vital to its national interests: the rise of Chinese power, the Iranian nuclear weapons program, nuclear terrorism, and the future of Iraq.”

Plan A-Minus: This “half-plan” is a variation of Plan A. The brainchild of two American academics, Michael O’Hanlon and Bruce Riedel, “Plan A-Minus” was presented in the winter 2011 issue of *The Washington Quarterly*. O’Hanlon is a senior fellow and director of research at the Washington-based Brookings Institution, and Bruce Riedel is a fellow at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy, also at the Brookings Institution. Riedel chaired President Obama’s 2009 review of policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In naming their approach “Plan A-Minus” O’Hanlon and Riedel note: “Plan A still has a good chance in Afghanistan. Robust counterinsurgency, concentrated in the Pashtun belt, may succeed in largely defusing the insurgency while building up Afghan institutions including the army, police, and other parts of the government. There is more promising news of late than most realize. Having said that, responsible strategists must ask the question of what the United States should do if the current approach in Afghanistan fails. Victory cannot be assured simply through resolve; the current strategy may face challenges that prevent accomplishing its core goals. If Afghan security forces continue to improve, but trends in violence do not, the best approach may be a Plan A-Minus, which emphasizes stabilizing a smaller number of key districts in Afghanistan, while building up the army and police according to current plans. The latter missions involve, importantly, partnering in the field between ISAF and Afghan units, so this plan is hardly a prescription for a rapid departure or an easy road ahead for U.S. and other foreign forces. But it would place a time limit on the operation that Plan A may not.”

“Oh, beat the drum slowly and play the fife lowly...” These lyrics from “The Streets of Laredo” by Johnny Cash suggest the patient, persistent, and honest effort that will be necessary to resolve the Afghanistan imbroglio. In discussion of these plans so far, it is evident that apart from Pakistan the role of Afghanistan’s neighbours in the process of resolving the conflict has been virtually ignored. Will Plan A, A-Minus, or B be acceptable to the regional powers? Although neither Washington nor Brussels has shown much inclination to engage the region in formulating a resolution of the Afghan conflict, it is certain that no solution excluding the regional nations can bring long-term stability to Afghanistan or the region. By not engaging the region, the statements issued routinely by the Western powers about improving the conditions in Afghanistan sound more and more like a vague echo of the White Man’s Burden, the old lament of colonial days.

Afghanistan needs a regional solution - plain, but perhaps not so simple. In the final settlement, whenever that is formulated, Pakistan will of course be a major player, and there is every reason why it should be so. But so far, Islamabad has been deliberately noncommittal if not downright cagey about what it wants.

In an article in the *International Herald Tribune* on 17 January 2011, “Afghanistan Security: Pakistan Shares Endgame Blueprint,” Kamran Yousaf cites a Pakistani security official, who, when asked by the visiting U.S. Vice President Joe Biden what is the bottom line for Pakistan on the Afghanistan endgame, said: “We told him that Pakistan wants peace, stability, and a unified Afghanistan. We don’t aspire for any role in the future political dispensation of Afghanistan.” The same official told Yousaf that Biden was keen to know Pakistan’s possible role in bringing the Afghan Taliban to the negotiating table, but that Islamabad’s reply was: “Pakistan is not the spokesperson of the Afghan Taliban. You should better talk to the Afghan government.”

Unfortunately, Pakistan’s importance to Washington and Brussels at this time does not stem from the fact that it is a neighbour of Afghanistan, but from the fact that Islamabad holds a large number of anti-American forces in its territory. It has become evident to the Obama administration that unless Islamabad is fully appeased vis-à-vis Afghanistan, that de-facto nuclear weapons nation could not only endanger the lives of the foreign troops but also undermine all further attempts by the U.S. and NATO to resolve the Afghan conflict.

To be blunt, Pakistan has the U.S.-NATO combine by the short hairs.

But continuing to indulge Islamabad by making Pakistan the sole representative of the region in the resolution of the Afghan conflict may only create new problems.

For instance, China, an “all-weather ally” of Pakistan, relies on Islamabad not to unleash jihadi elements within its territory, such as Xinjiang province. Pakistan may abide by that rule; but China will never push its luck on that score by also urging Islamabad to refrain from unleashing jihadis elsewhere, such as inside the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir. China’s other interest in a smooth relationship with Pakistan is to ensure access to Afghanistan’s mineral reserves and, in this context, would not be likely to oppose a Pakistan-guided Taliban rule in Afghanistan.

Under the circumstances, India, Russia, and Iran have great concern about Chinese interests in Afghanistan and the implications of its alliance with Pakistan, among other things, when it comes to a potential settlement in Afghanistan. Treating Islamabad as the representative of the region can only heighten these concerns and unleash waves of counterproductive suspicion. Without the support of regional countries like Russia, China, Iran, Pakistan, and the Central Asian states, it is well nigh impossible to bring long-term peace. These regional countries will not only contribute to the development, reconstruction, and reconciliation efforts in Afghanistan, but as a matter of their own national interest they will ensure peace and stability in the region.

OBAMA'S AF-PAK STRATEGY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUTH ASIA

UMA SHANKAR

EVOLUTION OF OBAMA'S AFGHAN POLICY

The Af-Pak strategy of Obama Administration marks a distinct stage in the evolution of the US policy towards Afghanistan since September 11, 2001. It draws upon the inadequacies of the Afghan policy of the Bush Administration which apparently believed in the rhetoric of war against terror but did not adopt effective strategy with well defined priorities. 'The Bush Administration's objectives were threefold: defeat of Al Qaeda, destruction of the Taliban support base and blind determination to bring democracy to Afghanistan and the wider Muslim world. Beyond these general aspirations, the US government during the Presidency of George Bush, never had an Afghanistan or Pakistan strategy let alone an Af-Pak strategy'.¹ Pakistan's covert support to Taliban leading to its resurgence and the inability of the US forces in hunting down Al Qaeda and the Taliban were causing uneasiness in the minds of the US leaders. Yet George Bush did not take any substantial initiatives in order to match his anti-terror rhetoric. He was not prepared to review the traditional perception of the United States towards Pakistan, whose military regime had, as a matter of convenience, suddenly turned into the US ally against terror.

The strategic importance of Pakistan in the global design of the United States is vital and the US is dependent on logistical and political support of Pakistan in its fight against Al Qaeda and Taliban. According to Congressional sources, "post- 9/11 Pakistan has received nearly 18 billion US dollars as aid from the United States, including 11.5 billion

US dollars as military assistance. Of the military assistance the maximum amount \$7.345 billion has gone to Pakistan as Coalition Support Fund which is actually the reimbursement for what Pakistan spent on support for the US operations in Afghanistan."² However, despite the massive US economic and military assistance, Pakistan's support has been in the nature of doublespeak. Fragile nature of Pakistan's domestic politics, its multiple power centres, pervasive ideology of Islamic extremism and its fixation with India have determined the nature of Pakistan's cooperation with the United States in the fight against terror. President Obama lamented, "Seven years after 9/11, the United States is worse off in than it was, American interests in the region were worse off than they were, and Pakistan is worse off than it was."³

A private intelligence firm Stratfor in its report said that within Pakistan "there was a national lack of acknowledgement that the country was being torn apart by religious extremism." Stratfor predicted, "it is only a matter of time before Washington escalates its unilateral military operations deeper into Pakistani territory" -a move experts warned could worsen collateral damage and fuel anti-Americanism. In Pakistan the US is faced with the Hobson's choice. The US Administration, on the one hand, finds long-term strategic usefulness of Pakistan and yet, on the other hand, its domestic political conditions and its fixation with India hinder Islamabad from providing adequate military and political cooperation in the task of elimination of the menace of terrorism. There is a growing perception among the US intelligence circles that Pakistan "lacked willingness and ability to take on the rapidly rising threat posed by Islamic extremism and militancy."⁴

The problem gets further complicated as the political and strategic objectives of both the countries in Afghanistan do not match. The US desires a stable and peaceful Afghanistan where there are no safe heavens for Al Qaeda and Taliban, while Pakistan wants to have a weak and unstable Afghanistan so that it can have strategic depth against any future military conflict with India. Pakistani establishments have nurtured a policy of using terrorist and extremist groups in maintaining low-intensity conflict with India. Unless the objectives of the US and Pakistan match in Afghanistan, the task of defeat of Al Qaeda and Taliban would remain an elusive one.

While the Bush Administration was aware of the dubious role played by Pakistan and its agencies, it remained preoccupied with Iraq and could not give a serious attention to the Afghan theatre in the war

against terror. Bush Administration's approach to the terrorist menace was deeply militaristic and devoid of any comprehensive political and diplomatic strategy. It did not attempt to link aid to Pakistan with its performance towards achieving the targets for which it was given. The Bush Administration defined the foreign policy goals and objectives for the United States post 9/11 in terms of a grand military strategy against terror. However, it did not do much in working out suitable means and strategies, which could have helped in making the globalizing world safe from the menace of terrorism and extremism where there are no safe heavens for terror groups like Al Qaeda and Taliban.

The Obama administration started its innings in the beginning of January 2009 and in the aftermath of the 26/11 terror attack on Mumbai. Obama ordered a thorough review of the US policy and strategy towards Afghanistan. It marked a willingness to change the US policy and evaluate the role of Pakistan quite critically. It also marked the beginning of a political and regional approach to the whole problem. Obama administration after a thorough inter-agency review announced the Af-Pak strategy, which clearly indicated the new approach of the US administration to view the Afghan imbroglio in linkage with what is happening within Pakistan. Taliban and Al Qaeda leaders have taken shelter and have been using the mountainous terrain in north-western Pakistan as safe heavens. There has been a growing perception in Washington that elements within Pakistan's official agencies with the knowledge of the Pakistani establishment have been nurturing extremist and terrorist organizations as their strategic asset in targeting India. These terror organizations are no longer confined to Kashmir. Instead terrorism emanating from Pakistan is the primary cause of military stalemate and resurgence of Taliban in Afghanistan. Al Qaeda and Taliban are firmly entrenched in Pakistan and unless they are eliminated, the US and its western allies will continue to face the threat of terrorist attack like 9/11 and 26/11. Obama administration has come to realize that success of its Afghanistan involvement will not be possible until it is able to persuade the Pakistani military and political establishment to wind up their support to terrorism

SYSTEMIC CRISIS IN PAKISTAN

An American scholar, Ashley J. Tellis in an article in *Washington Quarterly* in 2004 advocated a foreign policy strategy aimed at transforming

Pakistan instead of punishing it outrightly. He underlined the pivotal role of Army in Pakistan's politics, which is deeply entrenched in the very nature of historical evolution of Pakistan since its inception. The unresolved dispute over Kashmir as a bitter legacy of partition continues to be a potential cause of war between India and Pakistan. The persistence of the dispute and enmity with India has acquired an importance of its own for perpetuation of the military centric power structure within Pakistan. The serious internal crisis of Pakistan has made anti-India postures an obsessive compulsion for its power players. Tellis, however, notes that "historically its civilian regimes have been less obsessed with India than its military rulers."⁵ For more than half of its existence Pakistan has been governed by military dictatorships and even during civilian regimes the army has wielded substantial power and has often had a say in Pakistan's relations with India. Besides army, religious extremist parties have increased their penetration into Pakistan's society and politics since the days of the Afghan *jihad* against Soviet infidels. Army has patronized religious extremism in order to undermine democratic political process and the extremist parties in turn further legitimized and entrenched the army over politics. Consequently anti-India postures and maintenance of conflict over Kashmir are deeply rooted in the DNA of Pakistani state system. The role and importance of Pakistani army can be sensed from a recent statement of its former military ruler and President Pervez Musharraf from London in which he advocated a constitutional role for the army in Pakistan's governance and policy making.⁶

The policy of acquiring strategic depth in Afghanistan against India has guided Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan since the time of Soviet withdrawal and the subsequent American abandonment of the region during 1990s. 9/11 brought the Americans back into Afghanistan in the wake of hunt for Al Qaeda. The US forced Pakistani dictator Gen. Pervez Musharraf to be an ally in the war against terror but despite its massive economic and military aid, the threat of Al Qaeda and resurgence of Taliban is a grim reality today. Americans acknowledge that this is because Pakistan continues its policy of low-intensity conflict and recovering its strategic depth in Afghanistan against India. The US Administration under Obama is increasingly getting convinced that Pakistan is the epicentre of terrorism in the region. Obama said, "I am convinced that our security is at stake in Afghanistan and Pakistan. This is the centre of violent extremism practiced by Al Qaeda."⁷ But the

problem is what policy to be adopted towards Pakistan? A potential strategic ally in future and a nuclear armed country cannot be wished away by punitive actions.

Ashley J. Tellis suggests a strategy of transformation of Pakistan's society and politics towards incremental democratization and development as a moderate Muslim state which should be encouraged to live in harmony and peace with its neighbours. Tellis suggested way back in 2004 a policy strategy for the United States for the transformation of the structure of governance of Pakistan in which the present powerful army is reduced to a role to function under the guidance and direction of democratic civilian leadership. He finds a deep linkage between the dominant role of army in Pakistani politics and its policy of using terrorist and Islamic extremist groups against India and its policy of securing strategic depth in Afghanistan. The Army has consciously nurtured Islamic extremist groups for maintaining a low- intensity conflict with India. These extremist groups by the very nature of their anti-democratic and anti-modern ideology and worldview are the recruitment material for Al Qaeda.

Tellis says that "military regimes have repeatedly undermined centrist social forces and political parties in Pakistan by encouraging radical social groups opposed to democracy."⁸ The military regimes cannot resolve the security dilemma with India as the very basis of power and privilege of the army is based on its perception of permanent inevitable conflict with India. Unless there is transformation of Pakistan towards a modern Muslim state governed by a democratic civilian leadership it would be a pipedream to wean the country away from the path of sponsoring and nurturing terrorism. Hence if Pakistan is to live in peace with its neighbours and the international community and if it is not to be a safe heaven for terrorist and extremist groups who are a serious threat not only to India and Afghanistan but also to the United States and the West, its political process must be reformed.

Ashley Tellis has deeply analysed the systemic crisis facing Pakistan and is of firm view that curtailing the powers of the army can be the fulcrum of the strategy of its renewal and reform. He suggests an eventual, integrated solution whose key elements fall into four primary realms in which Pakistan's most difficult challenges exist; strategic, economic, political and social. Economic and social development initiatives and the external assistance can bring desirable results only if there is meaningful political reform towards democratic and civilian rule

where political leaders do not dance on the tune of the military. This cannot reach its logical conclusion if the Pakistani army continues to live under the self nurtured image of permanent enmity with India. Hence the United States will have to adopt a very sensitive and responsible approach where it sincerely facilitates India-Pakistan security cooperation and resolution of Kashmir dispute in a realistic and honourable manner to the satisfaction of both. It is hoped that the sincere US diplomatic initiatives on a long term basis can bring about slow but desirable change in the attitude and policy of the two nuclear armed neighbours.

OBAMA'S AF-PAK STRATEGY

On entering the White House, US President Barack Hussain Obama declared his aim to put the war in Afghanistan at the forefront of his security agenda following eight years of neglect by the Bush Administration preoccupied by the war in Iraq. After a protracted inter-agency deliberation and review by the end of 2009, President Obama "affirmed his Administration's commitment to degrading the capabilities of terrorist groups ensconced in Afghanistan and Pakistan." Obama announced a revised "Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan strategy at West Point, White House and in his speech, Obama affirmed the core goal of "disrupting, dismantling and defeating the Al Qaeda and preventing its return to either Afghanistan or Pakistan". The new strategy substantially scaled back the agenda of state building in Afghanistan and mandated an intense focus on the Ministeries of Interior and Defense.⁹ He, thus, confined himself to the goal of making his countrymen safe from the threat of Al Qaeda by denying them safe heaven in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In his address to the United States Corps of Cadets of the United States Military Academy at West Point on December 1, 2009 the President Obama said:

"We will act with full recognition that our success in Afghanistan is inextricably linked with our partnership with Pakistan. We are in Afghanistan to prevent a cancer from once again spreading through that country. But this same cancer has taken root in the border region of Pakistan. That is why we need a strategy that works on both sides of the border.

In the past, there have been those in Pakistan who have argued that struggle against extremism is not their fight, and that Pakistan is better off doing little

accommodation with those who use violence. But in recent years as innocents have been killed from Karachi to Islamabad, it has become clear that it is the Pakistani people who are most endangered by extremists. Public opinion has turned. The Pakistani Army has waged an offensive in Swat and South Waziristan. And there is no doubt that the United States and Pakistan share a common enemy.

In the past, we too often defined our relationship with Pakistan narrowly. Those days are over. Moving forward, we are committed to a partnership with Pakistan that is built on a foundation of mutual interests, mutual respect, and mutual trust. We will strengthen Pakistan's capacity to target those groups that threaten our countries, and have made it clear that 'we cannot tolerate a safe-haven for terrorists, whose location is known, and whose intentions are clear'. America is also providing substantial resources to support Pakistan's democracy and development. We are the largest international supporter for those Pakistanis displaced by the fighting. And going forward, the Pakistani people must know that America will remain a strong supporter of Pakistan's security and prosperity."¹⁰

With regard to the US policy towards Pakistan, Tellis suggests that "the US Administration will not necessarily have to change Pakistan's goals in Kashmir, but it will have to lean on Pakistan to change the means it has used since at least 1994, the most dangerous being the unleashing of Islamic terrorist groups."¹¹ Despite all the pressures from Pakistan and its friends in the US Senate, President Obama has refused to link Kashmir with his Af-Pak strategy.

In order to achieve these goals President Obama articulated a three-point strategy: Military, Civilian and Partnership with Pakistan. In the military strategy, Obama declared deployment of additional 30,000 troops to secure key population centres as a part of new population-centric counter terrorism strategy. The population-centric strategy emphasizes the protection of the population instead of killing the adversary. It means that sometimes it is better to take no action against an enemy combatant than it is to engage, especially if the civilians are at risk. As on 1 February 2010 the international troop presence in Afghanistan was 86,000. The military surge with additional 30,000 troops aims at reversing the momentum of the Taliban and Al Qaeda. It seeks to clear the areas from the control of the Taliban by defeating them.

