

Prospects of Enduring Peace in Afghanistan: Avoiding Zero Sum Game in Af-Pak Region

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Abstract

Afghanistan has witnessed a turbulent history of long and devastating war due to Soviet unabated invasion of Afghanistan of ten years producing unbearable losses of life, institutions and society. The United States along-with the support of majority of Muslim countries supported Jihad to defeat communism. This victory was, however, short-lived as infighting among Afghan war lords later entangled the entire country with even graver consequence. The emergence of Taliban and resultant occupation of 70% of Afghanistan had brought some degree of stability by providing good governance and expeditious justice system, but failed to pragmatically adjust to international environment. The unfortunate incidents of 9/11 changed the world for foreseeable time with even harsher fall out for Afghan nation as unleashing of the war of terror destroyed the left over Afghanistan. The instability in Afghanistan has caused negative effects on Pakistan as next door neighbour, which has rendered all sorts of humanitarian, diplomatic and moral support to Afghan cause since Soviet invasion and has also suffered most in the process due to spill-over effects. The democratic government is in-charge in Afghanistan after fall of Taliban regime in 2001 and several state institutions are also in place albeit at infancy stage, especially the security institutions, yet the prospects of enduring peace and stability are distant reality. More than three million Afghan refugees are still in Pakistan with very dim prospects of honourable return due to persisting instability. This paper highlights the causes of instability in Afghanistan with spill-over impact on Pakistan and suggests a course of action for enduring stability.

Key Words: Enduring Peace, Stability and Prosperity, Afghanistan.

Introduction

The history of Afghanistan is brimming with violent conflicts and wars from historical to contemporary times, one which is still going on albeit with different spectrum and dimensions. The recent one has linkages with foreign occupation by Soviet Union more than three decades ago, intra Afghan civil war between

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Mujahedeen factions and later emergence of Taliban and their rival war lords. The U.S.-led War on Terrorism (WOT) is the new phenomenon which Afghanistan is still coping with its negative impacts and renewed insurgency led by Taliban almost in the entire country with a calibrated degree of intensity. Throughout blustery history, the Afghanistan has been considered more like a tribal confederation rather than a unified nation-state. The draw down proclaimed by President Obama in on 22June2011 has been acknowledged as yet another “End Game” in Afghanistan (Landler & Cooper, 22 June 2011). It is a well-considered postulation that the dream of enduring stability in Afghanistan is difficult to fulfil with total defeat of Taliban through military means resulting into their surrender. The wider concern is not that as to when foreign troops will be leaving Afghanistan but more pertinent questions are; in what circumstances Afghanistan will be, if total withdrawal is hypothetically assumed, how rebalancing the interests of neighbouring countries and the regional players will be accommodated? How the objectives of self-defence and long term security needs of Afghanistan will be fulfilled with struggling economy and limited capacity of Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and their capabilities of bringing enduring stability? And lastly the biggest stake holder in Afghanistan’s stability is Pakistan which has gravely suffered in every domain, so how its concerns and interests will be adjusted with respect to future Afghan dispensation.

Significance of Issue

The global and regional efforts in bringing lasting peace amid varying manifestations and interests have been in action for quite some time now. Pakistan due to its geographical contiguity cannot be delinked from the developments in Afghanistan, therefore a single most country which has sacrificed and suffered in turn for Afghanistan. Persistent instability in Afghanistan is seriously affecting Pakistan as well due to its spill over effects; therefore, Pakistan cannot remain oblivious to such developments. This article highlights underlying causes of instability, critically evaluates the peace efforts by post 9/11 successive Afghan governments and recommends policy options for enduring stability.

Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework.

The article has been completed using qualitative research method by using the lens of Realism. The intra Afghan fighting, regional power politics and global player’s quest for domination have been dispassionately analysed from the realist perspective in order to draw logical conclusions.

Research Questions

The article has been analysed and built by logically responding to following research questions;

- Q-1 What efforts have been initiated by successive Afghan dispensations for bringing stability?
- Q-2 What are the core destabilizing factors? How these can be mitigated?
- Q-3 How President Trump's New Afghan policy is attempting to bring peace in war ravaged country?
- Q-4 How the dream of enduring peace and stability can be actualized in Afghanistan?

