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International Intervention in Afghanistan: Prospects for Peace and stability in the transformation decade

Shanthie Mariet D’Souza
Mantraya, Strategy, Innovation, Alternatives

Following the 9/11 attacks, an international military intervention in Afghanistan targeted the Taliban–Al Qaeda combine. The immediate result was the dislodging of the Taliban regime. However, close to a decade and half later, the goal of establishing order and stabilising Afghanistan has not been met. Presence of plethora of actors with differing goals and diverse range of activity has added to the complexities of achieving long term stability in Afghanistan. Lack of a unified vision and consequent lack of unity of effort has led to dissipated efforts. The inadequate understanding of the nature of state in Afghanistan among the international actors trying to shape the country’s future has impacted stabilisation project. Not surprisingly, with the commencement of NATO drawdown in Afghanistan there are concerns of the reversal the fragile gains of the last decade. This paper is a stock taking exercise of the international community’s role in the reconstruction of security, political, economic, and governance sectors in the last decade. It attempts to provide an alternative course of action for the international community in the transformation decade (2014-2024) to usher in durable peace and long term stability in Afghanistan.

Key Words: Military Intervention, stability, drawdown, peace, transformation.

Nature of the International intervention in Afghanistan (2001-14)

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) invoked Article Five of its Charter following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 in the United States (US). The Article seeks the involvement of the organization’s members to come to the aid of any member state subject to an armed attack. The deployment of NATO-led ISAF mission in Afghanistan was the result of this measure. With NATO leading the ISAF, Afghanistan emerged as an important area of cooperation outside its traditional Euro Atlantic theatre. On December 20, 2001, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) commenced its mission in Afghanistan on as an UN-mandated European organization. Two years later, in 2003, it became a NATO-led mission (Gallis, 2007). While the US-led ISAF mission’s activities were limited only to Kabul, the NATO-led ISAF took entire Afghanistan under its ambit assisting the government in Kabul "exercising and extending its authority and influence across the country, paving the way for reconstruction and effective governance" (NATO, 2015b). Four years later, in 2007, another expansion in NATO’s role occurred. The Resolution 1776 of September 17, 2007 allowed the organization not just to disarm the militias, but also undertake measures to "reform the justice system, train a national police force and army, provide security for elections, and combat the narcotics industry" (Morelli and Belkin, 2009).

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The US foreign policy towards Afghanistan underwent a significant transformation under President Barack Obama. By emphasizing on diplomacy and multilateralism, Obama's campaign period pledge rephrased the American engagement in Afghanistan as a "NATO mission" (Silva, 2009), an endeavour that is based on not just greater NATO participation in the war, but sought increased financial contribution from the NATO allies. Obama, in accordance with his election campaign pledge of renewed focus on the 'just war' in Afghanistan, called for a winding down of the 'unnecessary war of choice' in Iraq, while committing 17,000 new troops for combat in Afghanistan and a further 4,000 personnel for training local troops. In a speech on December 1, 2009 at West Point, Obama announced the troop surge, and yet linked this additional deployment to an eventual withdrawal of forces, to begin in 2011.

**Counter terrorism Vs Counter-insurgency approach**

Insurgency and Counter-insurgency (COIN) are subsets of warfare. In response to a dynamic insurgency, the nature of COIN constantly evolves. Insurgency attempts to control a contested political space. The COIN campaign, on the other hand, involves, all means- military, economic, political, psychological as well as civic action programmes- to surmount insurgency (Kilcullen, 2007). Military means alone are insufficient to win over insurgencies. The need, hence, is to synchronize both military as well as non-military methods. The role played by various agencies, international as well as local organizations hence become critical to making COIN effective. Due to the role of multiplicity of actors, it is essential that all actors work towards a common end state, by adhering to the broad principle of unity of effort. This not only has the capacity to neutralize threats from insurgents, but can build effective institutions that extend the influence of the host government and augment its capacity in providing basic services to its people.

The predominant narrative on Afghanistan is one of violence that has spiraled in spite of the troop surge. This has not only spread instability, but has painted the prevalent COIN strategy as one that is ineffective. The principal problems are easy to identify. These include among others COIN strategy that lacks unified effort, an aid distribution strategy that suffers from coordination mismatches, and little effort in shoring up the Afghan government’s capacities and image in the eyes of its own population. Afghanistan's landscape is dotted with a huge array actor. The multiple layers of interaction involve the Afghan government, the international donors, the non-governmental organizations, and also the international military forces. This is a complex web of interaction without much coordination. Each of these agencies and organizations has different perceptions of reconstruction, divergent operational approaches and a chronic unwillingness to coordinate their efforts with the Afghan government. In the absence of common vision and consequent lack of unified effort, such complex and divergent approaches have accentuated Afghanistan's internal and regional contradictions. Peace and stability, as a result, remain elusive.

**Relevance of NATO in Stabilizing Afghanistan**

The NATO mission in Afghanistan was a test case for the allies’ military capabilities. It further sought to assess their political will, especially in view of the difficulties involved and the possibilities of a decline in popular support back home. However, it was important for the 'new NATO', somewhat rechristened during its 1999 Washington Summit to undertake the mission. NATO, to its constituents, was capable of being a part of military operations dealing with terrorism and WMD proliferation threats beyond its conventional theatre- the Europe. This change in overall mission initially reflected a NATO consensus that the principal dangers to allied security lie distant from the treaty area and require new political tools and military capabilities to
combat them (Morelli & Belkin, 2009). The organisations battled against the pessimistic perceptions that the Afghan war could very well be unwinnable, which in the long run could generate negative publicity impacting on troop contribution. Initially 5000 NATO troops were allocated to Afghanistan. By January 2014, however, the numbers had swelled to 57,004 from 48 countries, which included all the 26 NATO countries (Gallis, 2007). In November 2014, the numbers fell to 28,360 after countries embarked upon withdrawal (NATO, 2015a). By February 2015, it fell further to 13,195 soldiers including 6,839 from the US drawn from 40 countries. (NATO, 2015c) In January 1, 2015, NATO launched the Resolute Support Mission (RSM) to train, advise and assist the Afghan security forces.

ISAF operations in Afghanistan have exposed the fault lines in the Alliance (Noetzel and Schreer, 2009) as NATO continued to grapple with ways and means to deal with the rising violence caused by the Taliban-led insurgency. The essential problem of coordination in the military sphere arose due to the presence of two major international military coalitions- the US led Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and the UN-mandated and NATO-led mission ISAF. The Bush administration attempted to merge both, only to face resistance from Britain, Germany, and France. Stabilization rather than combat mission was emphasized as NATO's role by Britain and Germany. Britain, in particular, leading the ISAF counter-narcotics effort, intended to retain the initiative in the political sphere of winning hearts and minds. Germany, on the other hand, opposed a merger of the commands because German forces in ISAF were trained only for stabilization and not for COIN operations. The French were concerned that the administration, with a US commander in place to guide all military activity, might use NATO as a toolbox to accomplish Washington’s broader objectives in Afghanistan (Krishnappa, D’Souza and Singh, 2009).

For the entire duration of its presence, NATO's efforts remained hampered by the reluctance of its members to provide troops and resources for the Afghan mission (Inderfurth, 2007 & DSouza, 2009). There were conflicting national agendas and caveats at work, imposed by NATO allies on their forces in Afghanistan. The COIN operations were mired by risk avoidance and risk-aversion strategy. While the Obama administration managed to effect a US troop surge, a similar call by NATO commanders for more troops evoked only a partial response. The distinction maintained between NATO countries of being a stabilisation force or a fighting force remained the reason behind what clearly emerged as two-tier alliance. Only some NATO members were willing to fight for establishing security. Others had a different vision. In February 2008, Robert Gates, the then US Defence Secretary warned the future of NATO is at risk due to differences over Afghanistan. He said that NATO may become a two-tier alliance (BBC, 2008).

Security

International military presence of 14 long years and pledges to rebuilding Afghanistan notwithstanding, a deadly Taliban-led insurgency continues to pose a serious security threat to the country. Many lethal strikes have been carried out by the insurgents against the international and Afghan forces as well as the civilians. Since 2006, the levels of violence and insurgent attacks have significantly increased (Guardian, 2013). A similar trend continues in 2015. While analysts argue that the troop surge achieved notable security gains, these gains remain fragile. Violence peaked in 2011, the worst year since the Taliban were dislodged from Kabul in 2001. The planned security transition (inteqal) met with several challenges, including insurgent attacks on NATO units, increase in green on blue attacks and rising civilian casualties. These developments eventually resulted in the USA being compelled to relinquish its right to carry out night raids and
D'Sousa

to hand over control of the main coalition prison to the Afghan Government, in an attempt to advance negotiations on a convoluted Strategic Partnership Agreement with Afghanistan.

From 2007 the Taliban placed less emphasis on ambushes and fire-fights, in the course of which they tended to suffer heavy casualties, and relied more on the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and suicide attacks. As a result, there was an increase in the average number of security incidents recorded per month, from 741 in 2008 to 960 in 2009, while the number of security incidents in January 2010 was 40 percent higher than one year earlier. Thus, while the augmented forces of ISAF, combined with the Afghan Government’s growing security forces, had some successes in reducing the Taliban presence in some areas of the country during 2009–10, the Taliban’s ascendancy, especially the expansion of areas of operation into the relatively stable north and west, remained an increasing concern. From 2011 some further changes in the Taliban’s strategy became evident, with a series of spectacular, high-profile attacks and a highly co-ordinated ‘spring offensive’ capturing considerable public and media attention. In the run up to the presidential elections in April 2014 and drawdown, increased targeting and attacks were carried out on hotels and restaurants frequented by foreigners in Kabul - the La Taverna du Liban, a popular Lebanese restaurant in Kabul (17 January 2014) and the Serena hotel (21 March 2014). Attacks on journalists increased in 2014. Swedish radio journalist Nils Horner was killed by unidentified gunmen in Kabul in March. In the same month, Sardar Ahmed of the AFP was killed in the attacks on Serena Hotel and two Western female journalists of the Associated press were targeted at a police compound by a man in a police uniform in the eastern city of Khost in April which killed Anja Niedringhaus and injured Kathy Gannon.

Initially in Afghanistan’s south and the east, the international forces were unable to hold on to areas cleared of insurgents. Inadequate number of troops and insufficient resources on the ground meant that the Afghan countryside remained insecure. The ratio of NATO and US troops to the Afghan population was 1:653. In real terms, this translated to one tenth of the necessary force level to effect stability in areas absent of insurgency. Afghanistan has the lowest international troop to population ratio of 1:1115, as per a 2004 estimate. (Bhatia, Lanigan and Wilkinson, 2004) Moreover, since the international forces remained engaged mostly in clear and sweep operations and did not concentrate on holding cleared off areas, their ability to secure areas on a long term basis and cultivate relations with local Afghans suffered.

The use of air power by the US military, in its efforts to target Taliban fighters, has resulted in considerable collateral damage and civilian casualties. The Afghan legislature and the former Afghan President Karzai demanded that the international military exercise greater restraint in their operations. This led to new rules of engagement adopted by international forces, in an attempt to reduce the risk of civilian casualties. The Afghan government took control of nationwide security in January 2014. President Karzai announced the security handover at a military academy outside Kabul and pledged that Afghan forces are ready to take on the insurgents. According to the Afghan Ministry of Defence, in 2010 810 Afghan soldiers were killed in operations. Between April and November 2012, another 830 ANA members were killed. The Afghan Council of Ministers in February 2014 put the total number of Afghan security forces killed in the past 13 years (till June 2013) at 13729. An additional 16511 Afghan soldiers and police officers had been injured.

There are varying opinions about the increasing capability and preparedness among the ANSF. Initially, the ANA had been primarily employed to augment the international forces’ COIN
operations. By mid-2008 its role had expanded and it was reportedly leading 62 percent of the operations. In 2011, the ISAF was conducting over 90 percent of its operations in conjunction with the ANA. In 2012, according to Afghan official sources, the ANA planned and led 80 percent of the combat operations. However, the rapid pace at which recruitment for both the ANA and the ANP has been made is said to have compromised the quality of the personnel recruited. According to a 2012 US Department of Defense report (Peter, 2012), only 13 of the 156 Afghan army battalions were being deemed as ‘independent with advisers’. Only 74 were regarded as ‘effective with advisers’.

Nonetheless, the ANA’s performance remained noteworthy during the high-profile insurgent attacks from 2011. According to the Afghan Ministry of the Interior, 3328 insurgents were killed and 3480 were detained in operations carried out by Afghan forces and the NATO-led coalition or ISAF troops in 2012. While the project of raising a capable and independent ANA had been realised to an extent, questions regarding capabilities of the Afghan National Police (ANP) and establishing rule of law remained relevant. An under-trained and under-manned ANP had almost no presence in Afghan villages. In urban centres, they had only minimal control. The ANA, in comparison, was relatively successful. However, even this force suffered from chronic deficiencies. Resources, arms and equipment, training module, desertion and infiltration by the insurgents remained some of the most commented upon shortcomings. The fact that Afghanistan could turn into a hyper-militarised state without adequate resources to support its bloated military was a different and insurmountable issue. This development, arguably unavoidable, created new challenges of civil-military relations. On the other hand, there are concerns among Afghans that reducing the numbers of the ANSF for funding reasons ignores the needs on the ground.

The net beneficiaries of such limited vision of nation-building were the insurgents. Powerful warlords, militias, drug trade and inadequacies of security sector reform (Sedra, 2006) emboldened the insurgents. The international community’s failed counter-narcotic strategy is an example of this trend. The US was not averse to using like aerial spraying, considered a forceful means to deal with the problem. However, the NATO countries feared that such means if adopted would defeat the very purpose of the heart and minds campaign among the Afghans, undermine support for the government of President Hamid Karzai, alienate the local populace, and provide a support base for the Taliban.

Drugs remained a significant major source insurgent funding. A complex network of Taliban-affiliated groups, their cross-border networks, and the support they elicited from local commanders, ensured that the drugs flowed rather seamlessly from Afghanistan into Central Asia, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, China, and India. The Taliban and organised crime gangs even managed to influence drug prices. In 2010, for example, they reportedly withheld 12400 tonnes of opium, worth about $1.25bn, from the international market to keep the price of heroin and opium at a profitable level (Syal, 2010).

The USA and Afghanistan signed a Strategic Partnership Agreement in May 2012. According to the Agreement, a considerable number of international troops, mostly American, will remain in Afghanistan, providing strategic support to the ANSF even after 2014. Additionally, the coalition countries, particularly the USA, will continue to grant financial assistance to Afghanistan for the foreseeable future. The pact was expected to be supplemented within a year by a Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) that would provide for a residual US military presence beyond 2014.
While President Karzai refused to sign the BSA, only in September 2014, President Ashraf Ghani put his signature on the Agreement, after the formation of the National Unity Government.

**Political**

A strong Afghan government remained a critical necessity for Afghanistan's long-term security and development. Success of the international community's COIN campaign depended significantly on building an effective government and governance in Afghanistan. The war in Iraq, however, appeared to have pushed these basic necessities to the background. The need for initiating a nation-building exercise in Afghanistan remained neglected for the Bush Presidency and the NATO.

Afghanistan’s democratic process continued to be challenged by the security situation, issues in governance and near absence of rule of law. Wide ranging political reforms, which had become a necessity remained unaddressed. The Afghan Constitution’s inherent limitations were evident while dealing with disputes between government’s different branches and jurisdictions of institutions over governing elections. Government led by former President Karzai was perceived as ‘weak, inefficient and corrupt’. Lieutenant General Karl Eikenberry, who served as US ambassador to Afghanistan once said that the greatest long-term threat to success in Afghanistan is ‘the potential irretrievable loss of legitimacy of the government of Afghanistan’. He specifically cited corruption, justice, and law enforcement as responsible (Jones and Pickering, 2008). Presence of individuals with direct ties to the country’s warlords, a number of individuals closely associated with the drug trade were elected to the parliament (DeGrasse and Hsu, 2005). International community’s attempts to convince President Karzai to pave way for direct role for political parties in the election process went unheeded. Afghan politics as a result remained fragmented and its legislative process often immobilized. The President and the legislature had divergent views over the introduction of electoral and other key legal reforms.

The 5 April 2014 Presidential election, third in post-2001 Afghanistan, constituted the country’s first democratic leadership change. Coming ahead of the ISAF drawdown at the end of 2014, candidates formed multi-ethnic three-person teams, one for President and two for Vice President posts, thereby maximizing their appeal to diverse vote banks. Former warlords and regional commanders as well as technocrats and moderates were candidates. This coalition building was indicative of the electoral compulsions which weaved together a team, necessary to bridge the ethno-tribal divide and bring about reform oriented agenda.

Among the several shifts witnessed in Afghan politics, the increase in the sheer number and mixture of veteran traditional leaders and new candidates, thereby providing greater options for the average voter and the tilt away from individual-based politics to issue-based politics are significant. The formation of the National Unity Government (NUG) between Dr. Ashraf Ghani and Dr. Abdullah prevented street protests from turning violent and further polarization. Moreover, the protracted electoral dispute in the runoff Presidential elections underlined several challenges to the Afghan political sector. The author’s discussions with election officials, observers representing political parties and persons on the street narratives in Kabul in August-September 2014 revealed that the ability of the Afghan Independent Electoral Commission to play an impartial role could have implications for the future conduct of elections in the country. The viability of the NUG would remain linked to its ability to move away from the patronage network based approach to long term institution building and reforms. The country needs a range of electoral reforms ahead of the parliamentary elections.
Peace Talks

As the search for a political solution intensified, negotiations with the Taliban were being explored as part of an Afghan reconciliation process. Individual and uncoordinated attempts at negotiations with the Taliban emerged as the alternative conflict management strategy for the NATO countries. The USA has been persistent in trying to bring about peace talks involving high-level Taliban leaders and, to this end, sanctioned the establishment of a Taliban political office in Qatar in January 2012, while also endorsing efforts to reconcile middle- and lower-level insurgent leaders and their followers. In 2011 US diplomats took the initiative in exploring the possibilities of holding talks. When Ambassador Marc Grossman assumed the position of US Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan in February 2011, following the death of Richard Holbrooke, the diplomatic focus that had been on a strategic dialogue to improve Afghan governance became instead a dedicated pursuit of reconciliation. Bringing high-level insurgents into talks was being explored as a strategy of co-option that would splinter/ fracture the insurgency and thus have a demoralizing effect on Taliban combatants. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton described US policy during congressional testimony in October 2011 as ‘fight, talk and build’ (DeYoung, 2011).

With the reconciliation strategy gaining momentum, it was unclear whether the process had received favourable sanctions of the Taliban leadership or was merely attempting to weave a narrative of success by involving irrelevant insurgent figures and impostors. The lack of credible information on the identity of the interlocutors was a lesser problem. Among the critical obstacles were the US proposal to retain bases within Afghanistan beyond 2014. Apart from the fact that the Taliban demanded a complete withdrawal of the Americans from Afghan soil, even President Karzai expressed concerns that the presence of US troops would be an impediment for negotiations with the Taliban. In spite of an abandoned move to win over the Taliban by releasing imprisoned Taliban commanders from the US detention centre at Guantánamo Bay that led the Taliban to suspend the peace talks in March 2012, both the US and the Karzai administration continued with their efforts to arrive at peace with the insurgents. The announcement of the drawdown of forces meant that the Taliban perceives a sense of victory and the inability of the Afghan government and international community to negotiate from a position of strength.

Several countries (the US, the United Kingdom, Germany, Norway, France and Japan) continued unilateral and parallel negotiation efforts by providing avenues and establishing contacts outside Afghanistan. This belittled the Afghan Government’s nascent efforts at peace-building through the High Peace Council (HPC) and the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP). In September 2011, killing of the HPC head and former President Burhanuddin Rabbani by a Taliban ‘peace emissary’ provided a serious setback to the process and underlined the roadblocks towards a peace settlement.

The international troop drawdown has added a renewed urgency for a negotiated settlement with the Taliban. In June 2013 Taliban representatives opened an office in Doha, Qatar, which US President Obama described as ‘an important first step toward reconciliation’. Nearly one year after announcing that it was suspending all dialogue with the US, a number of high-ranking Taliban officials travelled to Qatar, the location of the previous talks, apparently in an effort to revive the process. President Karzai opposed the process and declared that the Afghan Government would not take part in peace talks with the insurgents unless they were ‘Afghan-led’. The Doha process was stalled. In February 2014, a number of Taliban fighters were set free from
Bagram prison. The US too, in May 2014, transferred five senior Taliban leaders from Guantánamo Bay to Qatar in return for a US soldier Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl, who was in Taliban custody since June 2009. Under President Ghani, the Afghan government is continuing to make outreach efforts towards the Taliban but the road map of the peace process remains uncertain.

**Economic and Governance**

Isolating or separating the civilians from the warlords, drug lords, and insurgents, and giving them an alternate economic choice is one of the crucial COIN strategies. However, Afghanistan remains heavily dependent on foreign aid. According to the World Bank, Afghanistan receives about $3 billion annually in foreign assistance, which is an increase from $1.3 billion in 2002. The dependence on foreign aid for a rentier state (Rubin, 2002) creates problems of accountability and aid absorption. Afghan government remains incapable of exploiting its mineral and agricultural resources, raise its own revenues, and offset its aid dependence. For this state of affairs, the nature of the delivery of foreign aid assistance remains somewhat responsible.

According to modest estimates, 70 percent of international assistance is channeled through various contracts, subcontracts, embassies, Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), and other forms of alternative delivery mechanisms. Use of subcontractors widened the scope for corruption. In a survey conducted by Integrity Watch Afghanistan (IWA) in May 2008, 64 percent of respondents considered that the aid was marred by some form of corruption and another 60 percent said that more than 40 per cent of aid has been wasted through corruption. 92 percent of the respondents recommended that the international community should spend aid through the government (Torabi and Delesgues, 2008).

Parallel structures of aid delivery, continue to consume substantial amounts of net aid flows. They also undermine institution building processes as well as the credibility of the Afghan government in providing the basic service delivery. The problem in economic coordination among various actors is evident from the fact that multiple donors operate with their own respective notions of development, political agendas, bureaucratic procedures, and inertia. Huge aid commitments have resulted in little difference to the lives of Afghan people. In another IWA survey in 2010, about 50 percent of respondents said corruption was helping the Taliban expand its influence. (Londoño, 2010) Similarly, an earlier study titled ‘Falling Short’ by the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR) revealed that since the ouster of the Taliban regime in late 2001 the international community has pledged some $25 billion, out of which only $15 billion has been delivered. The study highlighted that nearly 40 per cent of the Western funds that are spent on aid projects are returned to the donor countries through fees to contractors and salaries to employees from those countries (Waldman, 2008). This ‘phantom aid’ (Jones, 2006) or flight of aid capital back to donor countries was the highest with the US funded projects.

Progress in building local capacity has been extremely slow and has been impeded by deeply-entrenched corruption, and patronage networks. Furthermore, donors have not been consistent in their willingness to direct funds to the authorities through the trust fund, and the Afghan Government has criticized the practice of the USA and other donors of implementing programmes independently. At the Kabul Conference of July 2010, donors agreed to allocate more of their aid through the Government but this was almost immediately undermined by allegations, in September, of major fraud at the privately-owned Kabul Bank. This resulted in the IMF suspending negotiations on a new funding programme for Afghanistan, and consequently in
donors also being obliged to halt all financial transfers to the Government. However, in November 2011 the IMF approved a new funding programme to support Afghanistan’s economic programme during 2011–14.

Unfortunately, the ongoing security transition process also assumes that Afghanistan will remain an aid-dependent state for another decade. The Bonn conference II of December 2011 had set an extended period of international assistance of 2014–24 terming it the transformational decade. The contours of international assistance and engagement remain unclear. While Afghanistan’s economic growth is certain to suffer over the next several years, there are concerted efforts to buffer a decline in aid with investments designed to build institutional capabilities. As uncertainty of continued foreign assistance and presence looms, Afghanistan witnessed a dip in real estate and flight of capital and trained personnel in 2013-14.

At a donor meeting in Tokyo, Japan, in July 2012, the international community pledged US $16,000m. to Afghanistan until 2015 in order to fund the reconstruction of its economy and necessary reforms. However, over the coming years Afghanistan will have to compensate for the certain shrinkage of external support, particularly from the USA, aid that in 2010–11 totaled $15,700m. At 90% of total public spending, this was virtually the size of Afghanistan’s entire GDP. The greatest concern was that the USA and other sources would make abrupt funding cuts over the next three years, rather than gradual, predictable reductions in non-military assistance. However, the full impact on Afghanistan’s economic growth, fiscal sustainability and service delivery will probably not be apparent until after 2015.

The way forward: Prospects for Regional Cooperation

Amid drawdown of international forces and the overall narrative of despondency, for Afghanistan there exists a window of opportunity in the transformation decade of achieving peace and stability. Regional co-operation has emerged as an important pillar of Afghan foreign policy and the international community’s strategy for the country’s long-term development. In December 2002, the ‘Kabul Declaration on Good-Neighbourly Relations’ sought the commitment of Afghanistan’s neighbouring countries to bilateral relations based on the principles of territorial integrity, mutual respect, friendly relations, cooperation and non-interference in each others’ internal affairs. Four years later, the 2006 London Conference issued the Afghanistan Compact, which reiterated the international community’s commitment to Afghanistan and support to the Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS).

Similarly, in November 2011, the İstanbul Conference for Afghanistan: Security and Cooperation in the Heart of Asia provided another agenda for regional co-operation. It placed Afghanistan at its centre and sought to engage countries like Turkey, China, Russia, Pakistan, Iran, India, Saudi Arabia and the former Soviet Central Asian republics, collectively called Heart of Asia, in co-operation for a peaceful and stable Afghanistan. In June 2012, at a follow up meet in Kabul, supporting countries and organisations reaffirmed the commitments enshrined in the 2002 Kabul Declaration and the principles stipulated in the Istanbul Process.

Such grandiose declarations and their reaffirmation, however, remain far from being implemented. Quick fix solutions and the setting of arbitrary time lines for ‘exit’ have not met with the needs on the ground. This disjuncture runs the inherent danger of reversing the limited gains made as the international community as it hurriedly prepares to disengage. Greader
regional integration is imperative if Afghanistan wants to avoid a severe contraction of its economy. As foreign aid and spending declines in the next few years, the Afghan economy will face not just a shortage of aggregate demand but also a more immediate shortage of foreign exchange. Strategically located between countries with surplus energy resources and others with high energy demands, Afghanistan has the potential of capitalising on its status as a land bridge between Central Asia and South Asia. Stability in Afghanistan will be essential for projects like the Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India (TAPI) natural gas pipeline. If materialised, project would create jobs inside Afghanistan and will raise US$ 100–300 million annually from transit fees, nearly doubling Afghanistan’s current domestic revenue. Trade, transit and regional connectivity would provide revenue, employment and economic opportunities not only to the people of Afghanistan but also to South and Central Asia.

Despite narratives of pessimism and doom-mongering in the international media, the drawdown of international military forces provides a unique opportunity for Afghanistan to pursue the goal of achieving long-term economic progress and stability through the mechanism of regional cooperation. If this is to materialise, the role and support of regional countries- Pakistan, Iran, China, Russia, India and the Central Asian Republics would be crucial. If the economic benefits of regional cooperation are accompanied by incremental steps in confidence building mechanisms, these will contribute to building long-term peace throughout the region. The promotion of inter-regional trade, transit, connectivity and energy pipelines, by capitalising on Afghanistan’s role as a ‘land bridge’, could thus reap huge economic benefits and peace dividend in the region.

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INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTION IN AFGHANISTAN


Received: June, 24th 2015
Revisions Received: Sep, 14th 2015
Post 2014 Spillover Effects of Afghanistan's Crisis on Pakistan's Foreign Policy

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Foreign policy of any country can never be fully controlled by herself. There are always certain non-tangible which directly influences national policies that is geography, demography, economy and environment in the region. Regions like ours which happens to most dense in prevailing environment additional factors like terrorism, instability in Afghanistan, presence of two nuclear powers having history of conflicts further exacerbate the challenges. These factors combined put Pakistan in a catch twenty two. With challenges come to opportunities if played properly we can still accrue benefits to safeguard our national interests. In context of Pak-Afghan; a peaceful and stable Afghanistan is the only interest of Pakistan. More than a Decade US occupation has troubled not only Afghanistan but Pakistan is also the ultimate victim of Afghan fall out. There is escalating militancy in Pakistan due to non-state actors in the shape of Al-Qaeda and Taliban myriad groups. There arise questions that what are Pakistan’s interests in Afghanistan? How Pakistan would safeguard her national and regional interests? What are foreign policy indicators in this scenario? Pakistan policy making elites should direct their course of action and to ensure constructive engagement at that hour. Pakistan should support an Afghan lead and Afghan owned solution for this. Scarlet thread in Pak-Afghan relationship is to have a friendly Afghanistan. It will not only stabilize our internal situation but in future enable Pakistan and India work together improve bilateral relations, which will improve the situation on both eastern and western borders. Furthermore, access to Central Asian Republics will be feasible and China can be more favorable to Pakistan in that context.

Key Words: Foreign policy, security, drawdown, taliban, militancy, national interests.

Pakistan and Afghanistan are intertwined, whose sphere of relations is not only inclusive of neighborhood but encircling the longest border, same ideology, Pashtun ethnicity. Besides the protracted war in Afghanistan, most probably the Jihad against communist forces of Soviet in which Pakistan’s soil sorted out freedom fighters to exonerate Afghanistan from ruthless clutches of the Soviet. Afghanistan is connected with Pakistan in such a way that stability in Pakistan cannot prevail in case of insecurity inside Afghanistan. Peace and stability in Afghanistan is paramount for Pakistan national interest. Pakistan is dependent on Afghanistan for channeling it’s access to not only Central Asian Republics but cordial strategic and economic relations with China are also possible only due to stable Afghanistan (Haq, 2013). Moreover, the bilateral relations can

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take a significant turn by mutual cooperation regarding Gwadar sea Port, Durand Line and Pashtun issue. Furthermore, this ambit encompassed the regional interests and reservations of Pakistan against India while keeping balance of power notion in consideration, and is apprehensive about Iran’s for her instigation of Shia militia in Baluchistan (Hanaur, 2012). Friendly and stable Afghanistan provides depth to Pakistan against India (Amin, 2013).