As a part of the military strategy, it aims at building the Afghan National Security Forces composed of the Afghan National Army, Afghan National Air Corps and the various elements of the Afghan National Police such as the uniformed police, border police and the civil

order police. This is in accordance with Obama's plan of transferring the responsibility to the Afghans themselves to be followed by a conditions-based phased withdrawal beginning with July 2011 of NATO and US troops which constitute International Security Assistance Force at present responsible for maintaining security there since December 2001.

The second component of Obama's strategy deals with civilian surge. Obama has often expressed the view about inadequacy of military success in achieving national security objectives. In July 2008 Obama said, "We cannot continue to rely on our military in order to achieve the national security objectives that we have set. We've got to have a civilian national security force, that's just as powerful, just as strong just as well funded." When Obama took over the White House in January 2009, there were only 320 civilians deployed by the US, of whom only 67 served outside of Kabul. In contrast, he indicated to deploy 388 persons from civilian surge in the Provinces.¹²

Shanthie Mariet D' Souza of the Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis, New Delhi has described the problem areas of the strategy where she notes that analysts in the region have viewed the Af-Pak strategy as a 'reductionist' strategy and a prelude to a US exit from Afghanistan. President Obama's 1 December 2009 speech only reconfirmed such apprehensions. She has outlined seven problem areas:¹³

Firstly, *Draw down of forces*; By linking additional troop deployments to a timetable for the drawdown of forces and narrowly defined goals. However, the strategy misses out on the core essentials of COIN campaigns which hinges on time, long term commitment, institution building and a larger political strategy. Moreover, by announcing the exit, it runs the danger of working to the advantage of the insurgents and their sponsors who will 'wait for their time'.

Secondly, *Troops surge*- Increase in troops numbers; While an increase in troops numbers for a 'population centric' policy is an essential step forward, without clear Rules of Engagement (RoE) in dealing with the tribes, especially the Pashtuns in south and east Afghanistan, it could result in further alienation of the people.

Thirdly, *Civilian Surge*- Problem of Unity of Effort- The present strategy has focused on the civic component or the 'civilian surge'. But the need is not to send more American experts but to build local Afghan capacities in better governance and aid delivery mechanisms.

Fourthly, *Building Afghan National Security institutions in a limited*

time frame- A major problem in outlining a time table for downsizing troops hinges on the need for a phased transition to Afghan national security forces, capable of independent action, to take over from the US forces in 18 months. There is also a problem of mentoring and funding such huge projects.

Fifthly, *Transferring authority to credible Afghan government-* A credibly elected Afghan president and his capacity to extend his writ beyond Kabul are critical to an eventual US exit plan. The shortcomings of the electoral process, redressal mechanisms and re-election procedures have highlighted the problems associated with the lack of political sector reforms.

Sixthly, *Issues of sanctuaries and safe havens-* The author points out that in the present scenario, increased dependence on the Pakistan army and without addressing the issue of 'sanctuaries', selected targeting of the Pakistani Taliban will not significantly dent the Afghan Taliban capability in the long term.

Seventhly, *Sources of funding of insurgency-* One of the major shortcomings of the present strategy is the lack of attention paid to the sources of funding for the insurgency. After this, the paper deals with the regional responses regarding American intentions in Afghanistan.

PROS AND CONS OF THE US WITHDRAWAL

Rebuilding of Afghanistan's economy and administrative system requires external assistance. Without improvement in economic and administrative infrastructures, it will not be possible to arrest the revival of insurgency and extremism. But it is clear that Obama has no plan to get engaged in a long arduous task of state building in Afghanistan. He is absolutely clear that 'Afghans will have to take responsibility for their security, and that America has no interest in fighting an endless war in Afghanistan'.¹⁴ There is the need for external assistance but the responsibility has to be of Afghans. Obama emphasized the US need to work with its partners, the United Nations and the Afghan people to pursue a more effective civilian strategy so that government can take advantage of improved security. With the technical advice and support the Afghans would have to take responsibility for reconstruction and peace in their country.

Cautioning President Obama against hasty withdrawal Paul D. Miller in an article in the latest January 2011 issue of *Foreign Affairs* points

out, "Washington should also recognise that it can choose to withdraw from Afghanistan quickly at high risk or slowly at low risk. The programs, budgets, and strategies that are now finally in place have only been operating for a few years; and it is unlikely that there will be dramatic progress by July 2011. The Obama Administration has calculated that some degree of withdrawal is necessary to pressure the Afghan government, but it should be wary lest a precipitous withdrawal lead to panic in Afghanistan, undoing a decade of careful gains."¹⁵

However, the success of the US strategy in Afghanistan is vitally dependent upon the whole hearted cooperation and support from Karzai government and Pakistani establishment. The great dilemma facing the Obama Administration is that of rampant systemic corruption and insincerity of the present Karzai government, on the one hand, and the doublespeak of Pakistani rulers, on the other. Unless Obama resolves the twin dilemmas, its plan to transfer responsibility to Afghans may turn out to be an invitation to anarchy and resurgence of terrorist threat. The contribution of Obama's Administration is in extending the fight against terror in Afghanistan to Pakistan and to accord greater importance to non-military aspects for the success of his mission against terror.

OBAMA'S PAKISTAN DILEMMA

Obama's approach to Pakistan is fundamentally different. He wants to fundamentally change the nature of USA's partnership with Pakistan, which is reflected in the 'Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act 2009.' The US law states conditions for arms transfers for fiscal years 2012 through 2014 upon certification by the Secretary of State that

"Pakistan continues to cooperate with the United States in efforts to dismantle supplier networks relating to the acquisition of nuclear weapons-related materials,...demonstrates a sustained commitment to and is making sufficient efforts towards combating terrorist groups... is ceasing support, including by any elements within the Pakistan military or its intelligence agency to extremist and terrorist groups... is preventing Al Qaeda, the Taliban and associated terrorist groups, such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed, from operating in the territory of Pakistan,..., closing terrorist camps in the ...FATA, dismantling terrorist bases of operations in other parts of the country... is strengthening counterterrorism and anti-money laundering laws and that the security forces of Pakistan are not materially and substantially subverting the political or judicial processes of Pakistan."¹⁶

The Act thus promises a long-term US commitment to Pakistan. It makes

a clear cut division between the US military and economic aid to Pakistan. It has made the aid to Pakistan conditional to its performance on the fulfillment of promise to fight against terror. Aid is thus linked with the accountability of its government and its control over the other agencies of state like Army and ISI with regard to support to terrorist groups. Non- military aid would be in greater proportion whose expenditure would be supervised. Its objective is to help in the transformation of Pakistan towards a stable, democratic and moderate Islamic state living in peace with its neighbours, particularly India and Afghanistan. Instead of punishing and isolating the nuclear armed Pakistan, Obama's policy has been to use its diplomatic and aid power to transform the nature of Pakistan's society, economy and politics into an area of peace and stability. The aid grants by the US Administration would have to follow a constitutional procedural requirement of certification that Pakistan is making progress on the front of terror and the aid money is being used properly for the designated purpose as per the provisions of the US law. It is very likely that as in the past the requirement of certification gives enormous flexibility for the US Administration to waive the stringent conditions in the light of prevailing strategic necessities. Pakistan can be easily bailed out of its anti-terrorism obligations whenever its cooperation would be vital for the USA's other larger interests.

ATTITUDE TOWARDS INDIA

Obama's Administration has further extended the process of de-hyphenisation of relations of the US with India and Pakistan. For the US national interests both the countries have their own importance. The US does not favour either country in the Kashmir dispute. "What it can do at the most, and that what it actually endeavours to do, is to nudge the two parties from crisis situation to negotiating table and to let them decide on their own about the modalities of their dialogue processes and the eventual resolution of their outstanding disputes."¹⁷ Its policy is primarily to prevent escalation of conflict between the two and bring them to the negotiating table in crisis situations. However, it is abundantly clear that the US is opposed to use of terror as a means of influencing the dialogue or terms of settlement of the dispute. President Obama has expressed solidarity with India on the issue of terrorism emanating from Pakistan's soil. Will the US continue its diplomatic and purse power to prevail upon Pakistan to eliminate its terror infrastructures operating against India is

a big question which is difficult to answer at present.

Obama's Af-Pak strategy becomes doubly complicated because of its India dimension. Pakistan's Afghan policy is a direct fallout of its confrontationalist policy towards India. Hence Obama's plan is bound to deeply affect India-Pakistan relations. Pakistan is opposed to India's growing influence in Afghanistan due to its role in economic and infrastructure development. Recently Obama has proposed joint India-US involvement in such projects in order to allay Pakistani propaganda against India. As regards India's complaints against US arms aid to Pakistan, Obama has done almost nothing to ensure that such US arms are not meant for use against India. The nature of US arms supply to Pakistan hardly matches its requirements for counter terror operations. India has been demanding monitoring mechanism over the use of US arms supplied to Pakistan. The issue of delivery of 18 F-16s to Pakistan as decided by Bush Administration is the best indicator of the USA's ambivalent approach. "The US is to deliver the F16 jets and adjust the money from the counter terrorism military assistance funds. Thus Pakistan is to buy F-16 jets from the American money.¹⁸ F-16 jets have been designed for war and are liable to be used against India but now an argument is being manufactured that the same jets have counter terrorism value also and can be used to fight Islamists. F16 has a symbolic importance in US-Pakistan relationship. The acid test of Obama's determination to weed out terrorism and its safe heavens is F16 in which the US has succumbed to Pakistani strategic blackmail.

AL QAEDA VS TALIBAN

The US sees its threat primarily from Al Qaeda and it has taken fight against Taliban because its chief Mullah Omar has refused to disassociate from Osama. It can be argued plausibly that if Taliban or a section of it were to disassociate from Al Qaeda the US would not be interested in continuing the fight against terror to its logical conclusion. Hence India must remain always on guard and continue its efforts to forge an international regime against terrorism and its diplomatic offensive against Pakistan-sponsored terrorism. Recent efforts by the US, Karzai government and Pakistan for facilitating some kind of acceptable peace deal with 'good Taliban' need to be watched carefully. Obama's Af-Pak strategy is to be seen in the light of his intention to withdraw the US forces before 2012 Presidential elections or at least laying down an exit

route and the timing and pace of the withdrawal would be influenced by the prevailing circumstances.

Obama's carrot and stick approach is based upon his political realism that there are obvious limits of the usefulness of militarist solution. The military power will have utility in weakening the backbone of Al Qaeda and Taliban thereby creating a split between Al Qaeda and various groups of Taliban. Ultimately peace in Afghanistan would have to follow an agreement among all sections of Afghanistan including those Taliban soldiers and individual leaders who show definite willingness to surrender arms and are ready to contribute to peace and development of Afghanistan under the present Constitution. After all no insurgency can ever be completely put to an end without a political settlement. Military onslaught should aim at compelling the Taliban who come from ethnic Pashtuns to come forward for peace agreement in order to establish stability and development in Afghanistan which shall live in peace and harmony with all its neighbours without undue foreign interference and respect norms and laws of international community. Obama's surge of troops and civilian security forces have targets to be achieved within a time frame. This reflects Obama's sense of urgency as well as his vision that the US commitments in Afghanistan are not open ended. Obama's increased military offensive and search for an honourable peace deal are moving simultaneously.

However, as the US overstays in Afghanistan day by day it is realizing that its success in Afghanistan is increasingly interwoven with muddle of domestic politics and India-centric policy of Pakistan. Obama Administration has come to the view that that while the theatre of terrorism is Afghanistan and Waziristan, its epicenter is within Pakistan and its command is in the hands of the Army. Obama has extended the Afghan war into Pakistan but does not have a clear strategy for Pakistan. The strategic policies of the US vis a vis Pakistan and Afghanistan seem to be a conundrum.

ILLUSIVE SEARCH FOR A PAKISTAN STRATEGY

Lot of contradictory statements and policy initiatives from the United States for Pakistan are coming. Whereas India India has recently finalized \$10 billion worth of military purchase from the USA, the Obama administration is in the process of \$2 billion worth new military aid to Pakistan. "The arms bonanza comes two weeks after Indian Defense

minister A.K. Antony conveyed New Delhi's apprehensions to Washington that US arms to Pakistan are invariably lined up against India, something even the Obama Administration has recognized. It also comes amid stunning disclosures following David Hedley's interrogation pointing to direct ISI's (and therefore the Pakistani state's) involvement in the 26/11 Mumbai attacks which President Obama visited during his stay in India beginning 8 November 2010... The latest US largesse, which is separate from the five year \$7.5 billion aid under Kerry- Lugar-Berman bill is being termed by Obama as security assistance package. It is aimed at addressing Pakistan's insistence that it does not have capability to go after terrorists and it needs more support from the US."¹⁹

President Obama has contingency plans ready for Pakistan if situation there goes out of control. In the event of a successful terrorist attack on the USA, President has given an unambiguous warning of USA's military response and attack on Pakistani terrorist camps deep inside its territory. In his book *Obama's Wars* (2010), Woodward has mentioned that the Obama administration has already listed and identified such 150 terrorist camps. It is expected that Obama is likely to press Pakistan for more military operations in north Waziristan along the lines of Swat valley and south Waziristan. In order to have assured support of Pakistan for the successful completion of its Afghan war, the US, however, sees itself being blackmailed and duped by Pakistan. The progenitor of terrorism is being wooed to fight terrorism and in exchange it is getting more carrots than sticks. The US objective has been to transform Pakistan's reluctance into willing partnership. The US sees long-term strategic usefulness of Pakistan owing to its strategic location and Pakistan, as in the past, will also go along with the USA so long as it strengthens its capability and bargaining position against India. India factor puts limits on US-Pak cooperation against Al Qaeda and Taliban.

The moot question is about the US long-term commitments to its declared goal of denying any safe havens to terror. Amidst all doubts and possibilities Obama deserves a chance to try his best. In his address to the Indian Parliament on 9 December 2010, Obama indicated his intention and determination to weed out the menace of terrorism. However, India must remain vigilant as it is probable that the US may wind up its troops one day from Afghanistan mid-way. However, the diplomatic and political commitment of the US to Afghanistan is likely to continue for a long time to come. It is hoped that the current review of its Af-Pak strategy by the Obama administration should ask for enduring

US commitment to Afghanistan with more focus on economic and political-diplomatic support.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUTH ASIA

As for implications of Obama's strategy for South Asia, the fate of peace and security in the region has never been so dependent upon the direction of the US policy as of now. During the Cold War days, the US policy used to affect bilateral relations of countries in the region. Today the US policy has serious implications for the nature and direction of domestic politics as well as peace and security in the region. Through its Af-Pak strategy the US is trying to strengthen the capability of Afghanistan to be able to take the responsibility of its internal security and independence, to reverse the tide of religious extremism within Pakistan, prevent extremists and army from having control over its state system and to prevent the possibility of India- Pakistan confrontation over the issue of cross- border terrorism. The US can not succeed in its primary goal of denying any safe havens to Al Qaeda in Af-Pak region unless it succeeds in realizing the above said objectives.

The Western troop surge and the accompanying civilian surge is directed towards an exit strategy - now being euphemistically termed the 'transition' strategy. This end goal is not without a cost, given the impatience to exit. In the pursuit of its core interests - which have been publicly and clearly defined as degradation of the capabilities of the al Qaeda and the supportive Taliban in order to prevent them from attacking the US, the Obama administration is supporting several steps in the area of security and stability that have long-term implications for the region.

Since building Afghan national forces is painstaking and time-consuming, British and American forces are rearming tribal and community militias despite clear concerns that such a step, without clear and accountable chains of command and control will rebound with a vengeance. They are encouraging the rapid build-up of the Afghan army and police, a move that is also viewed by some experts as a dangerous acceleration that would erode institutional stability of the armed forces. The recent emphasis on reconciliation with the insurgent groups also has its genesis in the need to bring the ongoing conflict to a manageable level that would allow the Western troops to exit gracefully. Almost all the steps are designed for short-term stability and may, in all likelihood,

lead to long-term instability in Afghanistan and the region.²⁰

Analysts have pointed out the increase in Taliban insurgency and its frightening implications. Ahmad Rashid in his latest book *Afghanistan: Descent into Chaos* has discussed the failure of the US in Afghanistan. However, it would be a lopsided picture of the Afghan scenario if we do not take stock of political and economic reconstruction after 2001. A significant development in infrastructure has taken place which should not be overlooked in the face of increase in insurgency, which demand a mix of military strategy as well as a strategy of political accommodation. Paul. D. Miller has referred to such development indicators indicating significant improvement keeping in view the low base benchmark of September 2001.²¹

The fate of the Afghan people is vitally linked to the outcome of Obama's strategy. If Obama's strategy flops and the US withdraws its forces from Afghanistan without ensuring security and sufficiently weakening the Taliban, the region would be again plunged into the ocean of anarchy and instability reminiscent of the era of the post- Soviet withdrawal days. On a note of optimistic realism possibly there may be reconciliation between the Karzai government and the moderate Taliban which may pave the way for durable political stability facilitating the US withdrawal. Obama's assurance of long-term and sustained US economic and diplomatic commitment provides a ray of hope. However, it is clear that the US has no interest in nation building in Afghanistan. Its only interest is in restoration of state in Afghanistan wherein the Afghans will be able to gradually shoulder their responsibility of security and independence on their own and not to be a safe haven for Al Qaeda any more. "The primary obstacle to state building in Afghanistan is the historical and ongoing inability of Afghans to establish a mutually acceptable balance of power between any central government and periphery communities and institutions."²² Keeping in view pros and cons of the whole situation, the US should at most serve as a facilitator in reaching the desired balance of power through a peace agreement among Afghans and provide economic, technical and political support to reconstruction, security and stability in that country.

