

The US's Withdrawal from Afghanistan and Its Impact on Indo-Pak Relations

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Abstract

The US President Barak Obama took oath for a second term. He vowed for crucial changes in US policy including the 2014 withdrawal of troops in Afghanistan. This development will impact India and Pakistan's security environment. The policy of recent regime is Pro-Indian which is not promoting the Kashmir cause. Pakistan always blame that India intervene in Pakistan through Afghanistan. More importantly, the peace plan seems to give primacy to Pakistan's role and nothing to India despite the fact that India has invested a good deal of money for aid and reconstruction in Afghanistan.

The main theme of the research is to analyze the changing scenario in Afghanistan and its future perspectives regarding the foreign policies of South-Asian countries. The research compares Indian and Pakistani Interests in Afghanistan. It also examines how Kabul navigates the Indian-Pakistani rivalry to protect and advance its own intereststs. The research paper also discusses the implications of India-Pakistan rivalry for US policy in the region and for US efforts to sustain stability in Afghanistan after the drawdown of combat troops in 2014. The approach of the study is descriptive and analytical. The research is based on original and secondary sources. The references and conclusion are in the end.

Key Words: Role of the Strategic partners war against terror. US's withdrawal from Afghanistan. New Shift in Pak-India Relations.

Introduction

Pakistan, India and Afghanistan were strategic partner during the war against terror in Afghanistan. Media reports from Washington say Obama and Afghan President Hamid Karzai on Friday agreed to speed up the exit if international troops during their talks. Other media reports earlier this month said the Obama administration has been considering a residual US force of between 3,000 and 9,000 troops far fewer than some US commanders propose- to conduct counterterrorism operations and to train and assist Afghan forces after the draw down in 2014.(Elizabeth Roach)1.

India and Pakistan have highly disparate goals for Afghanistan, and they thus undertaken very different activities there. Delhi has striven to bolster the government in Kabul and integrate Afghanistan into wider regional political and economic structures. This has not been done out of any sense of altruism. By strengthening Afghanistan, India advances its own national security objectives-namely, eliminating a critical safe haven for terrorists who have attacked India and continue plotting to do so in the future, projecting power throughout South Asia (and beyond),and gaining access to Central Asian trade and energy resources. Although Delhi's goals for Afghanistan certainly involve minimizing Islamabad's influence there, the governments overall policy is geared primarily to advancing India's broader domestic and regional interests independently of its rivalry with Pakistan. (Larry Hanauer.Peter Chalk).

In contrast, Pakistan's goals for Afghanistan are mainly –although not exclusively- India-centric and focus primarily on undermining Delhi's influence in Afghanistan. Islamabad seeks a weak Kabul government dominated by a pliant, supportive Taliban so that Pakistan can maintain “strategic depth” against an Indian invasion, guarantee safe haven for Islamist proxies that it supports, prevent Delhi from projecting power in South Asia, and obstruct

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India's ability to support separatists in the Pakistani province of Balochistan. In Islamabad's Afghanistan's calculus, protecting itself against Indian encroachment takes precedence over pursuing Pakistan's broader geopolitical and economic goals. Part of the reason for this strategic orientation is the preeminent decision-making role played by Pakistan's military, which emphasizes security matters over virtually all other elements of foreign policy. So long as India is viewed as an existential threat, and so, long as the military plays a central role in setting Pakistani policy, it is unlikely that there will be a fundamental shift in this policy bias. (Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh).

US Concerns

The United States has portrayed its policies in South Asia as aiming to strike a balance between India and Pakistan. Since the early days of the George W. Bush administration, US sought to delink the two countries on the assumption that India, as a rising power that is capable to contribute regional stability and countering growing Chinese influence. It was this calculus that led to the conclusion of US assistance to India's civilian nuclear sector (Ashley J. Tellis).

Despite this preference, there is no doubt that US has become increasingly dependent on Pakistan's cooperation to combat the near-term threat of Islamic extremism for which, over the past 12 years, it is provided Pakistan with some \$16 billion in security related assistance. The importance of Islamabad's counterterrorism cooperation, as well as its assistance to the Afghan war effort, has driven the United States to accommodate Pakistani sensitivities by encouraging India to remain on the sidelines of international efforts in Afghanistan. With the dual threat of al-Qaeda and the Taliban high on the US agenda and a large US/ Northern Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) force in Afghanistan, whatever additional contributions that India could make to Afghan security and reconstruction have been seen as less critical to US policy in Afghanistan than ensuring Islamabad's continued partnership.