Post 9/11 Afghanistan Political Dispensation

Recap on Hamid Karzai Regime

Professor Alfred W. McCoy raised serious concerns regarding the legitimacy of Karzai Regime. It argued that the Bonn Conference (December 2001) in Germany was a deliberate effort by Bush Administration to install Karzai in Afghanistan – not by a democratic election. It argued that Karzai was so distrustful of his Afghan comrades that American security was provided to protect and secure him. McCoy like Neumann has advocated that Karzai's power centre was Bush Administration not Afghanistan or the Afghan people. McCoy has highlighted the corruption of Karzai Regime since in 2001 as production of opium surged to 8200 tons in 2007 – more than half of the entire country's economy (McCoy 15 June 2010,).

Consequently, in 2009 Afghanistan was ranked most corrupt state by Transparency International ('Corruption Perceptions Index 2009', 2009). Alfred McCoy cited the UN Electoral Complaints report of October 2009 highlighting over 28% of Karzai's votes as bogus (McCoy, 15 June 2010). President Karzai's main dependency on the U.S. was due to the lack of a military force that could not only fight the insurgents but also to maintain peace in Afghanistan. Karzai was also heavily dependent upon Afghan warlords who were time and again pressurizing him for legitimacy and recognition. Apart from dependency in terms of security needs, Karzai Administration lacked monetary foundations (Neumann 2015). Besides structural problems, the Karzai Administration had to deal with the societal impediments of Afghan society that is reluctant to accept any sudden change throughout its history. Apart from the impediments of the Afghan culture and societal values, Americans had also suffered the same dilemma. Americans wanted Karzai to be "strong and subservient" then also acknowledged that the

American approach was “incapacitating and inconsistent” – while exercising power on his people and continuing to do the American will. Neumann has concluded that the mutual mistrust between U.S. and Karzai Administration was predominantly due to the Afghan side and primarily due to Karzai’s wrong perceptions about the Americans (Neumann, 2015).

It can be argued that apart from many inherent problems of the Afghan society and politics, the Karzai Administration failed to address the core issues to bring about a change in Afghan way of life. The corruption, mismanagement and mala-fide intentions of Karzai Administration and the habit of putting all the blame of the wrongdoings on a scapegoat like the neighbouring Pakistan – actually became a stumbling block in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. President Karzai believed that Americans were conspiring against him and Afghanistan by giving Pakistan a free hand and not acting against the Taliban hideouts in Pakistan (Neumann 2015). President Karzai besides his rhetoric to make Afghanistan a progressive nation – remained busy in consolidating power and removing opposing warlords. Former U.S. Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld narrates that the example of Pacha Khan Zadran– a warlord from Eastern city of Gardez – can be taken who in 2002 challenged Karzai to accept him as the provincial governor. Karzai instead of listening to him closely gave him two options – surrender or be obliterated. It is noticeable that Karzai did not have the military capacity to destroy the militia of Zadran but he was sure that American Military Forces would back him up in this endeavour. Rumsfeld contrary to the opinion of Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice to use military force – advised Karzai to use political influence and motivation to control the warlords (Rumsfeld 2011). Apart from many shortcomings of Karzai Administration, it failed to safeguard Afghan civilians from the American air raids killing several innocent people (Filkins 2002).

The Assuming of Office by President Ashraf Ghani in 2014

Amid turf war in post 2014 Elections, President Ashraf Ghani was declared the victor on 22September 2014 as a result of U.S. sponsored power division arrangement. Mr Abdullah Abdullah was appointed as Chief Executive Officer (CEO) through special constitutional provisions (Ali A. Jalali 2016). The new cabinet took offices on12January 2015. The office of Chief Executive is under review for its permanent absorption in the constitution and re-designation as a Prime Minister (Kenneth Katzman, Clayton Thomas 2017). Stalled U.S.-Afghanistan Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) was formalized on 30 September 2014 allowing coalition forces to stay in Afghanistan beyond 2014 which is going on till today with about 9800 troops since 2014, which continue their routine replacement and redeployment with varying force structure (Kenneth Katzman, Clayton Thomas 2017).