For Pakistan, the implications of Obama's strategy are even greater. After Wikileaks disclosures, the complicity of Pakistan's state agencies like Army and ISI in supporting and sustaining Taliban has been established beyond doubt about. The US Administration has been always aware of Pakistan's linkages with Taliban and the terror infrastructures

within Pakistan and the Wikileaks disclosures have increased pressure on the Obama Administration to tighten its diplomatic and financial strings against Pakistan. Pakistan is the single biggest foreign policy challenge for the United States and whether Obama Administration can come up to the challenge is a moot question. The Defence and State Departments for strategic reasons still have traditional love for Pakistan and in order to fight Al Qaeda and Taliban they are not willing to take the risk of Pakistan's drift away from the US. If Obama Administration puts too much pressure upon Pakistan's civilian government, its Army and public opinion is bound to turn anti-America. If the civilian government under pressure adopts pro-US policy, it is likely that Pakistan may go on Iranian path after its Islamic revolution in 1979. The challenge is huge and the dilemmas before the Obama Administration defy easy decision without serious risks involved.

The reports of misuse of Zia-era blasphemy law, the assassination of Salman Taseer, the Governor of its Punjab province, and subsequent wave of justification of the killing are grim reminder of deep roots of extremism in Pakistan. Obama's plan envisages reversing the tide of religious extremism in Pakistan. Through economic aid the US hopes to promote modern educational institutions and to regulate the *madarssas*, which produce young minds indoctrinated with extremist ideas. The Pakistani army is feeling uneasy with the attempts for promoting democratic institutions and accountability. Pakistan has been pleading for US role in mediation over Kashmir, which the Obama Administration has flatly refused so far. With its Af-Pak strategy the US is deeply involved in the sub-continental politics as never before. Cynics of the US role over history are arguing for the withdrawal of the US and NATO forces from Afghanistan in order to prevent the regional security environment from further deterioration.

On the other hand, by and large the Indian strategic community is of the opinion that the US should not withdraw from Afghanistan immediately without accomplishing the goal of defeating the Al Qaeda and Taliban. The winding up of India specific terror infrastructures within Pakistan is not within the perview of Obama's Af-Pak strategy. The US can not successfully meet the Af-Pak challenge unless there is a fundamental transformation in the priorities and structures of decision making of US foreign policy and it redefines US-Pakistani relationship free from the shadow of the past and lure of short term strategic gains. India may have to keep itself confined to its soft power presence in

Afghanistan through economic and technical assistance in building its infrastructures and need not rigidly stick to the goal of a friendly government in Kabul. Rather India needs to be prepared to work with any government in Kabul and accept a peace deal among Afghans even if it involves participation of moderate Taliban and Pakistan if it gets a credible assurance that Afghan soil would not be used for terrorist or anti-India activities.

CONCLUSION

A lot of realism and diplomatic planning are required to deal with the scenario of post-US withdrawal Afghanistan. Stability in the neighbourhood more particularly in Afghanistan and Pakistan has to be India's prime objective. A democratic government with a plural and tolerant society alone can provide long-term peace and stability in the region but in the short-term a government in Kabul without involving Taliban and Pakistan in some form may not be feasible. India cannot afford the prospects of instability in its north-west neighbourhood. Stability in Afghanistan requires a peace deal among Afghans as well as a regional arrangement among neighbouring countries. Pakistan, India, Iran and Russia should reach an agreement guaranteeing independence of Afghanistan, which shall not remain a client state of any foreign power. Geneva Accords in 1988 had facilitated withdrawal of the Soviet forces but left open the question of foreign arms assistance to their respective Afghan groups. Lessons from the Geneva Accords must be taken and the international community must ensure that following the US withdrawal no foreign countries supply any arms to any Afghan groups. Any external assistance in any form should reach the Afghans only through the legitimate Afghan government which are accountable to its people, to the international community and the United Nations.

For the successful outcome of the Af-Pak strategy President Obama will have to take diplomatic initiatives beyond Afghanistan and Pakistan with due concerns for regional stability and peace. The Af-Pak strategy lays down an exit route but not without accomplishing the job and the job is to dismantle and defeat the network of Al Qaeda. An independent and stable Afghanistan will not only deny any safe heaven to Al Qaeda and its affiliates but also will benefit Afghans immensely, strengthen the foundations of regional peace and security as well as improve the

global image and leadership credentials of the declining but lone Super Power - the USA.

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THE AFGHANISTAN CONUNDRUM

IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

K. WARIKOO

Located at the crossroads of Central, South and West Asia and sharing its borders with Central Asian Republics of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan on the north, Chinese province of Xinjiang in the east, Iran on the west and south west, and Pakistan and Pak-occupied Kashmir on the south and south east, Afghanistan occupies a unique geo-strategic placement in the region. Distinct ethno-linguistic groups settled in different parts of Afghanistan have diverse social moorings and political affiliations and aspirations. Thus the Tajiks, Turkmens and Uzbeks have been looking northwards to their respective Central Asian Republics. Shia Hazaras are attracted towards Iran and Pashtuns look southwards to NWFP in Pakistan. In fact the Gorno-Badakhshan region of Tajikistan and the Badakhshan region of Afghanistan have virtually no difference in terms of language, race, lifestyle etc. The division along ethno-linguistic and regional lines has always been there in Afghanistan. To quote an American geographer Prof. Niger Allen, "Afghanistan became a state, but in reality a space between Russian Central Asia and the British." He prefers to describe Afghanistan as "a space and not a place." Bringing diverse ethnic groups together to form a nation state was a challenge confronting the rulers of Afghanistan then, as it continues to be today.

With the Tajiks and Uzbeks gaining greater political influence, Pashtuns feared a loss of power which led to further polarisation between the Pashtuns and other ethnic groups. It was in these circumstances that the Taliban, a student militia comprising mostly of the young Pashtun students of the Islamic *madrassas* run by *Jamiat-e-Ulema-i-Islam* of Pakistan headed by the Islamist leader Maulana Fazlur Rahman, was successfully propped up by Pakistan. The then Interior Minister of Pakistan,

Naseerullah Babar also played a key role in the creation of Taliban militia. Unhappy with the failure of Hikmatyar and other *Mujahideen* groups to set up a compliant pro-Pak united government in Afghanistan, Pakistan was desperately looking for the strategic depth and the coveted land access to Central Asia. It was in late 1994 that the Taliban led by one-eyed Mullah Mohammad Omar wrested Kandahar from the forces of Hikmatyar thus gaining control over southern Afghanistan. Another key western city of Herat was captured in September 1995. Now Hikmatyar joined the Rabbani government in a bid to defend Kabul against the Taliban onslaught. The Taliban victory over Herat paved the way for Pakistan gaining control over the Quetta-Kandahar-Herat-Kushka route to Turkmenistan and other Central Asian Republics having huge reserves of oil and gas. By September 1996 the Taliban had seized control of Kabul. By May 1997 Pakistan recognised the Taliban regime with Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates following suit. On assuming power Taliban declared Afghanistan as 'Islamic Emirate' and imposed a strict Islamic code. Women were forced to wear veils and were prohibited to take employment or get educated. Former President Najibullah was dragged out of the UN premises and publicly hanged along with his brother. Non-Pashtun ethnic and religious minorities - Tajiks, Uzbeks and Shia Hazaras in particular, bore the brunt of Taliban atrocities. UN relief and aid agencies working in Afghanistan were harassed and attacked by the Taliban. Afghanistan became a safe haven for Osama bin Laden and his Al Qaeda network. The Taliban enforced their extremist religious and socio-political agenda and turned Afghanistan into the hub of arms and drug-trafficking and as the main centre of Islamist terrorists and their international networks.

The takeover of Afghanistan and imposition of an extremist and totalitarian social order by the Taliban posed a serious challenge to peace and security in South Asia, Central Asia, China, Russia and also in the west. The killing of Iranian diplomats by the Taliban in August 1998 brought Iran and Afghanistan to the verge of war. When the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania were bombed in early August 1998, the United States launched simultaneous air strikes against the terrorist bases in Afghanistan and Sudan, thus marking a shift in the US policy towards the Taliban. Repeated demands by the United States to hand over Osama bin Laden, who continued to run terrorist training camps in Afghanistan, were ignored by the Taliban. Rebuffing all international appeals and ignoring widespread worldwide condemnation, the Taliban

not only went ahead with the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas but even made a public demonstration of their savage acts. By destroying the rich and composite historical-cultural heritage of Afghanistan, the Taliban sought to reaffirm Afghanistan's lead role as a puritan Islamist state in South and Central Asia and also to set a new agenda of Islamist extremism. All efforts to persuade the Taliban to hand over Osama bin Laden proved futile. The threat posed by Osama bin Laden and the Taliban to world peace and security was universally recognised and UN sanctions were imposed against the Taliban. Undaunted by international criticism the Taliban unleashed atrocities against women, children, ethnic-religious minorities and political opponents, thereby deepening the internal divide in Afghanistan, besides violating the basic human rights of Afghans. There was a total collapse of all social and economic structures in Afghanistan particularly under the Taliban. Agriculture, industry, trade, handicrafts, monetary system, education, health care, all were in shambles. The UN and other international peace initiatives made no headway in the face of determined Taliban opposition to share power with rival Afghan groups. Afghanistan remained fractured and turbulent country posing great challenge to peace and security in the region.

Though the Taliban, Osama bin Laden and his network were actively engaged in fanning Islamist extremism and terrorism in South Asia, Central Asia, South East Asia and also in the West for quite sometime, it was only after the dreadful suicidal terrorist strikes on World Trade Centre and Pentagon on 11 September 2001, that is the commercial and military nerve centres of the United States, which resulted in the collapse of the twin towers of the WTC with thousands of casualties, that the United States and its western allies realised the severity of challenge posed by bin Laden, Al Qaeda and the Taliban. Now the United States mustered sufficient political will to lead the global war against terrorism. The US-led forces severely mauled the Taliban and the Al Qaeda, destroyed much of their military machine, bases, training camps etc. The UN talks on Afghanistan that took place in Bonn from 27 November to 5 December 2001, resulted in the Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan pending the re-establishment of Permanent Government Institutions which is known as the Bonn Agreement. By the 5 December 2001 Bonn Agreement, the international community committed itself to the task of starting the process of establishing permanent government institutions and protecting human security in

Afghanistan. New hope dawned in Afghanistan for building accountable national institutions and infrastructure that was destroyed during the over two decades of war and fighting.

Even 10 years after the 9/11 attacks, the Taliban and elements of Al Qaeda network, however, continue to exist both within and outside Afghanistan. Leaders and thousands of supporters of Al Qaeda and the Taliban militia who shifted to Pakistan to escape the US assault, have regrouped and organised into a deadly force. In March 2002, 65 Al Qaeda terrorists were arrested in Faisalabad and Lahore during the joint operations conducted by Pakistani and US security agencies. However, over two-thirds of the 2,000 militants belonging to *Lashkar-e-Toiba*, *Harkat-ul-Mujahideen*, *Jaish-e-Mohammad*, *Hizbul-Mujahideen* and others, who had been arrested after Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf's address on 12 January 2002, were released later. Karzai government of Afghanistan confronted Pakistan with evidence showing that the remnants of Taliban and their leaders were operating out of camps in Waziristan province of Pakistan. There have been continuing attacks by the Taliban fighters on the US and International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) in various places in Afghanistan. *Shab-nama* (night letters) offering 50,000 US dollars for a dead Westerner and 100,000 US dollars for a live one were being distributed by the Taliban and their supporters in various places.

Though the presidential and parliamentary elections in Afghanistan were successfully completed, a sizeable number of *Mujahideen* commanders and Taliban members made it to the parliament, reflecting the precarious situation on the ground. The past few years have witnessed increased violence and killing of thousands of innocent persons and resurgence of the Taliban. Even ten years after the Taliban were ousted from power, the Taliban have resurfaced resorting to bombings, suicide (*fidayeen*) attacks on government institutions, diplomatic missions and even soft targets. Hundreds of schools were either closed or burnt down and scores of government officials, tribal leaders and civilians killed. In their campaign against educated community leaders, Taliban militants dragged a High School teacher, Abdul Habib from his house in Zabul province and beheaded him. In another incident, a hand grenade was lobbed at a girl's school in December 2005 in Kandahar province, it being the fifth such attack on schools during that month. At least 41 teachers and students were killed during the year 2005. To quote Hanif Atmar, the Afghan Education Minister, over 40 per cent of the schools in southern Afghanistan were closed due to threats from the Taliban, particularly

the foreign (non-Afghan) militants.¹

Another disturbing trend is that these *Jihadis* have been adopting Iraq style suicide car bomb attacks resulting in large scale death and destruction. Even the workers engaged in construction of roads and buildings were not spared. In November 2005, a driver of India's Border Roads Organisation, Maniappan Ramakutty engaged in road construction was kidnapped and brutally killed by the Taliban. On 12 March 2006, Sibghatullah Mojaddedi, a prominent Muslim cleric and the head of Afghanistan's Upper House of Parliament, *Mesharano Jirga* and also head of the Reconciliation Commission was targeted by a suicide car bomb in Kabul. Though Mojaddedi escaped with minor injuries, four persons were killed in the explosion. The infamous Department of Vice and Virtue which issued edicts during the *Mujahideen* and Taliban rule, banning girls from going to school, men shaving or cutting beards, kite flying, music etc. is back again under the Karzai government, which, however, claims that the reactivated department would spread the message of Islam and morality. Ahmed Wali Karzai, the Kandahar provincial chief and half-brother of President Hamid Karzai was shot dead in Kandahar in mid-July 2011. An Afghan Governor of Sherzad district in Nangarhar province was killed along with three of his guards in a roadside bomb attack by the Taliban on 6 September 2011.

Even though war against terror in Afghanistan was launched over ten years ago, many basic freedoms – from insecurity, fear and poverty are yet to be achieved. The battle between the forces of democratisation and those of destabilisation in post-Taliban Afghanistan is still continuing. Reports of kidnappings, ambushes, killings, rocket attacks and bomb explosions in Afghanistan have been coming almost daily. The resurgent Taliban cadres pose a serious threat to the security situation in Afghanistan. Nearly 80 NATO soldiers were wounded and two Afghan civilians killed after a truck packed with explosives rammed into the entrance of a military base in Wardark province in eastern Afghanistan on 11 September 2011, the bombing coinciding with the 10th anniversary of 9/11. Earlier in August 2011, 30 NATO troops were killed after a helicopter they were travelling in, was shot down.

The Taliban leaders have been recruiting hundreds of young *fidayeen*. According to published reports, resurgent Taliban forces are in alliance with drug smugglers in Helmand province of Afghanistan, forcing the villagers to grow poppy. Community leader Haji Nazarullah cited the threat letters saying, "Now cultivate poppy or we will come and kill

you.” The Taliban strategy is to earn money through the drugs trade and undermine the legitimate civilian authority in Afghanistan. Bombing and suicide attacks have escalated particularly since 2006. During the year 2007, over 6,500 persons were estimated to have been killed. According to a UN report, the violence in Afghanistan witnessed 30 per cent increase in 2007, with an average of 550 violent incidents each month.² In the year 2009, 2,412 civilian casualties were recorded which represented an increase of 14 per cent over the year 2008.³ In the following year in 2010, the number of civilians killed surged to 2,777, with more than half occurring in south Afghanistan, where more than 100 Afghan civilians including teachers, nurses, doctors, tribal leaders, community elders, government officials, children, civilians working for international organisations were killed.⁴ And during the first six months of the year 2011, 1,462 civilians have been killed. The Senlis Council, an independent thinktank with long field experience in Afghanistan, reported that the Taliban “have a permanent presence in 54 per cent of Afghanistan and the country is in serious danger of falling into Taliban hands.”⁵ By 2009, the Taliban regained control of most of the Afghan countryside.

Ten years after 9/11, the situation in Afghanistan remains unstable due to increasing insecurity, waning influence of the Karzai government and rise in deadly attacks by the Taliban. The Taliban movement has not only regrouped and strengthened but has been operating both from Afghanistan and Pakistan. The original Taliban led by Mullah Omar now known as Quetta Shura are dominant in the south and east of Afghanistan. Haqqani network run by Sirajuddin Haqqani from Waziristan in Pakistan operates in Khost, Paktika, Paktia and Jalalabad provinces of Afghanistan. *Hizb-e-Islami* of Gulbadin Hikmatyar has strongholds in Mohmand and Bayour tribal districts. Pakistan Taliban – the *Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan* (TTP) is active in the NWFP and FATA areas of Pakistan. Killing of Osama bin Laden has not deterred the Taliban in their insurgent attacks. It is largely because Pakistan continues with its policy of preserving and using its strategic assets in the form of Taliban and other radical groups, who are seen to be its allies in any new government that takes shape in Afghanistan after the US and ISAF troops withdraw. The US announcement of withdrawal from Afghanistan has only boosted the Taliban which operate from its sanctuaries in Pakistan. The Taliban seek to return to power either through force or through a negotiated process in the name of reconciliation with the active Pak support. Due to its obsession with a pro-Pak regime in Kabul, Pakistan

continues its links and manipulation of the Taliban and allied groups, whether in the field or in the negotiation process between Kabul, US and the Taliban. Waning popularity, incompetence and corruption of the Karzai government and ruling elite, predatory warlords and inability of the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police in dealing with the insurgents, is only helping the Taliban on the ground. Besides, the weak resolve of international community, disjointed efforts of European countries and different national priorities have only resulted in lowering the morale of anti-Taliban elements in Afghanistan. UK's policy favoring negotiations with the Taliban and recruitment of militias also has had destabilizing impact on the ground.