US courting of Pakistan-whether through the provision of billions of dollars in US aid or past commitments to minimize Indian involvement in Afghanistan-have so far failed to reduce Pakistan's support for militancy and terrorism, and there is no reason to think that this will change. US repeatedly learned that it cannot rely on Islamabad to rein in militants whom the Pakistani military sees as valuable strategic assets in countering Indian power and influence-one of the reasons the United States has come to rely increasingly on unilateral operations to combat terrorists.

In addition to backing insurgents who have repeatedly attacked coalition forces in Afghanistan, Islamabad has undermined Washington's efforts to negotiate a political settlement with the Taliban, which is seen as critical to securing the eventual withdrawal of US combat troops; obstructed shipments of military material to US and NATO forces by closing its borders to such cargo; refused to investigate how Osama bin Laden managed to hide in the country for so many years without being detected; pledged to increase purchases of Iranian oil despite international sanctions on Tehran; and allowed Chinese officials to examine the wreckage of a US helicopter that crashed during the raid on the al-Qaeda leader's compound in Abbottabad (Anna Fifield).

As the United States prepares to draw down its military presence in Afghanistan, it will become less dependent on Pakistan to transport military material or to undertake efforts to rein in extremist attacks on US troops. At the same time, Washington will seek to ensure that its departure does not leave a security vacuum or a break in reconstruction efforts. To help prevent such developments, Washington could promote a proactive Indian role in Afghanistan-particularly in the security sector-as a means of fostering internal and regional stability and as a way to preserve and build on US achievements in Afghanistan. Doing so would require US policymakers to once again delink US policies toward India and Pakistan

to take advantage of the long-term strategic benefits of partnering with India. There was a general consensus that US was unlikely to withdraw completely from the region as it had long term interests. It was argued by some that there was an evolving convergence of interest between US-China on South Asia. It was also observed that America's economic and domestic political concerns would lead to real draw down of troops and eventual transfer of power to the Afghans; others argued that without a functional political centre in Afghanistan. Dialogue among Afghan parties and Afghans assuming management of their security looked suspect while the declared drawdown policy was in fact a pull back of surge troops. The 'End Game' only suggested a period of transition accompanied by competing perspectives of enduring American interests in the region-Central Asia and the Indian Ocean. The real question was whether the transition would be peaceful and if Pakistan would seize the opportunities that this transition period offered. Pakistan could evolve a trilateral consensus with Iran & Afghanistan, develop a triangular relationship with Iran and China or use the renewed security concerns of the Gulf States due to the Arab spring to extract economic benefits for security guarantees. However, there was a general consensus that Pakistan needed to redefine its terms of engagement with the US rather than move towards a path of confrontation. (CPPG Policy Brief)6.

Pakistan's Afghan Policy

It was observed that Afghan policy may be examined in the framework of Maximalist-minimalist approach; the advocates of minimalist approach contended that Pakistan must strive to gain the maximum benefits suiting Pakistan's needs and desires from the Afghan settlement. This approach encompassed: one, no accommodation with India, closing of Indian Qandahar and Jalalabad consulates and no Indian role in the regional settlement as near neighbor of Afghanistan; two, any power sharing agreement between Afghan Government and Taliban had to be guaranteed by Pakistan and thus Pakistan must be at a party in negotiations between Taliban and Kabul or Taliban and US; three, Pakistan had to be recognized as the key player, while other neighboring countries play a secondary role because of its lengthy common border and hosting of large Afghan refugee population. While the Minimalist, proposed a broad based peace in the region without Pakistan necessarily gaining overarching advantage. Minimalist approach encompassed: one, build trust among neighboring countries for a regional settlement by trying to balance Pakistan's interests with those of other countries; two, intense and innovative diplomacy between Pakistan & India specifically to clarify each other's role in Afghanistan; three facilitate rather than monopolize intra-Afghan dialogue to build bridges with Afghan factions who are unfriendly towards Pakistan; four, give Taliban the freedom to negotiate independently with Afghan Government and the US—case in point being Mullah Baradar's continued incarceration in Pakistan. There was a general consensus that Pakistan should take the middle route rather than pursuing a Maximalist addenda or Minimalist approach, with an understanding that brandishing Pakistan's strategic indispensability and insisting on an Afghan government of choice would deepen the Afghan quagmire, further expanding the theatre of war which had already engulf FATA, six Frontier Regions and seventeen districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Thus Pakistan should facilitate the peace process rather than to monopolize it. Pakistan needed to engage in a constructive and intense dialogue with Kabul, Afghan Taliban, US and Regional countries with the objective of peace and stability in Afghanistan—a friendly rather than a subservient Afghan Government with non-interference guarantees from all external parties including Pakistan. (CPPG Report)7.