In the comity of nations every nation grapple to serve her national interests. “National interests is a concept which could be used to describe, explain and assess the foreign policies of nations” (Rosenaus, 1964). National interest is a basis for evaluating the appropriateness of foreign policy. “Each state plots the course it thinks will best serve its interests” (Waltz, 1979). Realists have attributed to the domain of national interests. For Morgenthau, national interests are legitimization of foreign policy while for Kenneth Waltz national interests are survival of state in anarchical world. So far Pakistan interests are contemplated then following grounds are main contours of Pakistan’s foreign policy inside Afghanistan;

**Stable Afghanistan**

Pakistan’s stability is pervasively interlaced to Afghanistan because the ongoing turmoil across the western border has infested militancy and extremism inside Pakistan. One of main reasons of Pakistan insecurity is infiltration of militants across Durand Line. Pakistan has long border with Afghanistan, which is not well-managed and people sometimes move without visa. Some of that movement is healthy while other is unhealthy so the situation in Afghanistan has direct effect on Pakistan. (Khar, 2013) For example people after Swat operation were flee to Afghanistan and Pakistan government of PPP repeatedly asked Afghanistan to handed them over. (Khar, 2013) Therefore Pakistan has always asked neighboring countries to play their role in this regard by fixing intelligence devices, deployment of military check posts on the Afghan side of Durand line so as to curb militant’s infiltration (News Karachi, 2008).

Pakistan is unflinching for having cordial and peaceful relations with Afghanistan. But Afghan Taliban’s infiltration across Durand Line into Pakistan has ratcheted the parameter of stable bilateral relations by escalating militancy in tribal areas. This intricate security situation has been troubling to the country and demand exigency because resultantly it has doubted Pakistan’s role in war on terror. Pakistan has been accused by the US on more than one ground that ISI is backing, nourishing and harboring Taliban. If a realistic look is taking of Pakistan and Afghanistan relations, then it come to the surface that Pakistan and Afghanistan relations have been remained murky due to various reasons, among which Pashtunistan has been one of main troubling aspect since long. On Afghan side, Pashtunistan nationalism is based on argument that Pakistan’s Pashtun are integral part of Afghanistan, furthermore Baluchistan being an outlet of Afghanistan to the Indian Ocean is inevitable to merge with it. Due to these factors Afghanistan had refuted the validity of 1947 referendum and its foreign policy till 1980s revolved around Pashtunistan (Qassem, 2007). Pakistan is averse to the Afghanistan claim on Pashtun inhabitants of Pakistan (Rashid, 2010). In order to settle the issue of Pashtunistan, Pakistan wants client state in Afghanistan because this grave issue can bifurcate Pakistan on the basis of ethnic strife (Weinbaum and Harder, 2008). Pakistan and Afghanistan have common religion, culture, customs and traditions but to the great dismay the superpower involvement in both minor states has upset the apple cart. Undoubtedly, in Pakistan the non-state actors with their external patrons have trembled national security with exacerbated extremism and sectarianism which are the direct fall out of Afghanistan turmoil. Whereas, the US is also dependent on Pakistan’s role for degrading the momentum of Al-Qaeda and other terrorist networks.
Pakistan’s foreign policy in war on terror decades is on head on not only for regional stability and peace but is neutralizing the immediate threats and leverages in Afghanistan from India (Siddiqa, 2010).

Indian Influence in Afghanistan

India has envisaged Afghanistan pivotal significance in its foreign policy after 1990s at the demise of bipolar world structure. Basically, India carves to be most dominant power and player in South Asia and within Indian Ocean basin, to cater for its strategic interests and to grapple with all hurdles in this regard (Fair, 2011). India is farsightedly investing in Afghanistan in order to foster her nexus with Afghanistan, which could make it powerful stake holder at the exit and beyond 2014 (Ghazanfar, 2013). She is Afghanistan fifth largest bilateral donor, who has ventured so many infrastructure related construction projects (Ghazanfar, 2013). Moreover, she is contributing in development of Afghanistan and training Afghan integral security forces. Wherein India has disbursed more than $2 billion in Afghanistan and has strategic ties with Afghanistan, therefore Afghanistan looks up to India for her development (Sherpao, 2013).

As far as the role of India is contemplated then India has always remained averse to Taliban regime and sided along Iran, Tajikistan and Russia to Northern Alliance because Taliban are considered closely allied to Pakistan. India can pose challenge to Pakistan’s foreign policy because both India and Afghanistan are boisterous to Pakistan throughout the history. Southern and South Eastern Afghanistan is known to the Pashtun dominating areas, these appears to be a majority of Pro-Pakistan population , whereas presence of considerable number of Indian consulates on Af-Pak border indicates a certain degree of Indian interests with availability of some liberty of action. India sought proactive statecraft and pro-Indian lobbies in Afghanistan and has been succeeded to the great extent in this regard. It has flourished diplomatic missions in strategically significant areas which are maximizing Indian influence at the expense of Pakistan (Hussain, 2012).

Delhi is covetous to access Central Asia energy market and for an effective trade, transportation and infrastructure in Afghanistan. As China is nightmarish for US in this region but dominant role of India will curtail China influence in South and Central Asia which is desired by US and Delhi (Pant, 2010). On the other hand, Indian hegemonic status in Afghanistan is strategic defeat to Pakistan (Gates, 2009). India reopened embassy in Kabul soon after Taliban was toppled. It has also opened four consulate offices in major Afghan cities of Qandahar, Mazar-e-Sharif, Herat and Jalalabad. Prior to that there were no consular offices.

Furthermore, India is said to be providing funding to Baluch dissident groups for exerting pressure on Pakistan (Rizvi, 2013). India is utilizing consulates in Jalalabad and Kandahar, cities closer to the border, in order to instigate anti-Pakistan feelings in Baluchistan and FATA (Schaffer, 2011). Her interference and involvement in Baluchistan is a formidable threat. There is RAW, CIA, MOSSAD combined centre in Mazari Sharif which is very active in Baluchistan and had operated in Swat (Ghazanfar, 2013). This alliance is still playing in North and South Waziristan. It has been clearly manifested from the weapons recovered at Swat operation, which were labeled as ‘Made in Banaras’ (Ghazanfar, 2013). Islamabad objective is to prevent India from strengthening its strategic interests in Afghanistan, and to establish pro-Pakistan political set up in Afghanistan (Arnoldy, 2011). There is no doubt, that Indian presence in Afghanistan creates problems of many kinds in Pakistan. If India is hostile on Kashmir border, how can it be friendly on Afghanistan border?
Pakistan can adopt following policy options to counter India in Afghanistan. It can impede Afghanistan export to India through Pakistan, can abort pipeline construction project among Turkamanistan, Afghanistan and India, to foster bilateral pipeline project with Iran, further to invigorate military, commercial, infrastructure development with China and to the most constraining will be blocking the US convoy (Fair, 2011). Pakistan can render diplomatic offensive against Indian presence. Media campaign can be launched to expose India’s sinister designs in Afghanistan. Pressure on the Kabul government to control Indian activities can also be helpful. Furthermore, in case India deploys military forces in Afghanistan then Pakistan should have security options ready to deal with it (Mir, 2013).

**China Factor**

China has great market in Afghanistan and is important stake holder inside the latter. As consider the US response on China’s leverage in Afghanistan and Pakistan, then the US is comfortable with Chinese contribution to the region such as investment, civilian capacity and aid in Northern distribution network for NATO-Led ISAF. There is consideration that China can play a pivotal role in bringing Pakistan to the point of rendering headway in subjugating insurgency emanating from western border rather than confined only to India and eastern border. But this notion of the US has gone awry due to Chinese negligence. It is palpable that China can exercise leverage by asking Pakistan to settle militancy and extremist threats, which have been arise from Central and South Asia. Pakistan will concede with it hence these threats are detrimental to both Pakistan and China internal security.

China is hungry for natural resources. Pakistan should cooperate with China because its natural resources are exploited in China. Pakistan will provide transit route for carrying it to china and Pakistan can assist in setting up natural resource extraction industries as well (Noorani, 2013). China has covertly requested Pakistan to curb Uighur separatists in Pakistan tribal areas. China is preferring Pakistan interests as China is not opening Wakhan passage to NATO because it will bereft Pakistan from revenue generation (Toby and Nicholas, 2015). China is uncomfortable over Indian leverage in Afghanistan. However, in post withdrawal China will cautious to own security and will try to be neutral towards all regional countries.

The huge investment in Afghanistan has been carried out by China in order to be fully benefited by Afghanistan natural resources as Chirtian Le Miere, Jane’s Intelligence Review editor stated China is very interested in Cheap resources of neighbouring country and is already with lion investment $3.5 billion the project of Aynak, fields of copper which is situated in the province of Logar.

China does have its own regional and global concerns and is not oblivious of the challenges resulting from the US-led uni-polarity or its ‘pivotal’ ascendency in Asian regions. For this purpose the establishment of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was a step towards creating a regional bloc to withstand American ascendancy in this region (Ahmad, 2013). Chinese economy is already nightmare for the US because the US economy has come to the shutdown.

**Access to CARs**

Regional countries are striving to have market in these countries. Pakistan is connected to CARs through channels of history, common tradition, religion and culture. Pakistan is in dire need of oil and natural gas and central Asian Repulics are abounds with mineral resources so
Pakistan through trade agreement can import such commodities from these states (Ahmad, 2013). Pakistan can be shortest outlet for landlocked CARs to connect them to world economy and to Arabian Sea. CARs could provide its mineral treasure like gas, oil and electricity to Pakistan in order to recover this dearth to her. Pakistan throughout its history has grappled to have cordial political, economic and social relations with CARs on the basis of sovereign equality, non-interference in each other’s affairs and shared interests (Javed, 2002). 

There are myriad hurdles in Pakistan access to CARs market as for instance economic factors like infirm industrial infrastructure, literacy lower ratio, no advance in science and technology and financial turbulence. There are other competitors in this region as India, Iran, Turkey who are trying to surpass each other. India is main hurdle in this background which is favorite to CARs than Pakistan. To cap it all, India is successful in creating strained atmosphere for Pakistan in this area. Pakistan has no railway link with CARs. Afghanistan’s imbroglio has hampered Pakistan economic agreements with CARs and still its fulfillments are connected with peace and stability in Afghanistan (Javed, 2002).

**Rapprochement with Iran**

Pakistan foreign policy stands for friendly relations with all regional states. While engaged in settlement of Afghanistan turmoil, Pakistan has to safeguard regional interests. In Afghanistan’s perspective there arise various concerns and interests of all the neighboring countries. For instance, Iran whose foreign policy is dominated by two stances, one is to seek political leadership while semi-monarchy exists recently, the second is resistance against Islamic revolutionary power (Todge and Redman, 2011). Pakistan depends on Iran for import of energy in the shape of Iran Pakistan Pipeline (IPP), which is pending but determined to be fulfilled by Pakistan’s administration. It is about $ 7.5 billion pipeline, which would facilitate Pakistan with 7.8 billion cubic meter of gas from Iran’s South Pars gas field, both countries are planning to have trade from scant $ 1 billion in 2011 to $ 5 billion in 2015 (Tehran Times, 2011). Pakistan Iran relations are not so smooth due to Sunni-Shia differences and above all favor to different sects in Afghanistan. Afghanistan’s stability is conflated with Iran’s, and the latter is averse to Taliban rule which is likely to become imminent either by chaos or by peace talks. In that aspect Iran, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia relations have remained acrimonious throughout the history. Iran has aligned with Northern Alliance by all means whether political, economic and strategic. Moreover, Taliban have worked for degrading Shia Hazara minority as have trampled them in Mazar-e-Sharif in 1998 (Toby and Nicholas, 2011). Iran has supported the temporary Karzai ruling and is supporting the Kabul government since then. In order to trouble the US in Afghanistan, Iran have disbursed million of dollars to Karzai and own officials there. According to New York 700,000 has been paid to Karzai, which has been conceded with gratitude in October 2010 (Filkins, 2010).

Iran is cautious about Pakistan and Afghanistan new trends. Moreover, Iran is hostile to the US/NATO presence on Afghanistan soil, which has trembled security and for that cause Iran is supporting even the Taliban with latest equipment (Toby and Nicholas, 2011). Iran is dense in Herat, which was previously her integral part and is supporting it with political and economic aids. CARs and Persian Gulf are alluring to Iran through Afghanistan. Iran can be side lined either by the US sanctions or by Afghan alternative trade route. Moreover, the Pakistan and Saudi Arabia’s initiated peace talks with Taliban is also adverse to Iran. In 2014 the least US soldiers left over will induce Iran to support Afghanistan central government. Iran should ensure all inclusive set up based on regional consensus because the stability of Afghanistan is in interests of all regional countries.
Way Forward

The aforementioned policy contours of Pakistan are troubled due to turmoil in Afghanistan. The very first requirement is restoration of peace in Afghanistan. According to Brig. Asad Munir, peace in Afghanistan can only be ensured by Afghan Loya Jirga, a constitutional forum (Munir, 2013). While the rest of the countries like the US, Pakistan, Turkey, UK, Saudi Arabia and partly UAE should be in cooperation to find a solution for Afghanistan after the US pull out (Munir, 2013). This Peace Council must bring all the groups on the same page to ensure reintegration because exclusion of any group will vapor the reconciliation process into the air. Albeit Taliban envisaged this Council as ineffective, incredulous and predicted its ultimate failure on the longer run (Yusafand Zaidi, 2011) but the peace talks with Taliban is the lynchpin, the only way leads to stability.

As for as negotiation is contemplated, then there are three levels for negotiation; internally amongst Afghans, secondly with Taliban and thirdly regional stakeholders could struck a peace deal to escape the repercussions (Jarvenpaa, 2011). Because not only the local stakeholders but regional states could also play their role to restore peace (Dobbins; Shinn, 2011). For exit there is need to negotiate with Taliban because more than a decade military engagement has been unable to subdue the Taliban insurgency. It is apparent from the US recent strategy because when Obama talked about political strategy then he was referring negotiation with Taliban (Dobbins; Shinn, 2011). The U.S decision to bring about a drawdown of its forces from Afghanistan in 2014 also implies meeting the demand of the Taliban for a full withdrawal of foreign forces half-way. Accumulatively these developments are creating an environment in which restoration of peace in Afghanistan through dialogue with the Taliban has a chance. But only a chance, the availing of which would require some basic agreement among the power contenders and stake holders inside Afghanistan and imaginative diplomacy on the part of the U.S/West and neighbors of Afghanistan. Moreover, neutral foreign policy should be adopted towards its neighboring countries, an effective administration, propaganda and above all strong diplomatic relations with economically strong countries are viable policy options for Afghanistan. An ethnic strife has undermined any headway in both political and military aspects so an intra-Afghan dialogue should be arranged that brings together various ethnic groups like the Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras and anti-Taliban or at least moderate Pakhtuns to agree on power-sharing arrangements and changes in the constitutional structure (Sheikh, 2012).

As far as role of Pakistan is considered then Pakistan staunchly advocates Afghanistan led initiative because only stable Afghanistan can serve Pakistan’s interests and escape her from two frontline hostile borders. According to Pakistan former foreign minister Hina Rabbani Khar, their government has ensured Afghanistan that Pakistan is part of solution not part of problem. (Khar, 2013) As regard Pakistan political role in Afghanistan then Pakistan should cultivate relations with whosoever is in power in Kabul and stay away from direct involvement in Afghan politics. Pakistan has no other option rather than to be neutral in Afghanistan issue and with no favorite group there (Pervaiz, 2013).

Recently Afghanistan’s president Ashraf Ghani is more favorable to Pakistan and in this regard many positive trends have been emerged. Pakistan’s foreign policy is recently with indicators that Pakistan should deal with all Afghan factions on equal basis whether it is Taliban, Tajik, Uzbek or Hazaras and it has already become policy part. From Pakistan side the military institution is with leading role in this regard due to adhoc basis arrangement.
EFFECTS OF AFGHANISTAN’S CRISIS ON PAKISTAN’S FOREIGN POLICY

Not only politically but economically also Pakistan should play her role. It can use its economic ties, transit trade and ethnic ties to maintain multifaceted and mutually beneficial relations with Afghanistan (Rizvi, 2013). Both countries should flourish economic agreements and Pakistan should ensure maximum economic cooperation with Afghanistan.

Pakistan has great influence in Afghanistan and the US is aware of Pakistan’s significance in the region. The US interests in Afghanistan are not secure without Pakistan’s assistance.

As stated already that national interests of Pakistan and Afghanistan are interconnected and in the post withdrawal scenario three main factors will bind them close to each other; firstly, the advent of China as major actor in the game plan of the region will serve as a counterweight to the presence of India and the US. Secondly, the geo-strategic location of Pakistan makes it indispensable for Afghanistan. Thirdly, Gwader port will serve as the nearest trade terminal for Afghanistan.

In view of these facts, Pakistan will become essential for Afghanistan. Development of good relations will be in the interest of both countries. India will be eliminated from the scene sooner or later since it has no land link with Afghanistan (Haq, 2013). In Afghan backdrop our preference should be a twin track strategy. While improving relations with Afghanistan and the region, Pakistan should also make efforts to restrict Indian access in Afghanistan and simultaneously facilitate the US exit strategy from the region.

Pakistan’s interests in Afghanistan can be best served if it stretched beyond security to bilateral trade, energy and reconstruction projects (Jinnah Institute Report, 2010). As the Gwader Port develops it will serve not only Afghanistan but the entire Central Asian Republics. As such it is Afghanistan’s stability that is dependent on Pakistan. With the completion of Gwader-Kashger railway line, a Pak-China joint project is presently under construction, Pakistan will not have to depend on Afghanistan for its contacts with CARs and China. Karakoram Highway is being upgraded for the same reason.

It will be a golden opportunity for Pakistan to pursue an independent foreign policy in the region keeping in view its strategic location. Almost all countries of the region will be dependent on Pakistan for establishing social, political and economic relations with the rest of the world. Pakistan will be able to reach European markets in exchange for the trade opportunities it will provide to them for CARs.

We have to take serious steps to improve our relations with India otherwise it will continue to engage us on both the eastern and western borders besides creating internal problems for us which can threaten the stability of Pakistan. We should not forget what happened in East Pakistan in 1971 and what is now happening in Baluchistan (Jinnah Institute Report, 2010).

Afghanistan can be a conduit of oil and gas to Central Asia and Iran. This advantage can be reaped by Pakistan and CARs through a stable Afghanistan. Pakistan is of pivotal value due to deep sea port in Gwadar. If Baluchistan remained stable in security terms then it’s an important channel to expansion of economic ties and cooperation with Central Asia and Pakistan would be an energy corridor for the region.
Pakistan’s relations with CARs need to be developed further. The huge Central Asian land mass should be linked to Gwadar via Afghanistan. It is essential for peace that foreign forces exit Afghanistan, then Central Asia, Afghanistan trade route will flourish. Secondly, Central Asian states can join western China so trade and transit can take place through Kashgar – Gwadar corridor. The future of Central Asia and Pakistan are clearly linked.

**Conclusion**

The US is not altogether going to withdraw from Afghanistan as there is no apparent victory and US interests in South Asia are still hang in the balance. Taliban force has been degraded but still they are not in mode to comply with the US terms and conditions for negotiations. The US is likely for some military engagement beyond 2014.

If the US is only keen on stabilizing Afghanistan then a resolution to the conflict is possible. The US should be seeking, ideally, to achieve the following objectives; no foreign militants in Afghanistan, no more use of Afghanistan soil against any other country, progress towards pluralism, protection of minorities and to ensure human rights. The resistance in Afghanistan is prepared to go along with all these conditions. Pakistan should play a role in bringing a consensus around these points. Pakistan, rather than being obsessed with India’s role should focus on resolving the conflict.

Pakistan’s foreign policy should be based on that scenario on following basis; non-interference in Afghanistan, cooperate and facilitate the US exit, to enhance diplomatic relations with Iran and to be on friendly terms with China, India and Russia. Only stable Afghanistan can ensure the fulfillment of policy contours of Pakistan.

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Received: April, 20th, 2015
Revisions Received: Sep, 14th, 2015
Current Challenges and Future Settlement Opportunities in Afghanistan

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Afghanistan has been subject to occupation, invasion, civil war and conflict for almost thirty years. The events that have taken place in Afghanistan have not merely impacted on the region, they have engulfed it. Although thirteen years have passed since the start of the USA’s operation in Afghanistan, scholars still discuss its internal and external ramifications, and the prospective developments in the country after the withdrawal of the US forces. This paper seeks to evaluate the extent to which the USA’s operation and withdrawal plan have contributed to the current challenges and potential futures for Afghanistan. It takes into consideration the internal and external factors that impact on the stability of the political environment in the region; and proposes foresights of the possible scenarios for future state formation and political (re)orientation in Afghanistan. In conclusion, the paper suggests that that the withdrawal plan of the US forces in Afghanistan should be reconsidered as the continuance of instability in the country is likely to have a negative impact on NATO’s effectiveness. It also postulates that the regional powers should cooperate in the containment of problems in Afghanistan and reinforcement of the reconstruction of the country in order to build enduring peace in the region.

Key Words: ANSF, US withdrawal plan, instability, regional powers, state formation, Taliban

To fully understand this debate a historical analysis of Afghanistan must be undertaken. In 334 BC, Alexander the Great managed to invade neighbouring Iran in six months, whereas it took him almost three years to achieve dominance over the lands of Afghanistan. Britain, whose

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domain was so far reaching that it was said that the sun never sets in the British Empire, attempted to invade Afghanistan three times, all to no avail. As a matter of fact, in the first war, almost fifteen thousand British soldiers were killed. The Soviet Union was the next key state to seek to control Afghanistan, but had to call their invasion to an end after losing fifteen thousand people in ten years. This invasion without doubt dealt a big blow to the “Communist Bloc” and the Soviet Union has since dissolved.

This history begs the question of whether the USA’s invasion of Afghanistan was to be any different. Has “Operation Enduring Freedom” (OEF-A) really brought permanent freedom to Afghanistan? Without a doubt, these questions will continue to be asked for the foreseeable future. In analysing Afghanistan’s position, it is important to examine the possible scenarios for the future of the country and the surrounding region once the transformation process has been completed. What will the main policy decisions of the regional powers entail? What will the impact of the results be on the security architecture and unity of the West?

The aim of this paper is to analyse the internal and external impacts of the prospective developments in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of the US forces. This includes the current challenges in Afghanistan, primarily the future role of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), which are a major component of the USA’s withdrawal plan. Along with the evaluation of the role of a wide range of internal dynamics, this paper also focuses on the external forces. This includes the regional powers that are susceptible to the after-effects of the US withdrawal plan, and the context in which they will take part in affecting the stability of the political environment in the region. This paper concludes with foresights of the possible scenarios for future state formation and political (re)orientation in Afghanistan.

The withdrawal plan of the USA and the Afghan National Security Forces

There are three main reasons why Afghanistan is chosen as a case study. The first being that throughout history the strategies of great powers such as Britain, the Soviet Union and the USA, have involved the spread of their power in Central Asia through establishing a firm control over Afghanistan. Today, the control of Afghanistan not only results in the spreading of power, but also the ability to oversee China, Pakistan, India and Iran. These countries are considered to be crucial nuclear powers with respect to political, economic and global security. It can be argued that the inclusion of Western Turkestan states to this analysis would also be beneficial in gaining a better understanding of the power dynamics of the region.

Secondly, along with the military capabilities and resources of Afghanistan, its geopolitical position in the middle of three major cultural basins – Islam, Hinduism and China – indisputably provides Afghanistan the ability to affect geo-cultural dynamics.

Finally, Afghanistan, as an intersection point of the three main transit routes from Asia to the South, along with the Balkans, the Caucasus and Central Asia, has great importance geographically in the movement of petroleum and natural gas resources from the Caspian Basin to the Indian Ocean. This, in turn, highlights the necessity to establish control over its territory.

Today, the international community is predominantly focused on issues in Syria and Yemen. However, the release of Afghanistan as an unstable country, by the withdrawal of the USA, will cause more severe regional and global problems. These problems are not easy to tackle. In that respect, the main debate is whether the ANSF are ready to control the whole country.
Although the withdrawal plan of the USA seems to be specific to Afghanistan, the plan has wider regional and global impacts.

The USA, arguably the principal actor in instigating instability in Afghanistan, has begun to withdraw without achieving its goal of bringing enduring freedom to the people of Afghanistan. As per the security agreement signed between the USA and Afghanistan, the USA began to withdraw 41,000 of its troops. The agreement was to remove all but 12,000 foreign soldiers associated with NATO and its allies responsible for the training and support of the ANSF. Since this agreement was made, the President of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani paid an official visit to the USA and renegotiated the number of US troops to be maintained until the end of 2015. Subsequent to this new agreement, it is stated that the USA will increase the number of troops it is committing to Afghanistan as part of the NATO force to around 9800, instead of the original lower figure of 5500 (Bowman, 2015). Although both Presidents agreed to slow down the withdrawal of the US troops, they also declared that the remaining forces’ remit would only extend to training and counterterrorism activities, with the intention of reinforcing the military capabilities of the ANSF. They would not be carrying out offensive combat missions (Ahmed & Goldstein, 2015).

On the other hand, one of the most important, as yet unresolved, problems in Afghanistan is ensuring the ANSF have the ability to protect and guarantee the unity of its country. At the NATO Summit in 2010, where the withdrawal plans were discussed for the first time, there was a strong consensus and political support for the finalisation of the passing of responsibility from the foreign military forces to the Afghan Army and police. However, the reality was a very different story. There is a great disparity between the opinion of the Afghans and the Western powers with respect to the situation on the ground in Afghanistan.

The Afghan forces have drastically failed in their independent attempts to prevent suicide attacks; many lives have been lost as a result. This outcome points to the fact that the insufficient levels of able personnel and the lack of necessary resources are of great concern for Afghanistan.

It was decided at the most recent NATO Summit in Wales, that the allies will provide financial support worth 4.1 billion dollars annually for use within the security organisations of Afghanistan. However, this does not meet the annual cost of the Afghan Army, which is nearly 6 billion dollars. If the security situation allowed, it was intended that the number of Afghan military personnel would be reduced from 325,000 to 230,500 (Ferris-Rotman, 2013). Due to the effects of the most recent conflicts in the Middle East, this reduction of ANSF numbers has come to a halt. Instead, USA officials, including the Secretary of State John Kerry and Defence Secretary Ash Carter, declared that there has been a series of agreements that will lead to the increase of the ANSF personnel to 352,000 (Shinkman, 2015).

In spite of these agreements, it is predicted that the unwarranted distribution of the financial resources among Afghan soldiers, will cause an average of 63,000 to leave the Army annually (Grare, 2014: 2). This situation directly impacts on the ability of the Army to carry out its duty, and raises a real concern that these trained soldiers could join other forces.

In addition to these problems, the Afghan Army does not have any direct air support, nor does it have an intelligence service. When the inadequate logistics are also taken into consideration, the reality of the Afghan Army’s current situation becomes discernible. Although
the Afghan Army continues to have the responsibility for the security of Afghanistan, it is not difficult to foresee that they will be incapable of controlling the whole country. If they cannot act as a strong deterrent, then Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, will undoubtedly be frail, exposed and defenceless.

The regional impact of the (in)stability of Afghanistan

In light of these internal and external dynamics, and the political quarrelling in Afghanistan, it can be deduced that any security development at domestic level will be susceptible to external political influence, primarily from Pakistan, but also other countries in the region such as Iran, India, Russia, China and many others in Central Asia.

Pakistan; a lone country

The origin of Pakistani political influence in Afghanistan can be traced back to the 1980s. The main aim for Pakistan is to establish amicable and peaceful relations with Kabul, particularly focusing on border management whilst protecting the Afghan refugee presence in Pakistan. However, the border is not currently recognised by Kabul. The border, also known as the Durand Line, was drawn by Britain and is an unrealistic border in demographical, social, ethnic and tribal senses, underpinning the current conflicts in the region.

This border has not been changed since it was first created by the British Empire and has led to major problems in the region. The border region is largely rough, mountainous terrain with a harsh climate which makes it difficult to provide control and security (Stratfor, 2008). Furthermore, as the border passes through the middle of the Pashtun community, the legitimacy of the border can be called into question. It is important to note that the Pashtun population in Pakistan is higher than it is in Afghanistan. The border has never been taken seriously by the Pashtun community living on either side of the line and this has made it difficult to prevent movement across the border. The disregard for the border among Pashtun communities in Afghanistan and Pakistan, along with the terrain and weather conditions, makes it impossible to carry out an effective border control (Karaca, 2011).

The failure to provide border security for Pakistan is a concern, not only due to threats such as drug, arms and human trafficking, but also its combat with Tehrik-e Taliban. The lack of border control poses a great internal security problem for Pakistan, but the main priority for Pakistan is minimising the threat this border poses for India. For this reason, there are external powers, led by the USA, pressuring Pakistan to deploy additional military power on the Afghan border; this additional military requirement cannot be met by Pakistan. Regardless of Pakistan’s ability to provide a greater border presence, Pakistan believes that further control could put pressure on the Pashtun community, leading to disorder within Pakistan.

Pakistan is currently trying to prevent a possible unification of the Afghan Taliban and the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan. This explains Pakistan’s reluctance to assault the Afghan Taliban; and they instead attempt to bring them to the negotiation table. Nevertheless, even if a workable relationship is achievable, the emergence of Afghanistan under the influence of the Taliban could be a great threat for establishing ‘Pashtunistan’ in the future. Moreover, Pakistan is fearful of the possible manipulation of the Pakistan Taliban by the Afghan Taliban and the Indian intelligence services.¹

¹ For further information see (Rashid, 2011: 305-317).
For Islamabad, the instability in Afghanistan being controllable, combined with the low density of conflicts are reason enough for the prevention of the establishment of ‘Pashtunistan’ as a separate state. This would suggest that the stability of Afghanistan is more important to Pakistan than it is to Afghanistan’s other neighbours. On the other hand, Pakistan’s promise to the Northern Alliance to deter a possible Taliban intervention in the North, with the acceptance of the Taliban’s domination in the South, actually serves for its desire to prevent the Taliban’s overall domination in Afghanistan. In turn, this prevents the Pashtun community from achieving the power that Pakistan is so fearful of (Grare, 2004).