Being aware of the weakening resolve of the international community to hold on in Afghanistan, formal announcement of final withdrawal of US and ISAF troops by the year 2014 and initiation of the dialogue process with the Taliban, the latter have only escalated their attacks. Recent deadly attacks on high profile targets in Kabul – the Intercontinental Hotel in June 2011, the British Council in August 2011 and the US embassy and NATO headquarters in September 2011, have exposed the extreme fragility of security in Afghanistan. These attacks also reinforce doubts about the western strategy of negotiating with the Taliban, particularly so after the US held the Pakistan based Haqqani network responsible for the attack on US embassy and NATO headquarters in Kabul. Non-Pashtun Afghans are also worried over the prospects of the Taliban coming to power through such negotiations. While they retain bitter memories of Taliban's atrocities during the 1990s, they also fear the loss of economic and political influence. The resurgence of Taliban poses a direct threat to regional security in South and Central Asia.

So ensuring sustainable security and peace in Afghanistan is a great challenge facing the international community. This can be achieved only by total destruction of Taliban and Al Qaeda network and their infrastructure still existent and operational in various parts of the world. International community needs to evolve a concerted strategy to curb terrorism and extremism in and around Afghanistan by stopping their sources of funds, arms, logistics and training and ideological motivation. A stable, peaceful and democratic Afghanistan can emerge only after the dark forces of extremism and terrorism represented by the Taliban and their network are defeated and obliterated.

The reconstruction of collapsed social and economic infrastructure will help in putting the social and economic situation in Afghanistan

back on tracks, though the process is cumbersome and long drawn. International agencies like United Nations, World Bank, European Union etc. need to implement the reconstruction programmes employing professional and committed cadres in coordination with the local agencies/personnel. Air Dropping of dollars/cash or injecting lot of money instead of rebuilding the education system, health care, agriculture, trade and services have not been productive. At the same time, international agencies and donors need to adapt their aid disbursement and reconstruction programmes to the local situations, so that the foreign aid is not consumed in meeting the rentals, salary and travel bills of foreign aid managers/workers and that the benefit of foreign assistance percolates to the grassroots. Even after a decade of security, development and humanitarian assistance of about 57 billion US dollars of international aid, Afghanistan is yet to achieve peace, security, political stability and sustainable economic development.

The future of Afghanistan with guarantees of peace, security and well being of its people hinges upon the success of the de-Talibanisation process, the success of reconciliation between rival ethnic/regional Afghan political groups and commanders, emergence of a balanced and broad-based stable government representing diverse ethnic, regional and minority interests, the setting up and effective functioning of law enforcement agencies, on the speedy implementation of reconstruction of social, economic and education infrastructure, and on elimination of drugs and arms trafficking from Afghanistan. There is need to build strong institutions rather than pander to individual Afghan elite and their network. Whereas the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) need to be turned into a dependable, modern fighting force ready to take on the militants, the Taliban and other militant cadres need to be disarmed and neutralised. Improving the local governance and curtailing cash/aid flows to individuals, power brokers, politicians etc. can help in reducing corruption among the Afghan politicians, bureaucracy and power brokers. Indeed the process is complex and arduous, demanding continued international attention and assistance.

IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

Indian policy has been to help in rebuilding the physical infrastructure in Afghanistan, providing assistance, training and scholarships besides

developing close political relationship with the Karzai government. India gifted few hundred vehicles, some aeroplanes, besides undertaking reconstruction projects in several sectors particularly hydro-electricity, transmission lines, road construction, agriculture, telecommunications, information and broadcasting, education and health. India has been one of Afghanistan's foremost development partners providing an assistance of 1.2 billion US dollars in 2001.

India has built the road from Delaram to Zaranj in the southwestern Afghan province of Nimroz, at a cost of 7.7 billion rupees to let India-Afghanistan trade pass through the Iranian port of Chabahar. The Taliban tried to stall progress on this project which has been crucial to India-Afghanistan overland connectivity bypassing Pakistan. They kidnapped and brutally murdered a Border Roads Organisation (BRO) driver working on the project in November 2005, demanding that the BRO leave Afghanistan within 48 hours. Again in the first week of January 2008, a suicide bomber attacked the Indian Border Roads Organisation (BRO) convoy killing two personnel and injuring several others. This road will help reduce the distance by sea by 530 kms. and by road by 870 kms. for goods meant for Afghanistan via Iran, thus minimising both the cost of transportation and also the dependence of India and Afghanistan on the land route via Pakistan. This road was formally inaugurated by President Hamid Karzai and Indian Foreign Minister, Pranab Mukherjee on 22 January 2009.

India which used to be a traditional market for dry fruits before the turmoil in Afghanistan, is regaining its position in this sector. Now Afghanistan exports about 125 million dollars worth of goods, mostly dry fruits to India. Afghan businessmen and traders from Herat, Kandahar, Kabul and Jalalabad have begun to supply the Indian market with dry fruits, handicrafts, gemstones etc. Over forty firms dealing in textiles, handicrafts, gems, etc. participated in the India International Trade Fair at Delhi in November 2007, earning revenue of 8 million dollars during the two-week long fair.

India spent 5.1 million dollars in renovating the oldest and the biggest school - Habiba School in Afghanistan. When the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited Afghanistan in August 2005, he formally handed over this school to the Afghan officials. India is also constructing the new Parliament building in Afghanistan, as India's contribution to the development of democratic institutions in that country.

As yet another Indian reconstruction venture, the Power Grid

Corporation of India has undertaken a project to bring electricity from Termez bordering Uzbekistan to Kabul, so that areas in central and north-eastern Afghanistan get 100 to 200 MW electricity from the generating units in Uzbekistan. This project is being executed by India against heavy odds due to refusal of Pakistan to provide transit access for transportation of over 15,000 tonnes of construction material from India to Kabul.⁶

INDIA-AFGHANISTAN TRADE FIGURES (US\$ MILLION)

Year	Indian Exports		Indian Imports	
	Export to Afghanistan	Total Export	Import from Afghanistan	Total Import
1996-1997	22.74	33,469.94	3.05	39,132.41
1997-1998	21.25	34,784.99	10.7	41,484.49
1998-1999	12.81	33,218.72	28.14	42,388.71
1999-2000	33.20	36,822.49	21.06	49,738.06
2000-2001	25.86	44,560.29	26.59	50,536.46
2001-2002	24.37	43,826.73	17.52	51,413.29
2002-2003	60.77	52,719.43	18.46	61,412.13
2003-2004	145.47	63,842.97	40.51	78,149.61
2004-2005	165.44	83,535.94	47.01	111,517.44
2005-2006	142.67	103,090.54	58.42	149,165.73
2006-2007	181.72	126,361.46	34.37	185,735.24
2007-2008	249.21	163,132.18	109.97	251,654.01
2008-2009	394.23	185,295.36	126.24	303,696.31
2009-2010	463.55	178,751.43	125.19	288,372.88

Source: Government of India, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Department of Commerce, URL: <http://commerce.nic.in.eidf/default.asp>

Whereas India has pumped over 1.2 billion US dollars of assistance into Afghanistan, it lacks both strategic and military muscle in Afghanistan. Pakistan has been steadfastly refusing transit access to Indian goods and materials including humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan, through its territory. Pakistan has been consistent in its policy of blocking the overland Central Asia-Afghanistan-Pakistan corridor to India for import of energy resources and export of Indian goods. The experience shows, that Pakistan has not granted India any transit access to send even its humanitarian assistance in the form of wheat and other commodities to Afghanistan. The Afghanistan-Pakistan Trade Transit Agreement, which was finalized on 19 July 2010 in the presence of US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, while allowing Afghan trucks to carry goods to the Wagah border for onward dispatch to India,

does not allow these trucks to carry back Indian goods to Afghanistan. In return, Afghanistan has allowed Pakistani trucks to go through Afghanistan to Central Asia, Iran and Turkey. Earlier, Afghan trucks were allowed to carry goods only to the Pak-Afghan border at Torkham. Pakistan's Information Minister, Qamar Zaman Kaira, clarified that "according to the agreement approved by Pakistan's cabinet, Afghan goods will be allowed to transit through Pakistan in sealed containers having tracking devices."⁷ Though India has recently allowed duty-free market access to Afghanistan,⁸ it has been denied transit access through Pakistan to Afghanistan and onwards to Central Asia. Pakistan has linked this transit passage and other bilateral trade issues with India to the final resolution of Kashmir. India has rightly steered clear of any involvement in the international security forces deployment and operations in Afghanistan. However, India needs to effectively address the security requirements of the Indian personnel working in the reconstruction projects in various parts of Afghanistan. Indian goodwill and political understanding with the Afghan government led by Hamid Karzai has not helped in preventing attacks on Indian embassy or Indians working in Afghanistan.

Notwithstanding its massive assistance and deep involvement in the reconstruction of Afghanistan, India has not been able to persuade the Afghan authorities to redress the problems faced by Sikh and Hindu minorities in Kabul, who are even facing troubles in cremating their dead. Those Hindus and Sikhs who fled from Afghanistan to India during and after the *Mujahideen* / Taliban takeover in Afghanistan have not been able to return to their homeland.

The dismantling of the former Northern Alliance infrastructure in terms of its manpower, political and military cadres, social and regional base particularly in northern Afghanistan did suit the USA in pushing its own agenda and loyalists like Hamid Karzai and others to power in Kabul. But the idea of isolating and sidelining non-Pashtun leaders from the mainstream has in no way helped in neutralising the Taliban or their influence among the Pashtuns.

There is need for a rethink of the policy towards Afghanistan, both by the USA and its western allies and more so by India which has larger stakes there. The US policy of putting all eggs in the basket of Pakistan has miserably failed. Despite billions of dollars US aid for fighting the Taliban, Al Qaeda and *jihadi* fighters, Pakistan has not only been abetting the regrouping of Taliban but has also let its tribal areas to become the

haven for international terrorists. To quote a western analyst, “the six-year Western operation in Afghanistan has all but failed in its goal of stamping out lawlessness and turning the country into a stable pro-Western democracy. It has failed in eliminating the opium trade and in ridding the anarchic Afghan-Pakistan border of terrorist academies.”⁹

Though India does not support the initiative of President Hamid Karzai of engagement and reconciliation with the Taliban, the US and UK have been pushing this idea by involving the United Nations in this initiative. Karzai offered talks with the Taliban who rejected his overtures more than once. Karzai even offered to personally meet the Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar and Chief of another insurgent group Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, and include them in the government. Karzai claimed that the UN Secretary General and the US President Bush supported his proposal.¹⁰ But the Taliban strategy is to re-establish its authority over the southern provinces around its headquarters in Kandahar and to destabilise the area in and around Kabul. All these developments pose serious challenge to India and its policy in Afghanistan. India needs to ensure that the Afghan leadership and also the international community particularly the West do not pursue the illusion of bringing stability to Afghanistan by compromising with the Taliban. India needs to reorganize its traditional friends and assets in Afghanistan besides ensuring the optimum utilization of Indian resources and funds that have been generously made available to Afghanistan. The international community needs to encourage India in helping Afghanistan to build a multi-ethnic democracy representative of various ethnic, regional and religious groups.

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AFGHANISTAN

THE RUSSIAN CONNECTION

SREEMATI GANGULY

In the context of conventional notion of Afghanistan's foreign policy strategy, two countries are accorded the most prominent status- the U.S. and Pakistan. Russia, on the other hand, shares a unique relationship with Afghanistan. The role of the buffer state, as played out by Afghanistan, during the 19th century, halted Russian adventure towards South Asia, and Russian invasion of Afghanistan proved to be so much of a miscalculated affair as the misadventure led to the collapse of the Soviet Union itself. But even now, Russia has a great stake in Afghanistan's stability and is still considered to be a stabilizing factor in Afghanistan's security scenario. This paper analyzes the different phases of Russian involvement in Afghanistan in the context of changing international strategic environment.

THE GREAT GAME

The Anglo- Russian rivalry during the mid-late 19th century was based on the perceived British notion of possible Russian advances to Afghanistan and ultimately, to India- the jewel in the crown for the British Empire, in view of the fact of Russian moves and gains in the Central Asian region. At a number of times there were plans by Russian Generals to attack India so as to make England concentrate her forces and actions in South Asia and to weaken her actions in Europe. For example, there were plans by General Duhamel, at the beginning of the Crimean War, or the 1878 plan by General Skobelev to attack India in a three-pronged way- from the Caspian, through Bukhara and from Ferghana, or the 1898 plan by Captain Lebedev. Similarly, the advocates of the "Forward

Policy" in the British establishment, like Viceroy Lytton, Henry Rawlinson preferred a policy of aggression against Russia to stop her beyond the borders of Afghanistan. Afghanistan remained the buffer between the two aggressive Empires. Interestingly, Russia, in her bid to pacify the British, declared time and again that Afghanistan did not fall in Russia's zone of interest, as Prince Gorchakov communicated to the British in his communication in 1873. However, the economic as well as military non-feasibility of a direct confrontation necessitated a compromise between the two empires: the Anglo-Russian Agreements of 1873 and 1887 marked the north and north-west borders of Afghanistan with Russia, while 1893 Agreement marked the south and south-eastern borders of Afghanistan with British India. The Pamirs Boundary Agreement of 1895 drew the spheres of influence of the two empires in the Pamir region. As Martin Ewans commented that 'while the frontier would clearly have had no value if a crisis had arisen involving the two powers elsewhere in the world, it was never itself the cause of such a crisis. As things turned out, it was to be the limit of Tsarist Russia's advances in Central Asia and was the point at which the Indian frontier was secured.'¹ The 1907 Anglo-Russian Convention finally delineated their interests in Persia, Tibet and Afghanistan. In this Convention also, Russia again declared that Afghanistan was beyond its sphere of influence. Notably, Afghanistan became the theatre of rivalry between the two empires for its locational status between two zones of influence- Central Asia for Russia and India for the British. And it was made to be involved in a bitter and complicated power struggle between Britain and Russia- the so-called Great Game.

SOVIET INVASION

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and its ten-year long stay (as the withdrawal of Soviet forces was finally completed in 1989) there did radically alter the regional dynamics and calculus for good. South-West Asia became the new theatre of Cold War rivalry, the U.S. got an unexpected opportunity to get involved in the region, and, Pakistan became the frontline state in the U.S. strategy to checkmate the Soviets. And, as a related development, the financial and military aid Pakistan received from the Reagan administration for the creation and sustenance of the *mujahideen*, were used effectively to positioning itself as a strategic rival of India in military terms. *Mujahideen*, created with active support, training and material help from both the U.S. and Pakistan, added a

new chapter in the history of resistance warfare- as they denied a superpower the victory, an unthinkable proposition.

But, most important, it altered the Soviet history and its perceived role in the future of Afghanistan. There were many explanations as to why the Soviet Union decided to send army to Afghanistan: One of the views was that the Soviet Union was worried about the possible spread of radical Islam in the region, after the 1979 Iranian revolution²; while, some said that there was a fear of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan as the removal of the Shah regime meant, for all practical purposes, the loss of Iran for the U.S. and they needed another friendly regime in the region. Published procedures of three secret CPSU CC Politburo Meetings³ reveal some other explanations. The 24 May 1979 Meeting made the recommendation to send the Soviet army to Afghanistan on the basis of the internal chaos prevailing in Afghanistan, after the April 1978 Saur Revolution and as a fall-out of the bitter power struggle between the PDPA leader Nur Muhammad Taraki and Prime Minister Hafizullah Amin. The 31 December 1979 Meeting declared that the decision to send the army was taken in view of the extremely volatile situation there, which threatened the national security of the Soviet Union, and in response to the request made by the Afghan government and in accordance with the Soviet-Afghan Treaty of 1978. In the CC CPSU Plenum of 23 June, the international situation was analyzed to support the Soviet action- the moves by the U.S. and China to draw Afghanistan into the orbit of imperial policy to create a threat to the USSR from its southern borders, as well as the policies of the U.S. and NATO to increase sharply their military budget, to deploy new intermediate range weapons by the U.S. in Western European sites and to prepare the strike force in the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf. But, in hindsight, it was a miscalculated decision on the part of the Soviet authorities, who failed to understand how troublesome would be the troubled waters of Afghanistan.

Trenin-Malashenko⁴ presents a rigorous analysis of the lessons the Soviets got from their Afghan imbroglio: "What the Russians discovered in the mountains of the Hindu Kush was, above all, the power of militant Islam. They also saw the limits of reforming a traditional society and the impossibility of imposed modernization. They came to appreciate the intricacies of tribal society. They had to discount the power of military force relative to the power of purse, and the power of purse relative to the power of religious beliefs and traditional customs...They saw that

the enemies and the allies of the moment deeply resented foreigners, even as they sought to exploit them to their own advantage." The enduring trauma of this invasion- the death of approximately 14, 000 Soviet soldiers, the huge economic burden on the Soviet exchequer, the loss of faith in the invincibility of the Soviet military power, the return of the Soviet army, after an unsuccessful venture and the bitter realization that its superpower status also, to an extent, sunk in that Afghan 'graveyard of empires', like that of the British empire a century earlier- led to the hopeless feeling called 'Afghan syndrome', i.e., never to be involved actively in Afghan affairs again. It is a syndrome that still haunts the Russian national psyche and shapes Russia's policies and moves towards Afghanistan.

POST-9/II SCENARIO

The unenviable experience of remaining the theatre of superpower rivalry for 10 long years (1979-1989), the eventual Soviet pull-out (1989), the disintegration of the USSR (1991) and the emergence of the new states of Central Asia along its borders have redefined the nature and scope of Afghanistan's battleground. The political vacuum created after the Soviet pull-out, the inter-ethnic war, the failure of *mujahideen* in building some form of political stability, the alarming growth of drug-trafficking, the proliferation of small arms leading to the 'Kalashnikov culture' and a devastated economy - all these factors helped create an ideal atmosphere for militant religious extremism to flourish in Afghanistan. The close cooperation among the IMU of Uzbekistan and the Taliban and later, between the IJU and the Al-Qaeda network, the various terrorist incidents by these groups, the growing illegal traffic of arms into and presence of radical elements from Afghanistan in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan - all these have led to an obvious Afghan angle to the insecurity scenario in Central Asia.