Whereas under a separate agreement with NATO, additional 3000 troops are also stationed in Afghanistan. By agreeing to deal this issue urgently, President Ghanire-arranged the relationship fermented by former President Hamid Karzai, who declined to sign the agreements despite the approval of *Loya Jirga*(Grand Assembly) on 24November 2013. His main apprehensions were on grant of immunity from prosecution to U.S. Forces that operated brutally in Afghanistan, especially in the days of over throw of Taliban regime. The signing of BSA initiated Operation Freedom's Sentinel (OFS) on 1January 2015; concurrently Resolute Support (RS) mission commenced by NATO to back up counterterrorism efforts ('Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan' 2015).

Initiatives taken by President Ashraf Ghani

Yusuf and Smith argued that the National Unity Government (NUG) took control of Afghanistan under President Ashraf Ghani in September 2014. The nascent setup was weak and fragile since it was a result of almost twelve years of war and destruction. The economy was in tatters since it was heavily dependent upon external funding and support. Nevertheless, Ghani being an economist – took an unprecedented step and presented Pakistan with a proposal to use Islamabad's influence over Taliban for peace in Afghanistan. This move by Ghani was quite contrary to his predecessor Karzai (Moeed Yusuf and Scott Smith 2015). One contends Yusuf and Smith who argued that Pakistan allowed Taliban and Haqqani Network to operate from its territory to be used against Afghanistan (Moeed Yusuf and Scott Smith 2015) – since Pakistan and especially its Army remained under numerous attacks from terrorists – mainly coming from Afghanistan (Ian S. Livingston and Michael O'Hanlon 2016). The authors have admitted that Karzai Administration failed to militarily defeat the Taliban and even could not bring them in the political mainstream. The authors cited Alex Sund by from *CBS News* that Karzai– ostensibly after failing to engage Taliban – referred to them as “I am still calling them brothers (Sundby 2013).” Though, neither Karzai nor Ghani managed to effectively engage Taliban in Afghan politics. As a matter of fact among many other problems, Ghani's National Unity Government inherited the Taliban problem.

In fact the trust deficit between Pakistan and Afghanistan was a direct result of Karzai's incapacity to cooperate with Pakistan. Karzai visited Pakistan for nineteen times during his tenure as President of Afghanistan, nevertheless, he maintained an antagonistic posture towards the security establishments of Pakistan and continued to blame Islamabad for the problems faced by Afghanistan (Moeed Yusuf and Scott Smith n.d.). Jon Boone of *The Guardian* reported that former President of Pakistan Pervez Musharraf admitted that Pakistan helped Taliban to undermine Karzai Government since Karzai was

helping Pakistan's arch rival India to "stab Pakistan in the back (Boone 2015)." Musharraf also encouraged Pakistan to support President Ghani in his endeavour to balance the relations between the two neighbours (Boone 2015). This situation though seemed positive and patronizing had been influenced by the turbulent relations between Kabul and Islamabad and Ghani Administration was acceded to it. Houlihan and Spencer acknowledged the services rendered by the NUG in rehabilitating the Afghan society but they raised a serious concern on counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan. They believed that the operations should consider human rights violations and the consequent loss of trust among NUG, international community and the Afghan people. The authors have criticised NUG for not encouraging a healthy democratic environment and allowing different political parties to take part in the Afghan political process (Erin Houlihan and William Spencer 2017).

While keeping in view the arguments of Houlihan and Spencer, it is understandable that President Ghani in his endeavour to keep the Afghan society moving had to compromise on many issues. Nevertheless, Ghani promoted the rule of law in Afghanistan by strengthening the Office of the Attorney General. It also encouraged the Ministry of Justice to establish Juvenile Rehabilitation Directorate – primarily to de-radicalize the Afghan youth. Ghani also strengthened the Afghan National Police (ANP) so that law enforcement at the local level can be ensured (Erin Houlihan and William Spencer 2017). It also encouraged Afghan women to take active part in ANP as well (Erin Houlihan and William Spencer 2017). The NUG led by President Ghani signed Freedom of Information Law in December 2014. It was a unique step by any Afghan Government to ensure transparency and accountability. However, this law to ensure access to information and freedom of press could not meet required results and press in Afghanistan continued to face stumbling blocks e.g. harassment, disappearances, illegal arrests and threats (Erin Houlihan and William Spencer 2017). Malik argued that the incumbent Afghan Government headed by President Ashraf Ghani exercises authority and power only or perhaps limited to the capital and other major cities (Aqab Malik 2016). An inference can be drawn that President Ghani is suffering from the same dilemma that President Karzai suffered in the past.