Furthermore, this policy ensures India’s influence over Kabul is not strengthened. Conversely, it also causes setbacks for Pakistan; Iran, Tajikistan and even Uzbekistan can potentially increase their effectiveness in the North by struggle or mutual consent to mediate with the Taliban which could result in the isolation of Pakistan.

**Iran; an active player**

Iran saw the second highest influx of immigrants after the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1979. In contrast to Pakistan, Iran has never exploited its own land for resistance and insurgency.

Iran strongly believes that the USA, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have created a situation that allows the Taliban to seize power in order to weaken Iran’s regional power. However, it can be argued that the conduct of the Taliban has widened the sphere of influence of Iran over Shiites in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Nonetheless, the policy pursued over Khazarians has negatively affected Iran’s potential to build positive relations with other groups. Whilst Iran antagonizes the US military presence in Afghanistan, it does not want the Taliban to re-seize power. This situation puts Iran somewhere between a rock and a hard place. For the time being, the US presence is the fundamental guarantee of the Taliban’s failure to take control. It can be argued that it is imperative for both the USA and Iran to prevent the country from being presided over by the Taliban and turned into a safe haven for terrorist groups (Nader et al., 2014).

Although the turmoil created by the civil unrest in the Arab world, particularly in Syria, is primarily a threat to Iran; it has also created an opportunity for improved relations with the West. Iran has been cut off from the outside world by sanctions since the Iranian revolution in 1979, but there have been opportunities to build a relationship with the West through nuclear negotiations and the combined fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Given this, it can be argued that the relationship that Iran has built with the USA through the joint fight against ISIS can also contribute to a combined working relationship to help improve the situation in Afghanistan.

One of the most striking recent developments is the result of the 6+1 talks that led to the peaceful resolution of Iran’s nuclear programme (Borger & Lewis, 2015). As a result of this agreement, Iran is exempt from the economic sanctions previously enforced by the West. Now that Iran is no longer reliant on its close economic relationship with Pakistan, it is willing to isolate Pakistan on the issue of Afghanistan.

The conclusion of the nuclear negotiations with Iran was a much awaited landmark for all of the major international actors. The unique element to the nuclear talks is the compulsion for the West and Iran to cooperate. This cooperation is critical given the current climate in the Middle
East, particularly the threat levied by ISIS both in Syria and Iraq. Furthermore, if the negotiations were not to be successfully concluded, then the internal dynamics in both Afghanistan and Pakistan could continue to deteriorate. However, most recently on 14 July 2015, the world powers have reached a deal with Iran on limiting the country’s nuclear ability in return for the lifting of international oil and economic sanctions. The deal is widely accepted as a “historic” deal that not only opens “new chapter” in Iran’s relations with the world (BBC News, 2015) but also makes future cooperation between Iran and the USA more likely on global and regional security matters.

In light of these developments, it can be argued that Iran is one of the crucial actors in shaping the future of Afghanistan. This is highlighted by Iran’s immense influence over Tajik and Khazarian communities within the northern groups, despite the formation of a Taliban sympathising Afghan government in the aftermath of the US withdrawal. In fact one could conclude that this influence is more important given the current Afghan governance. A reason for the influence of Iran on the Khazarian community is the ethnic demographics of their own state, with a large Shia sect and that the official language of Iran is the Khazarian native tongue: Persian. Due to this link between the nations, a peaceful settlement that does not involve Iran will most certainly be deficient.

India; a role model or not?

India is considered to be one of the key states that try to exert influence over Afghanistan. New Delhi yearns for Afghanistan to be a trade bridge between Central Asia and South Asia for the transportation of Caspian energy resources. Nonetheless, it is among New Delhi’s intentions to give support to the democratic process in Afghanistan, as they believe that their own multicultural social structure and democracy can serve as a role model for the future of Afghanistan. Therefore, India chooses to ignore that the Afghan community is not keen on accepting any different model of state because of their own geography and cultural heritage.

The ignorance of the same truth by the West could make the Pashtun communities think that there will be consensus between India and the West. This situation in turn makes India vulnerable to the influence of Iran on the Indian Khazarian and Tajik communities. The improving relations between the USA and Iran also impact upon India, as they bring Iran to the table as one of the vital actors in the resolution of the conflict in Afghanistan; this in turn positions the country at the centre of the resettlement of Afghanistan after the withdrawal of the USA, reducing India’s own level of influence.

Although the withdrawal of US and NATO forces could pave the way for Indian control in Afghanistan, there is a high risk that in the aftermath of the withdrawal, the Taliban will seize both power and Pakistani support. This would cause India and Pakistan to be on opposite sides once again, just as they are emerging from clashes of religion - Islam and Hinduism and economic “asymmetry”. Of course there are also the ever present scars as a result of the “legacy of the trauma of partition” (Hussain, 2011: 319-347). Another important factor that should be considered by India is the potential settling of jihadist groups in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. This would pose a direct threat to the security of India, as these groups could become involved in stoking up the fires of old in Kashmir.

Russia; an untrustworthy power

Russia is seen as an untrustworthy power by almost all concerned due to the policies it pursued as part of the Soviet Union in the periods before and after the invasion of Afghanistan.
Since the Soviet retreat from Afghanistan, it appeared that Russia had chosen to be abstinent from forming and implementing policy on Afghanistan. However, since 2007 Russia has once again started to pursue an active role with respect to Afghanistan. This change in the attitude of Russia can be explained by the shifting internal dynamics in Afghanistan.

Due to the worsening security situation in Afghanistan, it became advantageous for Russia to insert influence domestically, and increase its prominence internationally. For instance, it can be asserted that Russia greatly benefits from refining its relations with the national government in Afghanistan, whilst at the same time making successful attempts at building coalitions with the Western powers. It also intends to minimise the influence of other adversaries, such as the USA and Pakistan, both of which are inclined to act in ways that inhibit Russian interests (Menkiszak, 2011: 7).

Russia believes that the repercussions of the military operations taking place in Afghanistan, legitimised and legalised by the West as “humanitarian action-enduring freedom”, cause a great threat to Russia. In every instance of the USA interfering and then withdrawing from a region, the region is left vulnerable to fundamentalism and extremism. For this exact reason, like Iran, Russia is concerned by the possibility of the Taliban taking control of Afghanistan. Particularly the opportunity for Afghanistan to then become so unstable in the aftermath of the US withdrawal, that the country becomes open to being an established training basin for terrorism. This could influence the Muslim community within the Russian Federation and lead to greater recruitment of Russian Muslims to these terrorist groups.

Furthermore, Russia is also vulnerable to becoming the biggest market for the Afghan drug trade. This poses a great threat to the young Russian generation. For these reasons, Russia has become more interested in reconciliation with the Afghans, with a view to influencing their governance to protect Russia against these threats. In that respect, it is highly probable that Russia could offer support and take on responsibilities and duties approved by the UN to be conducted by the international community.

It is likely that Russia would decide to support the Afghan government, whilst building contacts with the representatives of the former military front, the Northern Alliance, which includes Tajik warlords and the leaders of a number of other ethnic groups. It is also expected Russia will attempt to develop contacts with the Pashtun principals and establish a dialogue with forces in support of the Taliban. Moreover, Russia could sustain and even enhance its support of the national government and international actors to help secure Afghanistan’s security, conditional upon certain political and financial benefits. It is also conceivable that Russia could push the West, primarily the USA, to reduce their military presence in Central Asia either by collaborating with or by pressurising them. What’s more, the other subjects Russia will aim to influence across Central Asia are the rise of Islamic radicalism, the strengthening of its security presence and the substantiation of the controlled destabilisation of the region (Menkiszak, 2011).

Nonetheless, it is still unknown to the international community whether the war in Ukraine and the subsequent repeat isolation of Russia from the West will affect Russia’s compliant attitude towards international policy on Afghanistan.

On the other hand, Russia is satisfied with the instability in Afghanistan as it prevents the energy resources in Central Asia from being transported to the Indian subcontinent. This
increases Russia’s importance as an energy supplying state in the region. This domination further strengthens its position against the West concerning the Ukrainian crisis, as it is not just Central Asia, but also large portions of Europe that now rely on Russian energy resources.

**China; new actor**

China is predominantly concerned with the instability in Afghanistan due to its direct impact on its most important ally in the region, Pakistan. Furthermore, China assumes that if Pakistan becomes subject to a western orientated intervention, the fundamentalist movements could expand their influence over East Turkistan. The spread of conflict in Afghanistan to the Middle East could cause great concern to China, ascribed to its effect on energy imports.

Like Russia, China benefits from the instability in Afghanistan as it prevents the transportation of energy resources and trade from Central Asia to the Indian subcontinent. This leads to Central Asian energy resources and trade being redirected to China. It also has the benefit of limiting the trade relations of India with Central Asian countries causing India’s development to be hindered. This increases China’s status by reducing the number of rapidly developing Central Asian nations.

To summarise, like Russia and Pakistan, China is content with the controllable instability of Afghanistan. However, China is nervous of the USA’s presence in the region due to its ability to affect the control of energy resources to simultaneously benefit the US and detriment China politically, economically and militarily (Rafique, 2003: 56). This concern is balanced by China’s awareness of the potential uncontrollable nature of the instability in Afghanistan if the USA fully withdraws.

**Central Asian countries; ineffective actors**

The positions of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan on Afghanistan are almost identical. These countries want Afghanistan to reach political stabilisation so as to develop a safe region for trading routes and pipelines. For this reason, they support India in attempting to strengthen Afghanistan’s independence of Russia and China.

Nonetheless, drug trafficking and fundamentalism originating in Afghanistan can deeply influence the stability of Central Asian countries. The biggest problem for the administrations of these countries is the presence and activities of the fundamentalist Islamic groups. For this reason, the withdrawal of the USA could potentially create a safe haven for these groups to settle, from which they could spread their influence across the whole region. As a matter of fact, even the countries that don’t share borders with Afghanistan, such as Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, are troubled by these fundamentalist movements.

**Foresights**

**Continuation of the current situation by peace building**

There are two main features of the continuation of the current (reasonably) stable situation in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of the USA. These can be identified as the Taliban taking an active role in the government and also non-Taliban parties checking the Taliban’s power by joining them in a coalition government. It can be argued that without building a consensus with the Taliban, it is highly unlikely that security can be provided to reach the end goal of enduring peace and stability in the region.
For this political solution to be possible, an agreement with the Taliban must be formed by means of negotiation. On the evidence of recent history, it seems it is impossible to rid Afghanistan of the Taliban; instead, a consensus with the Taliban emerges as the best possible option for peace building.

With this in mind, the central government and foreign powers negotiate with the Taliban, encouraging it to actively take part in the governance of the country in the future. In the meantime, it has been shown that the current government fails to present a strong leadership representing all of the people and parties of Afghanistan.

It is difficult to conceive that all of Afghanistan will support the Taliban taking an active role in government. Some of the ethnic, political and social groups of Afghanistan were damaged under Taliban rule. Whilst the Taliban has been out of the political picture, these groups have become militarily stronger. This makes it seem impractical to try and get these groups to support the Taliban’s place at the negotiation table.

The trust of these groups in the Taliban can only begin being built if the resistance to their place in the political negotiations comes to a halt. For this reason, it is highly important that the USA continues to allocate resources and provide training to the ANSF, at least until the end of the resistance. During the most recent visit of President Ghani and the Chief Executive, Abdullah Abdullah, to the USA, the White House pledged to continue to provide financial support to the ANSF until at least 2017 (Mason and Rampton, 2015). Nonetheless, the unpredictability of the post-2017 period could lead to a degree of instability within the central government, leaving it open to the influence of the external actors in the region.

Aside from these resource allocations, it is also necessary to give durable financial assistance to Afghanistan in order to provide development in important areas such as education and health. It is not clear in the latest agreement for how long the assistance and support will continue.

When all elements are considered, it is unrealistic to expect peace in Afghanistan in the short term.

**A disintegrated Afghanistan**

Generally in Afghanistan, particularly during the Soviet occupation and consequent civil war, political parties were based on ethnicity. Regions where one ethnicity was dominant, and therefore the relevant political party had large support, tended to be controlled by armed groups linked to the political party. In spite of there being several examples of these groups forming their own autonomous governmental regions across the country in the early 1990s, there has never been concerns that the country would disintegrate into smaller states (Karaca, 2011).

Modern day Afghanistan is divided into two parts – North and South – by invisible borders. Whilst the northern groups support the presence of the US and NATO forces in the country as a protective shield against the Taliban, the Pashtun community in the South are generally against the presence of western powers in Afghanistan.

However, the withdrawal of US forces could accelerate the process of disintegration in Afghanistan. The potential spread of instability and terrorism, combined with the nuclear security threat, posed as a result of disintegration, would most certainly create a security problem deemed
as important as the struggle for control of Central Asia between Russia, China and India. In addition to these threats, the expansion of drug and arms trafficking as a result of increased instability would directly impact upon the Caucasus, East Turkmenistan, Central Asia and Kashmir.

Furthermore, the dissolution of Afghanistan will bring the possibility of fragmentation in Pakistan. The ramifications of Afghanistan breaking up would affect more than just the region of Central Asia, ripples would be felt across the World. The potential for nuclear weapons getting into the hands of terrorist groups is a disastrous scenario, but if Afghanistan were to disintegrate it is not implausible.

Moreover, if terrorist groups are able to train in this region with ease, the effects will not only reach the West, Afghanistan and Pakistan, but also Russia, China, India, all of Central Asia and the Middle East. It can also be argued that the emergence of a country under the leadership of Taliban in the aftermath of the disintegration will confirm beyond all doubt the failure of the US operation in Afghanistan. None of the global or regional powers, particularly the USA, will covet the emergence of a new country ruled by Taliban. Due to the general agreement of the Taliban’s terrorist group status, the UN could seek for an international consensus against a state forming under the control of the Taliban, leading to the prevention of the disintegration of Afghanistan.

The Taliban’s powerful influence and civil war

It is highly likely that the Taliban will seek to seize power in all parts of the country following the withdrawal of the US forces. This would be likely to start a civil war. However, as previously indicated, the current conditions are different from that of 1990s. There are now other groups in Afghanistan that have access to as many weapons as the Taliban, with better trained personnel and most importantly, in contrast to 1990s, a wider range of external support.

Given this, Taliban control of Kabul would not mean they had control of the entire country. If a civil war breaks out in Afghanistan, Pakistan may not be able to direct the war as it did in 1990s. Instead, a number of other countries in the region may become embroiled in the war, which, in turn, could bring the region to the brink of a bigger crisis than occurred in the 1990s.

Conclusion

Afghanistan can be portrayed as a patchwork cloth; it is a nation made up of areas controlled by different groups such as the ANSF, the Taliban, Warlords and organised crime gangs. Parallels can be drawn to the similar situation in Vietnam after the US invasion; due to the relative stability of the current system and that the USA still has a military presence in the country, the White House will have the opportunity to provide an honourable depiction of the situation in Afghanistan to its own people. However, the US forces that remain in Afghanistan will not be able to guarantee the future of the country.

Whilst the main threat to the USA, and the initial reason for their operation in Afghanistan, Al-Qaeda, seems to have been exterminated, it can potentially rematerialize, as it did upon the retreat of the Soviet Union in the 1990s. However, it is believed that this time, the withdrawal could lead to a greater problem that may result in higher numbers of losses, as all the groups that would be looking to seize control, particularly the ones in the North, are armed, trained and more powerful than they were in the 1990s.
Although billions of dollars have been spent, and thousands of lives have been lost, only a limited transformation has been achieved in Afghanistan in comparison to the initial intentions of the western powers. In addition to that, it can be argued that the recent developments in Syria, Iraq and Yemen will directly impact on the future of Afghanistan. Considering this, it is possible that the instability will spread over time and Afghanistan will be brought back to the state it was in in the early 1990s.

Furthermore, in the aftermath of the withdrawal of the US forces from Afghanistan, the country will lose its strategic importance to the other western powers and it could turn into a training centre for the terrorist groups. This will then pose a great potential threat for the western countries. If, as this paper predicts, the situation in Afghanistan has not improved after a 14 year operation there is likely to be a negative perception of the effectiveness of NATO. This is bound to have a long term impact on the organisation’s prestige and reputation.

The plans for the withdrawal of American and NATO forces from Afghanistan strongly emphasise the strengthening of the Afghan Army to reinforce the central government. Whilst the government in Kabul does need this military force to give it authority, it is in greater need of a base that will provide political legitimacy.

There is a wide consensus that the only way to prevent a new civil war and contribute to the future settlement opportunities in Afghanistan is to build a sustainable secure environment and to improve the effectiveness of the government’s ability internally. Externally however, Afghanistan requires the active involvement of the countries in the region, along with the actual commitment of the international community. The only way to attain these internal and external objectives is to form a coalition government or, at the very least, a working relationship with the Taliban. As, if no agreement is made, the nature of the Taliban’s strategy when left to their own devices would indisputably affect the stability of Afghanistan in the aftermath of the withdrawal of the USA.

Nonetheless, it is highly likely that Afghanistan, in the post-US deployment period, will become extremely vulnerable to external impacts. If the external Asian players decide to use Afghanistan as an excuse to engage in conflicts and quarrels to further their own external political interests, Afghanistan could reach a higher level of instability. This instability in turn, could not only absorb the Central Asian region, but also worsen the instability in the Middle East. In other words, if the bloodshed in Afghanistan cannot be stopped, it is inevitable that it will spread to the Caucasus, the Middle East and Central Asia.

Moreover, it could be asserted that the forces that benefit from reorganisation of the geography of the region have successfully completed their mission. Maintaining political order in the absence of external assistance (e.g. the USA and NATO) will inevitably be difficult for Afghanistan, particularly when the issues of unresolved disputes as well as changing internal and external dynamics are taken into consideration.

As a matter of fact, the current situation in Afghanistan shows that there is still a strong need for the further military training and financial assistance agreed upon in bilateral agreements. These agreements are surely accepted as important influence mechanisms for the sustainability of the basic military level necessary for combatting terrorist groups in the short term, and to maintain local and regional peace in the long term.
Nonetheless, the extensive fear amongst the Afghan community of the possibility of civil war in the event of the complete withdrawal of foreign forces exposes the general demand for the continuation of international support. Whether or not the US forces still deployed in Afghanistan would be able to repress the uprising created by the powerful internal and external influences poses another great concern. In that respect, it can be argued that the US forces left in Afghanistan will not be a decisive element for the future of the country. As a matter of fact, the withdrawal of the US forces without the successful completion of the operation could create an immense security vacuum in the country; this, in turn, could become an attractive motivation for the internal actors to seek control. These internal dynamics thereby reveal the reasons why external forces are so keen to attain peace and stability at the regional level.

Furthermore, the potential outcomes of the withdrawal, and their after effects, should be taken into consideration, not only for political settlement in Afghanistan, but also for the reintegration of the region. In this context, it becomes evident that the necessary and successful means of a resolution in Afghanistan includes military transition and peacekeeping, socio-economic sustainability, effective national institutions for self-governance and a successful ANSF internally. To achieve these goals Afghanistan needs security-orientated, peace-building operations, durable international support for political transition and solution-orientated political negotiations involving positive roles for other countries in the region that have a vested interest.

The current challenges and future settlement opportunities in Afghanistan portray a wide range of issues, actors and processes. Today the greatest problem Afghanistan faces may be the unknown nature of the future settlement opportunities in the country. The major operations and peace building efforts are predominantly carried out by the western powers, who expect to be able to provide democracy, but they fail to appreciate that the Afghan people have never been governed with a democratic mind-set. Therefore the imposition of a western orientated government could only worsen the situation. Especially if the realism surrounding the societal and political culture of Afghanistan is not taken into consideration.

It can be concluded that the withdrawal plan of the US forces in Afghanistan should be reconsidered. As further evidence to this end, in a recent speech, Barack Obama notes the need for a reassessment of the strengthening of the way the ANSF functions, so as to prevent the requirement for the USA to return to Afghanistan after their withdrawal (Shinkman, 2015).

Last but not least, in the year 2015 and beyond, Afghanistan seems to be more significant than ever to the regional and international powers, not only because of the challenges, but also the opportunities it involves militarily, politically, socially and economically. The optimistic approach in dealing with Afghanistan in the post-2015 period for the aforementioned regional powers should primarily involve the containment of problems ranging from instability, struggle and conflict, to the reinforcement of constructive developments such as state formation, and social, political and economic development. Although these regional powers could at times dispute the ways in which to reach a settlement in Afghanistan, it is evident that they have good reason to cooperate in building peace in Afghanistan for the foreseeable future.

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Received: April, 20th, 2015
Revisions Received: Sept, 14th, 2015
NATO Drawdown, Threat Scenarios in Afghanistan and Its Implications for Pakistan and Central Asia

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When Barak Obama took oath as President for the next term he pledged to change the US Policy. The expected changes were the drawdown of forces from Afghanistan. Over a decade US had been fighting war in Afghanistan resulted into lot of losses in term of lives and finances; US sacrificed over 2300 lives and 19,000 injured whereas US $650 billion have been spent on this war. This war has never been conclusive so far. The corrupt Afghan government is no way in possession to be taking responsibilities rather it has been challenged by armed groups all over. The economy has been largely dependent on international aids whereas this base is also shrinking.

Key Words: Drawdown, policy, government, security, economy.

The US public is skeptical of the US commitment in Afghanistan because of high costs and mostly nothing is in return of Afghan war. However US has been continuing fighting and somewhat able to prevent re-emergence of terrorist’s while trying to promote peace and stability in the region. The situation if going in right direction could be undermined by pulling out of US forces from Afghanistan. As Council Special Report explains, 2014 will be a pivotal year for Afghanistan. New government of Afghanistan has already been constituted with Asharf Ghani, an intellectual and scholar as President. US military is in the process to transfer the responsibilities of the security to ANSF; thereby making war effort as Afghan based leading.

With regard to the security environment in Afghanistan, think tank advised for staying of thirteen thousands US soldiers to pursue a “foreign internal defense mission.” These troops with support of NATO would be able to conduct battle when need arises. Additionally they will train, advise and assist Afghan forces in their reorganization. Peace building will encourage world body to continue their civilian aid pledges provided Afghan government maintains its commitments for good governance and transparency. With all said and done, the Drawdown offers US policymakers a realistic set of options in the political, security and economic realms that are consistent with the scope of US interests, the resources the US can reasonably bring to bear and Afghan realities. Despite many challenges being faced in Afghanistan in the years ahead, it is argued persuasively that US will seek and continue its role in Afghan future.

Afghanistan has remained a battle ground for external powers for the achievement of their strategic aims. It is because of its geographical location coupled with the polarized nature of society in which ethnic groups with help of external powers battled for power. The last three and a half decades of conflict and instability have ruined Afghanistan, destroyed much of the infrastructure, disrupted trade routes and dried up the supply of labour and capital. Long time

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back Soviet occupation forces were evicted. Resultantly anarchy prevailed for quite some time in Afghanistan. Finally 9/11 has given the opportunity for the intervention of NATO/ISAF forces.

After the removal of Taliban and operating for over a decade, now NATO/ISAF forces are intending to move out of Afghanistan (Rosenberg, 2012). "On 22 June 2011, President Obama announced the drawdown of forces from Afghanistan. With this, the transition begins in Afghanistan. This all were to be carried to conclude the war with a responsible end. This plan was having a forecast of national reconciliation programme to include Taliban in the folds. In this transition, ANSF are in the process of taking the security responsibilities of the entire Afghanistan and leaving the training role for NATO with an option to use them in case real emergency exists.

Now we can have a glimpse of the NATO forces since its arrival at Afghanistan; a total of 1, 50,000 NATO troops remained operative in 2012, however in November 2013, the number reduced to 87, 000 of which 50,000 were of US (NATO 2013). These NATO troops have been planned to be pulling out by December 2014 or at the start of 2015 or as the situation dictates. 50,000 US forces were halved in February 2014 whereas the remaining NATO troops from Georgia (1,550), UK (7,900), Poland (1,550), Italy (2,800) and Germany (4,400) will be also withdrawn by the end of 2014. Australia has already pulled its troops by 2013 (Parashar 2013).

The time span for pulling out of soldiers is being broadly carried out in two stages; first, the pulling out of 33,000 troops which has already been over, secondly, 74,500 troops would be moving out by the completion of transition in the second phase of withdrawal. As of now after the withdrawal of the rest of the troops, 13,500 troops will still be stationed for indefinite period in Afghanistan (Parashar, 2013).

When NATO troops (deployed in Afghanistan) withdrew, a new great game will emerge among the great powers. Massive cuts in aid and military budget will precipitate much down turn and slump in Afghanistan. It is believed that cooperation among great powers like US, China and Russia is not visible in the scene on the issue of Afghanistan in the near future. This situation is posing grave security threats not only for the Afghanistan itself but also for Central Asia and Pakistan. The aim of the article is to highlight NATO drawdown, threat scenarios in Afghanistan and its implications for Pakistan and Central Asia with view to give pertinent recommendations.

Mission of NATO Forces in Afghanistan:
The main role of NATO troops in Afghanistan was to help the government authorities to create security environment across the country. ISAF’s mission was spelled out comprehensively well before arriving of NATO Forces in Afghanistan.1

Roadmap for Drawdown Plan
Draft of roadmap was prepared hoping to make a comprehensive plan in coordination with Afghanistan to endorse the views of “conference on security” held on 20 July 2010 at Kabul. The Communiqué at conference had already reiterated the support of the world community that

1The missionary roles; with and without ANSF conduct operations throughout the country, conduct training and maintaining Afghan National Security Forces, constructing and developing Afghanistan by its Provincial Reconstruction Teams and helping Afghan Authorities to strengthen its institutions for establishing good governance.
“ANSF should be able to conduct and lead operations in Afghanistan after 2014”. Well thought out principles were set forth by the transition plan. (Tadjbaksh 2013).  

**Summit at Chicago Held by May 2012**

It was agreed upon in Chicago Summit held on 20 - 21 May 2012 that NATO mission will end by 31 December 2014. It was also agreed that ANSF will be in command by mid 2013. During the transition period the NATO operation will transform into training, advising and assisting. The commitment was further reiterated by Prime Minister of UK that British troops will withdraw by 2015 which will be met at all costs. This was marked a milestone in Lisbon roadmap. NATO is committed to gradually drawdown its troops to end its operation in Afghanistan by the end of 2014 (Rosenberg 2013). The details of the summit have explained accordingly.

**Timetable for Security Transition**

The Security responsibility of Afghanistan as agreed in Chicago’s Conference was to be gradually shifted to Afghan National Security Force. The drawdown of forces from Afghanistan started in 2011 and would be completed by 2014 in five stages. The Chicago summit had already set the security responsibility to be shifted to ANSF by mid2013. Concurrently, NATO forces will change into supervisory role on training, advising and supporting. Mr Karzai has summarized as, “2013 means, the lead will be given to Afghans, except for a few provinces, or areas where we would still need the foreign forces' presence”.

**Threat Scenarios in Afghanistan**

Unless very well planned, NATO pulling out can engender the entire region. The NATO pulling out will necessitate a sudden amputation in military consumption. In addition, NDN (Northern Distribution Network) will reduce or stop its stockpiles that will be huge blow for the interests of various govs and other agencies. The threat scenarios will possibly be emerging after the withdrawal of NATO forces;

1. **Threat Scenario – I.** That, Afghan govt will be unable to continue its rule due to poor law and order situation. Resultantly Taliban with help of other insurgent groups will take over Afghanistan.
2. **Threat Scenario – II.** That, Afghanistan will face protracted civil war like situation. This will create security dilemma for the regional powers who will be forced for intervention against their will.
3. **Threat Scenario – III.** That, on the wake of a rapid collapse of the Afghan regime, the immediate neighbouring countries will also be vulnerable for prevailing Taliban effort to use their proxies.

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2 The transition plan unfolded; transition would be based on the process of requirements and practicability of its recommendations to be seen on ground, the pulling out of NATO would not be symbolized by the Transition but a progressive transfer should continue according to the potentialities of ANSF and precisely transition will involve main institutions of Afghanistan and its functions.

3 The summit concluded with executive rules to follow; Afghanistan will not be allowed to become the safe haven of terrorism, the Government of Afghanistan is firm to its commitment to be transformed into a democratic society so as to be fighting corruption, adhering to the rule of law and other international norms, NATO will be encouraged to assist Afghanistan beyond 2014, NATO is invited by Afghan Govt to continue its stay in Afghanistan for imparting training to ANSF, Afghan govt and NATO to increase their negotiations towards continued cooperation, Commitment to execute the resolution 1325 of Security Council on security, peace and women and NATO is welcomed by Afghan Govt to continue its assistance for security in Afghanistan even afterwards 2014.
4. **Threat Scenario – IV.** That, Taliban will quickly take over the country or will have a protracted civil war like situation. Such situation will nullify the US and EU etc economic gains in Afghanistan.

5. **Threat Scenario – V.** That, with all odds, Afghan Government could maintain to signify a developing, secure and peaceful Afghanistan. In such situation Central Asia will transpire under an effective domain of Sino - Russian collaboration.

6. **Threat Scenario – VI.** That, an armed coup and counter coup keep seizing here and there or parts of the country. In this, neighboring countries will have to face Afghanistan as troubled country of pronounced ethnicity.

7. **Threat Scenario – VII.** That, Taliban is given share in the government through intense negotiation. This may be considered otherwise as US retreat unless proper projected.

**US/European Aids and Ground Realities:**

US and its allies were needed to evaluate the futuristic profitability to adjudge on taking the risk of making commitments in Afghanistan. Therefore it is difficult to predict that Afghanistan can get the level of aid as requested for a protracted period well beyond 2014 (Office of the President 2011). In this context instead to increase aid, US and European Allies as part of exit strategy from Afghanistan, have already begun in cutting the aid. US $ 1.5 billion descend in US development aid has been observed in 2012 (in 2011 it was US $3.5 billion and in 2012 it was approximately US $2 billion). Over fifty percent cut has been seen in aid for supporting democracy, rule of law and good governance (from US $ 231 million to US $94 million). NGOs and aid giving agencies have eliminated their aid programmes and many are making major cuts (Ministry of Finance of Afghanistan 2014).