According to the UN Regional Representative Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, approximately 65% of the narcotics from Afghanistan follow the route Afghanistan-Tajikistan-Kyrgyzstan-Kazakhstan-Russia-Europe. A 2002 Report by the U.S. State Department mentioned another permanent route: Afghanistan-Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Kazakhstan-Russia-Europe.⁵ Also, according to Russian sources, of the main six routes for shipment of narcotics to Europe, four are through Central Asia - Kandahar-Herat-Turkmenistan-CIS-Europe;

Kandahar-Balkh-Janjan-Uzbekistan–CIS-Europe; Kunduz-Tajikistan-Russia-Europe; Peshawar-Chitral-Afghan-Badakhshan-Gorno-Badakhshan-Kyrgyzstan-CIS-Europe.⁶ Russia is the most affected of this narcotics trade, as Russians are the number one consumers of the Afghan narcotics. According to UN ODCCP, though 65% of narcotics-export from Afghanistan goes through Central Asia, only 5% of this can be intercepted by the law-enforcement agencies of these countries.⁷

The ten-year long war against the Soviet occupation and the following civil war nearly destroyed Afghanistan's crop-irrigation system and now opium is not only Afghanistan's only significant cash crop, it is the dominant currency, traded for arms, food and shelter. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime in a Report put stress on the reasons of Central Asia becoming an easy transit route for Afghan narcotics: the geographical location of the Central Asian region between Afghanistan and the major markets of Russia and Europe; widespread corruption facilitating illegal activities including narcotics-trafficking; illegal labour migration providing ready-made channels for the clandestine transport of narcotics; and ill-capacity of law enforcement agencies of Central Asian states for interdiction of narcotics due to lack of resources, training and equipments. And major deficiencies in intelligence-collection and sharing between the Central Asian states and Afghanistan affect effective policing of common borders in a number of ways- 'a lack of understanding of the value of information in assisting effective law enforcement; a lack of planned, structured, systematic information gathering procedures within national law enforcement agencies, a lack of analytical capacity and skills; and a lack of inter-agency cooperation and consequent sharing of law enforcement related information.' So, there arise difficulties in 'designing strategies to counter drug trafficking'⁸ in a joint way.

Taliban's seizure of Kabul and Jalalabad in September 1996 prompted Russia to organize a meet of the Heads of the Central Asian states in Almaty in October 1996 to give a shape to the formation of a unified anti-Taliban coalition. This move later became institutionalized to make a viable resistance movement of the United Front with external support from Russia, Iran, India and all the Central Asian states, except Turkmenistan. Interestingly, Pakistan and Iran operated as two linkage states between internal and external actors. While Pakistan functioned as a linkage between the Taliban and the external states like the U.S. and Saudi Arabia; Iran served as the linkage between the Northern Alliance, the two Central Asian neighbours- Tajikistan and Uzbekistan- and two

non-regional countries- Russia and India.

During the War on Terror in 2001, Moscow offered close cooperation with Washington on several levels- intelligence sharing, use of Russian air corridors for humanitarian deliveries, increased support for the United Front, endorsement of decisions by the Central Asian Republics to grant the U.S. forces access to their military bases and airfields in Manas, Karshi-Khanabad, Kulyab, Kokaidy and Termez, and participation in search and rescue operations. Russia stopped short of direct participation in military campaigns as Russian policy-makers were guided by Russia's own problems in Chechnya and the possible repercussions of getting further embroiled in a war, evidently laden with anti-Islamic overtures as Russia has a large Muslim population and a somewhat troubled relations with its Muslim-dominated republics like Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia etc. Their actions were also restricted by the past Soviet experience in Afghanistan.

The political elite in Russia, despite the government's express overtures towards the U.S.-led initiatives against international terrorism, were increasingly concerned about the virtual re-division of sphere of influence taking place in the post-Soviet space. For example, Konstantin Zalutin, Head of the Institute of CIS states, speaking at a Moscow seminar on 14 March 2002, pointed out that Russia faced a new U.S. geopolitical challenge in Central Asia and that the U.S. military presence in the region posed a threat to the CIS.⁹

Significantly, Russia initiated a tactical move at this juncture in objective terms: while categorically denying itself any direct involvement in the U.S.-led military campaign, it reinforced its ties with the Rabbani government - which, until the ascendancy of Hamid Karzai as the interim President, conducted all the diplomatic offices of Afghanistan around the world - through a strenuous and enhanced military support to the Northern Alliance. This approach restricted its risks and expenses to a minimum, while offering a possible role for itself in the post-Taliban re-allocation of power in Afghanistan.

President Bush met President Putin and Chinese President Jiang Zemin at the Summit of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum in Shanghai in October 2001. The latter two leaders, in general, expressed their support for the U.S. military campaign against the Taliban with an obvious rider. The rider was evidenced in 2 November 2001 Dushanbe Declaration by a joint Russian-American working group which categorically denied any role of the Taliban in the future government of

Afghanistan.¹⁰

Russia was later an active participant in the 6+2 dialogue (involving the six neighbouring states of Afghanistan—Iran, Pakistan, China, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan as well as Russia and the US) for the reconstruction of post-War Afghanistan and also in the UN-sponsored Bonn Conference in 2001. Russia also donated approximately \$100 million to Afghanistan and donated hundreds of military trucks, jeeps, radios, wireless and communications units and heavy artillery spare parts to the Afghan National Army.¹¹

Both SCO and CSTO- the two regional security initiatives where Russia plays a significant role- project focus on Afghanistan through Working Groups. The SCO Contact Group on Afghanistan held a Conference, under the SCO Regional Security Group in March 2009 in Moscow, on the situation in Afghanistan and its influence on neighbouring states as well as to boost joint efforts to counteract terrorism, illegal drug trade and trans-border organized crime from Afghan territory. The CSTO established a Working Group on Afghanistan in 2005 to develop recommendations on strengthening Afghan security institutions and on anti-drug trafficking measures. CSTO also has plans to develop its own security relations with Afghanistan, involving training of Afghan army personnel, supply of arms and providing support to counter-narcotics operations, but nothing of that sort has been materialized as yet due to lack of funds and integrated approach among the CSTO member-states. There are also offers made by CSTO to create a joint CSTO-NATO cooperation mechanism on Afghanistan and the Uzbek suggestion to revive and transform the 6+2 Contact group on Afghanistan, into a 6+3 formation by involving NATO.

During the November 2010 Lisbon Meet of the NATO-Russia Council Meeting, it was decided on a greater Russian participation in the NATO operations in Afghanistan. Dmitry Medvedev, the Russian President, met the U.S. President Barack Obama, NATO Secretary General Fogh Rasmussen and the Heads of the leading NATO states. The cooperation agreements in the Summit envisaged Russian help to transport of NATO's military and other cargo to Afghanistan via air, rail and road; to supply Russian helicopters to Afghanistan and to train Afghan pilots, special forces and military, counter-terrorism and counter-narcotics by Russian instructors.¹² This development in cooperation between Russia and NATO followed a process of bilateral negotiations- a key conclusion of the 2009 SCO Meet was that any further progress in

the solution of the Afghan problem was not possible without a more active cooperation between NATO, Russia and the Central Asian states because of their close proximity with ground realities of and rich experiences in dealing with Afghanistan. This fact was reiterated by Rasmussen during his meeting with Prime Minister Vladimir Putin in December 2009 and also during Rasmussen's visit to Moscow in November 2010 to meet President Medvedev, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Defence Minister Serdyukov. This Corridor through the Russian territory will help avoid the extremely hazardous route through Pakistan, through which at least 70% of the supplies go at present and it will also cut the air-shipping costs as airlifts to Afghanistan costs \$14,000 for a tonne, whereas it will cost only about \$500 a tonne by railroutes from Europe to Afghanistan through Russia.¹³ And also, the Russian helicopters, particularly the Mi-17 Hip variety, are sturdier and better suited for Afghan operations.

This is a significant development, with various implications. It is a fact that Russia failed to achieve what is declared in its 2008 Foreign Policy Concept- a close cooperation between the CSTO, Iran and NATO in solving the Afghan problem and the status of a Dialogue Partner of NATO, as NATO's 'New Strategy' of May 2010 declared no acknowledgement of that sort.¹⁴ There is also a section of doubting Thomas within the Russian establishment, who was against any sort of cooperation with the West regarding Afghanistan, as the failure of the West, meaning the U.S., in winning this War, would mean, first, that the U.S. also joined Britain and Russia in this 'graveyard of civilizations'; that without Russian help, nothing is possible in this region of Russia's interest, and most important, that it would lead to the breaking of the existing international security structure and the birth of a new one, where Russia expects to get a place of its choice, based on its perceived capabilities.

But there are other voices in Russia that support this cooperative venture, a small beginning, for some larger goals. First, the defeat of the Taliban would result into the break-up of the infrastructure of terrorism and radical religious extremism as well as the export of these into and narcotics trafficking across the CIS territory- meaning an enhanced security scenario for Russia and for Central Asia- a zone of special concern for Russia. Also, it is for the first time that Russia would be in close cooperation with NATO, the most important international security organization in contemporary global scenario. And, this small venture

would allow Russia to gradually come out of its decades-long 'Afghan syndrome'.

NEW GREAT GAME

The rhetoric term 'new great game' is evoked time and again in analyzing the present situation in Afghanistan. Apart from academic writings, the term has found reference even in military parlances, as Richard Dannatt, head of the British Army suggested that Army was 'on the edge of a new and deadly great game in Afghanistan'¹⁵. On the other hand, there are authors who are opposed in using this term for various reasons. As Geoff Watson commented that "in many ways, it is a revealing term. It might be argued that the 'Great Game' is a useful conceptual tool through which to view the present situation in Afghanistan because it acknowledges the contest for political influence in Afghanistan and Central Asia which undoubtedly exists."¹⁶ He, still, was wary of using the term as it emphasizes the passivity of the states in the region, where the so-called game is played. But, it is a fact that a certain pattern of power-alignment and re-alignment is under way in the region covering Afghanistan and Central Asia. And there are points of differentiation between the so-called 'Great Game' of the nineteenth century and the current pattern of power-alignments which are identifiable in the facts: the US has replaced Britain in its effort to contain the revival of Russian influence in the region; the numbers of second-rung actors are multiple- China, Japan, Turkey and Iran. There are also the non-state actors- the EU, the NATO and the OSCE. The involvement of so many actors and the cross-currents of their motives and intentions have made these alignments more complicated and entangled. And, while Afghanistan was earlier deemed as the buffer zone by the two empires, now Afghanistan is very much included in the region for two reasons: as a transit country for a promising Southern pipeline route in the U.S. endeavour to promote non-Russian routes to carry energy from Central Asia (the TAGP Pipeline is the case in point) and as an epicenter of religious and narco- terrorism.

CONCLUSION

Russia has definite stakes in the security and stability of Afghanistan as these are vitally linked with Russia's interests in the regions of Central, West and South Asia. According to Trenin-Malashenko¹⁷, "Russia's current aims in Afghanistan include preventing an outright victory for the Taliban, essentially through the efforts of the U.S.-led coalition; stemming the flow of drugs out of Afghanistan, especially into Russia; and restoring a pacified and neutral Afghanistan as a buffer state between Central Asia and the Greater Middle East."

Russia's biggest disadvantage in being pro-active in Afghan affairs is past memories - memories of its invasion, after which things have never been the same again for Afghanistan. Also, Russia has not been able to act in a group- its friendly countries like Iran and India prefer to act alone. Even China-dominated SCO acts there in a parallel manner - not always in collaboration with the CSTO. But two developments might restructure the whole issue of the future of Russia in Afghanistan. First is the decision by both NATO and Russia to cooperate in November 2010 so as to make the 'War on Terror' a success. And, the second is the killing of Osama Bin Laden, the mastermind of the 9/11 attack and the most-wanted terrorist, by the U.S. forces in a Pakistani hideout on 2 May 2011. Apart from what is discussed earlier, a more significant fall-out of Russia's decision to help Afghan war efforts would be, this cooperation would help shape up a more positive Russian image for the Afghan establishment and the Afghan people, and that might lead to a greater Russian participation and involvement in the post-2014 Afghanistan, when the U.S. and NATO forces would gradually move out from the Afghan territory and a new security infrastructure would be in place, within a changed context of international politics. The implications of the second incident are far more serious and, might be, inconceivable so far. The way the U.S.-Pak relations would develop after this Operation Geronimo is to be observed, as there are already visible gaps and schisms within the alliance- questions are raised over the trust deficit between them and possible lessening of U.S. aid to Pakistan. It is certainly too early to predict whether this would lead to a lesser role of Pakistan in current Afghan scenario and in the future beyond 2014. But hopefully, there would be the realization (though belated) that greater cooperation between countries who have genuine stakes in a peaceful, democratic and developed Afghanistan is the necessity of the hour. It is also an

imperative for securing a positive future for Afghanistan after 2014. If such a cooperation between the U.S. and Russia could be achieved, then Afghanistan would become, for the first time in its history, a meeting ground of global powers, shading its somewhat dubious distinction of a ground of power rivalries and great and not-so-great games.

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AFGHANISTAN AFTER 2014 AND INDIA'S OPTIONS

INDRANIL BANERJI

Current speculation on the future of Afghanistan revolves around 2014, the year US forces are supposed to finally end their Afghan War mission. The key question is what will happen once the Americans depart? What sort of Afghanistan would emerge after that? Would the Taliban once again overrun that country and establish a ruthless Islamic emirate? Or would the pro-West regime in Kabul survive with the aid of the fledgling Afghan National Army and police? And where would all that leave India?

The post-2014 scenario building is complicated by the fact that Washington has not fully clarified whether they will completely withdraw from Afghanistan or whether they will maintain some sort of presence. Recent comments by Afghan President Hamid Karzai that his government is engaged in talks with the United States regarding the establishment of a few permanent military bases across the country has added a new dimension to the theorising. Washington itself appears unclear about how to proceed beyond 2014. A lot would obviously depend on domestic US policies; President Barack Obama comes up for re-election next year and much will depend on who would be the next president. If Obama survives and the US economy picks up, the chances of extended US involvement could be higher. But if the US economy continues to dawdle at low levels, then it will be extremely hard for the US Congress to continue passing large sums of money for the Afghan War beyond 2014. Moreover, by last year majority American public opinion had swung against the Afghan War. A series of opinion polls conducted by ABC News show that the percentage of Americans who believe that the Afghanistan war is not worth fighting, has risen from a

level of about 44 per cent in late 2009 to 64 per cent by March 2011. Even the Republicans could hesitate to linger in Afghanistan.

Another factor that would determine US decisions in 2014 would be the extent to which the current US military commander in Afghanistan, General David Petraeus, can damage the Taliban in the next couple of years. Most reports filtering through from Afghanistan suggest that while the US and NATO forces might be notching more tactical victories than in the past, the strategic situation remains largely unchanged. A former senior US intelligence officer, John McCreary, released a report¹ in January 2011 where he showed that although Taliban casualties doubled in November 2010 as compared to October of the same year, Taliban-NATO clashes actually increased. Relying on open source material, McCreary estimated that the Taliban strength had increased from about 10-15,000 in 2008 to about 25,000 at present.

The Taliban continues to have a seemingly endless supply of recruits as well as access to heavy weaponry, explosives and other military equipment. More Taliban casualties are unlikely to change the strategic situation, although the death of middle level commanders would temporarily cripple Taliban capabilities. It would therefore be safe to assume that the Taliban in its present form and strength would survive even in 2014. Many US strategists, including former Ambassador to India, Robert Blackwill, seem to think that once US forces leave, the Taliban would sweep across the country just as they did in the mid-1990s.

Afghan watchers in India do not necessarily share that pessimistic assessment. They argue that the situation within Afghanistan is very different from what it was in the 1990s. At that time, the world was least concerned with what was going on inside Afghanistan and Pakistan with the tacit acquiescence of the United States could do pretty well what it wanted in that country under the pretext of bringing order. The Pakistan Army along with Afghan jihadis under the Taliban banner could storm through the country and crush all opposition. In most places, Afghans actually welcomed the Taliban and the promise of order and security.

Today, Pakistan cannot replicate 1994, Indian strategists feel. The big powers would not allow it and any major covert action could be detected and even interdicted. Local resistance, especially from the non-Pashtun population would be much higher. Some Indian analysts also seem to have much more faith than their Western counterparts in the Afghan National Army (ANA) and believe it could resist the Taliban.

Another important development in the medium term could be

General Petraeus' decision to arm local Afghans throughout the country. Once foreign forces depart, these local militias could become a factor in deciding the military outcome of the inevitable civil war that would follow. However, even the optimists in New Delhi would have to concede that the Taliban would in all probabilities assume de facto control in large parts of Pashtun dominated east and south Afghanistan. As it is, even now despite the US surge and the help from local elements, the Taliban cannot entirely be suppressed in these areas. Time and again they are engaging NATO forces and hitting targets deep in supposedly protected areas.

While there is intense pressure on Washington to wind up its Afghan mission, there is also a growing realisation that a complete walkout might not be such a good idea. A unified Pashtun area in Afghanistan and Pakistan, dominated by the Taliban and its anti-American jihadi allies, would inevitably become a vortex of global instability. The question now, therefore, is how to prevent the domination of Afghanistan by the Taliban.

Nobody except some Indian strategists believes that a pro-Western regime in Kabul aided by militias and the ANA will be able to hold out on its own. One solution could be to establish permanent US military bases in strategic locations throughout the country. These bases could be protected by a small contingent of US forces along with ANA elements. Kabul and Bagram air base could constitute the centre of this strategic spread. Other bases could be at Mazar-e-Sharif, Helmand (Camp Bastion), Shindand and perhaps Kandahar. Overwhelming air power could be used to disrupt and destroy significant concentration of Taliban forces and interfere with their offensives. This would be far from a perfect solution. For one, most Afghans would continue to resent foreign occupation; pro-Western forces would by definition have gone on the defensive and would, therefore, be that much vulnerable; and keeping lines of communications and supplies open would be difficult and very expensive.