Challenges Faced by the Incumbent Government

The important questions related to challenges for Afghanistan in 2018 and beyond could be? First, and the most persistent concern is the issue of safety and security. As Coalition Forces numbers have decreased, the Taliban and their affiliates and other international terrorist organizations are trying to get inroads to exploit security vacuum in Afghanistan. As per Wall Street Journal reports (Margherita Stancati and Habib Khan Totakhil 2014), rising number of Afghan

soldiers have died combating Taliban attacks in 2014 as compared to previous years engaging Afghan Forces in the war of attrition and exhaustion. It is worth noting that the territorial control by Taliban insurgents remains debatable, yet they have successfully continued war of attrition with devastating consequences. The National Unity Government is facing daunting security challenges which in fact supersede all other priorities of socio economic significance. While President Ghani can be credited for his all-out desire for enduring peace by overtly initiating several diplomatic initiatives after taking office by visiting China, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Iran. However, the things did not unfold as desired or anticipated due to rising Taliban brutalities, their inflexibility towards negotiated peace process and later diplomatic straining of relations with neighbouring countries due to a host of reasons.

The second most tenacious challenge is how to ensure equitable and proportionate development and representation of diverse constituencies. Scepticism exists regarding the usefulness and long-term steadiness of a power-sharing deal; as both President Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah have to prove that their dispensation is proficient of taking Afghanistan to the zenith of new climax. One positive component of Ghani's governance is that he is open to suggestions and willing to work with United States and regional stake holders for long term stability and political settlement with Taliban. The recent announcement of joining Taliban to mainstream politics of Afghanistan is testimony of his sincere efforts. Additionally, Ghani has validated great interest in reaching out to Pakistan and China being most influential stake holders and both have responded positively to peace initiatives. Struggling economy is also a priority agenda set out by President Ghani along-with education especially the higher education to be spread across the country, addressing the joblessness and attracting foreign investment. None of these questions have a quick fix solution and are expected to take significant time and concerted efforts.

Threat Assessment and Destabilizing Factors

The continuing instability with rising terrorist incidents from red zone of Kabul to far flung areas with devastations and brutalities demonstrated by Taliban, Al Qaida and rising influence of ISIS are worrisome developments and persistent concerns for entire region. Loss of Kunduz in October 2015 was a huge setback however, the ANSF, with coalition assistance, were able to re-capture it within few days (Cordesman 2015). On the regional front, Indian attempts of marginalizing Pakistan in Afghanistan is also obfuscating the security matrix and main irritant between the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Safe havens of Tehrik e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in Afghanistan and staging of high profile terrorist attacks like APS Peshawar and Bacha Khan University Charsada and several others across the country are worrisome developments (Jamal 2015). In

the obtaining environment, Afghanistan's mounting closeness with India does not suggest well for Pakistan due to historical track record of zero sum relations between India and Pakistan. The varying perspectives of Iran, USA, Russia and China on future stability are also challenging existing security dynamics.

President Trump's New Afghan Policy

Lissner and Zenko argued that the Trump Administration has not been able to formulate a doctrine to envisage the policy objectives (Rebecca Friedman Lissner and Micah Zenko 2017). Trump's National Security Adviser Lt. Gen. McMaster and Gary D. Cohen (Director of the National Economic Council) outlined the basic contours of the Trump Doctrine. While focusing inwards on making America great again, he explicitly announced winning of Afghan war through military means and announced at several occasions that victory is in-fact very near contrary to ground realities (Stelzenmüller 2017). By providing cautious support to peace initiatives and announcements of amnesty by President Ghani, he has now sided towards politico-military solution with optimistic note. It is evident that American power and influence is declining. The primary reason for this decline is over-stretch of the U.S. Military Forces around the globe. McMaster and Cohen also tried to answer this by saying that "by asking for more buy-in, we have deepened our relationships. That is not surprising. Alliances based on mutual respect and shared responsibility are strong. And strong alliances bolster American power (H. R. McMaster and Gary D. Cohn, n.d.)." Trump's asking of more money from Germany for NATO and on withdrawing forces from Afghanistan are also examples of what William C. Martel called 'strike a balance between its security ends and economic means (William C. Martel 2015).'