In all of probabilities of getting aid or not, Afghanistan will remain a weak and divided state hence will be depending on US and outside aid beyond 2014. The security tool which is being left to handle the situation after the drawdown is the Afghan National Security Force, which is in no way compatible to the security environment of Afghanistan. It will not be able to sustain the pressure of insecurity hence will not able to manage the troubled situation in Afghanistan. The Afghan government is barely functioning in Afghanistan. The West should be blamed for instituting the constitution of Afghanistan aimed at centralization of power. President of Afghanistan has been given tremendous power to control the funds, who could not do much to encourage effectiveness of the government at the provincial and district levels. Success may require much deliberated mechanism in shape of strong security measures and provision of appropriate fund to avoid civil war and economic recession much before the perceived time of drawdown.

**Challenges in Afghanistan:**

**Security**

Maintaining security in Afghanistan is a biggest issue. It becomes very difficult to continue training sessions of ANSF because of taking extra security measures whenever there is surge in terrorist attacks on camps. In addition, Afghanistan is hesitant to send troops for training purposes to Pakistan however initiatives have been taken through sending six cadets to be trained in Pakistan Military Academy. With regard to ANSF, US and Australian trainers analyzed that out of the total 200 battalion of ANSF only a few can conduct military operations. The flaw is in its enrolment mainly of not representing the proportionate population like Pashtun, Uzbeks, Hazara and Tajik. Hence the ANSF is being organized on fault line (Cordesman 2012).
Desertions in the forces are the other areas which are on the increase. Then there are suspicions about these forces on the issue of their credibility whether they should be trusted or otherwise. As there have been individuals recruited in the past who harmed the trainers and leaking secrets to Taliban. Is this plight of transition is trusted and workable? If not then what should be taken into account so that things are worked for the transition. Do we consider these forces to control the lofty mountains of Afghanistan where there are hideouts of militants? It is highly questionable; therefore this shift in responsibility should be analyzed in its true perspective.

On the other hand, Afghan Air Force is also passing through the critical stage of its inception. NATO forces are carrying out combat missions with close support of vibrant NATO air force but how this kind of support will be available in case security responsibility is shifted to ANSF. At the moment Taliban don’t enjoy worthy support like in the past but still Taliban are maintaining good control over the areas to make them no go areas. Nobody can dare to enter in them without the permission of Taliban. Many believe that the new security agreement recently signed by US and Afghan Government will make ANSF well placed whenever they will be encountering Taliban.

US will be keeping around 13,000 troops for the maintenance of security and training however will be available on calls till 2024 for ANSF. The responsible end of the operation in Afghanistan is not in total lurch. But still NATO forces will be encountering strong resistance from militants which will have deep impact in the entire area (News Desk 2013). If government of Afghanistan is not strong enough after 2014, then it will not be able to fight Taliban thus Taliban will be resurfaced to the extent of establishing own system of checking and monitoring. To be capturing governance by Taliban will be a difficult preposition but the resurfacing is engraving in the minds of many Afghans after the pulling out of NATO troops.

According to The New York Times journalist Matthew, “a complete withdrawal from Afghanistan could be far costlier than it was in Iraq and it would force European powers to pull their forces as well, risking a dangerous collapse in confidence among Afghans and giving a boost to the Taliban, which remain a potent threat” (Rosenberg 2013). Taliban at the moment does not have the capability to capture cities etc and there would be a change phenomenally in the nature of the fighting between ANSF and Taliban. However this fighting will continue for at least a decade in future. After the NATO pulling out, fighting will be changing its mode some time getting intense and some time slowing down (Devine & Kassel 2015).

Additionally, ANSF inspite at an embryonic stage will be fighting on two fronts; first, it will be combating Taliban, who will be using its capacity to recapture lost territories in the far flung areas, secondly, to degrade the security apparatus to the lowest ebb thereby the army would demoralize and would be forcing to desert. (Tomas & Wagner 2013: 56-77) Former US ambassador in Pakistan, Richard Olson reconfirmed the US stance on the issue of withdrawal who said that the US withdrawal is not an exit rather US will pursue its battlement in Afghanistan after 2014. He restated President Obama, “US government will develop durable collaboration with Afghanistan to eliminate the worries of an initiation of attack on US in future” (News Desk 2013).

**Economy**

Foreign aid is the only source on which Afghanistan’s economy is dependent but this source has been dried considerably. Mostly all resources including media being funded by foreign
sustained, the investors from outside world will abandon their pending projects in Afghanistan. The shambling economy cannot sustain this hefty blast. It is deduced that in war situation where there is instability and insecurity after 2014, the foreign donors will cease their investments in Afghanistan (Tomas & Wagner 2013).

Moreover after 2014, Afghan currency will not maintain its position because of economic situation of the country. In such situation Afghan government needs to chalk out plans to convert to its own based backing system than on dollars and Euros. The feeble economy of the Country will severe the other burning problems of Afghanistan. New York Times remarks, “NATO forces withdrawal may also jeopardize vital aid commitments. Afghanistan is decades away from self sufficiency, it currently covers only about 20 percent of its own bills, with the rest paid by the US and its allies” (Rosenberg 2013). In the absence of any Afghan strategy, the poor economic situation will deepen the status. It is evident from the fact that Afghan government has yet to plan about the salaries of ANA and Police. This grave economic situation has seldom become a part of the post 2014 agenda (Yusufzai 2010).

Dependency on aid has not let the country to work for trade during NATO period. Afghanistan needs to be focusing on trade with its neighbors. This way Afghanistan economy can be saved from disaster after 2014. Side by side taxation policy has not been introduced and Afghanistan does not have sound base of taxation which is in dire need to run the country’s affairs. Adapting to some tax collection process will be a big issue after 2014. Afghanistan has not expended in industrial sector in any shape whereas Industries are playing heavy role in shaping of economy. (Ahmadzai 2013) On the other hand smuggling and corruption in Afghanistan has hollowed the entire system of governance.

**Insight of Civil War**

In all threat scenarios there is a possibility of civil war after 2014. The situation aversion can be tracked down only if all stake holders strike some political deal. Though it is highly complex but still efforts should underway in some way among all parties, however no obvious result is expected in the present environment. Afghan government opposed the dialogue process between Taliban and US and vice versa. The matter is so volatile that Afghan government opposed even a meeting between US and Taliban officials organized by UN in Turkmenistan. Same way US does not accept Taliban’s conditions of releasing of Taliban from their captivities. The peaceful talks could be resumed which was suspended in March 2012 after softening of stances (Tomas 2013).

Taliban and NATO fought each other over more than ten year of war. If Taliban are given part in power; this will call for civil war, because Taliban will start taking revenge for their martyrs from Afghan or NATO forces. The withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan in 2014 is likely to be followed by a civil war between a predominantly non-Pashtun security apparatus and Taliban forces. If US pulls out its forces from Afghanistan without placing any political resolve then there will be anarchic situation thus obviously an eruption of civil war will take place (Devine & Kassel 2015).

This instability will take the region especially Pakistan in its folds. However, Afghan journalist Mujeeb Angar has optimistic and rejected the possibility of civil war in Afghanistan after 2014. According to him, Afghans have now become billionaires and have also tasted power during tranquility. They would never repeat the mistake of initiating war, however, no doubt there will
be trouble in the southern provinces like Paktia, Zabul, Khost and Paktika. Mostly various groups in Afghanistan like Uzbek, Hazara and Tajik have constructed beautiful buildings and other constructions along with various units of industries. Those well established people will not throw themselves in war again. While thinking positively, it should happen the same way as reflected by Mujeeb Angar, but there is linkage with filling of vacuum by extremists instead of moderates inside Afghanistan and the same can happen after NATO withdrawal (Khan 2013).

Political Crisis
Before the presidential election of May 2014 a weak government was in place in Afghanistan. Now there is coalition government in Afghanistan and they have all the capacity and capability to underscore various strategies inside and outside Afghanistan. This government is believed to establish its writ throughout Afghanistan as well as to bring harmony among various ethnic groups inside Afghanistan however; power sharing will be a great challenge. Unless this is done, deprivation, and intolerance among the groups can create political discontentment. To be critically analyzing due to Taliban factor Pashtuns were not given share in power. Moreover it is also believed that Afghan government can be disintegrated within itself due to many obvious reasons. Desertion in ANSF can disorganize the forces to the maximum resultantly the deserted forces can join Taliban groups.

Taliban have many sympathizers in the Afghan interior ministry and ANSF that can create turmoil in the internal political situation. On joining the Taliban camps then the turmoil will turn into embarrassment and will be out of control. Neither US and nor Afghan government will be able to control this big challenge. Though Afghanistan has regained much of the lost traditions; it has reconstituted its army, restored national anthem and flag that were swept away. The government structure is also restored to a great extent, however, how political situation will move after 2014 in Afghanistan, is very important. Whether UN peacekeeping forces will be appointed to watch the security and political situation or not will be a question for survivability (Devine & Kassel 2015).

The political structure is still very weak in Afghanistan and the political parties have yet to attain its maturity, as Afghanistan has entered into democratic processes after a 30 years political turmoil and war. Due to uncertain situation and the embryonic political environment, Afghans are hesitant to return to their home from Pakistan. Political turmoil, therefore, can be another challenge to Afghanistan after 2014. Though a weak political set up has been restored in Afghanistan, but still it has its importance. Large scale rigging were reported in the presidential elections. Even Senator John Kerry confessed it by saying that America knew about this rigging but has kept a compromised silence. It was a very common perception about Afghanistan that, “da cha sara topak wi hakhumat da hagh wi”, (Those who have guns, will rule). The present Parliament is factionalized institution consisting of indignant representatives. This dissension and negative behaviour in the parliament can lead to posit an astounding threat to politics in Afghanistan (Kanwal2015).

Taliban perhaps being hopeful of their victory in a year or two, are not showing much interest in talks. After Soviet Union exit from Afghanistan, due to inefficient and disunited Afghan leadership, civil war erupted that too in the presence of the agreement to help in resolving the conflict. The blame can be given to the leadership crisis as no serious effort was undertaken to resolve the issue. The situation is not different than the previous; rather it is even tougher and tenser. It is sure that Taliban resistance will continue till the presence of foreign troops in
Afghanistan. Majority of both ANSF and Taliban are Afghans; it means Afghans are fighting against each other, which is a clear indication of impending civil war. (Rosenberg 2012)

The glaring difference in Soviet and US exit is that Soviet Union completely withdrew its forces from the landlocked country. However, US have repeatedly announced that they would not repeat the past mistake and would leave behind some troops on ground while keeping the central Asian perspective in view. In nutshell the Soviet withdrawal was a complete exit, while the US has partial withdrawal plans, and this is the main difference, however, time will show how the outcome of both the decisions may be different. Soviet Union and US were the intruders, Soviets made their way into Afghanistan with the help of a small group of communist supporters and likewise Northern Alliance has fully backed US (Policy Brief 2011).

Soviet Union and US exist from Afghanistan have both similarities and contrasts. At the time of Soviet Union pulling out, the world was bi-polar and there was Cold War between both US and Soviet Union. Comparing to Soviet invasion now the key players in Afghanistan believe in peaceful Afghanistan and pin their own stability with calm and tranquility. With several other changes, the nature, thinking and living style of Afghans have also changed, a new generation has now grown up who believe in peace and peaceful living. Some realities are common in pulling out of troops, like US is leaving a politically and economically weak government in Afghanistan amid the mounting foreign interference as was left by the Soviet Union. (Khan 2015)

**Drawdown Implications for the Region including Central Asia:**

From post withdrawal of 2014, different scenarios can emerge, but the most threatening one, is the continuation of poor law and order situation and instability. This anarchic situation will destabilize the entire region. There is long lasting stakes for the neighbors in a stable and peaceful Afghanistan. However, due to their vested interests, these neighbors become sources of insecurity and uncertainty hence they involve sabotaging the peace outlook. This situation will endanger the entire region especially the countries those are located nearby and enjoy good relations with Afghanistan.

**Pakistan and Central Asian Republics**

Pakistan has long historical linkage with Afghanistan. It pledges healthy support for ANSF. As a good will gesture, Afghan Army Chief General Sher Muhammad Karimi was invited to review passing out parade at Pakistan Military Academy. This will go a long way in establishing good military relationship between both the countries. Considerable bilateral trade is conducted between both the states. Pakistan has been looking after the Afghan refugees over long period. Being an ally of NATO, Pakistan suffered heavily in the war on terror. It is very terrible for Pakistan that war in Afghanistan has spilled over in Pakistan and most of the parts of Pakistan are under insurgency like situation. Pakistan had suffered over 60,000 causalities and incurred an economic loss of approximately US $ 125 Billion in exports, foreign investment, industrial output and tax collection due to the war on terror (Akhter 2013).

Moreover it is feared that an unstable Afghanistan could lead to aggravate the problem of narcotics, intensify extremism and militancy in both the countries. If the same situation continues it will have devastating effects on Pakistan. Central Asian Republics have long list of stake in Afghanistan. Afghanistan provides many opportunities to the Central Asian states to offer, these include gaining access to southern trade routes, the opportunity for investments, infrastructure
construction and the opportunity to gain significance in international politics. All these are possible when there is some kind of stability in Afghanistan.

**Other Regional Countries**

India enjoys good relations with Afghanistan and is contributing to train Afghan Security forces. India’s interest in Afghanistan has two basic objectives – **first** to counter Pakistani influence and **secondly** to access Central Asian market. At large, India has been using Afghanistan to mount destabilization attempts against Pakistan in Balochistan and FATA. The perceived anarchic situation will make India to get out of Afghanistan’s internal politics however its main role will remain to maintain its proxies for using them against Pakistan. Iran has strong linkages with Northern Alliance (Tajiks and Hazaras). To hurt the interests of US, it is maintaining close linkages with Taliban. Iran’s long-term objectives are to counter narcotics and use Afghanistan as an energy corridor. These objectives are achievable only in case there is stability in Afghanistan.

China maintains a modest aid portfolio in Afghanistan and has stakes in communications, copper mining and oil and gas exploration. China has been showing its concerns in Afghanistan instability however it has distanced itself from the security issues of Afghanistan. Russia is interested in a stable and moderate Afghanistan however it is apprehensive about the bases being maintained by US. Chinese are also apprehensive about the future role of Taliban in Afghanistan. Russia believed that an unstable Afghanistan will spread terrorism and militancy as well as narco-trade in the region (Nopens 2014).

**Peace Prospects in Afghanistan**

The withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan will inevitably encourage not only Taliban in Afghanistan but the anti state elements inside Pakistan and other proxies in the region. It is high time to hint on the failures of world bodies to seek solution to the problem. The stakeholders have divergence of interests in Afghanistan. There is a need to develop convergence and coherence on identifying common grounds by regional and major powers in bringing political solution to Afghanistan. A few are;

**Peace Prospect - Negotiations at Local Level (Afghanistan Based)**

US and ISAF are encouraging a negotiated settlement between the Afghan government and the insurgents. Some form of serious talks may begin with new Taliban entity being established in Qatar or elsewhere. The US has also signaled that it will not see the Taliban as an enemy if it accepts peace, rejects violence and joins the Afghan government. Taliban may treat the talks as part of delaying tactics to win politically, however they don’t give the feelings of being defeated. If Taliban is accommodated in the peace process then the warring parties will arrive on some meaningful solution.

For this entire process the role of Pakistan is very important. It is pertinent to mention that relations between US and Pakistan are improving progressively. The mistrust between US and Pakistan was a result of a few misconceptions and incidents in the past like the raid by US forces in which Bin Laden was killed and targeting a Pakistani outpost in Mahmoud Agency by US forces resulted into killing of 24 Pakistan soldiers. In reaction Pakistan expelled US advisors, closed UACV base and supply routes. At the moment relations between Pakistan and US is moderately moving in right direction.
Peace Prospect at Regional Level:
Regional peace, economic growth and interdependence in central Asia are dependent on harmony and stability among the regional states. In this connection a new equilibrium of regional powers should be established among local powers like CARs, India, Pakistan and to some extent Iran. The nature of this equilibrium will largely depend on role being played by these countries especially Pakistan and India.

At Large, the Positive Role by Major Powers at International Level:
It will pave up towards long and durable solution to the issue but is highly unpredictable during the course of transition. Regional as well as the local solutions are easy to call for if the internal problems could be dealt properly. Experts on economic development focus on regional cooperation as ways of improving the political and economic stability. Studies by groups like World Bank, IMF and Asian Development Bank indicate that this transition will be eased through cooperation and improving regional development in three different sub regions (Borger, 2011). 

One, Central Asia and the “CARs” to the north of Afghanistan, Secondly, Afghanistan and the border areas in Pakistan that affects the Afghanistan War and Thirdly, Indian and Pakistani relations within the context of South Asia and the tensions between India and Pakistan.

In theory there is an economic and political case for regional cooperation between the “CARs,” Russia, China, India, Pakistan, and Iran. There is a case for a “New Silk Road” that seeks to find ways to develop and stabilize Afghanistan and finding some regional solution to the India-Pakistan conflict usually centered on Kashmir that would help to reduce Indian and Pakistani conflict in Afghanistan. (World Bank, 2011)

However, if much is not done for the stability in Afghanistan, the end game in Afghanistan would be shaped after post 2014 that “Taliban and its proxies control and operate in Northern and Southern Pashtun Areas. Afghan ethnic groups are likely to create some new form of Alliance in the Northern whereas central government in Kabul will either play some limited local role, or become a key player in a form of civil conflict”.

Shift in Pak Policy Viz a Viz US Deflection towards India:
A shift in Pak Policy could be seen in fighting terrorism at Pakistan's outlook which has attracted World especially US. It should be taken a transformation mode from failure to victory in Afghanistan for all parties including US. It could be further seen in action that US is keeping 13,500 troops for indefinite period in Afghanistan against the drawdown plan. General Raheel Sharif is leading the security part of Pakistan and his foreign trips are a reflection to pursue Pakistan’s security policy. Additionally US may be watching General Raheel to be aligned with what they were needed previously.

Resultantly, now Pakistan has eliminated the words like Good and Bad Taliban therefore Pakistan is fighting its way against terrorism in its true perspective. On the other hand Afghanistan is on its way to help Pakistan to fight Pakistan’s way on the assurance that Pakistan will take possible course of action for the security and stability of Afghanistan. All three (US, Pakistan and Afghanistan) are moving on one grid. This shift in policy of Pakistan is making the ground towards a responsible end of the war in Afghanistan. However, Pakistan needs to play its cards serially and very carefully.
Pakistan should also calculate as required and foresee the issues like Indian involvement in Pakistan, energy crisis, CARs economic corridor, Iran gas pipeline and then above all operationalization of Gwadar Port. To be aware of the sequences if terrorism is uprooted in Afghanistan, then there should be an assurance on issue of not asking to do more or surfacing Nuclear Issue etc. Pakistan should assume that US policy towards South Asia would bring positive results. As a result of which US needs to pursue India to refrain her and its proxies from terrorist activities inside Pakistan through Afghanistan.

**General Raheel Doctrine - Behind a Paradigm Shift: (Chishti, 2015)**

1. Pakistan, US and China are now cooperating and partnering over Afghanistan. India, Russia and Iran are being tossed out of Afghanistan. The GHQ led paradigm shift has three objectives:-
   a. One, reducing the Indian influence in Afghanistan.
   b. Two, political mainstreaming of Taliban.
   c. Three, stabilising Afghanistan in order to mitigate potentiality of Afghan turmoil spilling over into Pakistan.
   d. This Doctrine has been managing to haul US and China onto the Pakistani bandwagon.
2. Afghanistan has started to transfer captured Uyghur militants to China whereas China is backing Pakistan led Afghan Taliban peace talks in Afghanistan.
3. At the same time, Afghan intelligence has pledged to deny East Turkestan Islamic Movement safe haven in Afghanistan. With this development, China’s state owned, risk tolerant, Metallurgical Corporation of China has pledged US $ 3.5 billion to develop Aynak Copper mines.
4. US allows increased Chinese influence in and around China’s ‘Silk Road Economic Belt’ in return for China’s acceptance of an extended US troop presence in Afghanistan (seven airbases and five land bases).
5. US wants a stable Afghanistan and a stable Afghanistan is also in China’s interests as China plans increased economic activity in and around its restive Xinjiang.
6. In 2011, Afghan President Karzai signed a strategic partnership agreement with India (the agreement included Indian military training for Afghan army). In 2013, Karzai, during a visit to India, sought Cheetah light helicopters, A2. A18 105 millimeter howitzers, tanks and other military equipment from India.
7. Now, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani has withdrawn his predecessor's request for Indian military aid.
8. In February 2015, six Afghan cadets arrived in Pakistan to begin training at the prestigious Pakistan Military Academy at Kakul (PMA).
9. Pakistan and China alliance is to become “the key to Afghan stability.” China has committed to build a hydroelectric dam on the Kunar River (the dam will provide electricity to both, Pakistan and Afghanistan).
10. China has also committed to build rail and road links connecting Pakistan and Afghanistan.
11. Face to face talks between US, Afghan officials and Taliban leaders will take place in Doha in March or April 2015.
12. Beijing has already hosted an Afghan Taliban delegation and the talks “if successful would represent the realization of a 13 years effort to negotiate for peace with the Taliban.”
13. In 2012 and then again in 2013, the US has been unsuccessful in brokering reconciliation talks. Beijng has now “submitted a proposal to the Afghan government that suggests it could broker reconciliation talks (Chinese proposal includes Pakistan’s participation).”
14. As far as Afghanistan is concerned, Russia, Iran and India have now become wildcards.
Recommendations
1. The strategy should be simple and clear about the withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan.
2. Afghanistan should refrain from making the Durand Line as political issue rather it should settle its border issue with Pakistan because over 80 percent unrest will be over with its settlement.
3. Pakistan can only take part actively when the role of Indian inside Afghanistan is reduced to the minimum level of Pakistani satisfaction. In most of the brute terrorist acts inside Pakistan there are evidences of Indian involvement so India is using the soil of Afghanistan against Pakistan. Therefore the role of India inside Afghanistan should be restricted only to developmental projects. India should stop meddling into Afghanistan; this will cease most of the activities to counter Indian presence.
4. The new Government in Afghanistan has all the senses, will and understanding to find workable solutions to many of its problems.
5. Pakistan, Afghanistan and US will have to think beyond some local issues in Afghanistan. As there is huge scope for cooperation among these countries but this will be restricted to only papers unless sincere effort is done.
6. For creation of safe exit of NATO forces few minor but important things to be done are; black listing should be removed, labeling Taliban as country’s enemy should be done away, prisoners either be exchanged or released and main groups in Taliban should be given the standing role in the politics. This confidence building measures can provide safe passage for the NATO forces to exit.
7. Resistance will justify for presence of NATO forces for another considerable time. Afghanistan should expand political process to the far flung areas of Afghanistan so that people could participate in the political process. This requires activation, strengthening and registering political parties so that ethnic group should have representation in the political process.
8. Lasting peace in the war torn country could only be achieved if moderate Taliban members are allowed to participate in the development of Afghanistan's political structure, therefore with all tactical or local finishing or involving world body like UN for the solution to the Afghan crisis, etc, there will be a requirement of major cooperating efforts at all levels as under:

a. **Cooperation at Afghanistan Including Government and Insurgent Groups and Pakistan**
   Level. Sincere efforts at Pakistan and Afghanistan level is required to bring all the warring groups on negotiation table with clear mandated stakes in the future of Afghanistan. Unless this happens, chaos and uncertainty will prevail not only in Afghanistan but may spill over to entire region.

b. **Regional Cooperation (India, Pakistan, Iran and CARs).** As a first step to establishing contact among the warring groups, some mechanism like Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) be involved to discuss the issue at regional level with the main aim to establish and maintain an appropriate level of stability in Afghanistan, for this there is a dire need to bring consensus and establish close liaison among the states so that they forego their vested interests and only work for the stability of Afghanistan and the region.

c. **Big Powers Cooperation including US, China, Russia and European States.** Chicago Conference declared the affirmation of international body for maintaining solidarity over Afghan problem after 2014 who promised to give all kinds of support but they could not carry out any workable plan for handling the vacuum of security being left behind and the role to be played by major players. Therefore the big powers should ratify the efforts at local and regional level and to
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give assurance to all warring parties that their concerns will be addressed at International level. It is time to sit together and start brain storming by big powers cooperation for durable peace in Afghanistan and brush aside their vest interests for long lasting stability in the region.

Conclusion

The strategy of NATO “to clear, hold, transfer and exit” has moderately met success in getting military and political objectives. In this the important point is the insecurity situation as whole. The severity of insecurity is emerging as the approach of pulling out of forces is accumulating acceleration. The neighbouring countries of Afghanistan can largely fill this security shortfall if they agree to be lured in for acceptance of responsibilities including troops contribution as peacekeeper being mandated by UN. China, Russia, CARs, Iran, India and Pakistan have dissimilar plans because of their vest interests. All and in particular, Pakistan, Iran and India being the major regional players, require to plan together for bestowing towards peace and stability of Afghanistan.

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THREAT SCENARIOS IN AFGHANISTAN


Received: June, 25th, 2015
Revisions Received: Sep, 14th, 2015
Withdrawal of NATO and US Forces and the Role of Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Afghanistan

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Regional and international organizations have got significant importance in world politics and these organizations are playing vital role in economic development and stability. Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is one of the regional international organizations which played a constructive role in the stability of the region (Central Asia & China) since its inception. According to many analyst and security expert on the region fear that the withdrawal of international forces from Afghanistan will create a security vacuum which will endanger the regional security. SCO in this regard can play a crucial role for stability and economic development due to various reasons such as, the organization has long experience in tackling terrorism in the region, it has non-intervention policy in the internal affair of other states and more importantly it has good relation with Afghanistan. The SCO afghan contact group, the status of observer state and all other interactions shows that the organization has keen interest in the stability and economic development of the country. In order avoid the 1990s situation in the country, it is necessary to strengthen the Afghan government ad need to avoid the intervention policy of regional states into the internal affairs. There is need of collective approach in order to secure regional stability and enhance economic development and SCO provide such platform. Through this platform, the regional states can solve their problems because regional problems need regional solutions. Descriptive analytical and qualitative research method is used in the research.

Key words: SCO, Afghanistan, post withdrawal, regional stability, NATO/ US, Terrorism

After almost thirteen years of US and NATO presence in Afghanistan, the security situation is still fragile and there is a lot to do in security and economic front in order to make Afghanistan a peaceful and economically prosperous country. The announcement of the US and NATO withdrawal in December 2014 further brought some question and observation in the mind of the analyst like how the stability should be maintain, how the Taliban resistance should be deal and most important how the country should be avoided form the situation like in 1990s mean there are threats for the civil war again in the post withdrawal period. On the other hand there are some positive views regarding the future development such as Afghan government build national army and police forces which cansomehow maintain the peace and security secondly the current election was also a positive development. So we can say that the current situation is up to

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a greater extent different from the 1990s situation because there are some local and regional realities which can be seen as positive in the sense of stability and regional cooperation.

In the post withdrawal period, the regional and neighbors countries have to play their role and their role will be vital for the stability of Afghanistan. In this globalized world no state can solve its issues without the support of the other state particularity those issues which are related to the security and economic developments. The series of negotiation has been made with Afghanistan where the regional countries such as Pakistan, China, Russia and Iran are encouraged to play their role in the stability of Afghanistan (Simbal, 2009: 9). All these regional key states are members or observers of SCO so its mean SCO has to play a crucial role. When we look into the history of Afghanistan, we see there is intervention of neighboring countries in internal affairs of the country which created some problems so there is need of cooperation rather than intervention in internal affairs. Currently Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is playing very significant role in the regional stability and economic development. Apart from the conferences and discussion, SCO wants to play a bigger role in the stability of Afghanistan. The role of SCO will be of vital interest for Afghanistan and regional stability because the non-intervention policy in the internal affair of the other state will provide an opportunity for SCO to play a positive and constructive role in the post withdrawal period secondly the main focus of the organization is to fight against extremism which is also a critical issue for Afghanistan and thirdly regional stability and peace will not be achieved with a stable Afghanistan so this also make the cooperation between Afghanistan and SCO of mutual interest. All these common points make the situation suitable for the future cooperation especially in the field of security and economic development.

The role of SCO is vital for many reasons such as it is in the interest of SCO to have a stable and peaceful Afghanistan because violence, instability and separatism tendencies in the SCO member states are in one way or in the other way linked with Afghanistan such is the presence of IMU members and some Uighur in the country make security problem for the SCO states, so in order to counter these forces, it is better to have good relations with Afghanistan government in order to come over on the issue of security and extremism.

Background of SCO
The history of SCO goes back to early 1990s, when the Central Asian states got independence. In order to solve the boundaries problems and build cordial relations, China, Russia, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan decide to establish Shanghai Five (Gleason, 2001). With the passage of time and the changing regional security situations compel the leaders of Shanghai Five to further enhance the organization in order to deal effectively with rising security challenges in the region. With the inclusion of Uzbekistan, the Shanghai Five was transformed into Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2001 (Hanova, 2009). The main idea behind this transformation was to make the organization more effective in order to deal with trans-border issues such as terrorism, extremism and drug trafficking. The organization within a short period of time became an influential regional international organization. The main reason for the popularity of the organization is the significant role for the regional stability and economic developments (Oresman & Chargynov, 2005).

SCO and Afghanistan Issue
Since its inception in 2001, the organization got significant role in the dynamics of the regional issues such as fighting extremism and drug trafficking. In the short span of time the organization was able to expand military cooperation, intelligence sharing and counter terrorism mechanism among its members. Afghanistan which is situated in strategically important area and
host to a number of militant organizations, always remained vital for the regional stability, that’s why the organization is specially focusing on friendly relation with the country.