Given that even a much reduced US force post-2014 would not be able to ensure its writ in those areas, it would be extremely sanguine to assume that the ANA and local militias could prevail. Thus, even the most optimistic scenario would suggest that pro-US forces would have to fall back to the edges of the Pashtun areas. This would signal the de facto partition of Afghanistan. Indian missions and projects in the east and south would be open targets for Taliban elements directed by the Pakistan Army.

PAKISTAN FACTOR

Pakistan continues to be a key player in Afghanistan and it has managed to save a part of its jihadi assets for use in the post-NATO period. The US intelligence and military is aware of the Pakistan Army's close links with the Afghan Taliban and fighters like Jalaluddin Haqqani. The *New York Times* correspondent David Sanger, in his book *The Inheritance*, has written how US military intelligence overheard General Ashfaq Kayani referring to Maulavi Jalaluddin Haqqani as "a strategic asset".

The US decision to withdraw from Afghanistan has delighted the Pakistani military establishment. If anybody is exulting at all this, it is Pakistan's military establishment. The Afghanistan end game is going their way. They have managed a remarkable turnaround. For, ten years ago, things were very different. The US leadership had threatened to obliterate the Pakistani military establishment if it did not end support to the Taliban in Afghanistan and help US forces clear that country of extremist Islamist forces, the al Qaeda included. That was a bad time for Islamabad: its plans for the domination of Afghanistan had been shattered by one rude phone call from Washington. Worse followed, including humiliation and hard US dictation.

The decision to go along with Washington's demand to act fast, decisively and demonstrably against radical Islamist groups within Pakistan was the second huge compromise that General Pervez Musharraf had to make. There was no choice agreed his senior military commanders: their very survival was at stake. But even at that moment, as the generals agreed to publicly endorse Washington's anti-terrorism strategy, they also decided that no matter what they would make every attempt to protect and preserve their jihadi elements, both for Kashmir as well as Afghan operations. They had, however, no compunctions about taking on the al Qaeda and elements close to it. The Pakistan Army successfully dodged every accusation that it was not acting against home grown radicals by pointing to the large number of terrorists killed and apprehended within the country. The Pakistan Army did notch up the highest numbers of kills – only the dead were not their men.

The top leaders of several groups had been whisked away to safe locations by Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) Directorate operatives; others were asked to lie low; and many were given refuge in *madrassas* and other religious establishments. The years 2001 and 2002 constituted a period of shock and awe in Afghanistan and the jihadi

establishment was badly shaken. Thereafter, things began to return to normal as Washington took its eyes off the ball and looked towards Iraq. NATO troops in Afghanistan were happy to patrol the bad lands but not hold it. This suited the Taliban and other jihadi fighters just fine. They crept back across the borders and soon the Pathan tribes of Pakistan's frontier agencies were also back in action. Fighters from Waziristan in the south to Bajaur and Swat in the north began regularly crossing over to give battle to NATO troops in Afghanistan.

Today, the jihadi protégés of the Pakistan Army, the Taliban as well as fighters led by the elusive Jalaluddin Haqaani, are calling the shots. The Pathan tribes of Pakistan's frontier agencies are also back in action. Fighters from Waziristan in the south to Bajaur and Swat in the north regularly cross over to give battle to NATO troops in Afghanistan. This is like the *jihad* against the Soviets.

The Pakistani military establishment appears convinced that after the US withdrawal they will be back in business in Afghanistan. Since last year, the Pakistan Army has openly begun talking about obtaining strategic depth in Afghanistan. While talking to journalists in February 2010, Pakistan Army chief General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani said: "We want a strategic depth in Afghanistan but do not want to control it. There are some key issues of the conflict that needed to be fully understood and addressed. There was a need for realisation of Pakistan's key regional position and its contribution in the war, while warning against growing Indian influence in Afghanistan.² The General could not have spoken more clearly. Once the US withdraws, the Pakistan Army will consider anything more than a token Indian presence in Afghanistan unwarranted. If New Delhi does not agree then it should be prepared for a fight.

INDIA'S OPTIONS

When the Taliban swept over Kabul in September 1996, Indians had to beat a hasty retreat. The embassy was evacuated and its remaining personnel were flown out on 26 September 1996 as Ahmed Shah Massoud's forces were beginning to abandon the city. For more than five years, India had no diplomatic presence in Afghanistan. It was only after the entry of US and Northern Alliance forces re-entry into Kabul in the end of 2001 that the Indians could return. The embassy was formally reopened on 22 December 2001, the day Karzai was sworn in as president. After the closure of the Indian Embassy in Kabul, the then Indian Foreign

Minister I. K. Gujral had told the Indian parliament that though “we had to withdraw our embassy on 27 September 1996...There is recognition that India has vital interest in Afghanistan and, therefore, a role to assist in the restoration of peace and tranquility there”. He admitted that the government had “recently seen credible reports in the international media on the Taliban handing over terrorist training facilities to the *Harkat-ul-Ansar*. It is reported that at these training camps, Pakistani and other youth are being trained for terrorist activities in Kashmir. I may assure the hon’ble members that the Government of India and the people of our country continue to sustain their vigil and are taking all necessary steps to safeguard the country’s security.”³

However, the fact was that the Indian government was unable to do anything substantial in Afghanistan to prevent the continued presence of anti-Indian terrorist training camps and a virulently anti-Indian regime assisting Pakistan. The only positive action by the government was the provision of piecemeal military assistance to the Northern Alliance with Iranian help. Even this aid in the form of arms and ammunitions was niggardly and only of marginal use to the Northern Alliance that was being battered by Taliban forces aided by the Pakistan regular Army. New Delhi also showed no inclination to give priority to increased intelligence and covert activities within Afghanistan. The Pakistani Army and its intelligence wing, the ISI, had complete and unfettered play across most of Afghanistan.

India’s most ignominious moment was in December 1999 when Pakistani terrorists aided by the ISI hijacked an Indian airlines jetliner from Kathmandu and flew it to the Taliban heartland of Kandahar. The Indian government had no assets in Afghanistan and absolutely no leverage. New Delhi was humiliated and ultimately forced to release three hard core terrorists in exchange for the airline passengers being held hostage. The three terrorists were flown to Kandahar and drove away into the horizon, leaving the Indian government red faced. It was a huge psychological blow and jihadi violence against India increased and ultimately peaked with an attack on the Indian parliament.

The Indians returned once Kabul was cleared of the Taliban to find their once proud embassy and ambassador’s grand residence in a complete shambles. It was slowly rebuilt and Indian presence in Kabul gradually increased. The embassy was formally re-opened by the then External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh in December 2001. This time, New Delhi was much more proactive in Afghanistan. It quickly prepared

and began the execution of a massive reconstruction assistance programme which today has crossed a billion dollars. At the same time, consulates were opened in several Afghan cities, including Jalalabad, Kandahar, Herat and Mazar-e-Sharif.

India's assistance to Afghanistan too has been major. Indian aid has helped malnourished Afghan children, improved infrastructure, built an electricity transmission line from Pul-e-Khumri to Kabul, constructed the 218-kilometer Zaranj-Delaram road and built the Afghan parliament building. It is reconstructing the Salma Dam in the western province of Herat and has built telephone exchanges linking 11 provinces to Kabul. India has also supplied hundreds of buses and mini-buses, trained bureaucrats and provided thousands of scholarships to aspiring Afghan students. This is truly a massive humanitarian effort undertaken without thought of profit or long term pay off.

Sadly, a number of Indians have died while involved in development projects in that country. This is chiefly because Pakistan and its agents in Afghanistan consider the Indian presence an anathema. The Indian embassy too has been a target of jihadi terrorists. On 7 July 2008, when Afghan citizens had queued up outside the Embassy's fortified compound for visas, a suicide operative rammed his explosive filled Toyota Corolla into an embassy vehicle on its way in. The powerful blast destroyed two embassy vehicles and blew the gates off the embassy's outer perimeter. At least 58 people were killed and 140 injured. The dead included the Indian Defence Attaché and the embassy's Political and Information Counsellor. The blast also killed two Indo-Tibetan Border Police security officers, a local Afghan employee of the embassy and some 10 Afghan police officers.

This was only one of a series of attacks designed to intimidate Indians. The South Asia Terrorism portal (www.satp.org) has listed a number of terrorist attacks on Indians in Afghanistan. This list⁴ is worth reproducing:

11 October 2010: Two Indian nationals were killed in a missile attack launched by the Taliban militants on an Indian NGO's office in Kunar province.

26 February 2010: The Taliban militants on carried out coordinated suicide attacks at two hotels in Kabul, the capital city of Afghanistan, killing at least nine Indians, including two Major-rank Army officers. At least 10 others, including five Indian Army officers, were injured in the

8 October 2009: Targeting the Indian embassy in Kabul for the second time, a Taliban suicide bomber blew up an explosives-laden car outside the mission,

killing 17 persons and injuring over 80, including three Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) soldiers. 9 February 2009: Simon Paramanathan, an Indian from Villupuram in Tamil Nadu held captive by militants in Afghanistan for nearly four months was killed.

7 July 2008: A suicide attack on the Indian Embassy in Kabul killed 58 persons and injured over 140.

5 June 2008: An ITBP trooper was killed and four others injured in an attack by the Taliban in the south-west Province of Nimroz.

12 April 2008: Two Indian nationals, M.P. Singh and C. Govindaswamy, personnel of the Indian Army's Border Roads Organisation (BRO), were killed and seven persons, including five BRO personnel, sustained injuries in a suicide-bomb attack in the Nimroz Province.

3 January 2008: In the first-ever suicide attack on Indians in the country, two ITBP soldiers were killed and five others injured in the Razai village of Nimroz Province.

15 December 2007: Two bombs were lobbed into the Indian consulate in Jalalabad, capital of the Nangarhar province in Afghanistan. There was however, no casualty or damage.

7 May 2006: An explosion occurred near the Indian Consulate in the fourth police district of the western Herat Province. There were no casualties.

28 April 2006: An Indian telecommunications engineer working for a Bahrain based firm in the Zabul Province, K Suryanarayana was abducted and subsequently beheaded after two days.

7 February 2006: Bharat Kumar, an engineer working with a Turkish company, was killed in a bomb attack by the Taliban in the western province of Farah.

19 November 2005: Maniappan Kutty, a driver working with the BRO's project of building the Zaranj-Delaram highway, was abducted and his decapitated body was found on a road between Zaranj, capital of Nimroz, and an area called Ghor Ghor, four days later.

8 November 2003: An Indian telecommunications engineer working for the Afghan ireless Company was shot dead.

These attacks prove beyond doubt that the extremist jihadi elements in Afghanistan will never reconcile itself to a major Indian role or presence. It is clear that there is covert Pakistani collusion as well. In the circumstances, the key question is whether India will be able to defend its position in Afghanistan once the US withdraws? India has many friends within Afghanistan but can they assure continued security? There are no clear answers and thus even after ten years of intense involvement

in Afghanistan, New Delhi cannot say it has secured a permanent and unassailable position within that country.

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IRAN'S AFGHANISTAN POLICY *POST-TALIBAN EVALUATION*

MIRWAIS K. BALKHI

The financial assistance of Iranian authorities to the President of Afghanistan Hamid Karzai in October 2010, has once again sparked the discussion on Iranian policy towards Afghanistan. The fable of “money envelopes” which was delivered by Islamic Republic of Iran by non-diplomatic means remains a hot topic both inside and outside Afghanistan. Hamid Karzai confirmed at a press conference that his chief of office receives cash between five to seven hundred thousand Euros twice each year from Iran. Though the President of Afghanistan clarified that this controversial so called financial aid has been part of the international financial support in which Iran is involved in the post-Taliban reconstruction of Afghanistan, his reply could not convince the analysts who are experts on Iran and Afghanistan policies. The main reason that the issue became controversial has been the media propaganda related to this issue in which Iran is accused of providing military aid and financial support to the Taliban in Afghanistan. The seizure of two thousand oil tankers by Iranian government which resulted in a large anti-Iranian demonstration in Kabul against the Iran embassy highlighted the issue. Few months before, in March 2010, Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinezhad during his visit to Kabul emphasized Iran’s disagreement over the presence of NATO in Afghanistan. He said: “the deployment of international forces in Afghanistan is not conducive to regional peace.”¹

This meeting was held between the two leaders two days after Robert Gates, the US secretary of Defence had visited Kabul. Both the Presidents met each other after their respective and controversial re-election in 2009 in which both congratulated each other’s victory. This

exchange of the two Presidents and the visit of Ahmadinezhad to Kabul has been the focus of attention by the media and analysts. The two leaders discussed several regional issues, including the expansion of bilateral and economic relations between Iran and Afghanistan.² President Ahmadinezhad also announced Iran's intention to build a new railroad between Pakistan and Iran via Afghanistan.³

Throughout the recorded history, Iran and Afghanistan have been two sides of one mainland. Afghanistan has been the main part of greater Khurasan which included half of present Iran. Even before the advent of western imperialism in the 17th century, boundaries between Iran and Afghanistan were not demarcated as they are now. Cultural, social, traditional and religious bonds connected the people of these two countries. But Iran's relations with Afghanistan have not been cordial in spite of the geographical contiguity, common religion, and shared cultural and economic interests. This is because of several issues confronting both these neighbours. There have been ups and downs in the relations between the two sides. In the post-2001 period, events in the region have forced Tehran to bring an introspective change in its foreign policy towards the neighbouring states and especially Afghanistan.

Afghanistan in the east of Iran faced a dramatic change in 2001. The assassination of the charismatic leader of the United National Front, Ahmad Shah Massoud followed by the events of 9/11 marked a turning point in the history and politics of Afghanistan and the region. The scenario in Afghanistan took a dramatic turn after the US declared war against Al Qaeda and Taliban in Afghanistan which resulted in the annihilation of Taliban rule in Kabul. The two most wanted leaders in the United States, Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar, succeeded in retreating from Afghanistan safely and took shelter in the northern frontiers of Pakistan. The fall of Taliban removed a major irritant in Afghanistan-Iran relations but the new trends in the regional strategic dynamics did not stabilize.

The presence of American troops on the eastern borders of Iran has been very disturbing for Tehran. This long term enemy had already a base on the western side of the country in the Persian Gulf. This disturbance motivated Iranian leadership to move in to the region and meet other regional powers. Soon after the fall of Taliban in Afghanistan, the Iranian Foreign Minister, Kamal Kharazi, paid a two days visit to Islamabad, during which he confirmed that both the countries had come

close to each other's point of view on the Afghan issue. Both agreed to help each other in the establishment of a broad based multi-ethnic government in Afghanistan under the auspices of the United Nations. Such an understanding suits both the nations and helps greatly to ensure stability in Afghanistan as well. They also declared to respect the sovereignty, territorial integrity and their full support for Hamid Karzai's interim government and Bonn Peace Process.⁴

This is because the historical and geopolitical realities have given certain context to the link between Iran and Afghanistan. Therefore Afghanistan has a privileged position for Iran. Tehran knows well that Afghanistan's lack of access to open sea, adjacent to Iran along with its energy production and transit to warm waters, Persian Gulf and Caspian Sea would naturally attract Afghans towards their western neighbour. Meanwhile Tehran also knows that to maintain its stability and security along with the solution to the issue of the scarcity of water resources in its eastern provinces of Sistan Baluchistan and Khurasan, it is dependent on Afghanistan. Besides the cultural and civilizational ties, language and religious affinities reinforce the effectiveness and interaction of both countries.

Iran has played an important role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan by allocating \$ 560 million within five years. Annually two thousand Afghan students continue their education in Iranian universities. Besides, tens of thousands of Afghans pursue graduation in different schools of Iran. Iran also gives funds to Afghanistan's autonomous schools which exist all over the country and are run by Afghan immigrants. But despite all this, inside Afghanistan this Iranian policy is described as double standard by Afghan analysts. Razaq Ma'mun- the famous Afghan journalist in his book *In the Path of the Pharaoh* relates the assassination of Ahmad Shah Massoud to Iranian strategy in Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, Iran's role in Afghanistan in the field of reconstruction is facing challenges as well as limitations. On the one hand, the reconstruction of Afghanistan is severely under the influence of major powers which are present in the country. Factors such as, over all United States presence and its influence in Kabul, Iran-Pakistan rivalry for passing energy pipeline from Central Asia through Afghanistan and Pakistan limit Iran's position and role. However, economic problems in the field of advanced technology, insufficiency of foreign investment, lack of marketing and regulation, lack of organized and coordinated

business in Afghanistan have always compelled Afghans to go to Iran for jobs which gives an opportunity to Iranian strategists to have their policies on the basis of these potentialities in Afghanistan. Since the fall of Taliban and formation of the new Afghan government, the overall Iranian policies towards Afghanistan can be studied under certain subtitles which are discussed below.

IRAN'S POLICY IN AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan as a Market

For Iran, Afghanistan has been an important market for its products since 2001. Since that time Iran has invested several hundred million dollars for the reconstruction of Afghanistan but at the same time Iran has also emphasized upon the broadening of its export market into various major parts of the country. According to the Fars News Agency, Iran's non-oil exports to Afghanistan in 2008 amounted to over half a billion dollars.⁵ For Tehran a long-term market in Afghanistan can benefit the extension of its regional influence also. For now, western parts of Afghanistan are economically influenced by Iranian products. This is especially visible in Herat province which is one of the four major cities in Afghanistan. Iranian firms and investors have taken part in road construction between the cities of Mashad and Herat.⁶ Iran has provided electricity for the people of Herat, while in contrast Kabul - the capital of the country is still suffering a shortage of electricity.