During his speech, President Trump said that "my original instinct was to pull out – and, historically, I like following my instincts" ('Remarks by President Trump on the Strategy in Afghanistan and South Asia', 2017) – but contrary to his instinct he resorted to reengagement. The men who are dominating Trump Administration and have encircled President Trump are either warriors or such men who have been seriously critical of U.S. Policy for Afghanistan. Peter Bergen drew a remarkable critique on the new policy and argued that the Trump's New South Asia Policy is a clear result of him being under the serious control of his Generals (Bergen n.d.). The ramifications of this new strategy would be severely negative – since it is like giving a free hand to the military to handle the Afghan War. To achieve military cum political objectives – the number of drone strikes would increase inside Pakistan – primarily targeting civilian and unarmed populations. These drone strikes have had little value in counter-terrorism in the past but now these strikes would not only be aimed to eliminate high value targets but to stir things up in the Pak-Afghan border areas.

As a consequence of those strikes there will be a new wave of terrorist incidents across Pakistan and those groups who somehow ceased their terrorist activities will begin to re-evaluate their strategy. Also, unfortunate but ‘deliberate accidents’ like Salala Incident – are likely to happen again – ostensibly depicting the frustration of the U.S. Military Forces. The chain of actions would also trigger an increased pressure on Pakistan by heating up the Eastern and Western borders and would see considerable increase in cross-border skirmishes. Apart from the concerns of Trump – it has been an established opinion of commentators that there exists only one solution for Afghanistan and that is to bring Taliban on the negotiations table by allowing Pakistan to use its influence. Great powers like China and Russia have also admitted the fact that without Pakistan being onboard – sustainable and long lasting peace can never be achieved in Afghanistan.

The acquisition of power and prestige has always been instrumental in the international system and particularly the great powers seem to be obsessed with it. Overtly, America being a great power – aspires to achieve only one specific objective – to find an honorable exit from Afghanistan. Without a slightest doubt – the Trump Administration is applying the same principle that Henry Kissinger applied in Vietnam – to expand the conflict. Nixon and Kissinger took Vietnam War to neighboring Cambodia and Laos to suppress the Communist Forces operating through the alleged ‘Ho Chi Minh Strait’. Kissinger’s orders to General Alexander Haig to ‘destroy everything that moves’ is a testament to American strategic culture – that is perhaps coming into play again.

Analytical Debate on Anticipated Peace in Afghanistan

The security environments have consistently disparaged since December 2014 when coalition forces formally declared ending of combat actions. The security vacuum in its aftermath presented an opportunity which was keenly exploited by Taliban and their associates for retaining their control, and ability to project deadly attacks at will. In the year 2017 and just in last three months of 2018 more than 15 deadly attacks have been witnessed in Kabul and other major cities thus pointing towards inability of ANSF in effectively articulating response against the persistent threat. The decision of pending of further drawdown by U.S and coalition forces to enhance a degree of hard earned stability, rejuvenation of ANSF to control security independently, Pakistani impetus to resume peace talks and establishment of quartet dialogue forum comprising US, China, Afghanistan and Pakistan in speeding up reconciliation efforts are indeed positive developments which will have significant on security milieu of Afghanistan and the entire region. Significant stabilizing dynamics have been examined in the ensuing paragraphs:

- **Domestic Factors Affecting Stability.** In spite of irrepressible insurgency and rising suicide attacks by Taliban, the Afghan Government preserves and maintains the control of capital Kabul, major transportation routes, reasonable degree of control over provincial capitals, and approximately all the district headquarters. With the support of existing coalition forces, ANSF have remained largely successful and resolute in defending major populace centres and dis-incentivizing Taliban in retaining or sustaining control over those areas for extended period of time, such as Kunduz. Contrarily, the Taliban have demonstrated their capability of capturing rural areas and challenging the significant terrain features like ones in Helmand province and using those as spring boards for threatening Kabul and other adjoining areas. The future scheming of Afghanistan's constancy will have to take into account the rising foot prints of ISIS which along-with Al Qaida and Taliban will complicate the security situation even further. According to report by Pentagon around 1000 to 3000 ISIS terrorist have captured territory in Nangarhar from Taliban (Curtis 2016).
- **Global and Regional Factors Affecting Security.** The Afghan Government and other stakeholders affirm that the reconciliation and a political settlement with all insurgent groups mainly the Taliban is vital for ensuring durable peace in Afghanistan. In this regard, Pakistan has made several overtures and tried to facilitate talks between Taliban and the Afghan government. However, this has so-far proved to be futile exercise due to inflexible stance and divergent positions by both parties (Talat Masood 2015), thus adding complexities to the whole scenario. However, despite complexities, a silver lining can be seen as all major stake holders are supporting the peace process. As a continuation of this strategy, The Quartets (Afghanistan, Pakistan, the U.S. and China) are making all-out efforts to turn the reconciliation process into a success. The attendance of the Chinese is of special importance and enhances substantial weight to the entire peace process and Taliban leaders also recognize this fact. From Pakistan's stand point, it is vital that the peace process must succeed in order to bring stability in Afghanistan and the region. The diplomatic relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan are critical for enduring stability in Afghanistan. Despite increase in bilateral tension due to series of devastating suicide attacks in both Afghanistan and Pakistan since 2014, both countries have generally maintained steady contact at government and military levels. Geographic compulsions compel both countries to keep channels of communication open. Most of Pakistan's current and future projects like Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline (TAPI), Central Asia South Asia 1000 (CASA 1000) to name a few, are linked to stability in Afghanistan thus warranting a win-win cooperation.

The Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process is one of the major foreign policy successes, which has immense potentials of contributing towards stability of Afghanistan. This initiative provided an effective forum to bring focus firmly on Afghanistan's issues (Ikram Sehgal 2015). Participants therefore consented to endeavour and make Afghanistan a peaceful, stable, and prosperous country. This is vital to stability and prosperity of entire 'Heart of Asia' region, therefore, a collective responsibility was realized in enabling Afghanistan in successfully fighting the challenges ('The Heart of Asia- Istanbul Process Senior Officials Meeting', Heart of Asia. 2015). The TAPI gas pipeline project kicked off on December 13,2015promising investment of US\$ 10 billion will be a fate changer for relevant countries. Through this project, Pakistan and India will get over 1.3 billion cubic feet per day of gas, while Afghanistan will get 0.5 billion cubic feet. India will pay US\$200-250 million in transit fees to Pakistan while Pakistan will pay the same amount in transit fees to Afghanistan (TAPI Project Begins Next Week', Daily Outlook Afghanistan. 2015). TAPI is not just a gas transit initiative connecting energy-rich Central Asia with energy-starved South Asia, but a trail-blazing project that will open doors for greater regional economic collaboration and stability in Afghanistan.

Commitments of the International Community

The enduring peace and stability in Afghanistan mainly depends upon international efforts in implementing feasible procedures for an orderly transfer of security obligations, fast track follow up of reconciliation process, maintainable and unstinted support of regional partners for sustainable economic development. Following aspects are suggested in this regard:

- **Long Term Partnership with U.S and Other Coalition Partners.** The incumbent dispensation in Afghanistan has already signed Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) with USA and Status of Forces Agreements (SOFA) with NATO. The conceptual dimensions of newly formed strategic partnership warrant unswerving assistance in security and economic development for making the relevant Afghan institutions to sustain and deliver without banking upon the outside support. Such transformation is essentially needed for two main objectives, first to demonstrate the capability of handling overarching security across Afghanistan as a potent force and prevent the country falling into chaos as witnessed in post-Soviet hasty withdrawal and secondly; allow smooth transition of security duties from coalition forces to ANSF.
- **Partnership with Regional Countries and the Islamic World.** Afghanistan due to its geographical proximity to the Muslim world also needs support of those countries as well as the regional powers.