The formal mutual relations between Afghanistan and SCO started in 2005 when the SCO and Afghanistan Contact Group protocol was signed. The basic purpose of the group was to enhance cooperation and to discuss peace related issues. In this group, diplomats and expert from both sides were included and it was also decided to make interaction with institutions of Afghanistan. The establishment of this group was vital for both side because it provides the opportunity to interact and cooperate with each other (The SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group between the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2005).

In 2009, SCO organized an international conference on Afghanistan which got recognition from the international organizations such as UN, NATO and OIC. All the participants recognized and appreciated the role of SCO for the stable, prosperous and democratic Afghanistan. In the conference the participant were agreed to enhance their cooperation with the country in order to deal with trans-border and regional issues such as terrorism and drug trafficking (Declaration of the special Conference on Afghanistan convened under the auspices of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, 2009). The significant role of the organization was discussed and the participant argued that for the stability in Afghanistan this forum can play an effective role and can cooperate with international community already working for the stability and prosperity of the country. In joint statement the members of SCO and Islamic Republic of Afghanistan agreed to support and assist the Afghan government in socio-economic developments, building institution, working for the stability of the country mean enhancing the capability of Afghanistan security forces through training and assistance and to make effective mechanism for the countering terrorism and drug trafficking which is a challenge to the entire region.

These efforts of the organization shows that it has keen interest in the stability and overall developments of the country because the regional security and stability will be achieved through the cooperation among the regional states and SCO is such forum through which all the regional states can enhance cooperation in order to deal with regional issues and challenges. As the foreign minister of Russia expressed his observation that in case United State and the international forces failed to bring stability in Afghanistan, the terrorism may increase which is a severe issue for the regional stability (Safranchuk I. , 2009: 144-145).

In 2011, Afghanistan formally forwarded an application to join the organization. In June 2012, the organization granted observer status and thus after Mongolia, Pakistan, Iran and India, Afghanistan become the 5th observer state of SCO. The inclusion of the country into SCO was important because of various reasons such as it will help both parties to fight effectively against cross border terrorism, drug trafficking and weapon smuggling, on the other hand with the support of Afghanistan, the SCO members will be able to counter the extremist groups which are using Afghanistan as a base for the their activities in the region like IMU (Luan, 2012). The entry of Afghanistan into the organization was occurred in a chaotic situation. All the member states of the organization welcomed the entry of Afghanistan. Russia especially encouraged it and the Foreign Minister was of the view that such interactions will be fruitful for the eradication of terrorism and for regional stability (Kundu, 2012).
Post-withdrawal period and Role of SCO

After the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the US, NATO and ISAF forces were not able to restore complete peace and stability in the country and on the other hand they failed to reach to an agreement with Taliban. The government of Afghanistan taken certain steps to include Taliban in main stream politics but not able to bring them on the table. Since January, the ISAF forces withdrew from combatant operation and giving training to Afghan security forces in order to make them able to take the responsibility of the country security. On the other hand there are many attacks made by Taliban infiltrator, in which may ISAF forces has been died. Its mean that the Afghan security forces are not reliable and there are some Taliban within security forces which are targeting the international forces and this may lead to further uncertainty to the stability of Afghanistan. These situations shows that the post-withdrawal period is very uncertain because the US and NATO forces announced their withdrawal without stabilizing the country. After the withdrawal period the US announce that it will keep some forces its mean that after the withdrawal it need the support of other regional state. In this regard the US and SCO can cooperate with each other (Guang, 2011).

Some analyst fear that history may repeat itself in the country its mean that if peace and stability not brought in the country than it may lead toward the 1990s situation where different groups were fighting with each other and the country witnessed a civil war (Reis & Simionato, 2009: 135). There are other views as well, like some analyst argue that the situation in the country is for much different from the situation of 90s and now there is some ground and regional realities which cannot be ignored such as the beginning of a democratic system and the growing awareness among the people to support democratic forces and reject the extremist tendencies in the country. So its mean that there are differences of opinion but one thing is clear that the country will be facing great challenges in the post-withdrawal period such as law and order situation and economic developments.

In order to bring stability and peace in Afghanistan, it is the responsibility of the regional states to support the country without any intervention in the internal affairs. The regional players have dynamic interest in the country (Mazhar, Khan, & Goraya, 2013: 73 & 78). SCO in this regard can play very significant role because of many reasons such as the non-intervention policy of the organization make it easy for Afghanistan to have close cooperation with the organization for the country stability secondly, the organization main objective is to fight against terrorism and extremism which are the key issues for the country thirdly, the role of the organization since its inception remain very positive for the countering terrorism, regional stability and economic developments and lastly the organization has an observer status in UN which further provide the opportunity to play a constructive role in the country mean this international recognition of the organization will help to play a positive role for peaceful, stable and economically prosperous Afghanistan.

Post-withdrawal, SCO and the role of regional states in Afghanistan Stability

You can change your friend and enemy but you cannot change your neighbors. In order to analyze the stability and economic development in Afghanistan, it is necessary to describe the role of regional key player like Pakistan, India and Iran. In the complex security situation and global issues such as terrorism, drug trafficking, there is need of mutual cooperation. In the post-cold war era, the weak states are became a threat for international peace and stability. According to Francis Fukuyama, nations that are not able to exercise the responsible sovereignty, are causing spillover effect (Fukuyama, 2004). Its mean that, it is in the vital interest of the regional
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states to have a stable Afghanistan because the spillover effect will disturb the whole region security order. The regional states must work with the country in order to strengthen its capacities to control the territory and the internal threat of insurgency, terrorism and other crimes such as drug trafficking.

After the 9/11 attack, the US and international forces invaded Afghanistan in order to bring stability and curb terrorism. This invasion has changed the dynamics of regional politics and security (Gul, Post-9/11 Afghanistan and the Regional Security Scenario, 2006:5). India is emerged is one of the influential state in the region and further increase its influence in Afghanistan. On the other hand, Pakistan significance and its geo-strategic importance cannot be ignored, that’s why we see series of bilateral and trilateral meeting attended by Pakistan officials. Similarly Iran is also a key regional state having influence in the country. Speaking historically, these individual interests somehow effected the internal situation in Afghanistan particularly Pakistan and India has been blamed for proxy war. What are the solutions to these problems? There is need of institutions and regional forums which can handle these complex issues. Although, Afghanistan and other regional key states mentioned above are not permanent members of SCO, still they have the opportunity to use this platform for the regional stability. SCO members are also have keen interest to work with all these countries for regional stability and economic prosperity in the region as Ivan Safranchuk has discussed in his paper on Afghanistan and regional stability that The SCO has shown it is going to play an increasingly active role in Afghanistan issues and promote an agenda of its own, while cooperating with other interested countries (Safranchuk, 2009: 143-144).

Tackling terrorism, drug trafficking, the SCO Experience
Within a short period of time SCO got a significance position in the world politics particularly in dealing issues like terrorism, separatism drug trafficking and borders issues. The SCO members such as Uzbekistan and other Central Asian state were facing similar security problems facing by Afghanistan today. The organization first developed cordial relation among all members and then adopted certain measure to solve the regional issues.

The SCO experience regarding regional stability and greater economic cooperation can benefit other regional and neighbor states such as Afghanistan. In order to bring stability in member state and in the region, SCO established Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS)(The Executive Committee of the Regional Counter-Terrorism Structure, 2013). The SCO member states view combating terrorism, separatism, and extremism within the framework of the SCO as a foreign policy objective of the greatest importance and consider that the development of additional mechanisms of international cooperation in this area must become an appropriate step in increasing and modernizing the capacity for swift anti-crisis reaction and must facilitate the effective joint use of opening possibilities and the countering of new challenges and threats.

The Executive Committee of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure is responsible for carrying out all the activities such as coordination, legal procedure and all other related issues. So within a decade the organization was able to contain the activities of all the extremist group by effectively implemented its agenda on counter terrorism through effective use of intelligence information and close cooperation. How can this SCO experience work for Afghanistan? The geographical location of Afghanistan is very significant for the regional security and stability. The SCO member able to contain the extremist group and up to a greater level able to restore peace and security but they were not able to completely vanish the extremist group. One of the main reasons was their easy access to Afghanistan that’s why the SCO member closely cooperating in order to contain these group. This cooperation will enhance the possibilities of regional stability and economic cooperation.
SCo A Model of Regionalism
In the post-Cold War era the regional integration process has increased and this can be seen through the establishment of regional organizations and also the increasing role of the existed organizations (Mistry, 2000: 48-49 & 55). European Union and ASEAN are the model of regional integration which played a crucial role for regional security and economic development. In Asia two regional organization (SCO and ASEAN) played a vital role in economic integration and regional stability. Both organization have some similarities and distinctions. Outside the Europe, these two organization are model of regional cooperation (Aris, A new model of Asian regionalism: does the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation have more potential than ASEAN?, 2009:43).

The SCO provides a platform for the regional states to cooperate and work together for curbing the common threats such as China and Russia helped out the CARs to fight against the militant groups and restore law and order situation in their countries. According to Joshua S. Goldstein the concept of collective security is broadened in twenty first century like the weak states have very little control over their territories so these territories becomes safe havens for drug trafficking and terrorism. It is the responsibility of international community to provide a sound supports to the weak states in restoring law and order situation (Goldstein, 2008: 85-87).

As a model of regional integration, SCO focuses on all social, political, economic and security issues. In order to enhance regional security, the organization has conducted military exercises and training, to train the security forces particularly the Central Asian States force that face serious threats from the militant groups operating in the mountainous regions (Gordon, 2010). The organization has also played a constructive in the economic development of the region and took some positive measure to enhance economic development in the region such as the agreement on SCO Business Council and Interbank Association. The heads of all SCO member states welcomed that agreement and express the hope that both Council will work together for the prosperity of the region (Joint Communiqué of Meeting of the Council of Heads of Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, 2007). Part from this, the organization has also established energy club.

All these developments will help the regional states to become economically more integrated. All the observer states of SCO are the potential to become the permanent member of the organization in the near future. The informal interactions among the regional state may institutionalized by using SCO as a model for regionalism. According to Stephen Aris, the author of Eurasian Regionalism and Shanghai Cooperation Organization, outside the West SCO is significant case study in international Relation particularly on regionalism (StephenAris, 2011).

Post-withdrawal and Regional Security
Located between Central and South Asia, Afghanistan is remain a key state for the regional stability. This peculiar position of the country remain a sour of interest for the big power (Gul, The Post- 9/1 1 Afghanistan and the Regional Security, 2006: 51-52). In the last many decades, Afghanistan is remained a sour of conflict in the region which start from Central Asia and further expand to Chechnya and other surrounding areas. On one hand the security situation in Afghanistan is affected the security situations in these area and on the other hand it remain a hub for the drug trafficking. In order to understand and solve the issues especially the security challenges in the country it will be better to understand the regional dynamics and its impact on the regional and Afghanistan security situation (Rubin & Armstrong, 2003: 35).
The withdrawal of NATO and ISAF forces after December, 2014 has great impact on the security of Afghanistan as well as on the entire region. As discussed above that certain measure should be taken in order to make a stable Afghanistan because unstable Afghanistan has direct and indirect impact on the regional security. Speaking historically Afghanistan has remained a safe haven for the different extremist groups of the region like the growing presence of IMU members in Northern Afghanistan which are operating in Central Asian and posed a serious threat to CARs security especially Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. On the other hand the Chinese government is much cautious about the activities of the Uighur separatist groups such as East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM). The Chinese government accuses such groups of getting training in Afghanistan and are involved in different terrorist activities(Pereire, 2006). These militant groups are connected with each other, therefore the Chinese government not only working with Afghanistan but also with the central Asian States to counter these groups by collecting data, share information and also extradition of culprits in order to enhance the regional security(Clarke, 2007). The SCO has developed such mechanism through which it able to share intelligence information in order to contain these militant groups.

Similarly Russia wants to have stable Central Asia because instability and extremism has some consequences for Russia such as in Chechnya. The Central Asian states security has been on the risk due to growing presence of IMU member. IMU is not only operating in CARs but also have deep roots in Afghanistan. There are a number of IMU members which are operating in different provinces of Afghanistan(Feitt, 2010). Although US and international forces weaken these groups but not able to completely vanish them. In these situations the problem of insecurity and militancy can be seen through regional approach because almost all the regional states are affected and affecting by fragile security situation. SCO in this regard can play a vital role because securing the member states and region from militancy and extremism is the prime objective of this organization.

In the post 2014 period, there will be serious and great challenges to the regional security because the militant groups are still active and they are partially defeated by the NATO and ISAF forces. According to Roger N. McDermott, the writer of report on the security of Central Asian state in post-2014 says, the militant groups such as Al-Qaeda, Taliban, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, East Turkistan Islamic Movement and Islamic Jihad Union and other militant groups can pose a serious threat to the regional security after the withdrawal of US and NATO forces(McDermott, 2013: 13). All these concern and threat shows that there is need of some mechanism and bodies which can deal the situation in the post 014 period.

The SCO can play a bigger role for regional stability and the main reasons are, the organization has long experience in tackling extremism, the fragile security situation will directly affect the internal security dynamics of the member states and the growing cooperation between Afghanistan and SCO can help both sides to curb out the extremism from the region. SCO during a short time of period develop a security community for the regional security. The organization promotes confidence building measure, military cooperation, economic and political support and also strategic cooperation which is necessary for the regional stability (Lanteigne, 2006/07).

The world is going toward multipolar approach in international politics where different regional powers such as regional international organizations can solve their regional issues and SCO has the potential to play a vital role for the regional stability and economic development (Aris, Eurasian Regionalism The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, 2011: 100-102). Apart from
the regional approach, the SCO also has international recognition which can help to play more constructive role in Afghanistan in the post-withdrawal period.

The organization has UN observer status and also has arranged an international conference on Afghanistan which shows its interest in the economic development and enhancing the fragile security situation in the country. With international recognition and having a positive role in regional stability it will be easy for the organization to interact and cooperate with Afghanistan for its stability and economic development.

**Conclusion**

The withdrawal of NATO and ISAF forces in 2014 have great implications for local, regional and international security. After the invasion and the presence of international forces, entire peace and security has not been restored in the country which worried the countries especially the neighbor and regional states. Although there is some improvement in the security and economic development in the country such as, the strengthening of Afghan National Army (ANA) and police forces but still the overall security situation is volatile. Keeping in view the entire situation, it is the prime responsibility of international community particularly the regional states to play their role in the improvement of security and economic development of the country.

In the past Afghanistan is remained a center of interest for different countries particularly the regional countries which created a bad impression of the involvement of neighbors in the internal affairs of the country. In such kind of uncertain situation there is need of such regional forum which can play a positive role instead of intervention in the internal affairs of the country. SCO can and will play a bigger role in the stability of the country because SCO has non-interventionist policy, it has played a significant role in the regional stability and countering terrorism, it is now playing a significant role in world politics and most importantly it has cordial relation with Afghanistan. All these conditions are suitable for the greater role of SCO particularly in the security and economic sector. SCO has a long experience of building confidence measure, good neighborhood and tackling extremism and terrorism in the member states, this experience can help Afghanistan because the country has facing the same problems. Apart from the security improvement the organization has also made significant development in the economic sector so similarly it can play the same role in Afghanistan and as an observer it is important for the country to learn from the experience of the organization.

SCO members are also worried about the spell over effect from Afghanistan because instability in Afghanistan can affect the overall security of the region. Afghanistan has remain a center for the extremist groups such Al-Qaeda, Taliban, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and several other groups operating in the region. All these circumstances compel the regional states to cooperate with each other. In international Relations states act through formal organizations because these organizations are providing legitimacy for their actions. In order to curb extremism, SCO in this regard can play a vital role in the stability and developments of Afghanistan and stable Afghanistan will further contribute to the regional stability which is the prime objective of the Organization. The country has cordial relations with the Organization, the relations further improved when the country got the observer status. The organization has keen interest in the stability and development of the country because it taken some steps such as the establishment of SCO- Afghan contacts group and the arrangement of an international conference on Afghanistan which got international support and recognition. This shows that in the post-withdrawal period the role of organization will be crucial.
Regionalism is of the important subject in international Relations theory and SCO can be view as model of regionalism. Regional organizations such as EU and ASEAN have played an important for regional integration and economic development. Similarly, SCO can play a vital role in integrating South, Central and Eastern parts of Asia. Regional problems need regional solutions. SCO within a short period of time was able to enhance the greater cooperation among its member and the same role can be extend to other regional and neighbors country. The international Relations scholars are of the views that, in this globalized world individual and particularly the weak states are not able to depend their territory. So there is need of collective actions and mutual cooperation which can be achieved through regional and international organization. Keeping in view all these argument we can conclude that for regional stability and economic prosperity, the SCO will play an important role in Afghanistan in the post 2014 era.

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NATO AND US FORCES AND THE ROLE OF SHANGHAI


Received: April, 20th, 2015
Revisions Received: Sep, 14th, 2015
Major Threats to Pakistan in the Wake of US Withdrawal from Afghanistan: The Case of FATA and KP

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Afghanistan is the next down neighbor on the north west of Pakistan and both the countries are of immense geo-strategic and geo political importance for each other. Both the countries have certain degree commonality when it comes to culture, religion, history and ethnicity. But the conflicting position on Durand line, rise of militancy in the region and frequent blame games have turned them into rivals rather than friends. Since the Soviet occupation, Afghanistan posed a serious threat to Pakistan and the level of threat increased manifolds after US attacked Afghanistan for wiping the Taliban regime. The post 9/11 military action of the NATO forces put immense international pressure and compelled Pakistan to become the front line state in fighting the ‘War on Terror’. Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) that became the sanctuary of militants owing to the porous Pak-Afghan border borne the brunt of the militancy along with the settled districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhawa. The staggering death rates due to militancy in the regions are hard to fathom in addition to social and economic damages particularly when it comes to FATA and KP. The withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan at the end of year 2014 occurred without the complete defeat of Afghan Taliban and this encouraged Pakistani Taliban that in similar manner they can challenge the writ of Pakistani Government. In the current scenario Pakistan has to effectively deal with the local militants and has to wisely counter the blame game emanating from the Afghan Government for the stability in FATA and KP. If Afghanistan after the US withdrawal like Iraq became the battle ground of proxy wars it will have serious security threats for Pakistan and the major effects will be seen in FATA and KP.

Key words: US withdrawal, militancy, FATA, Khyber Pahtunkhawa, security threats, 

The US led invasion of Afghanistan after the incidence of 9/11 opened new debate vis-a-vis tracing the roots and strategies of nabbing terrorism in this region. The use of military force was considered essential to demolish the evil forces known to the world by the name of Al-Qaeda and thereof the ‘War on Terror’ became the flashpoint of the Twenty first century. The invasion impressed upon countries to change their foreign policy in the best interest of global peace by fighting the ‘War on Terror’. Pakistan being the most important neighbor of Afghanistan had no other choice but to fight the war against the forces of terror. The ghost of militancy started to haunt Pakistan when it abandoned the former allies i.e. Taliban in Afghanistan. There is no denial of the fact that Pakistan was once a staunch supporter of Taliban regime in Afghanistan prior to the incident of 9/11and countries like Iran, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkeministan deeply denounced the act of assisting Taliban (Rais, 2004). Pakistan had its own interest in extending

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support to Taliban movement as it wanted to keep its arch enemy, India at bay who was not only a close ally of Soviet Union but was more focused on taking full control of Indian Ocean, setting its eyes to acquire a permanent seat in the security council, aiming to damage the nuclear program of Pakistan and domination over the entire South Asia and littoral states (Koreshi, 2012). India is still pursuing her goals and it is maximizing threat perception of Pakistan by countering Pakistan’s role in Afghanistan.

Commencement of ‘Operation enduring Freedom’ on October 7, 2001 although effected countries like Iran, Russia and China to a certain degree, their international image was not compromised. But, the case did not hold true for Pakistan because its involvement in Afghan conflict by extending active support to US military action made Pakistan a flashpoint in the world (Rais, 2004). The spillover effects of the war on terror have done havoc in Pakistan. Today Pakistan has more internal challenges than external challenges and all are the byproducts of indulging in Afghan’s war and ‘War on Terror’. From Karachi to Khyber the whole country is engulfed in the fratricidal blood bath. Musharraf also admitted in his autobiography highlighting the issue and stated:

“The United States was not the only casualty of 9/11. The attacks hit Pakistan differently, but with equally savage force. We feel the ramifications to this day. No other country has faced as many threats on as many fronts” (Musharraf, 2006).

The Afghan war is the second longest war of United States after Vietnam War. The withdrawal of the US troops gave a new paradigm shift to the region. The world has witnessed the case of Iraq and is now apprehensive about the future of Afghanistan. It is pertinent to mention here that Islamic State (IS) which emerged in 2014, right three years after US drawdown from Iraq is the outcome of Post-Saddam anarchy. In 2011 President Obama declared with high confidence: “We are leaving behind a sovereign, stable and self-reliant Iraq” (Macreal, 2014). Today the IS has leashed its unbridled atrocities in Iraq, Syria and Yemen and analysts are acutely aware that countries lying at the eastern boarder of Iraq will face the imminent threat if preemptive measures are not taken.

US has gained nothing in the thirteen years war in Afghanistan, the counter insurgency operations by the US and NATO forces have yielded no positive results for the threat of Taliban has not diminished from the region. According to Mahmud Shah, “The only trophy which it can claim is the elimination of Osama bin Laden. Otherwise, the terrorism which the Americans came to eliminate has increased, not decreased” (Shah, 2013). When the withdrawal of the US and NATO was at the corner stone, the same year 2014 is regarded as the deadliest year after 2001 for more than 3180 civilians were killed, 6430 were injured and there was 33% increase being witnessed in the deadliest battleground (Dominguez, 2014). The rising death toll puts the performance of Afghan National Security forces in question and signifies the drawbacks of ‘Resolute Support Mission’. US need not to undermine that professional development of the armed forces could not be achieved in prescribed timeline. Armed forces take years to mature and acquire proficiency let alone for example of Pakistan Infantry’s history goes back to 1914.

‘Operation Enduring Freedom’ might have ended in Afghanistan on December 28, 2014. But the war is yet not over because Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) signed on September 30, 2014 entails the presence of 9800 US military personnel in 2015. In a recent report Mr. Dobbins, US Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan from May 2013 to July 2014 and Mr.
Malkasian, political adviser to General Joseph Dunford from May 2013 to August 2014 have urged United States to ‘seize the moment’ by keeping forces in Afghanistan till 2017 and beyond (Dawn, 2015). The presence of foreign boots will certainly have active role in the events that will unfold in future. Modern day Great Game is being played around inner Asia and centers on Afghanistan. Major powers embroiled in competition are China, Russia, India and the United States but Pakistan is also an important player and faced with accelerated blow back especially its border region of FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhawa (Goodson, 2014).

**Afghanistan and Pakistan from Past to Present**

Pakistan is geopolitically the most important country of the Asian heartland as Hasan Dani (2008) mentions, “it is not land locked, parched and isolated”. It is widely believed that Afghanistan and Pakistan are not only next door neighbors but the connections are deeper for their similarity in history, religion, culture, trade language and ethnic linkages. Despite the similarities between the two countries the relations between them have remained in doldrums over the issue of Durand Line, the idea of greater Pakhtunistan, the soviet invasion, Taliban rise in the region, unending war on terror, India’s increasing influence in Afghanistan and currently the peace dialogue with Taliban in the context of US withdrawal from the region are bone of contention and sources of threat to Pakistan.

When Pakistan got independence in 1947 the basic principle of its foreign policy as enunciated by Quaid-e-Azam was “peace at home and peace abroad” (Koreshi, 2012). Therefore the primal objective was to establish friendly relations with Afghanistan. However, Afghanistan was reluctant to accept the newly established state and owing to the complex dynamics of its creation considered it fragile to survive in the long run and set the eyes on its territory. Attempts were made to create obstacles for Pakistan by renouncing the Durand Line and adopted a rigid posture on an Independent Pashtun nation. However, Pakistan marginalized all the claims of Afghanistan (Budihas, 2011).

Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 perplexed Pakistan. The amiable relations between Soviet Union and India were something that Pakistan was not fond of. In order to ward off the danger of Communist Regime, United States extended the helping hand to Pakistan for the expulsion of common enemy from Afghan Territory. Together they raised *Mujahedeen* trained in Pakistan with funding from United States to defeat the Red Army and they achieved the goal (Budihas, 2011).

Major repercussions Pakistan bore internally of the Soviet War in Afghanistan and saw the increase in cross border drug proliferation and large exodus of Afghan refugees to its land. Refugees were burden on Pakistan economy and led to new demographical and political tensions (Grare, 2003). Till date Pakistan is facing the problem of 2 Million refugees who are reluctant to leave the country. In the post-Soviet era especially after the collapse of the Najibullah Government in 1992 plunged the entire Afghanistan into a civil war. War lords were not afraid of using heinous acts for gaining power in the country. Chaotic situation in Afghanistan gave emergence to Taliban gaining the control of the country in 1996. Pakistan supported the Taliban regime for its pro Pakistani stance which was missing in the previous stake holders of Afghan political scene. But, the support vanished after the incident of 9/11 as Pakistan relinquished supporting Taliban regime under monumental International pressure.
Fusillade of allegations between Kabul and Islamabad started when Hamid Karzai, a Pashtun leader from Kandahar took charge of Afghan presidential office in December 2001. Afghanistan blamed Pakistan for insurgency in the region while Pakistan reciprocated by making it accomplice of India in fanning the flames of hatred in Balochistan. In the year 2008 from attack on Indian embassy to the killing of NATO soldiers Pakistan was held accountable. When Burhanuddin Rabbani, former Afghan president and chief of High Peace Council was assassinated in 2011 there was no deviation from the norm. Similar trend was observed when Afghan Spy Chief was attacked in 2012. The relations between Northern Alliance and Pakistan were marred with trust deficit (Hussain & Latif, 2012). Pakistan in 2012 adopted a “Strategic Shift” in its Afghan policy and focused reconciliation with Northern Alliance as its relation with United states were at impasse over the Salala check post incident, Raymond David case and on the Operation Neptune Spear. Pakistan feared diplomatic isolation and was quick to change its maneuvers. Islamabad is mindful of the fact that insecurity and instability in Afghanistan will have serious implications for its own security and might increase the burden on its counterterrorism efforts. For that reason, Pakistan has been helping the US and the Afghan government in their efforts to reach out to the Afghan Taliban through peace talks. Pakistan was part of the international efforts that finally resulted in the Taliban opening an office in Qatar. At the same time, over the years Islamabad has launched extensive efforts to reach out to non-Pashtun Afghans in an effort to demonstrate that Pakistan’s Afghan policy was no longer exclusively focused on Pashtuns or the Taliban. Pakistan, like other countries in the region, cannot afford the rule of Taliban in Kabul as that would give impetus to Taliban-like movements in Pakistan (Yusuf, 2013).

Mr. Ashraf Ghani who came to power last year September 2014 in Afghanistan wants to establish peace in his country by having a composite dialogue with Afghan Taliban and is interested in Pakistan to play its role effectively. Unlike his predecessor he has pro Pakistan approach and cancelled the arm deal signed by Hamid Karzai in 2011 with India to Pacify Pakistan. Pakistan need to act in a quid pro quo before the president Ghani changes his mind due to the brazen annual summer offensive launched by Afghan Taliban.

Ramifications for FATA and KP

Pakistan has 2640 km long border with Afghanistan. There are almost 300 passes that link Afghanistan with Khyber Pakhutnkhwa (KP) and Balouchistan (Hilali, 2005). Since the incidence of 9/11 Pakistan has been considered the sanctuary for the terrorists who escaped from Afghanistan after the US invasion (Ahmed, 2010). One major reason that contributed to the settlement of militants in FATA is the porous border between Afghanistan and Pakistan (Javaid, 2011) and the other is Pashtunwali (the Pashtun way of life) that governs the behavior of people residing in FATA and KP which allow them to facilitate new comers namely guests (Ahmed, 2010). Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) is approximately 27,220 sq km in size and has 600 km porous border with Afghanistan. It comprises of seven tribal agencies namely: Mohmand, Bajaur,

Orakzai, Kurram, Khyber, South and North Waziristan and six Frontier Regions (Bannu, FR Dera Ismail Khan, FR Kohat, FR Laki, FR Peshawar and FR Tank). It is semi-autonomous region, lying in the North West of Pakistan considered to be tribal hunter land having its own political and social set up.

For people of FATA, War on Terror is a political rather than an ideological problem. They are of the view that Taliban are legitimate fighters against the United States as they perceived American occupation over the Afghanistan as illegal. Majority of the people in FATA considers the
US as an *enemy state* and only few in numbers consider them *friend*. They have a staunch belief that it was War on Terror that pushed them to miseries and ruined their peaceful life. Many of them are also of the view that the killing of civilians and security forces in suicide bombing and target killings are *acts of terrorism* (Akbar, 2015).

The porous border between Afghanistan and Pakistan prompted the settlement of Afghan Taliban in the Tribal areas of Pakistan and as a result the inhospitable terrain of FATA became the flashpoint of militants where in emerged *Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan* (TTP). These Non State Actors are adamant to destabilize Pakistan. They have carried heinous crimes like assassinations, kidnappings, suicidal attacks and damage to the infrastructure of the country. They have not only killed 400 Maliks of the FATA and Swat Valley but have brutally killed civilians, personals of the military forces and various political and religious leaders (Parveen, khalil, & Shah, 2014). Numerous military operations have been carried out to silence the enemy of Pakistan as it was not possible to brush aside their hostilities through peaceful dialogue. Further, whenever Government of Pakistan initiated a dialogue with TTP it yielded no positive outcomes. Operation *Rah-e-Rast* a massive military operation was launched in Swat Valley on April 26, 2009 against TTP of Swat and their associates. In Bajaur agency operation *Sher-Dil* (Lion Heart) was launched on September 9, 2008 against 2000 militants who were residing in the region. In Orakzai Agency safe havens of militants were dismantled with Aerial Strikes by Pakistan Air force. Operation *Sirat-e-Mustakim* was launched in Bara Tehsil area of Khyber Agency over massive killing of minorities by the militants. In Kurrum agency operation *Koh-i-Sufaid* (White Mountain) was conducted between May 2, 2011 and August 17, 2011 (Parveen, khalil, & Shah, 2014).