Pakistan could use the peace process to gain trust of the various Afghan factions; the North Alliance and the Nationalist Afghan Pashtuns who have been alienated because of Pakistan's predisposition towards the Taliban. More importantly, security should not be the sole criteria

driving Pakistan's Afghan policy and instead economic considerations must be given primacy as economic advantages in regional development through stable and peaceful Afghanistan were enormous: trade corridor and energy pipelines (linking Gulf, China, Central & South Asia.).

Indian Focus

India's concerns also stem from the fact that the Taliban—seen as proxy for Pakistan—will be in a position to call the shots in a new administration in Kabul put together after talks between the US, Afghanistan and Taliban representatives in time for American troops to withdraw. India has long held the view that there are no “good and bad” Taliban, the former groups being the ones the US and its Western Allies are trying to lure into a dialogue.

Former Foreign Secretary Kanwal Sibal said, “the fact that the Taliban seem getting ready to be part of Afghan government institutions and the use of a facilitator in this process, shows that Pakistan's interests would be looked after in any future dispensation in Afghanistan” (Kanwal Sibal).

Greater Indian involvement in Afghanistan will promote objectives that both the United States and India share. Indian political mediation and training for the Afghan military and police can help avert violence and internal conflict. At the same time, Delhi's interactions with the Kabul government—which have involved all Afghan ethnic groups to some degree, despite India's history of support for Tajiks, Uzbeks, and other non-Pashtuns—will help marginalize the Taliban and the extremist groups that target both India and the United States. Just as importantly, India's continued development aid can contribute to improvements in health care, education, power generation, and other critical sector, and its extensive private investment and efforts to integrate Afghanistan into regional trade arrangements will promote the type of economic growth that is critical for the country's long term stability.

A robust Indian role in Afghanistan should serve to advance other US foreign policy objectives as well. In its efforts to gain greater access to Central Asian energy markets, for example, Delhi will need to develop an effective trade and transportation infrastructure in Afghanistan to connect with the central Asian republics (CARs), particularly Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan. This will, in turn, reduce China's influence in South and Central Asia—an objective that both Washington and Delhi share. Furthermore, as India increasingly aspires to be a dominant regional actor, its contributions will help reduce the level of US involvement and resources needed to stabilize that part of the world. Supporting a more robust role for Delhi—which would contribute to Afghanistan's security, stability, and economic development—is thus a more effective long-term strategy for both countering terrorism and stabilizing Afghanistan than continuing to partner with Pakistan on short-term counter-terrorism operations (Rand Public Centre).

By early 2012, Pakistan's repeated, deliberate efforts to undercut US policies had clearly prompted US officials to reconsider the value of the overall security partnership with Islamabad. This became clear when Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, during a June 2012 trip to Afghanistan and India, issued Washington's starkest criticism yet of Pakistan, pointedly stating that Washington was “reaching the limits of its patience.” with Islamabad's refusal to crack down on terrorist safe havens operating in its territory (Jim Garmone).

Panetta further noted India's positive contributions to Afghanistan's economic and commercial development and, arguably more significantly, expressed support for Delhi's training of the country's nascent armed forces and encouraged it to continue with this security assistance mission. Panetta's implicit nod to Indian military engagement in Afghanistan represented a significant shift in US policy away from Pakistan and an acknowledgment that Delhi had more to offer in terms of promoting Afghanistan's internal stability.

Conclusion

It is concluded that US's withdrawal from Afghanistan will affect the geo-political and economic conditions of the region. There will new shift in convergences and divergences in Pak-India relations. Pakistan needed to get out of its collective siege mentality to bury conspiracy theories and blaming others; and start assessing the situation according to changing realities. The fact is that Pakistan is facing a blowback of its own policies. It is imperative for Pakistan to get out of the denial mode, start putting its internal house in order and not shy away from seeking international help. The regional states and global powers were favorably disposed towards helping Pakistan to counter the extremism and terrorism menace; of course they wanted to help Pakistan in their own interest. A second type of terrorism is sectarian in nature involving domestic groups but fueled by the Arab-Iran rivalry. It is important to reach a consensus with the Arab States and Iran that Pakistan cannot afford their proxy war on its soil. The regional actors should adopt regional approach towards peace where they should stand together to block the external forces interfering in the affairs of the region.

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