Afghanistan must adopt a policy of robust engagement through proactive diplomacy. The fine balancing of relations between Pakistan and India out of zero sum prism would be a big challenge and toll order, however, will have to adopt as supreme national interest and finally harmonizing the interests of Iran and Saudi Arabia. Following such a complex and multidimensional diplomacy will necessitate trust, capacity and credibility.

- **Strategic Partnership with Russia and China.** Building long term partnership with Russia and China will be significant as these are important regional players and their rising international stature will be extremely beneficial especially the economic investment opportunities promised by China for long term sustainability and both countries can play a positive role to deal with Afghanistan's security and economic dilemmas. On their part, both Powers have yet to come up with any substantial economic, political and military assistance for Afghanistan.

Anticipated Security Conditions

The consistency and focused approach by the Afghan Government and the enactment of the ANSF will define the future threat matrix in Afghanistan. The terrorists and insurgents will continue to pose formidable security and political challenges in a bid to maintain their relevance. The Taliban insurgency has likely been bolstered by the Coalition Forces' changeover to Train, Assist and Advice (TAA) role and decrease in combat troops. Reconciliation is perceived to be the linchpin for post withdrawal stability and enduring peace. U.S. will also endure to monitor the rising threat emanating from ISIS – K's existence in Afghanistan. President Ghani has described it as the "ecology of terror" (President of Afghanistan President Ghani's Remarks at 51st Munich Security Conference, Munich, Germany', Office of the President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. 2015). The most worrisome scenario is intensification of conflict and a re-enactment of the post 1979 bloody war after U.S. and Coalition Forces withdrawal without a sustainable political settlement. Indian aspirations for a greater role in Afghanistan beyond reconstruction process has become visible in the form of enhanced consulates alongside the Pak-Afghan border and channelling of apparatus and training to Baloch insurgents and consistent efforts in destabilizing Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

On the other hand, it induces thinking in Pakistanis that Pakistan should reserve the right to take 'protective measures'. It is, therefore, significant to pursue U.S. for a three-fold argument which are; take Pakistan on board in the reconciliation process, de-emphasize Indian influence in Afghanistan detrimental to Pakistan's sovereignty, and thirdly clear cut policy on drone strikes. Peaceful, prosperous and stable Afghanistan is in Pakistan's interest, therefore, Pakistan

will continue to help Afghan brethren as well as act as facilitator in reconciliation process and remain relevant as part of the solution. Pakistan feels that political stability and conducive security environment are precondition for economic development of Pakistan as well and actualization of TAPI gas pipeline and CPEC projects. Afghanistan's stability is fundamentally linked to the country's economy and security sector's capacity to control violence. Since 2010, more than 70% of budget is coming from foreign funding for Afghanistan which is unsustainable and requires long term international commitment. The international community will have to continue substantial monetary support for at least coming five years to avoid an economic collapse in Afghanistan (Dale, 2011). Recently inaugurated TAPI gas pipeline is assumed to play a key role in supporting the perspectives of all stakeholders on Afghanistan as it will knit together the future energy needs of three significant South Asian countries (Sadat, 2015).

Conclusion

Enduring peace in Afghanistan is the ultimate desire of Afghanistan, Pakistan, regional players and global powers despite varying perspectives on the methodology. The sufferings of Afghan people and next door Pakistan must come to an end as lot of bloodshed and infrastructure damage has occurred as a fall out in instability. Peace will also guarantee actualization of regional economic initiatives like TAPI, CASA 1000 and proposed extension of CPEC to include Afghanistan and Iran and bind the relevant countries into well-knit economic incentives for benefit of all parties. Afghanistan still stands at crossroads due to a number of reasons – its leadership being the most important one has to formulate pragmatic policies for reconciliation to succeed. Pakistani nation should stand unified, display resolve and the government should adopt whole of nation approach for bringing an end to Afghan issue with honourable repatriation of refugees.

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