On June 24, 2014 operation *Zarb-e-Azab* was launched in North Waziristan, area having history of violence even before the existence of Pakistan. Director General, Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) on the launch of Operation said,

> “On the directions of the Government, Armed forces of Pakistan have launched a comprehensive operation against foreign and local terrorists who are hiding in sanctuaries in North Waziristan Agency….. They had also paralyzed life within the agency and had perpetually terrorized the entire peace loving and patriotic local population.” (The News, 2014)

What militants did in retaliation to operation *Zarb-e-Azab*, was the most callous act never seen before in the history of Pakistan killing 135 students in a military run school in Peshawar leaving the entire nation in anger and grief. The Prime Minister of Pakistan described the incident as a “national tragedy unleashed by savages” (Dawn,2014). Anger and grief filled the atmosphere of Pakistan demanding quick response by the State. Pakistan responded by establishing military courts through 21st Amendment aiming to enforce death penalty to the terrorists. *Zarb-e Azab* attained greater momentum and after its one year of launch 2,763 militants has been killed and over 9000 have surrendered (Shahid, 2015).

**Settlement of Internally Displaced People (IDPs)**

Whenever fierce fighting breaks out between militants and Security forces, displacement comes as a natural phenomenon. From military operation in Swat to North Waziristan, the region has witnessed displacement of the indigenous people compelling them to take shelters in adjoining areas by living in the camps or with their relatives. According to FATA Disaster Management Authority (FDMA) displaced individuals are 283,463. Detail breakdown of displaced people is documented region wise in Figure1.
Effective settlement of internally displaced people (IDPS) is a major concern for both Civil and Military Administration. Without winning the hearts of the native people it is difficult to bring peace and stability in the region. Realizing the issue Prime Minister and Chief of Army Staff strongly emphasized on their rehabilitation in apex committee held at KP (Dawn, 2015). People of FATA consider the displacement an attack on their self esteem they have to face various social economic and political problems. According to FATA Research Centre (2013) major challenges being faced by women and children IDPS are loss of identity, lack of shelter, physical health and hygiene problems and food problems. There is a dire need for bringing reforms in FATA because successful repatriation and effective settlement of IDPs cannot be achieved unless there are developmental projects, improved governance and improved law and order situation in the region. There is likelihood that militants will make an attempt to influence the mind of the displaced people through their welfare activities. In this context it is vital for the government to cut the financial resource network of the militants and reach to the minds and hearts of the people before the miscreants galvanize them in their ranks and file.

The Issue of Drone Attacks

Under Obama’s administration drone attacks have particularly increased relative to Bush Administration with the introduction of signature strikes. In 2013 President Obama regulated the rules for Drone Attacks relying on more intelligence information to decrease the civilian casualties but exempted Pakistan from any such measure declaring “proposed targets are imminent threats to the US”(Entous, 2015). In this backdrop after the Withdrawal of the US forces from Afghanistan there will be sufficient rise in the drone attacks. Examining the statistics shown in figure 2, it is evident that there might be hiatus in drone attacks for some time but US will not abandon the predator when it comes to terrorists hideouts in FATA and KP.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Incidents</th>
<th>Killed</th>
<th>Injured</th>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
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The drone attack dilemma would not be resolved easily because of the mixed reviews within Pakistan. One school of thought believes that they are effective in curbing the militancy from the region as in the rugged terrain it is not possible to win the war without using these predators. While the other school of thought believes that the strikes are unlawful on the ground that they are extrajudicial killings and the casualty rate of the civilians are high than the militants. Although TTP leaders like Baitullah Mehsud, Hakim Ullah Mehsud and more recently Khawaray Mehsud had been killed in drone attacks but there is no denial that civilians death rate is high compared to the militants as Maan, (2014) stated “unilateral use of drones in FATA has led to significant collateral damage, apart from killing a few HVTs.” Given overall environment in FATA drone strikes is like double edge sword it has the potential to enhance anti-American sentiment and proliferate violence in the coming years.
Consortium of Militants

The ongoing military operation Zarb -e- Azab has dismantled TTP residing in North Waziristan to certain degree. Most of the militants went to Kunar, Afghanistan to avoid the wrath of the Pakistani security forces. Victory against militancy cannot be claimed until the entire state get rid of militancy particularly FATA and KP. Today in Pakistan various militants outfits are present namely Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Lashkar-i-Jhangvi, Jamaat ul Ahrar, Lashkar-i-Khorasan, Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamat, Jamaat ud Dawa, the State clearly needs to ban these militants outfits by taking stringent measures against them because a high probability of collusion between Afghanistan and Pakistan militants after the US withdrawal is highly possible. The weak ANSF if allowed Afghanistan to become once again the conduit of proxy wars in such case Pakistani militants will remerge with different names and with different allies within the country and on the Pak-Afghan border region. The emergence will pose serious threat to the stability of FATA and KP because the cross borders attacks would increase destabilizing the entire region. The new wave of insurgency will turn FATA and KP into ashes, for the militants will only seek revenge from the Government and military of Pakistan. It is imperative now for law enforcement agencies to be ahead of militants in their strategies.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Stability in Afghanistan can be achieved after the US withdrawal only if the countries in the region play their role positively in the war torn country. A stable Afghanistan is of paramount importance to Pakistan because without it stability in FATA and KP is a distant cry. Pakistan needs to overcome its internal challenges from militancy in FATA and KP curbing insurgency in Baluchistan, without solving them Pakistan Army will be occupied with Western Border ignoring the Eastern border where the threat is still present. The issue of IDPs and Drone attacks if not addressed properly will make the displaced individuals vulnerable to the diabolic plans of the militants who may use them against Pakistan posing serious threat to the writ of the state. Further, the absence of developmental projects in FATA and KP leads to abject poverty which will remain the hallmark of the region unless the internal strife is not resolved and the governance is not improved.

Following recommendations can be taken into consideration:

- **Diplomacy:** Pakistan needs to play the rules of diplomacy in a dignified manner. Any faux pas would leave the country in a lurch. President like Ashraf Ghani would be hard to find in Afghanistan having pro Pakistani stance, in case Pakistan does not meet his expectations consequently a strong Kabul-Delhi Nexus will emerge. Therefore, Pakistan needs to play the role in the region effectively.

- **Reforms in FCR:** It is time to bring positive changes in FCR. People of FATA like other citizens of Pakistan need to be protected under the constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan. If the sense of belongingness is missing among the people of FATA and they feel disgruntled and their honor is not redeemed then no matter what effective measures are adopted by the State they would not generate any positive results.

- **Concreted Efforts:** Militancy cannot be eradicated from FATA and KP unless the military and civil government is on the same page. With concerted efforts of the concerned quarters like removing the distinction between good and bad Taliban the deteriorating situation of the country could only then be improved.

- **Breaking the Nexus:** The nexus between TTP and Al-Qaeda and now Islamic State (IS), if the regions have to be freed from the tyranny of these militants. By cutting the financial arteries through intelligence sharing and joint ventures these groups could be dismantled and
defeated. Delaying of measures against these groups will allow their expansion, growth and unity which will turn the world a horrible place to live in.

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Received: July, 14th, 2015
Revisions Received: Sep, 14, 2015
China's Economic and Strategic Interests in Afghanistan

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Afghanistan has a unique and indeed, an immense significance in the strategic calculus of People’s Republic of China. The geopolitics of this Chinese neighbourhood has four glaring peculiarities, which include; political, strategic, geographical, and economic. In the rapidly changing global security environment, these aspects demands a deeper cooperation not only between China and Afghanistan but also for the regional integration of all those countries eager for regional peace and harmony, based on mutual respect and sovereignty. The central argument of this research is based on the postulation that in the post 2014 scenario, ‘constructive engagement with Afghanistan will serve the Chinese strategic, economic and security interests. In the academic sphere, the argument is strongly supported by the realist school of thought. It directly correlates with China’s own national security stakes and economic opportunities. Indeed, a fragmented, fundamentalist and anarchic Afghanistan would stand contrary to China’s interest of maintaining stability and defying the ongoing militancy in its autonomous region, Xinjiang. Though security may be the immediate objective, the long-term aim is economic and strategic cooperation with Afghanistan, driven by the liberal paradigm, which China finds as the most crucial and enduring. Such a Chinese engagement will improve security situation and bring economic development in Afghanistan; a win-win situation.

Key Words: Economic, strategic, xinjiang, stability, realist school

Visualizing a buoyant and constructive Chinese role in Afghanistan, the Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, visited China soon after taking over the power in October 2014. Afghan president’s first official trip to China explains the growing realization of importance of bilateral relations on both the sides. While on one hand, Afghans look towards China for a major role both in its economic development as well as in the security stabilization, on the other hand China too seems to be forthcoming for playing a positive role in the contemporary Afghanistan. While the contemporary developments in the bilateral relationship of both countries are in the making, the Sino-Afghan relationship dates back to centuries. There has been a huge impact of Buddhism (originating from China) on the lives of people of this country from 7th century B.C to 1st century CE (Alikuzai, 2008, p.57). Besides, it had the influence of Turks, Arabs, and Mongols (New International Magazine, 2008).

Historian Arnold Toynbee has described Afghanistan as the “roundabout of the ancient world” (Blood and Aghajanian, 2007, p.3). Indeed, this terrain has been at the junction of the land routes from China and India to the West and a place of convergence for numerous, dynamic

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nations and cultures. It, therefore, is rightly said that Afghanistan is a bridge connecting the present day South Asia, Central Asia, West Asia and East Asia. Over the years, the migrants who passed through this region left behind “a mosaic of ethnic and linguistic groups” (Mazhar, Khan and Goraya, 2013). Thus, Afghanistan is truly a multi-cultural land and there have been Chinese civilizational impacts over this country.

Owing to the global power play between the major contenders, Afghanistan has been subjected to foreign invasions and intrusions quite frequently, mainly owing to its geopolitical location. It was in fact the geopolitical location of Afghanistan, which attracted global occupying powers from Alexander to former Soviet Union, and now NATO and US. In recent history, following the withdrawal of Soviet forces in 1989 (Grau and Gress, 2002, p.6), U.S being the key beneficiary of the covert campaign left the region in haste. In the absence of any substantial representative and consensus Government in Kabul, factional fighting prevailed until the administration was taken up the by religiously motivated Taliban in the middle of 1990s (Rashid, 2001, p.239). Coldblooded in nature, Taliban neither succeeded in securing public acceptance at home, nor won the recognition of international community (Rashid, 2001, p.239). The failure was mutual. In the post 9/11 scenario, the US led NATO action also could neither subdue the Taliban, nor could it reinstate stability in the war-ravaged Afghanistan. The US objectives to occupy Afghanistan were in line with Dr. Brzezinski’s geostrategic imperative of “managing” Eurasia (Phallon, 2013). It aimed at gaining access to and in turn, greater influence in the Eurasian Heartland. The strategy hinged upon containment and not cooperation with China. Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski writes in The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives "For America, the chief geopolitical prize is Eurasia...how America manages Eurasia is critical" (Phallon, 2013).

How successful the US strategy has been is another debate, but what’s known is the fact that after almost fourteen years of military commove, the US led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), has finally pulled out maximum combat forces from Afghanistan, leaving behind approximately 10000 US troops on nine strategic bases. While there still exists ambiguity regarding future US involvement in Afghanistan, the new regional alignments are in the making. In this regard, after a prolong silence, the People’s Republic of China; geographically contiguous to Afghanistan implied for the first time in June 2012 that it would play a major role in the stabilization of Afghanistan in the post 2014 scenario. The apparent Chinese role can be inferred from the statement of its former President, Mr. Hu Jintao, who clearly envisioned that, “We will continue to manage regional affairs by ourselves, guarding against shocks from turbulence outside the region, and will play a bigger role in Afghanistan’s peaceful reconstruction” (Bryanski and Buckley, 2012).

Since, the former Chinese President implicitly referred to his country’s plans regarding post-2014 Afghanistan, President Xi Jinping reitered Chinese commitment for Afghanistan’s peace, stability and economic prosperity, once he met President Ashraf Ghani in October 2014 in Beijing. President Xi even said that, he was all set to work with his Afghan counterpart towards, “a new era of cooperation in China-Afghanistan relations and take development to a new depth and breadth” (Panda, 2014). President Ghani endorsed the Chinese Silk Road Initiative and remarked that, “We feel that our vision of Afghanistan as a hub of regional trade, transit, and peace would be an illustration of your vision of East Asia and South Asia cooperation” (Panda, 2014). China has already made huge financial investments for the development of Afghanistan’s mineral sector. It
China has pledged $330 million grants over the next three years and agreed to provide professional training for 3,000 Afghans.

Indeed, China has a lot at stake in Afghanistan, security of its western autonomous region (Xinjiang) being the most significant. Consequently, restoration of peace and stability in Afghanistan is in the interest of China, besides this being vital for Afghan masses. Not only has China sufficient resources for making long-term investments in Afghanistan, there is a strong will of the determined Chinese leadership to strengthen communication, coordination and collaboration in dealing with major international and regional issues. China is analyzing new cooperation models and suggesting ways to identify non-resource sectors as a new priority for economic cooperation in Afghanistan and the region. Apart from its own interest for stabilization and reconstruction of Afghanistan, there is acceptability for China’s increased role in Afghanistan amongst the masses and leadership alike. At such a crucial time, deep-rooted economic and strategic relations with Afghanistan would not only bring economic gains to China but would also enhance its global stature. If China can rebuild the war-torn Afghanistan, it will be seen as a triumphant alternative to U.S.

**Chronology of Sino-Afghan Relationship**

The history of Sino-Afghan relationship can be traced back to 7th Century when Chinese Monks used to travel to Afghanistan through Silk Road, visiting Buddha statues in Bamyian province of Afghanistan (Scott, 2008), provided that the Afghan land had once been the focus of Buddhism. Under Buddhism, by 500 B.C, Kandahar and Heart provinces (then known Arachosia and Aria) were considered as the jewels of the world. Buddhist rule on Afghanistan remained from 650-321 B.C (the Mauryan Age) (Alikuzai, 2013). The largest Buddha statue (one thousand meters long, Sleeping Buddha statue) was made in the Bamyian province. There were twelve small and large Buddhist monarchies in Afghanistan; Kingdom of Bactria with its capital at Kandahar as the biggest and most significant (Alikuzai, 2013). Indeed, the Buddha statues of Bamyian (destroyed by Taliban in March 2001) had greater attraction for Chinese people, apart from many followers of this religion (UNESCO).

During the recent digging at the Aynak copper mines, some archaeological sites have been found that are not only part of Afghanistan’s cultural heritage but also of Chinese interests. Afghan and foreign archaeologists and historians have repeatedly highlighted the cross-border cultural links interspersed throughout this region. These sites are also part of China’s history. According to China, “this is China’s neighborhood, and they are committed to making sure it works out well” (UNESCO).

Through the extensive use of the Silk Road, a robust trade relationship existed between Asia and Europe. While China was the hub of Asian trade, Afghanistan played a significant role as key transit trade route between the two continents; Asia and Europe. The cordial Sino-Afghan relationships have been maintained through ages. It was after the re-positioning of global power centers, sequel to World War-II, People’s Republic of China and Afghanistan established their bilateral relationship in 1950s.

The diplomatic relationships, however, were established between the two neighbours in 1957. During the Cold war era, Chinese Prime Minister, Mr Zhu Enlai visited Afghanistan in 1957. Earlier, Prime Minister Daud Khan paid a visit to Peking in the same year. These visits strengthened the bilateral relationship between the two states. The Sino-Afghan Treaty of
Friendship and Non-Aggression was signed in August-1960 (Rahimi, 2008). Thereafter, the Peking Treaty of formal demarcation of boundary between China and Afghanistan was signed in 1963, thus settling the 76 Kilometres long border issues once and for all (Rahimi, 2008).

Being a signatory of 'Good Neighbour' Declaration-2002, China has pledged to respect Afghanistan's independence and territorial integrity. Indeed, both the states enjoyed friendly relations since the beginning of the bilateral relationship in 1950s; something that could perhaps be exceptional in the realm of international relations. China suspended her official relations with Afghanistan amidst the Soviet Union and restored relations only after the fall of Taliban regime in 2001. Since then, the Sino-Afghan relations have transformed and improved. Recently, the bilateral meetings and high level meetings have become quite frequent. Just last year, Chinese Foreign Minister, state Councilor, and Deputy Chief of PLA General Staff visited Afghanistan separately. In fact, this is the first time in history that this many Chinese visits have been made to Afghanistan in a span of one year only. Furthermore, China’s has massively upgraded aid to Afghanistan. While it provided a total of $240 million aid to Afghanistan from 2001-2013; in 2014 it has provided $80 million aid to the country and pledges to provide another $240 million from 2015-2018 (Huasheng, 2015).

Within the regional context, Afghanistan’s relations with China are likely to figure out much, both during the ongoing transition period and in the post-2014 scenario, as China is not only the most powerful regional country, with a thriving economy but also has the will to play a positive role in Afghanistan. China, as an economic power and neighbour can play a key role to help Afghanistan overcome the devastation of more than a decade long war. On its part, Afghanistan can offer China the easiest transport route for exploration of energy and mineral resources within Afghanistan and in its neighbouring region of Central Asia and Caucasus.

As of today, thousands of Afghan citizens acquire visas to travel to China in order to find good opportunities for business and trade. In addition to this, there are hundreds of Chinese citizens living and working in Afghanistan. Another important aspect of Sino-Afghan relationship is that China never had any political or ideological conflicts with Afghanistan, thus providing it with a special and unique privilege, unavailable to those countries that are apparently struggling to stabilize and democratize Afghanistan for their vested interests. "They are rare among the actors in Afghanistan in that they are not seen as having been too close to any side of the conflict. All sides are happy to see China's expanded role" (Gray, 2013). China has had balanced relationship with almost Afghan ethnic groups and therefore has not favoured any particular faction against the other; a policy that should have been learnt by others. According to Andrew Small, a US based Chinese expert, “China is the only actor which can foot the level of investment needed in Afghanistan to make it succeed and stick it out” (Wadsam, 2013).

The geo-economic significance of Afghanistan as well as Chinese huge investments in Afghanistan reflect an urge by both the sides to further expand relations and economic cooperation. Currently, several Chinese companies are engaged in various economic and construction activities in Afghanistan. It is likely that in near future, China emerges as the largest investor in Afghanistan’s enormous energy and mineral resources. The payoff for China could be enormous, despite having provided little aid and no blood over the last decade. In October 2009, Sultan Ahmad Baheen, Afghanistan's ambassador to China stated that, “We believe that Afghanistan should be the ground for cooperation of civilizations, not the competition between
the countries. I think there is room for everyone in Afghanistan” (Kuhn, 2009). If Beijing uses its strategy of less politics, more economy; it can definitely enjoy the larger share of room.

**Chinese Role in the Economic Development of Afghanistan**

Sino-Afghan political relationship, economic cooperation and trade relations date back to the era of Silk Road. The relations were established in 1955 and then were further strengthened through the ‘Treaty of Economic and Technical Cooperation in 1964.’ In the recent years, trade between the two countries has steadily increased and China has swiftly emerged as one of the main exporters to Afghanistan in the past decade. The Sino-Afghan trade has already reached over $700 million. A look at China-Afghan Trade volume highlights certain facts which points towards the environment conducive for China’s business interests. Just between 2002 and 2010, the trade volume remained considerably high i.e. China’s export volume increased from $19.91 million to $704 million. There also is a small but significant increase in China’s import volume which increased from $.08 million to $11.7 million (Huasheng, 2012, p.7). Furthermore, recently the Afghan Government and the donor agencies are contracting a number of Chinese companies for diverse areas of reconstruction activities.

Afghanistan is lucky to have abundance of natural resources like; copper, iron, coal, marble, precious metals, lithium, gemstones and above all hydrocarbons, some of which have been discovered while most remains un-explored, owing to the ongoing conflict. According to Afghan and American Geological Surveys, conducted between 2007 and 2009, deposits of copper, mercury, rare-earth elements, sulfur, chromites, asbestos, potash, graphite, and sand and gravel were found in over 20 mineralized areas. The survey reveals that, “The most significant known metal deposits are of copper and iron. The total copper resources in Afghanistan range up to 60 million metric tons of copper of which the sediment-hosted copper deposits at Aynak are estimated to contain nearly 30 million metric tons copper. Resources in undiscovered porphyry copper and skarn deposits are estimated to be about 28.5 million metric tons of copper, with additional molybdenum, gold, and silver resources. Sedimentary iron deposits are abundant, and the Haji Gak and surrounding deposits are estimated to contain about 2,260 million metric tons of iron ore with grades higher than 62 weight percent iron. Additional resources in similar deposits are likely” (Huasheng, 2012).

During the first decade of the 21st Century, trade between China and Afghanistan has steadily increased and China has emerged as one of the main exporters to Afghanistan. China is making substantive contributions in terms of developing the natural resources and infrastructure of Afghanistan. In 2007, Metallurgical Corporation of China (MCC) and Jiangxi Copper Corporation (JCCL) agreed to make the single largest foreign investment of $3.5 billion in Afghanistan by winning a tender to develop what geologists believe is the world’s second largest undeveloped copper deposit at Aynak in Logar Province, 35 kilometers southeast of Kabul (Downs, 2012). These copper deposits are estimated to be worth $1-$3 trillion (United States Geological Survey, 2007).

Indeed, China became the first foreign country in decades to sign an oil exploration deal with Afghanistan, making it possible for the later to earn $7 billion over next 25 years (Space Daily, 2011). In 2011, China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) and its Afghan partner, Watan Oil & Gas, secured the rights to three oil blocks in the provinces of Sari-i-Pul and Faryab in northwestern Afghanistan (Downs, 2012). China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) and its Afghan partner are exploring crude oil from Amu Darya River Basin oil deposits in northern Afghan region. Amu Darya River Basin deposits are of more than 87 million barrels of crude oil reserves (Downs, 2012).
Besides this, Northern Afghanistan region is believed to contain more than 1.6 billion barrels of crude oil, 16 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, and 500 million barrels of natural liquids gas (Downs, 2012). China has initially invested $400 million for the oil exploration in these oilfields in Afghanistan (Harooni, 2011).

The general perception is that the Chinese provide economic assistance in the form of part and parcel of the bid which makes it uncompetitive for anyone else to bid against Chinese companies. On the other hand, China has offered to build a power plant and a railroad to service the mine, which could nearly multiply the investment and will be beneficial for the population with civic facilities for the local population. It is interesting to note that while U.S. troops risk their lives in Afghanistan, it is Chinese companies that reap the economic benefits (Daishi, 2009).

Wakhan Corridor and New Eurasian Land Bridge

For long Afghanistan has desired that China should construct a direct road link to open the narrow Afghan-China border through Wakhan Corridor across the remote 47-mile border between the two countries. Wakhan border lies close to the city of Kashgar and its economic zone. China hopes to restore Kashgar as a launching pad and serve its previous position in the legendary Silk Road (Lin, 2011). Such a route would connect China to Central Asia, Europe and warm waters of Gulf via Afghanistan. In other words, it will be present worlds’ Silk Road, a new China’s Eurasian Land Bridge. According to Afghan Ambassador to China, Afghan Government has asked Beijing to open the narrow Afghan-China border. “If we have this link, for sure the Afghan people will benefit from this way. So this is why we proposed to the Chinese to build a road, even a railroad from this Wakhan Corridor to Afghanistan” (Kuhn, 2009). During his visit to China in October 2014, President Ghani proposed to his Chinese counterpart, President Xi, that both countries should “work to set up a transport link along their narrow border at the easternmost tip of the Wakhan Corridor, an inhospitable and mountainous region” (Panda, 2014).

While the West has been using the rhetoric about a “regional strategy” as the key to Afghanistan's future, China is the one that is actually implementing such an approach, anticipating both China’s readiness and the future in which Beijing will have much more of an impact on the region than Washington. “The deal is a way of getting a foot inside the door. China is looking towards a much bigger scale of investment. This could involve projects in infrastructure, including high-speed rail in times to come.”
In the discussion of a New Silk Road the former US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, hearkens back to historic East-West links and suggests a long-term investment in the region, China’s new Eurasian land bridge that is under construction. Linking Afghanistan to Central Asia—by developing direct land links between China, Europe and warm waters in the Gulf using a mesh of rail and road links—shows China is a serious, capable and long-term player in the region.

**Security and Sino-Afghan Strategic Relationship**

In June 2012, China and Afghanistan decided to form a framework for strategic cooperation between the two countries, both sides agreeing to bring about the strategic cooperation based on the UN charter and historic friendship. The strategic cooperation would guard national interests of both the countries, strengthen efforts for maintaining historic friendship between the two sides and develop support in political, financial, cultural and security sectors. Both countries have decided to support mutual issues of national integrity, unity and protection of land and not to let their soil be used against the other side.

The current President is more than willing for joint strategy to fight out terrorism like the former Afghan President Karzai who during his meeting with the then Chinese President Mr Hu in Beijing, agreed to step up cooperation in security and the fight against terrorism, other than upgrading intelligence sharing. China is trying to ensure that the Muslim separatist group: East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) in a western Chinese Xinjiang region does not benefit from the Taliban after the withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan. An important development in this context is China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Trilateral Strategic Dialogue, whose first round was held in February in Kabul. With focus on peace and stability, Pakistan and China have reemphasized their support for “Afghanistan-led and Afghanistan-owned” reconciliation process (Nihao-Salam, 2015).

Chinese strategy has been that it does support the international community in its efforts in Afghanistan but stays away from direct military involvement (Perlez, 2012). China, however, has serious concerns about the highly instable, war torn Afghanistan that will affect China’s internal security too, other than making it important to guard the borders. “China’s first concern is national security and to make sure the Uighurs don’t get more strength” (Perlez, 2012). Two major aims in this context are to discourage unrest in the Uighur population and thwart terrorist attacks carried out by ETIM (Gartenstein-Ross, Trombly and Barr, 2014). As agreed in 2012, during the visit of China’s domestic security chief, Mr Zhou Yongkang, the most senior Chinese official to visit Afghanistan in last 50 years, China would help train the Afghan police force. Under the new agreements, around 300 Afghan police officers would be sent to China for training over the next four years (Perlez 2012).

**The Regional Scenario: Soundings from SCO**

From SCO forum in June 2012, China clearly expressed its desire to play a greater role for the stabilization of Afghanistan alongside Russia. As mentioned earlier that President Hu vowed to make sure China would play an active role to manage the “regional affairs” against the “shocks from turbulence outside the region” and that would also include the reconstruction of Afghanistan and rehabilitation of Afghan population (Bryanski and Buckley, 2012). According to Mr Zhang Deguang, Chairman of China Foundation of International Studies (CFIS), “SCO can and will play a bigger role in Afghanistan after the NATO withdrawal” (Bryanski and Buckley, 2012). He added that China would provide $10 billion for undertaking projects in the SCO countries. Since most of the SCO countries are geographically contiguous with Afghanistan, and thus are
Khan

vulnerable to spillover effects of terrorism and Afghan-originated drug trafficking. Indeed, Afghan issue occupies importance throughout the history of SCO. This probably is the reason that SCO policy towards Afghanistan is evolving.

Owing to these facts, they have an interest to stabilize this country. SCO has laid down its views regarding Afghan policy and they are: promote political stability and economic development in Afghanistan, build a stable terrorism, narcotics and poverty-free Afghanistan, encourage the country to build an environment favorable for good relations with the neighbors, and further maintains that the international community must assist using the platform of United Nations (Huasheng, 2012). As presumed by scholars, the biggest test of the SCO would be its developmental role in post-2014 Afghanistan. Looking at China’s growing attention of Afghanistan, it becomes clear that China is well aware of all these realities and is ready to make an effort to ensure regional stability connected to that of Afghanistan. Former Chinese President Mr Hu once said that, “China will continue actively participating in international and regional cooperation concerning Afghanistan” (Bryanski and Buckley, 2012). Furthermore, Afghanistan has become the observer state to SCO.

In a statement, Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi said that member states should boost security collaboration to safeguard regional stability, including stepping up the fight against terrorism, separatism and extremism, optimizing the model for cooperation in ensuring security for major international events, and carrying on joint anti-terrorism exercises. Yang also called for better links among the SCO member states, boosting infrastructural construction, further facilitating trade and investment and expanding cooperation in sectors such as finance, transport, energy, telecommunication and agriculture amid the economic slump.

The historical Ufa Summit of SCO-2015 has formally initiated the expansion plan for membership of this organization. The Ufa Summit of SCO has regional and global implications. Regionally, two important South Asian countries have been housed in the organization as full members; a step forwards the regional integration process of the Asian Continent. Globally, Russia and China has given a clear indication to present a joint disagreement against the current unipolar world order, where US is the sole super power. At the level of South Asia, it is a well-coming step that Pakistan and India have been formally accepted as the members of SCO. Their entry into the organization will pave way for improvement in their bilateral relationship. This aspect has been even supported by Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Cheng Guoping, who said that, “India and Pakistan’s admission to the SCO will play an important role in the SCO’s development and it will play a constructive role in pushing for the improvement of their bilateral relations” (Daily Times, 2015). Chinese President also welcomed the expansion of SCO and called the members to “uphold the “Shanghai Spirit” for common development. He hoped that, admission of new forces into the SCO will inject new impetus into the organization’s all-ranging cooperation and especially for the stability and peace in Afghanistan.

Contemporary Debate on Sino-Afghan Relationship

So far, China has invested $4.4 billion through its two state-owned companies i.e. Metallurgical Corporation of China (MCC) and Jiangxi Copper Corporation (JCCL) at Mes Aynak, one of the world’s largest copper mines (Downs, 2012). As per US Geological Survey (USGS), “Afghanistan may be sitting on mineral wealth worth around $1 trillion” (Downs, 2012). Besides, it has huge lithium deposits, which could turn the country into, ‘Saudi Arabia of lithium’. Estimates of its iron ores are of some $421 billion’s worth and there may be copper of worth $273 billion
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(Downs, 2012). Furthermore, in the north, “Afghanistan sits atop the lower end of the hydrocarbon rich Amu Darya basin” (Downs, 2012).