Iranian firms have also invested in building business operations in Afghanistan. Iran's largest automobile maker, Iran Khodro, announced in March 2009 that it planned to invest twenty million dollars in a manufacturing plant in Herat.⁷ This commercial interest in building physical infrastructure indicates a long-term perspective of Iranian economic presence in Afghanistan. Iran has been competing with China, Pakistan, India and Turkey to monopolise Afghanistan's markets.⁸

The economic policy of Iran in Afghanistan is not only limited to the western part of the country, but is also interested in expanding its commercial links further towards northern side of Afghanistan to Mazar-e-Sharif province. Iran's strategy is to link Tajikistan and Iran via Afghanistan by developing a railway line. This was indicated by the Vice President of Iran, Prevez Dawoodi in February 2009.⁹ The initial stage of the project has begun between Iran and Herat province in western

Afghanistan which will take five years and will cost five billion dollars.¹⁰ Iran is also trying to connect itself with China via Afghanistan. This was discussed between Iran and Afghanistan in July 2009 in which Iran proposed to construct a railway line through the central parts of the country.¹¹ In Afghanistan many analysts have taken Iran's proposal as an advantage for Afghanistan for the re-opening of Silk Road where Afghanistan can assume its ancient position as a centre for exchange.¹²

Opposition to Western Domination

Most analysts believe that Iran's double standard policy in Afghanistan is due to the presence of U.S troops in this country. It is argued that in case these forces were not there in Afghanistan, the policy of Iran would also change towards its eastern neighbour. Today Iran's Afghanistan policy is overshadowed by the American presence in that country. Saeedi believes that the aim of Iran is not to suppress or defeat the people of Afghanistan but their intention is to defeat America and American troops who are present in the land. No doubt the U.S is an old enemy of the present regime in Iran, therefore, the goal for Iranian regime is to make the American troops bankrupt which will make them leave the country in shame. This is the main objective of Iran in Afghanistan which inspires its foreign policy. This anti-western strain in Iran's foreign policy does not stop it from availing any opportunity to fight American and NATO troops in Afghanistan. Wikileaks recently published a series of documents related to the years 2004 to 2009 in which the commander of ISAF talks about the presence of eight Taliban top leaders in Iran and their further operations in Afghanistan against American and other western troops. The reports add that these Taliban leaders enter Afghanistan for recruiting Taliban and for killing NGO activists and government officials. The reports also state that the Iranian government pays one lakh Afghani to each person who murders an Afghan soldier while the rate is two lakhs for the person who is able to kill an Afghan government official.

Iran has blamed the NATO forces operating in Afghanistan for the ongoing narcotics trafficking, saying that the alliance has failed to acceptably combat production and smuggling of opium. In an August 2009 speech, Iranian Ambassador to Afghanistan Fada Hoseyn Maleki claimed that the United States and United Kingdom have been disgraced by their failure to "achieve any satisfactory results from their operations and strategies in Afghanistan." The ambassador went on to state that if

NATO forces continue to “shirk their responsibilities,” Iran will be forced to “review [its] decisions.” In the same speech, Maleki called plans for the deployment of additional NATO forces to Afghanistan a mistake and implied that the West was “trying to postpone the election... [By] pretend [ing] that Afghanistan is insecure”.¹³

The regime in Kabul has announced on each occasion that Afghanistan will remain neutral in the hostility between Iran and the west and as President Hamid Karzai stated in July 2008 that Afghanistan will not allow its territory to be used in any outside conflicts and has reiterated that Kabul has friendly relations with both the United States and Iran.¹⁴ Karzai reiterated that “Afghanistan does not want its soil to be used against any country and Afghanistan wants to be a friend of Iran as a neighbour who shares the same language and religion.”¹⁵

After the fall of the Taliban, the Iranian government immediately started using soft power to compete with other regional and international powers. Hassan Kazemi Qomi, commander of the IRGC and the Quds Force was appointed the Iranian Consul General in Herat to coordinate Iranian aid to Afghanistan. Imam Khomeini Relief Committee offices were opened in Kabul in 2002 with its branches in Herat, Nimruz, Balkh and other parts of Afghanistan where the main inhabitants are Persian or Shiite. In 2003, Iranian media reported that only in Herat there are forty-four major infrastructure projects under construction with the support of Iran.¹⁶

This institution in Afghanistan, led by Massoud Ashkan¹⁷, has focused their activities on helping orphans, the disabled and the elderly. Besides, offering facilities to distribute food, blankets, fuel, it has set up computer classes, provides no-interest loans, and gives grants to the needy young married couples.¹⁸ The other activities of the organization are like the celebration of the anniversary of Islamic Revolution, the death anniversary of Imam Khomeini and free *Ramadan* services to the public.¹⁹ Currently, more than seven thousand Afghan households, including approximately thirty-two thousand people are on the list of grant recipients getting training under the name of social and cultural development program. They also receive aid via this committee in different parts of the country.

But the Relief Committee does not confine to charities only. The committee also does propaganda against common enemies such as America and Israel in Afghanistan as it does in Lebanon and Palestinian Territories. For example, The Committee on the anniversary of the Islamic

Revolution held a competition for a thousand people about the divine letter of Imam Khomeini in the Iranian embassy in Kabul.²⁰ The Relief Committee also annually organizes the Quds Day for commemorating and showing solidarity with Al-Quds Day of the Palestinian people.²¹

Supporting Shia Minority

Another policy of Iran towards Afghanistan is to support the Shia minority. This has been a priority in Iran's foreign policy since the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Iran sent a high mission to Kabul in 1990 to meet the Shia leaders.

As the epicentre of Shia Islam and its only Shia neighbour, Iran's religious influence among the Hazaras is naturally robust. Historically, the Hazaras often fought in Iran's armies and visited the shrines of Shia Imams in Iran and Iraq. The first assembly of Afghan Shias was formed with the full support of Iranian authority. In the meeting of the assembly a resolution was passed which was under the direct influence of the *Walayat-e-Faqih* in Afghanistan. The article 14th of the resolution stated:

“According to the accepted principle of *Walayat-e-Faqih* in Islam, the assembly sincerely would follow the guidelines of supreme leader of Islamic jurisprudence- Ayatollah Khomeini.”

The project of supporting Shias emerged as part of Iranian policy towards Afghanistan after the rise of *Hezbollah* in Lebanon and fall of Saddam in Iraq which paved the way for the Iranians to breathe openly. Taking the opportunity of the lack of a strong central government in Iraq, Lebanon and Afghanistan, the expansion of Shiism and Shiite ideology was given priority in Iran's foreign policy and millions of dollars have been channelled into these countries under the name of financial aid by different religious and constructive institutions.

Today, Iran funds mosques, universities, and charities in Afghanistan. Many prominent Hazara political leaders spend time in Iran for education, political refuge, or military support. The Hazara Ayatollah Asif Mohseni runs a seminary and television studio to broadcast Shia Islam in Kabul.²² The conservative Shia leaders in Afghanistan claim that Tehran sponsors the religious Shia *madrassas* in Afghanistan. The leaders also claim that Iran gives financial support even to those jihadi leaders who had relation with Iranian intelligence agency once. Qari Ahmad Ali- an Iranian backed Shia commander once said: “Iran supports schools and *madrassas* in Herat province. In these

madrassas the photographs of Khomeini, Khomeini along with Hezbollah flag demonstrate the influence of Iran in Afghanistan." Currently, there are one million refugees in Iran, 43 percent of whom are Hazaras. A third of these refugees have spent more than half of their life in Iran and face increasing pressure to repatriate.

Strengthening Iran's Position in the Region

Afghanistan has always played a key role in maintaining the balance of power in Iran's regional policies. Iran during Pahlavi dynasty, had the privilege of being called the gendarme of Persian Gulf by the United States. During this time Shah of Iran increased its influence over Afghanistan by providing \$ 2 billion as economic aid to Afghanistan. An atmosphere was created in which the normalization of Pak-Afghan relations became imminent, which however, deteriorated after the ascendancy of Mohammad Daud Khan. The Shah of Iran pushed Pakistani and Afghani leaders to the negotiating table to search for peaceful ways to end their 30-years old hostility.²³ With the end the communist regime in Afghanistan in 1992, in a balance of power game, Iran succeeded in marginalizing its regional rivals like Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Turkey and had cordial and friendly relations with Afghan *Mujahideen* in Kabul. But Iran's victory over other influential surrounding states in the region could not be sustained which later on resulted in the formation of Taliban which marginalized Iran's role in Afghanistan. Iran remained busy in a regional rivalry in Afghanistan till 2001 and later with the presence of U.S troops inside Afghanistan. It has become the issue of security and survival for Iran now. American influence from Turkey to Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Persian Gulf, Pakistan and Afghanistan has enclosed and limited more than 60% of Iranian borders.

Iran is geopolitically important to the peace and stability in Afghanistan, this factor is being recognized not only by the people and government of Afghanistan but also by the extra-regional players. Thus, Iran in the context of a new set up in Afghanistan, under Hamid Karzai can work together to be the real guarantor of Afghanistan's reconstruction and security, which itself is very important for peace and prosperity for both countries.

Fight against Drug Trafficking

Iran has the highest number of people who are addicted to opium which is described as a disaster for the Iranian society.²⁴ As per estimates more

than two million Iranians suffer from such an addiction, which encompasses 2.8% of the total population. It was also reported that majority of the addicts were among youths who have just crossed age of 15. According to UNODC estimation, 450 metric tons of opium is consumed in Iran each year.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reported that Iran and Afghanistan, along with Pakistan, recently began conducting cooperative counter-narcotic operations, including interdiction measures.²⁵ According to Iran's top counter-narcotic police official, General Hamid Reza Hussein Abadi, Iran reportedly seized one thousand tons of illicit narcotics moving through its territory in 2008, and spent over half a billion dollars to combat drug trafficking.²⁶

In recent years Iran has been seeking to seal its eastern border with Afghanistan partly to address its concerns regarding the migration of Afghan refugees and drug flows. Iran spent nearly a billion dollars since 2006 constructing a ninety-mile long border wall, over one hundred and fifty border watchtowers, and several hundred miles of trenches in addition to training Afghan customs officials and constructing a customs checkpoint at Islam Qala.²⁷ This action was condemned severely in Afghanistan. In Afghanistan it is believed that there is a border dispute between Iran and Afghanistan which is not resolved yet.²⁸ Iranian Police Chief Brigadier General Ismail Ahmadi Moqaddam stated in July 2009 that Iranian police forces had "tightened surveillance and control operations along the country's borders." Iranian and Afghan border police, in the meantime, has begun to conduct coordinated patrols along the shared border.²⁹

CONCLUSION

Iranian role in the post-Taliban construction in Afghanistan depends on two factors; first, continuation of international cooperation is part of the process of reconstruction in Afghanistan where major powers are involved actively. Secondly assuming its appropriate role and abilities in the region and inside Afghanistan, Iran acts as an individual player. Despite these problems Iran has relative strengths and advantages in Afghanistan that other countries are lacking. These include: due to geographical isolation and a mediated access to the rest of the world, Iran can create a desirable connection for Afghanistan because of its geopolitical situation with full enjoyment of transit in air, sea, and land

including roads and railways. Secondly long term stay of two million Afghan refugees in Iran and their gradual return to their home having similar cultural and linguistic dialects is a strong point. Among the hundreds of thousands of school students, there are tens of thousands of skilled and semi-skilled workers and thousands of university students.

For Afghan analysts, Iran's Afghanistan policy is in negative shape. They believe that Iran plays a double-standard policy towards Afghanistan. After the fall of Taliban and the presence of United States troops in the country, since 2001 there have been direct and indirect interventions in Afghanistan's internal affairs from Iran. It is said in Afghanistan that Iran has always fed the anti-Kabul opposition in order to avail maximum interest for the benefit of Iran instead of getting involved in peace and security for its neighbouring country. An Afghan journalist and political analyst explains further the Iranian dual game in Afghanistan as: "on one side they tell the thief to be smart while on the other side teaches the landlord to be awake! The political intention of Al-Quds Day is not hidden from the Afghan media and *Kabul Press*, an independent news website in Afghanistan has accused the Iranian government to misuse of Quds Day to promote "Evil purpose".

Over all, the future relations between Iran and Afghanistan can be seen in three areas: culture, economics and security. In the sphere of culture, naturally Persian cultural loop dominates the cultural relations between both the countries. The multi-dimensional problems in Afghanistan and mass camping of Afghan immigrants in Iran, traditional dependency of work in that country by the Afghans because of the unbalanced economy in their country, are the major reasons why the Afghans are being absorbed in Iran which can also be a factor in Iran's hand towards advancing its interests in Afghanistan.

Iran is always worried of an unstable Afghanistan since it has a long common border and suffers from drug trafficking. Iran hosts more than one million Afghan refugees despite facing economic challenges. According to the United Nations estimates, Iran suffers the most from drug fields in Afghanistan; therefore, a stable Afghanistan and weakened Taliban is Iran's main concern. There is little possibility of regional cooperation between Iran and United States of America as Iran is worried over the U.S. presence in the region. Washington is also concerned about Iran becoming a regional power in the Middle East. However, the Obama administration has been trying to maintain friendly relations between the two countries as far as terrorism is

concerned. In his speech of the New Year (*Nawruz*), Obama stressed the need to establish constructive relations with Iran. But the pessimistic space which overshadow the foreign policies of both Iran and the United States only widen the gap between them.

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LANDMINES IN AFGHANISTAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

NEERU SHARMA

The politico-military conflicts are constant in history. These politico-military conflicts have been deeply entrenched in human society. Scientific developments after Second World War have, however, rendered conventional military warfare redundant. The fact is that much of, what is now publicly said or written about both war and peace is obsolete. We are now confronted with sophisticated nuclear missiles, means of biological, radiological and chemical warfare, which raise the grim possibility of destruction of civilized existence. Indeed the twentieth century has been the biggest producer of war and conflicts victims. All major wars and politico- military conflicts of the twentieth century, including the conflicts in Afghanistan, have one hidden causality and, that is, environment. Amid politico-military conflicts, brutality, death and deprivation, environment may seem a minor causality but actually it has long-term impact as the destruction of the environment can prolong human sufferings for decades and consequently undermine the foundation of social progress and economic security.

In common parlance conflict is simply defined as a contest between groups of people. Conflicts are very rarely free of violence. It is possible to think of a clash of ideologies or values taking place without violence but in politics or real life usually conflicts are accompanied by violence.¹ Conflict is a part of social process by which people, groups and states adjust their different and changing interest capabilities and will. It is both a manifestation of a breakdown in social expectations and a means by which new expectations can be formed.²

The vast majority of armed conflicts today are not traditional wars between states or coalitions of states, but rather internal conflicts.

Paramilitary forces, guerrilla groups, ethnic militias, criminal gangs and mercenaries do the fighting as often. As technology of weapons and war strategy has advanced, so too has the technological level of targets, which are selected. This has increased not only civilian casualties but also the incidence of environmental destruction. Unexploded weapons, land mines, polluted rivers, contaminated soil and damaged landscapes have all harmed human health, local economies and ecosystem. Use of more advanced arms and ammunition means more damage to the environment. Besides this, physical facilities for transportation, health care, water supply, electricity and communication, traditional method of farming and conservation are often eliminated. Systems for environmental protection get deactivated and resources for such services usually get diverted to military assets.

The situation in the case of Afghanistan is worse. While environmental concerns and sustainable development are on the agenda of the international community, including many developing countries, the war-ravaged country of Afghanistan is facing a devastating environmental crisis. Over three decades of military and armed conflicts in Afghanistan have degraded the environment to the extent that it now presents a stumbling block for the reconstruction efforts. The result has been a seemingly uncontrollable environmental crisis that has not been addressed fully. This crisis has in turn contributed to immense environmental scarcity that has affected the lives of millions of people and endangered the continuity of a very ancient civilization in this part of globe.³

Conflicts are a constant part and parcel of the Afghan society. The nature and intensity of Afghan conflict is a result of a complex dialectic relationship between internal social factors and external interference. What changes is only the nature of conflict. The war in Afghanistan has encompassed different stages. Each stage has been marked by changes in political strategy and military tactics. At the time of communist coup in April 1978 there was no indication that such a devastating war would occur in Afghanistan.

After the Soviet intervention, there developed a total aversion and fury towards the Soviets due to many reasons. As Robert Canfield puts it, among the Afghans there was "a special repugnance for the Soviet because of their avowed atheism, which to the Afghan moral conscience implies filthiness, gluttony, drunkenness and sexual promiscuity". It is this repugnance, which broke out into a civil war in the country since

1980s. Its repercussions continued in the later-day politics with different manifestations.⁴ The Geneva Accord of April 1988 marked a turning point by providing a political framework for the Soviet troop withdrawal, but not for a permanent regulation of the conflict as such. Thus, the conflict lost its geo-strategic significance for the global powers, which consequently cut their assistance drastically. The war was, however, soon resumed in the downgraded version of a civil war by the internal actors, who received support mainly from neighbouring countries.⁵

AFGHAN CRISIS IN POST – SOVIET PERIOD: FIVE PHASES

The crisis, which took different dimensions after the Soviet withdrawal, could be seen in five phases. First phase is the conflict between communists and fundamentalists. The second one is the conflict among fundamentalists on the question of power sharing and third is the conflict between the fundamentalists who belonged to different nationalities and ethnic groups for the assertion of their age-old tradition and authority. The fourth phase is partly an extension of the third phase and partly a conflict between Taliban terrorism and direct intervention of foreign forces led by USA. In fact these two aspects have converged in the fourth phase. In the fifth phase a new national government has come to power through UN negotiations and US Intervention.