About the Chinese engagement in Afghanistan, there are two opinions. First, on the issues of its security, China has benefited from the NATO and US presence in Afghanistan, thus did not commit its own troops there. Chinese security planners argue had there been no foreign troops in Afghanistan, the Taliban and Al-Qaeda operatives would have enlarged their sway of militancy into its already disturbed autonomous region, Xinjiang, where Uyghur population is hostile to the Chinese rule. Since Afghan Taliban and Al-Qaeda have been fighting against the NATO and US troops, thereby, giving China a leeway for improving the security apparatus in this unstable region. However, there have been widespread demonstrations and violence in this region, mainly undertaken by East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM). Occasionally China blames foreign troops and their spying agencies for fueling this violence. However, there is no denying the fact that China has been an indirect beneficiary of this foreign presence in Afghanistan. This intentional ambiguity in the Chinese policy on Afghanistan can be attributed to this particular beneficial aspect; i.e. to make strategic gains on others’ expense.

The second opinion, however, argues that China is only interested in the economic benefits of the region; Central Asia and Afghanistan, and therefore makes economic investments where it feels secured and ensured; Mes Ayank and Amu Darya being the prominent examples. Proponents of this opinion also argue that China has long waited for the right time for its future strategy in Afghanistan for its intimate involvement. This opinion strengthened the ground realities and statement of the former Chinese President Mr. Hu, who promised playing a major role for the stabilization of the Afghanistan in the post 2014 scenario. There is a strong feeling among the Western policy makers, academic circles and think tanks that while NATO and US forces fought the Taliban, al-Qaeda and other militants in Afghanistan, China garnered the fruits of their sacrifices, thus emerging as the true beneficiary. According to Raffaello Pantucci, a senior research fellow at RUSI, “Beijing correctly assumed that NATO’s presence in Afghanistan would mean regional terrorist networks would remain focused on attacking Alliance forces rather than stirring up trouble in neighboring countries like China” (Pantucci, 2013).

Chinese new leadership is zealous for improving its ties with its neighbors. In this regard, President Xi Jinping fully acknowledges that the good neighborly relations would help China’s own development and the goals of achieving a prosperous, stable and a modern country. On Oct 24, 2013, while addressing the party central committee’s political bureau on ‘Diplomatic work on neighboring countries’ President Xi said in his major policy statement that dealings with neighboring countries "should have a three-dimensional, multi-element perspective, beyond time and space." Owing to geopolitics and geo-economics’ significance of the region, President Xi sought common grounds and converging interests of China and other regional countries. The new leadership is striving to promote friendship among its neighbors and other regional countries to extend communication in all spheres: political, security and economics. Mr. Xi further added, “We must have deeper security cooperation and closer people-to-people ties.”

There can be no second opinion about the intent of the Chinese leadership for promoting good relationship with neighbors, but, exclusively on Afghanistan, Chinese strategy remains indistinct. During the visit of Central Asian region, President Xi did discuss the post 2014 Afghan scenario with the regional leadership, however, it has not come out with a clear strategy, as how to deal with the post 2014 Afghanistan. After negotiation of Bilateral Security Agreement
between US and Afghanistan, the situation would not be the one Chinese might have appreciated i-e the complete pull out of NATO and US troops from its neighborhood by December 2014. The scenario has changed now and US has only 10,000 troops on its strategically located military bases. Besides taking care of security aspects of Afghanistan, where primarily the Afghan National Army would be responsible for its security, these bases would pursue the US strategic interests in the region. Surely, a rising China and resurgent Russia fall within in the future radar of the United States, and the super power will definitely not encourage any obstruction in the exercise of its sole power status at the global level.

Notwithstanding these ground realities, China has its strategic and economic interests in Afghanistan and Central Asia. Since Afghanistan has yet to come out from the shocks of ill devised foreign invasion and thus is unable to take a clear line of action about its future correlation. The change of Afghan leadership in April 2014 is another factor that has benefitted China. The Central Asian states have mixed sentiments regarding the growing Chinese influence. It may affect the regional affairs in different ways. Firstly, it will invite other international competitors like United States and Russia to enlarge their sway or else to counter the Chinese influence in Central Asia. Already the major powers seem at loggerheads over their economic interests in the region. However, Central Asian states can benefit from the economic struggles of the great powers. If played well, these states can reap the maximum benefits.

However, the enhanced Chinese influence may convert the region as vassal states of the former. These republics are not ready to repeat the history through subordination of another major power after experiencing the despotic policies of former Soviet Union. Besides, the region has already been incorporated via multiple regional organizations: Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and security setup like Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Being the hub of hydrocarbon reserves and Eurasian in character, Europe and US would like to extend their influence on the region. Certainly, the Chinese soft power image and economic incentives are rewarding aspect for the Central Asian Republics in the continuation of their economic relationship with China.

In Afghanistan there is also a perception that, China has contributed little in terms of reconstruction of the country and provision of facilities to its masses. Even India has developed a lot in communication infrastructure and contributed in reconstruction of educational institutions, health services, transport services and training of the Afghan military personnel, its bureaucracy and intelligence agency (NDS). It is desired that, China should focus on providing facilities, extremely essential to win the hearts and mind of a common Afghan. To win the vote of masses, Chinese firms must provide employment opportunities to the locals. Raffaello Pantucci, a scholar at RUSI, conducted a field survey in some parts of Afghanistan and found that, “Kabul – China’s optics in Afghanistan are not good. After a week of travelling around talking to Afghans and others in Kabul, the consensus is that China is doing little to contribute on the ground. In fact, the perception remains is that China is doing little to contribute on the ground. In fact, the perception remains that China is trying to draw profit from Afghanistan’s abundant natural resources while giving little in return” (Pantucci, 2013).

The Future Prospects
According to Davood Moradiyan of Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies, Kabul, “The Chinese are ambiguous. They don’t want the Taliban to return to power and are concerned about a vacuum after 2014 that the Taliban could fill, but they also don’t like having U.S. troops in their neighbourhood” (Gary, 2013). Definitely, China is not going to jump into Afghanistan after US pulls
out. However, it is likely that it would have a new and a renewed approach towards its immediate neighborhood. Indeed, “If you are able to see a more or less stable situation in Afghanistan, if it becomes another relatively normal Central Asian state, China will be the natural beneficiary” (Gary, 2013).

According to Andrew Small, a China expert, “If you look across Central Asia that is what has already happened. ... China is the only actor which can foot the level of investment needed in Afghanistan to make it succeed and stick it out” (STRATEGEM, 2013). A stable Afghanistan is of vital importance to China for its reaching over to Eurasia; and moreover, it cannot afford to stand aside following the U.S. troop withdrawal and in the process of political transition. The strategic partnership Agreement signed between China and Afghanistan in 2012 signifies Chinese interests in Post 2014 Afghanistan. China fears that if Taliban come back to power, it will have a great impact on the “separatist group, the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) (Greene, 2012). China has a greater role in Afghanistan in any case, for this purpose China has already made benefits from the pre-Soviet era agreements with Afghanistan.

As far as Chinese policies towards Afghanistan are concerned, it goes beyond saying that China would like stability in Afghanistan. The Central Asian gas pipeline is only the most vivacious illustration of China's rising stakes (and its new vulnerabilities) in that county. Meanwhile, there are also indications that China is re-evaluating and reconsidering its responsibility as far as Central Asia is concerned, against the conditions of the renewed thrust by Moscow on Eurasian integration (with apathetic fallouts until now), after departure of major ISAF troops from Afghanistan and the ebb of US concern in the region that may proceed.

In the post 2014, China will stride carefully in assuming any major responsibility in order to bring harmony in Afghanistan, yet it intends to stay away from the wreckage of the war, security vacuity and shows little approval to a long-term US troop presence in Afghanistan. The point is, while China is looking forward to role played by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in stabilizing post-2014 Afghanistan, its key focus is on the bilateral proposals. From the US perspective, this has repercussions for the great-power enmity in Central Asia. China is ever more restructuring Central Asia to turn into its backyard rather than Russia's, and this will carry certain regional responsibilities that China has not yet figured out how to address. For that very reason, China will have to construct an appropriate strategy for Central Asia, other than the one for Afghanistan.

Regional countries will have the chance to play better role in Afghanistan. Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has recognized Afghanistan as an observer member. Though tangential now, SCO is preparing itself to presume a larger task in Afghanistan. Following the exit of foreign troops, China has signed a series of agreements with Afghanistan and appears to be maintaining its policy of resource mobilization through “investment in mining and communications”, and guarantees to “facilitate, instruct, support and equip Afghan police.” However, the question of security remains the overriding issue. The SCO countries do not have the capital in order to utilize in Afghanistan, nevertheless they can present support for capacity building. There exists likelihood that Afghanistan will develop good relations with Central Asia in the post-2014 phase, as there is least probability that Afghanistan might come out as a “Transit Nucleus” between the Indian Sub-Continent and Central Asia. Apart from Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline, it can yield considerable profits from ‘overland trade’, but only if the it gets stable.
Conclusion

To promote stability in Afghanistan, there is a pressing need for regional countries to play a vital yet neural role in Afghanistan through a regional co-operation mechanism. This all has to be done along with respecting the territorial veracity and sovereignty of Afghanistan viz a viz its neighbors. The geo-economic significance of Afghanistan as well as impressive Chinese investments in that country indicates a desire by both countries to upgrade their relations and uphold economic cooperation. By means of regional co-operation order, the Afghan imbroglio, uncertain security situation, fragile economy and divided society can be brought back to normalcy, thereby enabling Afghanistan to establish fruitful relations with the rest of the world. For this very purpose, China needs to design its post-2014 policy for the stabilization of Afghanistan carefully through its economic investment and reconstruction. It should also contribute in provision of facilities like communication network, educational and health services and impart training to Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police on the lines of US and many other regional and international countries. Surely, compared to the West’s increasingly discomfort in last decade, China can set itself up to guarantee a peaceful, secure and stable Afghanistan and consequently a peaceful, secure and stable South Asia in the Asian century. In fact, the rising power of China cannot afford a confrontational approach towards its neighborhood and particularly in Afghanistan, where NATO and U.S still maintain their ascendency. However, China is all set for the constructive engagement with Afghanistan and Central Asia for its subsequent influence and economic cum political gains beyond the region through Eurasia.

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Received: April, 20th, 2015
Revisions Received: Sep, 14th, 2015
Afghanistan’s Political and Economic Condition: An Appraisal of Likely Situation at NATO-Drawdown

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Afghanistan as a state emerged in 1747 whereby it was a tribal state at that time. The treaty of Panjdeh and Durand Line stretched its Northwest and Southeast borders and transformed Afghanistan from tribal status to nation-state. This instigates intra-Afghan tribal and ethnic composition with multi-ethnic and multi-sectarian polity. This balance was shattered by Soviet military intervention whereas Afghanistan’s problem was turned into an international issue between two superpowers and continued turmoil became Afghanistan’s ultimate fate. Meanwhile Al-Qaeda acquired significant policy control over Taliban, and it was refusal by Taliban to hand over Osama Bin Laden after 9/11, which proved as proverbial last straw on the camel’s back. The US invaded Afghanistan on the pretext of 9/11 whereby it stretched back to Mearsheimer’s theory of Offensive realism because the US engagement in Afghanistan is not short of offensive mode and main aim of the US in this regard is to become a global hegemon. There arise questions that whether the US intervention has improved or exacerbated Afghanistan political and economic conditions? What can be likely situation at post-drawdown? The US decision to drawdown its forces from Afghanistan implies the Taliban demand half way. In this situation dialogues with Taliban has had a chance, but to fulfill it require some basic agreements among power contenders and imaginative diplomacy on the part of the US. By contemplating economic situation, the economy of Afghanistan has been flourished since 2001 due to foreign aid and developmental works. Post exit will instigate fiscal deficit, construction and reconstruction will in doldrums. But despite all this foreign forces cannot be allowed to stay any more. The best possible options in this regard can be international community investment in mines and infrastructure of Afghanistan but it needs political stability and security.

Key Words: Government, nation-state, economy, drawdown, Afghanistan, Durand Line,

Afghanistan is at the world focus since 9/11 with international cooperation towards reconstruction and development. As Afghanistan is turmoil ridden country so political instability loomed large there. Numerous factors responsible for this instability as highly centralized political...
system, demarcation of internal stake holders (most probably warlords) due to controversial background, connecting ongoing insurgency and terrorism with ‘Pashtun alienation’ and interest oriented usage of this notion by self-seeking politicians, inadequate international aid has exacerbated already worst insecurity (Qassem, 2009).

Since 2002 Afghanistan government is keen to convert ‘landlocked’ Afghanistan image to ‘landbridge’ among Central Asia, South Asia, Middle East and Far East (Veilkind, 2003) This will generate enormous revenue and can be capable to stabilize the country. (Asian Delopment Bank, 2004).

This research will highlight Afghanistan’s political and economic condition under the US engagement and an appraisal will be made of likely situation on the eve of NATO-Drawdown. Here main emphasis lies on that whether the US engagement has improved or exacerbated the situation.

Formulation of Government
Representation vis-a-vis ethnic composition of Afghan population
Afghanistan as a state came into existence in 1747. It was founded by Ahmad Shah Abdali. Afghanistan has population of approximately twenty million, dividing into twenty ethnic groups more than fifty in all. People speak one of official languages Pashto and Dari. There are thirty different languages in Afghanistan due to myriad factions (Ewans, 2001).

Pashtun are a boded in the east and south of Afghanistan and same ratio of Pashtun are across the Durand Line on Pakistan side. There are two subdivision of Pashtun as Durrani, who lives in between Herat and Kandahar. Abdali is a sub-tribe of the Durrani tribe which is ethnically Pashtun. In its initial days, Afghanistan was structured around the Durrani tribes’ prowess and it consisted of territories inhabited by the Durrani tribe or where the influence of Durrans and their control prevailed. Ghilzai, who are between Kandahar and Ghazni. These tribes lived at south of Afghanistan with not ending confrontations and enmities. Eastern hills comprised Wazirs, Mohmand, Mehsuds, Afridi, Khattaks, and Shinwaris. They are famous for their aggression and were known to British army for skirmishes over North West Frontier. Tajiks are one fifth of population who are concentrated in Badakhshah around Kabul, Herat, Kohistan and Panjshir. They have major role in country’s administration. So basically it was a tribal state and its borders in the Northwest and Southeast were not internationally demarcated as such.

Uzbek are semi-independent under begs or amirs. They were conquered by Afghan Amir. They are mostly farmers, horse breeders and karakul sheeps. Hazaras are of mongol origin and are descendants of Genghis Khan as flocks of thousands arrived in the same era. Some people opined that they have been migrated from Central Asia. They are mostly sheep breeder.

There is representation of all major ethnic groups in Afghanistan’s administration as for instance president, foreign minister and finance minister are all Pashtun, vice president and defense minister are Tajiks, second vice president is of Hazara, minister of mine is an Uzbek besides others (Hanlon and Flourney, 2013).

In order to understand the ethnic strife in Afghanistan it is better to depict the background, which stretched to the treaty of Panjdeh and treaty of Durand Line due to which Afghanistan was transformed from tribal state to national state status. In 1887 in the Treaty of Panjdeh, Afghanistan and Czarist Russia demarcated Afghanistan’s North Western
border with Central Asia which by then had fallen under Russian control. In 1893, Ameer Abdul Rehman the ruler of Afghanistan under the agreement of Durrand Line demarcated Afghanistan’s border with British India. With set and internationally demarcated borders Ameer Abdul Rehman initiated the process of transforming Afghanistan from a tribal into a national state. But his task was not easy.

More so since under the Treaty of Panjdeh, significant chunks of Tajik and Uzbek territory had become part of Afghanistan. And under the Treaty of the Durrand Line some major Pashtun tribes like Yusufzais, Khattaks, Mehsuds and sizeable portions of Wazirs, Shinwaris, Mehmunds and Achakzais had come under the control of British India. Besides, the Hazara tribes in central Afghanistan mostly Shiites and of Mongol ethnic origin had also become Afghan nationals. So, this process of transforming a Pashtun tribal state into a national state did not succeed much. It only papered over the cracks or reality of a multi-ethnic and multi-sectarian polity. However, by establishing a delicate balance of intra-Pashtun and inter-ethnic (Pashtuns versus Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras) tribes following a policy of strict neutrality which contributed to regional power equilibrium, Afghan rulers were able to acquire a degree of stability for their country.

That intra–Afghan tribal and ethnic balance and regional equilibrium was disturbed by Sardar Daud who toppled the monarchy of King Zahir Shah in a military coup in 1973. Sardar (President) Daud’s government in turn was also toppled five years later in a military coup by General Abdul Qadir Dagarwal and the Afghan army gave power to two little known leftist parties: Khalq (mostly Pashtun dominated) and Parcham (mostly Tajik and Uzbek dominated).

While Sardar Daud had disturbed the delicate tribal balance inside Afghanistan and regional equilibrium by adopting a proactive irredentist posture against Pakistan, Soviet intervention in Afghanistan (28 December 1979) completely destroyed the balance and equilibrium enjoyed by Afghanistan as a non-aligned neutral state.

In Afghanistan there are myriad factions besides transitional government. There is ethnic strife between Pashtuns mostly Taliban and minority comprised Tajiks and Uzbeks of North of Afghanistan which has hampered integration. Trade of Opium has also intensified this ethnic dispute. Besides ethnicity this unity has been muddled by external actors in order to access and exploit oil resources. Disintegration is apprehensive not only to the local Afghan population but regional countries and above all international community are also at dismay about Taliban brutalities of their recent past regime and even the ongoing insurgencies. (Marine Barracks: 23)
The defeat of Taliban has led to the Afghan society’s polarization and most probably it is better to state that it get bisected into Taliban and anti-Taliban with two different streams of abiding. Tajik and Uzbek were domineering in comparison of Pashtun. The resistance against foreign forces was waged by Taliban and diverse factions and the strain on the US was further intensified by warlords (Samad, 2011).

There are various factors which have destabilized the political structure of Afghanistan as ethnic strife, poor governance, no viable connections of central government with the people, moreover there is no impartial political dispensation at the local level. Worst of all vested interests have been with due weightage in quite illegal way. To cap it all, the share of common Afghans are negated and their desire for peace and stability is also in dire straits by both Taliban and local power broker. (Brown, 2012).

By political engagement the US aim was to change people’s mind set so that to deviate them from traditional abiding to Taliban and to spread the western influence and culture there. This strategy has been working in Afghanistan and Obama is steering his way in an adventurous type mode, without consideration of factor that his administration has faced more losses than gains. (Hilaly, 2012) He does not evaluate tactical retreat until and unless the strategic environs turned into his favor.

The underlying political objective of America is to impede Russian, China and Pakistan entry to Afghanistan so that to have control over natural resources of both Afghanistan and CARs which comprised oil and gas. (Ali, 2013) The US has established Karzai’s Government as puppet there.

Afghanistan’s main apprehension is ethnic strife which is capable to dismantle the political settlement. Stability cannot be ensured in Afghanistan with increase in size of Afghan forces unless and until people get secure at local level as well. On the eve of withdrawal both security and political stalemate can be happened. (Brown, 2012) After western exit, the major stack holders in Afghanistan will be Kabul regime, Taliban and northern alliance supported by Afghanistan’s neighbours. (Nadir, 2013) On the eve of exit the US needs Zalmay Khalilzad like persons to carry out the US policy, sponsored by CIA in Afghanistan, where they will not physically present. Aftab Sherpao, the former interior minister, Rustam Shah Mohmand, the former
Ambassador to Afghanistan, and Hasan Askari Rizvi, Defence Analyst, conceded that after ISAF/US/NATO pullout there will be The Kabul government, various groups working as the Afghan Taliban, tribal chiefs and local Taliban commanders as main power holders. (Sherpao, Mohmand and Rizvi, 2013) Regional stakeholders will be Pakistan, Iran besides Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkamanistan, Russia, USA, UK and Saudi Arabia. (Munir, 2013) The level of control of present Afghan Government over the country is moderate and after US pull out is likely to be minimal. The Afghan Taliban are likely to control large parts of the country more so in the South even if Kabul does not fall to them in quick time (Mir, 2013).

Composition and effectiveness/ influences

The US influence is spreading to whole world in shape of its economy and culture. Transnational politics is at forefront which has reduced distances and the US has to include its interests in realm of its foreign policy. She is grappling to eliminate illegal criminal activities as drugs trafficking and terrorism across the border. The US is now to set priorities and to adapt feasible options that what it has to perform for strengthening its domestic politics and to maintain its image to outside world as well. For this purpose it will require coalition to part with and work for stability of democracy, social values and economic growth. Joseph Nye debated on power and divided it into soft and hard power, former dealt with economic and military while latter with cultural and ideological perspective. Both are for coercive and co-optive stances respectively. For him soft power fascination is in international trade and institution that work for it. Soft power is more powerful and obliging than hard power which is compulsive. It was the soft power attractions of hard currency commerce that played a dominant role in bringing down the Iron Curtain and shaping the post-Cold War world. (Nye, 2002: 8-12) Both powers are indispensable for each other as in arena of world politics and especially foreign policy is game of intermingling both soft and hard powers. The US in order to accomplish her policy options, has spread its tentacles to Afghanistan political setup by both soft and hard powers. According to United Kingdom’s ambassador to Afghanistan, Afghanistan is not a failed today as things have changed over the last ten years, particularly over the last three years, provincial governance in places like Helmand is very effective, every district has district governor, there is prosecutor, schools are opening and moreover, Afghan people have stake in governance (Patey, 2013).

The present Afghanistan government is totally dependent on the US. There are continuous desertions from the Afghanistan army and police. The Afghanistan President is often referred to as the “Mayor of Kabul” The central government has hardly any control over rural Afghanistan. (Khan, 2013) Many parts of Afghanistan are not under the effective control of the Kabul government at the moment. This control is expected to decline after 2014 when the Afghan Taliban will become more assertive (Rizvi, 2013).

But as stated by Aftab Sherpao, former interior minister, that Karzai government has been right from historical point of view because all kings and president had control over Kabul and provinces were under command of Warlords and chieftains (Sherpao, 2013).

Albeit Karzai has welcomed the entry of peaceful Taliban to join key position in his government on condition to obliged the provisions of constitution (Gall, Abrashi, 2007). He proceeded to include Mullah Omar and Hekmatyar in his government but Taliban are indifferent and have bad taste for political system. They opposed the government backed by US, UK and UN and put forwarded their own notion of constitution based on ‘Islamic doctrines (Wilkinson, 2007).
After the US decade long engagement Afghanistan is the third most corrupt country after Somalia and North Korea (Transparency International Report, 2011). According to United Nations report in February, 2012 Afghan Locals had greased the state official’s palms with approximately $3, 9. Moreover, for taking projects of Afghanistan’s rebuilding, Western companies had paid $1 billion to Afghan concerned officials. (Bobkin, 2013) According to Center for American Progress (CAP), the US think tank, which have closer links with the US government have commented after studies that main reason for Afghanistan bad governance are the overwhelming influence of the US and NATO at the costs of Local Afghans views (Carlstrom, 2013).

**Capabilities- Running the affairs without US assistance**

There are rampant corruption cases and government is unable to curb these. (Afghan Online, 2011)According to New York Times report the biggest source of corruption in Afghanistan is the US. The CIA has poured ten millions of dollars in cash to Karzai, and Karzai has conceded with this report. Karzai has confessed that it had been since last decade, this money was given to Afghan warlords in an attempt to secure stability before the foreign forces exit (CIA Buying Peace, 2013). According Glenn Carle, former CIA Deputy national intelligence officer, this is not the entirely new story because ghost money or likely assistance are behind the scene intelligence diplomatic functions.

Due to US engagement in Afghanistan the situation has turned from bad to worse and the political and security set up has become so intricate and it became a nightmare that what could be the post withdrawal scenario as the US is not leaving Afghanistan altogether and will keep minimum presence. This presence will not let Afghan government to decide according to their own will. The US who is staunch advocate of Human Rights, must give a chance to the Afghanistan to develop their political set up. No doubt that Afghan history is abounds with scintillating examples of political chaos but recent turmoil has turned Afghanistan a horrible, ethnic strife ridden soil, where Afghans are tormented by Foreign occupants and has infested insecurity in the region as well. The US is pouring money in Afghanistan for securing her own purposes in the garb to win people minds but all this political engagement has been proved as moth eaten for Afghan society.

**Political challenges**

The US intervention has caused disparity and discontent due to undue national and provincial power distribution short of public preferences and interests. It has excluded Pashtun from key power position for the sake of Tajiks and Uzbeks. There is dominancy of military power and weak civilian control in Kabul has trembled security. Karzai has even no control on all Pashtun factions (Harrison, 2009). Afghan’s military has no independence from Northern Alliance in accomplishing any task and to vanquish militants. There existed major retaliation from Afghan population by excluding Taliban from mainstream.

Afghan national army nor police is capable to have state writ in areas where even US has been succumbed. Karzai is eager to access India for providing additional political and economic assistance in this regard. India’s help regarding military and police training would enhance further in subjugating both Afghan militants and Pakistan supported Taliban. Afghanistan political set up has been infested with so many murky factors as sleaze, grave crime, illegal occupation of land and resources, favor to the kith and kin, lawlessness so on and so forth. Afghans have been anguished by prevalent criminal mafia system hence, they are longing for a
transient and accountable system. They hope for steadfast leadership and security for all and sundry.

Meanwhile Afghanistan has myriad ethnic groups and rugged geography so it seems arduous to establish central government writ firmly. Without flourished on the ethnic reality no army or police can control this diverse armed population (hmad, 2011).

**Economic Engagement**

The US has boosted the Afghan economy with foreign direct investment and various developmental works.

**Brief detail of Afghan economy**

People of Afghanistan earn from Agriculture, cattle or from crafts of such sorts. Major agricultural production consist food grains principally wheat albeit cotton, fruit and opium are kind of cash crops. The economy of Afghanistan is basically based on farmer, peasants who are connected with these occupations in order to feed their families and forward the products to the market as well. Afghan people are mostly inclined towards herding, forestry and fishing.

Albeit before current devastation manufacturing, trade, mining and transportation were occupied by Afghani. Afghanistan has attempted to cope with successful economic and social models but all these efforts remained futile. Prior to 1917 there was following of capitalist model and Afghans were subjugated by British imperialism. But the Afghan high handedness and abhorrence for external rule made them revolted against Britain ruthless clutches. Soviet model also come to failure. (McCauley, 2002) Afghanistan dwindling economy has been flourished since 2001 due to donor’s contribution and aids. Foreign agencies and companies raised developmental works that are backed by Pentagon and CIA.

American assisted Afghanistan with foreign aid and planning to boost their economy. Per capita income has been enhanced from $ 147-289 from 2002-2007. This has been due to aid and reconstruction which is approximately 40% of GDP. GDP is directly connected with agriculture production as good cereal harvest of nearly 6 million Tonnes in 2007 ensured production of 13.7%GDP while poor harvest of 4 million tonnes in 2008 led to 3.6% of GDP in fiscal year 2008/2009. In the same year harvest of 6.8 million tonnes produced 20.9% of GDP (Harvest Data, 2011). Government revenue has been enhanced ten times in eight years from Af 5.9 billion or 3.3 % of GDP in 2002/2003 to Af 63.3 billion or 9.4 % of GDP in 2009/10. It increased to 26% in 2010/11 due to ameliorated customs and tax collection. (Quarterly Report, 2011) Most of economic share come from agriculture production and for this purpose myriad canals were operated for irrigation but the outcome was of great despair. Afghanistan’s farmers are despise new technologies and are headstrong to traditional ways of production.

The disbursement of US aid in Kandahar and Helmand in 2009 has gone for a burton with local economies as it had instigated grumbles rather than development. However, it is foreboding that end of foreign aid on the eve of exit would be detrimental to Afghan economy. Foreign aid is boosting Afghan’s economy since 2002 so post 2014 will instigate fiscal deficit, construction and reconstruction will be in doldrums. Transit and security will be adversely affected because recently Afghanistan earn multi-billion dollars projects for transporting 6,000-8,000 convoys, essential for US forces in Afghanistan (Congressional Report, 2010).
The NATO/ISAF withdrawal presents economic crunch for Afghanistan due to discontinuation of International resources funds. Afghanistan has rich mineral resources at her disposal but their exploitation cannot be carried out in instable and insecure atmosphere. Only stability will generate revenue from mineral resources which in turn can be utilized in infrastructure amelioration, human capital and for public goods rather to be snatched by the wealthy few. If Afghanistan Silk Road vision would visualized which is junction of Middle East, south and central Asia then it will dissolved the region’s major powers disputes and enmities (Brown, 2012).

**Infrastructure development**

As Afghanistan is landlocked so all international trade and logistic work is operated through roads and air transport. There are road network as Ring Road, international road links, direct Kabul-Herat road developed during 1930-70s with assistance of USAID and Soviet in cold war. (Ispahani, 1989) There are seven major international road links connecting Ring road and major cities of Mazar-e-Sharif, Qonduz, Herat, Qandahar, Jalalabad to Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkamanistan, Pakistan and Iran. In 2002 these roads were in worst shape when Afghanistan was launching reconstruction process. (Securing Afghanistan: 1-14) By 2008 the ring road and all roads connecting it to neighboring countries were to be fully upgraded and maintained.

The country aimed to have ‘Open sky policy’ to have tremendous pace of growth of air transport and to increase aviation field competition. From March 2006 to March 2007 there was rebuilt of 2,200 KM of roads. Ring road construction initiated in 2003 with US help. There would be enhanced traffic speed from 9-16 hours to 5-6 hours if security situation remained stable (Afghanistan Road, 2013). Myriad bridges have been built by USAID and Agha Khan development network over Amu Darya to connect Badakhshah and Qonduz with Tajikistan (Tayyar, 2000). Asphalt and concrete road network built in 1960s and 1970s by Soviet and the US have been damaged badly by three decades of wars (Dodge and Redman, 2011).