After winning second presidential elections in November 2009, Hamid Karzai declared that Loya Jirga (tribal council) would be set up to tackle the thorny issue of political reconciliation and corruption would be tackled. None of these aims will be easily achieved. Corruption certainly needs to be addressed if Karzai is to deliver essentials, including food, irrigation and employment. It is up to him to enhance the legitimacy he himself weakened by rigging the vote in the second presidential poll.⁶

In its all stages the Afghan war has been one of the deadliest and most persistent conflicts of the second half of twentieth century. Every region of Afghanistan was touched by the war. Even residents of government held urban centers were not safe. The countryside was ravaged, marked by widespread destruction of villages, fields, orchards and irrigation systems. The physical destruction of Afghanistan is the most obvious way in which the long war has affected the country. Furthermore, it is this physical destruction that underlies the rest of the changes wrought by the war. Physical destruction takes two major forms: destruction of population measured in number of percentage of people

killed, wounded and displaced by the war, and destruction of property, measured in damage to infrastructure.⁷ At one point or another since 1978, virtually everything has been a target. Cities, towns, villages, houses, mosques, minarets, schools, hospitals, industrial structures, building roads, bridges, orchards and fields have all been damaged or destroyed during combat.⁸

A UN Environment Programme Post Conflict Assessment Report produced in close cooperation with the Afghanistan Transitional Authority in 2003 showed that more than two decades of warfare degraded the environment to the extent that it now presents a major stumbling block for the country's reconstruction efforts. Conflict has put previous environmental management and conservation strategies on hold, brought about a collapse of local and national governance, destroyed infrastructure, hindered agricultural activity, and driven people into cities already lacking the most basic public amenities.⁹

LANDMINES IN AFGHANISTAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

The country is littered with landmines, representing one of the greatest humanitarian and development challenges to be overcome in the reconstruction process. These landmines have not caused suffering for human population and resulted in the loss of wildlife, but they also have destroyed the irrigation system. Landmines accelerate environmental damage through their explosions, but the fear of mines also drives herders, villages and others from productive areas thought to be mined into more marginal and fragile environments – speeding the depletion of resources and destruction of biological diversity.¹⁰ The heavy use of mines throughout Afghanistan cause not only death and injury but also make fields unusable.¹¹

Landmines were used during the Soviet occupation (1979-89) during the period of the pro-Soviet ruling government (1989-1992), during fighting between various factions (1992-95), during the Taliban era, in fighting with resistance forces, and finally during military operations by and against the international coalition (since October 2001). The bulk of Afghanistan's problem with landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) stems from the 1979 to 1992 war between, on the one hand, the Soviet - backed government of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) and, on the other hand, the resistance movement, in large degree operating from exile in Pakistan and Iran. The United

States provided landmines to *Mujahideen* fighters as part of US covert assistance in the 1980s.¹² The Soviets and the government forces stand responsible for the majority of the mines laid. Mines, both anti-personnel and anti-tank, were used extensively to protect armed positions, around towns and villages, as well as in order to block transport routes. The resistance also deployed mines, mainly anti-tank, in order to hinder the transport of soldiers and supplies.¹³

Mines continued to be used following the fall of the PDPA government to a coalition of *Mujahideen* groups in 1992. Though the Taliban movement, which emerged in late 1994, and took control of the capital in 1996, adopted an ostensible stand against the use of mines as 'un-Islamic', deployment of mines during the latter half of the 1990s, continued and have had the most impact in those areas that were subject to the most intense fighting, such as the Shomali plains north of Kabul, and the Gormach and Murghab districts in the northwestern province of Badghis.

International Committee of the Red Cross in its case study of Afghanistan mentioned that landmines are a daily threat in Afghanistan Somalia, Bosnia, Croatia, Iraq, Sudan and dozens of other countries. The stark reality is that many more mines are deployed every day than are removed. It costs about 100 times more to remove one mine than to produce it. More than 60 countries have manufactured about 200 million anti personnel landmines in the last 25 years. Some 120 million active mines are scattered in 70 countries. Scattered in their thousands, these bar access to farmland, irrigation channels, power plants and roads. Report further mentioned that millions of people have to choose between farming in fear, going hungry or leave their homes. Almost all the landmines in worst affected countries were provided by foreign sources. Afghanistan, Angola Cambodia – none of these countries is reported to produce its own mines.¹⁴

The bulk of mines found in Afghanistan are Russian made, but mines manufactured by Italy, China, US, Pakistan, Egypt, Britain have also been found. Afghanistan has been described as the most dangerous museum of unexploded ordinances in the world. Fifty-two different landmines have been identified designed either to attack single individuals or threaten anyone within 30 meters or both.¹⁵ Landmines have been planted indiscriminately over most of the country. Grazing areas, agricultural land, irrigation systems, residential areas, roads and footpaths, in both urban and rural areas are contaminated. Even the mere

suspicion of mines prevents people using natural resources by denying access to that component of the environment. The extensive use of landmines accelerates deforestation. In areas where an agricultural and grazing land has been mined, forests often became the only source of fuel and livelihood.

During the Cold War, super powers and regional neighbours supplied and supervised million of landmines being sown into the Afghan soil. Kabul became the most heavily mined city because of a bitter war among various factions. The laws of the war dictate that soldiers and their weapons discriminate between soldiers and civilians. However anti-personnel mines cannot distinguish between the footfall of a soldier and that of a child.¹⁶

Along roads and footpaths of Afghanistan painted stones mark the safe zones – white on the inner clear side and red on the outer dangerous side. And yet one constantly sees Afghans walking into the minefields to gather fuel or till their fields. The presence of more than ten million landmines in the country made it the world's most deadly minefield. Afghanistan is the second most heavily mined country in the world, an estimated 700 sq. kms of land need de-mining. Mines and unexploded ordinance (UXO) have created amputees, blindness and paralysis. One third of Afghanistan's 100,000 mine victims are children – an average of four children are injured every day across the country. The poorest Afghans are the most affected as it is the desperate and destitute who risk entering minefields to seek food and fuel. An estimated 3 to 4 percent of Afghans are disabled. Many have sustained mine injuries, but others are disabled because of a break down in the health service.

Soviets scattered the butterfly type of mine that looked more like a toy than a bomb.¹⁷ Hundreds of thousands of "butterfly" mines – attached with fins so to float down gently – poured out of Soviet aircraft. Once on the ground they were meant not to kill, but to rip off a leg, foot or – ever most worrisome to soldiers – other lower appendages, on the theory that a mangled man comprised a larger problem for the resistance than a dead one. Even worse was the spreading of mines disguised as toys – gaily colored birds or dolls – meant to be grabbed by children.¹⁸

All factions and parties to the Afghan conflict have resorted to mine warfare. Noteworthy are the peaks of mine casualties in 1992 and 1995. This increase coincided with two phenomena. The first was a large influx of returning refugees in 1992, many of whom entered mined areas in the region of their return without knowing the full extent of the dangerous

areas. The second peak represented an upsurge in military activity between the Kabul government and the Taliban movement. This military activity included the wide scale use of mines in the city of Kabul itself, which resulted in large number of casualties; both combatants and civilians.¹⁹ Anti-personnel landmines have taken a heavy toll for decades. They continue to kill indiscriminately long after a conflict has come to an end and they cannot distinguish between soldiers and civilians. Estimates indicate that a million people have been killed or maimed by landmines since 1975; some 80 percent of them were civilians.²⁰

According to a survey conducted by CIET International in 37 Afghan communities in 1994, 12% of all households surveyed were affected by landmines. On average, the casualty rate since 1995 has been 50 people per week. Since 1995, about 225 kms have been cleared of landmines and 1.6 million explosives, and 227,000 landmines have been neutralized, but about 350 kms are still left to be cleared. Anna Cataldi, an Italian author and journalist who has travelled four times to Afghanistan found that 70 percent of the buildings in city have been destroyed. Even the Kabul central office for land mine clearing was destroyed in air strikes.²¹ Three quarters of the city received serious damage. Half of the city was virtually destroyed. Over the past three decades almost one hundred thousand Afghans lost their limbs as a result of landmines.²²

IMPACT ON NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Among the many problems attached to use of landmines are those related to its impact on natural environment and its components. Landmines set in motion a series of events leading to environmental degradation in the forms of soil degradation, deforestation, and pollution of water resources with heavy metals and possibly altering entire species' populations by degrading habitats and altering food chains. Environmental degradation can occur while de-mining is taking place or by destruction of stockpile as well.

The years long civil war, use of deadly weapons, landmines in Afghanistan disturbed the environment to such an extent that it became difficult for poor people to start their life afresh. They were unable to buy food as their homes were burnt and landmines kept them away from cultivation in fields. It compelled people not only to migrate from their homeland but also made them disabled having no source of income except begging.²³ Landmines effectively bar people from land forcing

them to clear forests and other precious areas for agriculture with consequences for the fertility of soils, accelerated land degradation and loss of wildlife. Much of the potential grazing area of the country was ruined by landmines liberally strewn through it by the soviets.²⁴ The means of storing the wheat typically grown in Afghanistan were largely gone. It resulted into profitable cash crop-poppy.

Afghanistan faces significant socio-economic repercussions of landmines pollution. Transportation infrastructure has been disrupted reducing exports and imports and environmental damage further delays the rehabilitation of the agricultural based economy. Pollution caused by landmines leads to environmental degradation and ecological disruption. The degraded environment threatens human health and well-being. Landmines introduced poisonous substances into the environment. These substances and the compounds derived from them are soluble in water. The devastation to the environment caused by cluster bombs and use of depleted uranium artillery (contained in Tomahawk missiles) remains a lingering nightmare against the environment and Afghanistan's people. Uncleared landmines constitute a malignant threat to the society, as mines are often laid in the areas of human occupation. Landmine pollution has the effect of pushing people from their traditional lands into the refugee camps. Refugees unable to return to their contaminated lands, are often forced out into otherwise unused or marginal land, placing additional pressure on the already fragile environment. Mine contamination disrupts traditional subsistence agriculture and forces societies to move into urban environments, contributing to air and noise pollution and problems with water supply, sanitation and waste disposal.²⁵

Indirect impacts may be continuous and delayed and at a short, medium or long term. By continuous impact we refer to those landmine related physico-chemical effects, which degrade, pollute or transform in any ecologically sensitive perspective those environmental elements interacting with the device. Delayed impacts are those negatively affecting the environment and its components at a later time in a single, recognizable event. In 1988 landmines in Afghanistan were seen primarily as a military problem, which needed to be addressed on an urgent basis to reduce risk of fatalities. Mines rendered large tracts of agricultural land unusable, wreaking environmental and economic devastation. In Afghanistan around 35% of the land is unusable due to millions of buried landmines. Many die in the fields from loss of blood

or lack of transport to get medical help. The indirect, economic political and social costs of environmental pollution by landmines in Afghanistan have been immense. The landmine problem in Afghanistan measured in terms of personal, social and economic cost will persist long after the last mine is removed. Drawing on the experience of 174,489 people in 206 communities, including 37 in Afghanistan, Anderson attempted to document the social cost of landmines. The main outcome measures included effect on food security, residence, livestock and land use as well as the physical, psychological, social and economic cost of the injuries. 78% of Afghans reported that their daily activities were affected by landmines within herding and walking the highest risk activities. Without mines, agricultural production in Afghanistan could increase by 200%. Food security was threatened in 40% of households with a landmine victim and kuchies reported losses of an average of 24.4 animals per household.²⁶

Clearing landmines is a long, expensive and dangerous business. Each one takes 100 times longer to remove than to deploy and a weapon that costs \$4 or less to manufacture may eventually cost \$1,000 to remove. Demining is carried out with various priorities and objectives. These may include clearing strategic areas, such as airports or power stations, transport links such as roads & bridges, fields' pastures for food production, homes, water sources, and other areas essential for community.

By early 2001, Afghanistan was a country reduced by the technology of modern war to a premodern level of existence. Its formal economy had essentially collapsed. Economic reconstruction has also been constrained by the continued threat posed by mines and other unexploded ordnance throughout the country. Although mine clearing has been under way for over two decades there are still several million mines throughout Afghanistan, making resettlement of some areas and resumption of traditional economic activities dangerous.

With Afghanistan's physical, political and economic systems in shambles, environmental concerns would simply not be top priority, either for the new government or for international donor agencies. Unfortunately, shunting environmental concerns to the side is shortsighted, for continued damage and destruction of the environment will lead to negative impact on human life. The agrarian life-style of most people in Afghanistan means a dependency on environmental conditions. If these conditions continue to deteriorate, it will be

impossible for any government, even with aid from major international donors, to reconstruct Afghanistan or stem the humanitarian and environmental consequences spreading to neighboring countries, including Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Iran.

Extracting a living from mountainous dry lands of Afghanistan has never been easy but more than three decades of armed conflict have created widespread environment devastation across the country. Both under the Soviet control and later under American domination issue of environment was not a priority. Environmental conservation efforts have not been on the forefront of priorities. With the continued political upheaval and civil war, environmental and conservation efforts in Afghanistan have essentially been ignored. In all conflicts, it has been the Afghan people who have paid the highest price. This price is the dead – no one knows the exact number – the deformed and crippled Afghans, the destruction of entire villages and valleys, of irrigation systems and many other economic commodities and agricultural products, and millions of refugees in the neighbouring countries of Iran and Pakistan. Then there are the countless “displaced persons” within Afghanistan itself and the gradual destruction of a rich and varied culture and the collapse of moral standards.

The mine action program for Afghanistan started operations in 1989. MAPA consists of UN Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan, four UN Regional Mine Action Centers and 15 implementing partners.²⁷ Landmines and unexploded ordnance are scattered throughout Afghanistan in urban and commercial areas farmland, grazing lands. Mine and UXO contamination affects almost all regions- over 1,500 villages in 27 provinces were mine impacted during 2002, according to UN-with heavier concentration and greater impact in western eastern and southern regions.²⁸

In June 2002 Afghanistan signed the instrument of accession to Mine Ban Treaty. Afghanistan formally deposited the instrument of accession at the UN on 11 September 2002 and the treaty entered into force on 1st March 2003. The Afghan Campaign to Ban Landmines (ACBL) worked intensively with high ranking Afghan authorities to pave the way to Mine Ban Treaty accession. The ACBL, together with the government, UN, and ICBL, organized an international conference in Kabul from 28-31 July 2002. Participants included President Hamid Karzai, 1997 Nobel Peace Laureate Jody Williams, and Special representative of the UN secretary- General Lakhdar Brahimi, and journalists. During 2002 and

2003, the ACBL distributed brochures and newsletters regarding the risk posed by Landmines. The ACBL organized Afghan Mine Action Awareness Month from 15 April to 15 May 2003, which included a focus on the need for stockpile destruction.²⁹

Given its geographic position, and given the enormous damage, which decades of conflicts have done to the human, institutional and physical environments, Afghanistan is faced with a major challenge to work towards the attainment of the commitment to reduce vulnerability and protect the environment. Widespread environmental degradation poses an immense threat to livelihoods. It also resulted in rural migration. Warfare in Afghanistan have degraded the environment to the extent it now presents a major stumbling block for the country's reconstruction efforts.

CONCLUSION

Countries are prepared to make considerable sacrifices in order to defend their national sovereignty and territory. Environmental degradation is a more fundamental, if sometimes subtler, threat to the security of all nations. It undermines the very support systems on which human activity depends and eventually manifests itself as a threat to economic well being. But most countries are doing precious little to preserve their environmental security.

When one talks of national security, one thinks usually of the security of geographical borders and of maintenance of law and order within the country. Our well being is irrevocably intertwined with long range ecological security. Ecological security implies continued access across to clean air and water, bereft to toxicants, healthy and productive top soil free from landmines for productive agriculture. So far human security is concerned it is also linked with ecological security. Some of the threats to human security came from deterioration of physical environment. Human Security is an evolving principle for organizing humanitarian endeavors. It places the welfare of people at the core of programs and policies are community oriented seeks to prevent harm and recognize the mutual vulnerability of all people and the growing global interdependence that mark the current era.³⁰ The concept of human security was first defined by the UNDP (United Nations Development Program) in 1994. Human Security entailed the security of persons in seven domains: the economic security (assured basic income), food

security (physical and economic access to food), health security (freedom from disease and infection), environmental security (access to sanitary, water supply, clean air and a non degraded land system), personal security (security from physical violence and threats), community security (security of cultural identity and political security (protection of basic human rights and freedoms)).³¹

Environmental issues are often security concerns because even without directly causing open conflicts, they have the potential to destabilize regimes, displace population and lead to state collapse. It is largely owing to the emergence of environmental problems that we are being forced to into achieving a truly new world order. Therefore, the whole notion of security as traditionally understood in terms of political and military threats to national sovereignty must be expanded to include the growing impacts of environmental stress-local, national, regional and global.

Landmines, 'the fields of the devil' stretch around the world and constitute an environmental and humanitarian disaster that is reaching pandemic dimensions. Referring to the growing problem as a global landmine crisis, Boutros Boutros Ghali the former UN secretary General said that unlike other types of weapons uncleared landmines constitute a unique and malignant threat to whole societies. The UN concludes that because the natural environment constitutes the basis of all social life and economic development, the direct degradation caused by landmines and unexploded ordnance may destroy the basis for socio-economic development in badly affected countries. Even the mere suspicion of mines prevents people using natural resources by denying access to that component of the environment.³² Scholars note that because mines are often laid in areas of human occupation, landmine pollution has the effect of pushing people from their traditional lands into refugee camps. Refugees unable to return to their contaminated lands are often forced out into otherwise unused or marginal land placing additional pressure on already fragile environments.³³ Demining also degrades the environment, perhaps the most controversial issue surrounding it is the use of animals for detecting mines. Dogs, bees and rats have all been used in efforts to demine mine affected zones. Displaced villagers also out of necessity, often resort to using their domesticated animals to detect upon returning to their farms.³⁴

In a country where people to a large extent are dependent upon natural resource forests and agricultural land, widespread environmental

degradation caused by different conflicts poses an immense threat to their livelihoods. Over three decades of warfare have left the nation devastated. It is apparent that the people of Afghanistan face exacting difficulties in attempting to reconstruct their nation.³⁵ With the development of the new administration in Afghanistan, a vital opportunity exists. The time for successful reconstruction of Afghanistan based on a sustainable development agenda has come. In reconstruction agenda environmental situation is already a major concern. At present, protecting the environment in an underdeveloped country like Afghanistan with rugged topography and little usable land for agriculture and farming is exceptionally important. Once an environmental management procedure is established, then long-term programs can be drawn up at local, regional and national levels to sustain the environment and protect its fragile nature for future generations.

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