Afghanistan has tremendous mineral resources which are going to be exploited by foreign multinational within probable demarcation. The covetous Chinese companies in order to surpass India are rapidly undergoing contracts in Afghanistan so as to satisfy their presence there albeit they are not initiating practical steps of resources exploitation. Afghan government has to focus and invest in infrastructure development if security remains stable for utilization of resources. Chinese are hesitant about investment in Afghanistan due to prevalent corruption and insecurity which might have drastic impacts for investors.

**Industry and Agriculture sector**

The US has flated out to develop agriculture and to prevent poppy cultivation. For this purpose the US has launched ‘civilian-military agriculture development strategy to reinvigorate Afghanistan economy with dynamic agriculture with assistance of USAID, US department of agriculture (USDA), Army National Guard Agriculture development Teams. This will work in coordination with Ministry of Agriculture Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL). (USA Report, 2010: 18) Afghanistan northern regions are breadbaskets of country leading to 70 % of total production. But it is in need of rainfall because no widespread irrigation arrangement is available. There is dearth of fertilizers, seeds, machines to many farmers. Furthermore, 58 % of villages have no approach to town by road in some seasons of the year. According to National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA) 2007/08, 44% of rural population are dependent on agriculture for income generation while 54% of these firms for household consumption (Boone, 2010).
Northern Afghanistan, cotton, hashish and opium are three major products that are in competition at world community (Clark, 2010). After Soviet withdrawal in 1989, opium became the sole income source of warlords. Afghanistan is manifested by enhanced production of 1,570 tonnes in 1990 and 2,335 tonnes in 1995 which was increased further in Taliban regime. Taliban later on banned its cultivation as 90% of its cultivation was stopped in 2001. After collapse of Taliban regime, opium has again overwhelmed world market. In Afghanistan 2007, there was 95% of world’s papaver somniferum, the type of poppy from which natural alkaloid morphine is derived (Griffith, 2009). Afghanistan provides nine tenth of world’s opium and therefore recently heroine. Mostly the cultivation of poppy is carried out by poverty rather than criminal inclination. In 2010 due to fungus and droughts its growth was lowered. Approximately 41% of opium production was processed into heroin in 1995 in Afghanistan, in 2008 that ratio was escalated to 70%. Whereas in 2011, nearly 380-400 tonnes of heroine was produced in Afghanistan, these are suffice to carry out global demand of consumption. (Dreyfuss, 2010) UNODC had estimated that Afghanistan farmers earned $440 million from opium in 2009, traffickers were with $2.2 billion and the share of Taliban was settled as $140 million to 170 million in informal taxes. (UNODC, 2011) In order to control the poppy production, there must be less demands from consuming countries like the US and Europe. The Afghanistan main source of export and rural earning is opium although it’s not officially declared.

Sustainable economy without aid

Afghanistan economy is mostly dependent on foreign assistance, without foreign aid it may be with downward spiral as in Jinnah institute final report on Afghanistan endgame in Pakistan and US perspective the economic ratio shown for year 2010 is $11.4 billion and $4.4 billion has been credited due to trade, transport and government developmental projects, $3.3 billion is by agriculture production and just $52 million is attributed by mining. (Arnoldy, 2010) The IMF predicted that till 2023 it is quite impossible for Afghanistan to achieve fiscal balance as previously the timeline was settled at 2015 (IMF, 2011).

Karzai will strive hard to ameliorate economy for securing validity among Afghan population. Afghanistan can adopt long term economic sustainability if the security prevails Afghanistan mining sector can be exploited, where Afghanistan have $1 trillion mineral assets (Risen, 2010) and by creating a New Silk Road project.
According to Zalmay Rassoul, Afghan foreign minister stated in one of his interview with James Bays on Aljazeera that there are two things very important for post withdrawal, one is civilian part of Afghanistan post 2014, another is security part. The December Bonn Conference about civilian part was successful, where world community have been agreed to assist us in coming decade. On security side the process is under consideration, long term partnership with Germany, UK, France, Italy, and Australia for military, security and economic assistance. (Rassoul, 2013) Despite great dependence on the US economic aid, Afghanistan cannot allow the foreign forces on her soil for long. The Soviet engagement was also stretched to military, political and economic engagement, where in 1980 the Afghan economy was termed as ‘Sovietization’ based. (Larry, 200) Because by 1984, Soviet-Afghan trade comprised $1.1 billion, which was 70-80 % of Afghan trade. By 1986, USSR had disbursed $1.77 billion. Indeed the Soviet had flourished the Afghan military and economy but if there were no Soviet invasion, then refugees crisis, the narcotics subculture, Klashinkovization and other miserable regional problems could never happened. The US engagement is the same episode which is not devoid of fall out, so the Afghan government would better to explore own resources.

According to Afghan’s foreign minister Afghanistan has tremendous economic potentials, minerals, oil and gas. What they want is international community investment in their mines and infrastructure. By 2014, self-sustaining Afghanistan will not in need of dollar.

Likely engagement after 2014 in above areas
There is no satiation in power competition. The US will not exit altogether from Afghanistan but will stay foot here in one or other form in order to covertly observe the region from her bases in Afghanistan. The real challenge is political transition rather than forces withdrawal. Different regional stakeholders have conflicting interests in Afghanistan which would obstruct peace settlement in Afghanistan beyond exit. There can be ethnic strife as already Tajik, Hazara and Uzbek have reservations.

Afghanistan will be with grave scenario on multi fronts as political polarization seems imminent, economic depression due to cutting of military and economic aid by USA not only due to exit from Afghanistan but US is in severe economic pressure. Despite mineral resources at Afghanistan’s disposal and silk route establishment, there are still apprehension about country because they are currently dependent on foreign aid in all sectors. In spite of efforts to enhance employment revenue but stalemate is likely for the coming three years. Insecurity and lack of political reconciliation are main impediments to licit economic growth.

By contemplating an overview of the US invasion in Afghanistan, it is clear that inside Afghanistan there was no national consensus for this intervention. Second, the U.S/NATO strategy in Afghanistan was that while through a high tech war they would topple the government of the Taliban, the dirty work on the ground would be done by the forces of the Northern Alliance, mostly Tajiks and Uzbeks. For the same reason, politically only elements belonging to the Northern Alliance or strongly opposed to the Taliban were co-opted by the U.S/NATO. The neutral Pashtuns who were not opposed to the Taliban but were not pro-Taliban either were side-lined in the new dispensation.

Resultantly four things happened. First, the forces of the Northern Alliance effective in the Tajik-Uzbek-Hazarajat areas, turned out to be of no use in Pashtun areas – the hub of the Taliban. They simply could not fight with the Taliban on Pashtun ground. Eventually, while the elements belonging to Northern Alliance came to fill positions in the new dispensation or get
top posts in the security services, it mostly fell to the lot of the U.S/NATO forces to do the fighting on the ground. Second, the Bonn Accord about establishment of a new democratic order in Afghanistan acquired little ownership among the majority Pashtun ethnic group in Afghanistan. As a result, its political support base inside Afghanistan remained very narrow. Third, the Taliban who had just melted into the Pashtun areas in the face of a U.S/NATO assault regrouped and started giving tough resistance to the U.S/NATO forces in these areas. Fourth, in this situation a legitimate international military intervention sanctioned by the UN came to be seen as a purely foreign occupation by a large number of Afghans since mostly it was a war not between Afghans but between the Afghans and the U.S/NATO forces. The building of the Afghan National Army to fight the Taliban against this background became extremely difficult. That difficulty persists to this day. Accumulatively the three challenges of reconstruction, reconciliation and restoration of peace and stability could not be addressed timely. These challenges remain to haunt Afghanistan with no clear signs of solution.

Offensive realism is the sub-division of neo-realism theory, expounded by John J. Mearshiemer in The tragedy of great power politics, where he stated that International system is anarchic where states always coaxed to maximize their relative powers at the costs of other states. Mearsheimer, 2001, believes that becoming global hegemon is near impossible so that great power would always wrestle for power. Brandon, 2009, has described the theory as below:

**Three Tenets of Offensive Realism**

1. Goal is to maximize share of world power.
2. Ultimate aim is to become the hegemon.
3. Since global hegemony is impossible, the world is condemned to perpetual great power competition.

For power maximization states are ready to offense. (Mearshiemer, 2001: 3) The United States is a regional hegemon according to Mearshiemer, she is trying to become global hegemon, which is impossible so there is perpetual struggle for power. In this pursuit of power struggle and to become a global hegemon which cannot be short of offensive mode as war, turmoil, blood shedding and civilian casualties.

The US invasion of Afghanistan gives her:

1. Power maximization by Military operations in Afghanistan and her rehabilitation later on and Status of a regional hegemon in South Asian and Central Asian regions.
3. Since global hegemony is impossible, It’s better to be a hegemon in more regions for a leading world power.

The US invaded Afghanistan after 9/11, in order to use pre-emptive power mode, to use force before imminent threat happened to the national interests. The US as major power is militarily engaged in the minor state, Afghanistan. The 9/11 was pre-text for the US to invade Afghanistan, because Afghanistan was not directly connected to that incident. The contours of US military engagement policy was to defeat, disrupt and dismantle Al-Qaeda. The operational mode of policy remained in constant state of flux, encircled not only Al-Qaeda but also Taliban in its ambit. Then Obama strategy emphasized on reinvigoration of military engagement but simultaneously came to the reconciliation and talks to the Taliban. It seems the Afghan war is now all about American politics. Obama could have certainly made the peace move two years ago. He
could have averted the violence, bloodshed and displacement in Afghanistan produced by the surge, as well as the huge cost involved in the exercise. The strategy of reconciliation has been with no fruitful outcome so the US is to exit from Afghanistan, leaving behind nine military bases. NATO will remained in Herat and Mazar-i-Sharif in order to serve the US underlying objectives, to control Iran and China from those basis. The US is also on alarm from Russia and China as stake holders in Afghanistan. As the US has realized this threat and perhaps this can be one of the reasons for its draw down from Afghanistan soil and to be shifted towards Asia Pacific to have access to Thailand, China, Malaysia, Singapore. If contemplated about the remaining troops, then majority of the troops will be of France and UK who are closest ally of US. Australia and Canadian are in lower number now. In Kabul there will self protected system so that in emergency they could protect themselves by using air and will have fortress or cottage like dwellings (Ghazanfar, 2013).

Conclusion
Afghanistan has been remained turmoil ridden throughout the US engagement whereby nightmarish challenges loom large. The United States of America engagement in Afghanistan is a long war that served no purpose. Did they do it in a premeditated attempt to seize greater political and economic power? These are questions that history will answer. For now, at least, one thing is clear. The US invaded Afghanistan on the pretext of 9/11 by waging an unrelated “war on terror” which is now generally considered as the ‘wrong war.’ The offenses of the US have perturbed the security of Afghanistan with uprising in insurgency, Taliban and warlords are fighting with their own agendas in order to strengthen their power holds. The US sponsor government has led to corruption, ethnic strife and instability. Undoubtedly the economy of Afghanistan has been flourished due to said US engagement but foreign forces cannot be tolerated for the same very purpose. The best possible option at Afghanistan’s disposal is international investment in their mines and infrastructure and to ensure political stability and security by building agreement among basic power contenders.

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Received: April, 20th, 2015
Revisions Received: Sep, 14th, 2015
The NATO led International Security Assistance Force completed its drawdown by end 2014 and arguably a new era in the history of Afghanistan has now begun. The drawdown not only affects Afghanistan but is also a cause of concern for Pakistan as different scenarios can result in different repercussions for Pakistan. Of the three possible scenarios the most favourable one is a stable and peaceful Afghanistan as it would not only enable Pakistan focus upon its own domestic issues but also be helpful in forging trade links with Central Asia via Afghanistan. A possible second scenario is a protracted civil war while in the worst case scenario Taliban may seize Kabul which would result in further aggravation in terrorist activities in Pakistan. Some recent developments, however, like significant improvement in Pak-Afghan relations and resumption of Pakistan and China mediated peace talks between Afghan government and Taliban. Give some cause for optimism for durable peace in the region.

**Key words**: Security, drawdown, terrorist, Civil war, Taliban, peace.

A decade after authorisation of military action in Afghanistan by the Bonn Agreement under the auspices of the United Nations, the United States announced drawdown of its troops in 2011 with completion by end 2014. (Security Council Resolution, 2013) “Operation Enduring Freedom” in military terms and "Obama's war” in journalistic circles, the Afghan war has now officially been concluded by the U.S strategists. Despite being the longest war the endgame has been downplayed by the US administration and media as other domestic issues and new foreign affairs challenges like Ukraine and ISIS grabbed the headlines (The Huffington Post, n.d). The development however cannot be downplayed by Pakistan as it is a watershed in the history of the region. Though about 9,800 U.S. troops will remain in Afghanistan to support a non-combat "train, advise, and assist mission," the Afghan National Security Force (ANSF)
will be mainly responsible for defending the country against any insurgency. In this paper a critical analysis of the post drawdown situation has been made with a focus upon the likely impact upon Pakistan.

**Military intervention in Afghanistan**

After 9/11 terrorist incident in 2001 the U.S led NATO forces entered Afghanistan to flush out Al-Qaeda friendly Taliban government and hence dismantle the headquarters of a deadly international terrorist movement which allegedly had masterminded the attack. The officially stated key priorities of NATO led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan were:

- To protect the Afghan people;
- To build the capacity of the Afghan security forces so they can take lead responsibility for security in their own country;
- To counter the insurgency; and
- To enable the delivery of stronger governance and development. (ISAF, 2014)

Since NATO took command of ISAF in August 2003, the Alliance gradually expanded the reach of its mission, originally limited to Kabul, to cover all of the Afghanistan’s territory. Accordingly, the number of ISAF troops grew from the initial 5,000 to more than 130,000 troops from 48 countries, including all 28 NATO member nations. The strategic aims of the U.S were later spelled out in different policy statements. Unveiled on June 29, 2011 President Barack Obama’s counterterrorism strategy is significant for both what it says or is silent on. (Lodhi 2011) Presenting a 19-page strategy document, Obama’s top anti-terrorism adviser, John Brennan declared that America’s “best offense won’t always be deploying large armies abroad but delivering targeted, surgical pressure’’ against groups that threaten” the US. This affirmed a shift in the US policy from large-scale military interventions to clandestine campaigns (Lodhi, 2011).

A reluctant Pakistan that had hitherto invested heavily in a friendly Taliban government also joined the international coalition by offering physical and intelligence assistance to the U.S. The Taliban who were written off after their defeat by the Northern Alliance forces staged a surprise comeback in the Afghan spring offensive 2006. (Reidal, 2011) A fact finding 66-page report by the then Commander of U.S forces in Afghanistan General McChrystal painted a very grim picture and concluded “While the situation is serious, success is still achievable”. (Woodwar, 2010) Despite the morale boosting killing of Osama Bin Laden in a covert operation in May 2011 situation on ground remained less optimistic from the U.S perspective. The surge in activities of Afghan anti-government insurgents as evidenced by shooting down of a U.S chopper killing 30 SEAL commandoes and a daredevil attack on British Council building demonstrated that Taliban fighters were not short on motivation. This raised many questions about future of Afghanistan after departure of all foreign troops in accordance with the Lisbon meeting announcement. This analysis
reviews the situation in Afghanistan and focuses on post withdrawal implications on Pakistan.

A summit of NATO leaders in Lisbon was held in November 2010 which was also attended by Hamid Karzai, the then Afghan president, and Ban Ki-moon, the UN secretary general. The summit agreed on a "transition strategy" for Afghanistan which envisaged phase wise handover of the country's provinces to ANSF from 2011 to 2014. Some of the NATO leaders were however guarded in declaring 2014 as a clear deadline (Guardian, 2014). Anders Fogh Rasmussen, the NATO secretary general expressed NATO's resolve to stay till completion of the job and declared that the process must be conditions-based, not calendar-based. Similarly the U.N Secretary General also added that reality and not schedules should guide the Afghan policy. In the summit the NATO leaders emphasised that Afghan army and police forces were to grow to more than 300,000 by October 2011 and that the international forces would be able to gradually pull out, leaving behind training missions which would not engage in combat.

The commitment of the members of the NATO alliance not to abandon Afghanistan to chaos was however widely questioned because of waning domestic support for massive defence spending on a foreign venture while no concrete gains could be achieved. The process of withdrawal began with the Dutch and the Canadians forces pulling out in 2010 and 2011 respectively. William Hague the British Foreign Secretary also emphasised the finality of 2015 being an absolute deadline for withdrawal, irrespective of ground realities in Afghanistan (Motlagh, 2014). Both Britain and France have now already vacated Afghanistan leaving the U.S to deal with the post withdrawal uncertainties (CBC News, 2011).

President Barack Obama championed the cause of Afghan war in the first year of his first presidency, approving more than 40,000 additional forces for Afghanistan. He also pledged to begin withdrawing the U.S. troops in July 2011. The then Foreign Secretary and now the Presidential candidate, Hillary Clinton had stressed the need for caution by telling the NATO foreign ministers in Berlin that the alliance had "to underscore that we are transitioning, not leaving." She reaffirmed support for the Afghan government’s desire to accommodate the Taliban fighters back into society as long as they expressed their support for a reconciliation process. Advocating a carrot and stick policy she added that "Those who choose violence must face relentless pressure," she said. "The Taliban need to know that they cannot wait us out" (Zimbio, n.d).

**A Critical Analysis of Post Withdrawal Scenarios**

Many analysts have discussed the situation in Afghanistan after NATO’s drawdown of troops from Afghanistan by end 2014. Most of them are aware of the dangers posed to security situation in future. Even the U.S does not fool itself by painting a rosy picture. For instance Hillary Clinton in a clear message said "We have to steel ourselves and our publics for the possibility that the Taliban will resort to the most
destructive and sensational attacks we have seen and that we have to send a clear message that we remain united, and we have to offer the Taliban a clear choice”. The BBC editor in Kabul contrasts two likely scenarios; a hopeful one in which Taliban join the negotiations and become part of the political process and second a pessimistic one in which Taliban take over Kabul after a civil war. Unfortunately less attention has been paid by our analysts in the popular media to carry out a detailed analysis of likely impact of various scenarios in Afghanistan upon social, political and economic life in Pakistan. It is only after a detailed and impassionate analysis that we can judge what would be best from Pakistani perspective.

There is a difference of opinion within Pakistan over what a post-drawdown Afghanistan will look like. Some envisage it as a threat for Pakistan’s security, while others perceive it as a chance for the country to solve its own domestic security problem and regain influence in Afghanistan. Most of our analysts focus upon Afghanistan to comment upon geostrategic dynamics in the post withdrawal situation. Very few extend this analysis to socio-economic impact on Pakistan, as already observed. Some exceptions are however there. For instance, a Khaled Ahmed, a noted analyst contends that: “The Americans and the NATO allies are going to start withdrawing from Afghanistan but Pakistan is tempted to repeat the blunders of 1989-90 banking on conquest by the Taliban and the Punjabi Taliban on both sides of the Durand Line” (Ahmed, 2011). The writer raises his concerns about Pakistan’s ability to cope with surging terrorism if it does not change its Afghan policy in future. Similarly, another analysts Hasan Askari views the situation and identifies the joint cooperation of the U.S, Afghanistan and Pakistan as a key to stability in the region (Daily Times, 2010). In a two piece analysis, Dr. Haider Shah, a public policy expert, identifies three likely scenarios which might affect Pakistan after NATO’s drawdown of troops is completed. He extends the analysis to socio-economic level and identifies economic dividends that would accrue to Pakistan if a stable and peaceful Afghanistan survives (Daily Times, 2011).

There are various dynamics of the Afghan puzzle which makes it difficult to predict one likely outcome. Taking cue from Dr. Haider Shah’s analysis the post drawdown situation can best be analysed in terms of various possible scenarios. There are three such scenarios which are discussed next.

**Stable Afghanistan under ANSF and Afghan Police**

In January 2010, the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board, the formal decision-making body for Afghan and international coordination, endorsed an increase of the Afghan National Army (ANA) growth target to 134,000 by October 2010 and 171,600 by October 2011; and for the Afghan National Police (ANP) to 109,000 by October 2010 and 134,000 by October 2011. The Afghan army has now about 195,000 troops mostly financed by the U.S. (Huffington Post, 2014) But the Afghan defence experts argue that Afghanistan needed much greater strength between 600,000 to
700,000 troops as per the U.S. military’s own counterinsurgency manual. Including police and other security units, Afghanistan currently has about 350,000 Western-funded security forces. A U.S. report says funding the Afghan Army costs $4.1 billion a year, with only $500 million coming from the Afghan government (Huffington Post, 2014).

In Regional Command-Capital, since 28 August 2008, the ANSF gradually took over the lead responsibility for security in Kabul province. The Afghan Ministry of Interior (MoI) and Ministry of Defence (MoD) lead this effort with the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). The best case scenario primarily rests on the ability of ANSF to withstand any onslaught of anti-government insurgents, the Taliban. Additional determinant which would work towards a stable Afghanistan is the absence factor of foreign troops in Afghanistan, a primary motive for garnering popular support among Afghan villagers. The moderate Taliban will be persuaded by this enabling environment to join mainstream politics and hence contribute to long term peace and stability.

Pakistan can benefit enormously from this situation. It can boost regional trade by becoming a hub for trade between India, Afghanistan and Central Asian states. Presently there exists a negative perception about Pakistan due to its long association with Taliban. The fact that Osama Bin Laden was found in a posh cantonment of Pakistan also did not help our international image. If we help in establishing a stable Afghanistan Pakistan will be seen as a responsible member of the international community. We would then also be able to focus our anti-terrorism effort more on domestic issues such as sectarianism, trouble in Baluchistan and law and order in Karachi.

**Protracted civil war in Afghanistan**

The second possible scenario can be a protracted civil war between the Taliban forces and the internationally recognised Afghan government. Many national and international analysts fear that the departure of foreign troops may result in a steady expansion in the attacks of Taliban forces. But we are also not neglectful of the fact that the Afghan government will also not be without friends. In fact not only the NATO has maintained its presence in the region by 10,000 US and 5000 other NATO member troops, many regional players will also be keen on not seeing Taliban make any headway. Neighbouring countries like Iran and Central Asian states support the present Afghan power structure due to shared historical ties. India also has a stake in the present Afghan government as it invested significantly in many economic development projects inside Afghanistan and would therefore not be happy with an abrupt change. (Daily Times, 2011) Russia, a major military power in the region also is fearful of the instability in Afghanistan as it could spill over into some of the Central Asian republics along its borders. Russia therefore willingly signed an agreement with the NATO coalition to expand the use of supply routes through Russia to Afghanistan. It also expressed its willingness to supply trainers besides military hardware like helicopters and guns to boost the Afghan military. China, another emerging military and economic
giant, also does not want any militant jihadi regime in Afghanistan as this does not augur well for the troubled Muslims majority Sinkiang region.

Local insurgents like Taliban and international terrorist networks like Al Qaeda and ISIS are also aware of the situation and are determined to take full advantage of the situation and would sabotage any effort towards a peaceful settlement. The collision of these opposing interests will result in a long drawn war between Taliban forces and the internationally recognised Afghan government. Pakistan is still grappling with two million Afghan refugees who despite many repatriation schemes have shown little interest in returning to their country. The anarchy in Afghanistan would force other refugees from Afghanistan to Pakistan that would further make the prospects of existing millions of refugees going back home bleak. Pakistan pays heavily for its refugees’ problems in the form of environmental degradation, a heavy strain on its energy sources, and a steep rise in crime. (Janjua, 2008) In fact there is a nexus between organized crime and lawlessness in Afghanistan and criminal activities in the adjoining Pakistani territories. One criminal activity that has risen appreciably is kidnapping for ransom with the involvement of militants.

Actions of Afghan warlords to take local control encouraged local clerics of Pakistani tribal areas to follow suit. Even the adjoining areas of Peshawar experienced lawlessness due to this trend which ultimately had to be dealt with sternly by Pakistani law enforcement agencies. In Swat which was known as a tourist paradise, Maulvi Fazal-Ullah, now Taliban’s head, became so powerful that he controlled an autonomous local regime after terrorizing local population. (Almeida, 2008) If encouraged, the clerics and criminal gangs will again try to run such fiefdoms of their own.

**Fall of Kabul to Taliban**

The third possible scenario can be the ultimate fall of Kabul to the militants. This will be a re-enactment of what happened in 1992 when Dr. Najib’s government was toppled by Mujahideen’s speedy advancement. This is not an unimaginable scenario as the economic and military aid providers to the Afghan government are experiencing a very troubled economic situation at home themselves. The US is increasingly finding it difficult to fix the gaping hole in its fiscal budget and as Afghan war is a major drain on the U.S economy it is possible that sooner or later Afghanistan finds itself left on its own. Many European members also have acute economic issues at home and hence their continued monetary support for Afghanistan cannot be taken for granted. Besides the possibility of discontinuation of fiscal support, the quality of the military strength of Afghanistan is also questionable. If history is to be used as a guide, if the going gets tough the probability of mass desertions by military personnel cannot be ruled out. There is a growing unease among the donors over wide spread corruption and nepotism in the official circles of Afghanistan. It can therefore be concluded that if foreign funding comes to an end and the Afghan forces melt down a takeover by militants is not a remote reality. While sympathisers of jihadi cause can find happiness in this eventuality it should not be forgotten that state failure in Afghanistan would result in weak
governance and lawlessness. This in turn would lead to ineffective counter insurgency and organized crime/drug trafficking which would spill over into Pakistan and hence this scenario would pose a clear and imminent danger to Pakistan’s security and stability as well. The domino effect will be stronger in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Baluchistan and FATA which are already beset with serious security challenges like insurgency, drug proliferation, and religiously inspired militant extremism.

The success of a radical militant Islamist movement in Afghanistan will inspire the strategists in Pakistan who are imbued with a spirit of international jihad. They will use the event as a propaganda weapon to brainwash young recruits in Pakistan who will be told that after defeating one superpower, Soviet Union, they had defeated the collective power of all western powers. If our government extends support to such a regime, our relations with the international community would be further strained. In the late 1980s ‘access to the newly liberated Central Asian states’ was the motivational driver for our strategists and Taliban were used as a means towards that goal. We are aware that this remained an exercise in daydreaming only. Foreign investment cannot be wooed if a country is infested with terrorism. Moreover the strong ties between anti-Taliban forces and Central Asian states will be an impediment against any trade aspirations at our end.

The socio religious consequences of a Taliban government upon Pakistan need to be carefully factored in. Being faith brothers, the Taliban government will support the Pakistani Taliban movement both militarily and with indoctrination. The severe backlash on law and order situation, especially in FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa cannot be over emphasised. To make situation worse, a sectarian warfare would also erupt as Al-Qaeda and ISIS related sectarian groups would feel emboldened by Taliban’s victory in Afghanistan. The logical consequence would be that Pakistan, like Afghanistan, would also end up becoming a pariah state. Perhaps the U.S Vide President Joe Biden’s comment made in 2008 that “If Afghanistan fails, Pakistan could follow, because extremists will set their sights on the bigger prize to the east” will become a reality.

Afghanistan has remained a major determinant in the US-Pakistan relations which have seen many ups and down in the recent years. In the event of Taliban takeover with Pakistan’s complicity our relations with the international community will hit the rock bottom. It is a known fact that Pakistanis travelling abroad are considered as high risk visitors. One natural consequence will be that in the event of a disturbed South Asian region all developed countries will raise the visa barrier even higher for Pakistanis travelling to these countries. The most adversely affected will therefore be thousands of students who plan to go to western countries for higher studies. On economic side investment in Pakistan will be negatively affected as no investor will be interested in risking flow of funds to a high risk country like Pakistan.
We need to understand the paradigm of Taliban ideologues who aspire to extend their control across the border through one Caliph (Ameerul Momineen) as Taliban do not believe in national states but in one caliphate. All radical campaigners, like Hizbul Tehreer will be further emboldened to promote their propaganda against democracy in Pakistan and consequently there is a likelihood of merger of Afghan Taliban & TTP into a unified force. Whether the Afghan Taliban government will acknowledge ISIS caliph or will compete for global leadership is hard to guess in that scenario. But in any scenario with regards to the relationship between Middle East based ISIS insurgency and Taliban the tribal belt of Pakistan will be infested with the pro-Caliphate insurgency militancy.

**The emerging situation and Pakistan**

There are two important developments which might prove instrumental in determining the course of history. The first one is Pakistan’s paradigm shift in dealing with jihadi elements by waging an all-out war against terrorists, code named Zarab e Azb, and announcement of a national anti-terrorism plan (NAP) to root out extremists as a national policy. Election of Ashraf Ghani, a cool headed administrator and negotiator, as the President of Afghanistan also encouraged this shift in Pakistan’s Afghan policy. In regional disputes, personalities at the helm of affairs play an important role despite the fact that the inertia of the past remains a potent determinant. In the given scenario, Ashraf Ghani can be seen as the right person at the right time. Recent happenings indicate that both Pakistan and Afghanistan have finally realised that their economic development is dependent upon regional peace and mutual cooperation. (Shah, 2014)

Pakistan’s military engagement on its Western border in the backdrop of India’s increasing role in Afghan’s security infrastructure was a source of concern for Pakistan’s security establishment. However the new Afghan government has dispelled this perception by forging relations with Pakistan on a friendlier basis thus lessening the burden of geography and history. (Lodhi, 2014) Making a break with a history of hostilities and mutual mistrust a very high level exchange of visits has taken place in the recent past between Pakistan and Afghanistan. In this regard, Sartaj Aziz, Pakistan’s Foreign Affairs Advisor, Raheel Sharif Chief of Army Staff and Lieutenant General Rizwan Akhtar, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) chief met their counterparts in Pakistan and Afghanistan in reciprocal visits of mutual goodwill and trust building. To further amplify the signals of a new beginning in Pak-Afghan relations President Ashraf Ghani visited Pakistan where he expressed his desire to leave hostilities behind. A clear indicator of significant progress in this regard is the completion of military training of six Afghan army cadets in Pakistan’s military academy where Afghan Army chief was the chief guest at the time of passing out ceremony (BBC Report).

The second important development is the resumption of peace negotiations between the Afghan government and Taliban. This latest peace initiative is considered more promising than the past doomed efforts because of Pakistani and Chinese mediation (Reuters Report, 2015). Greater hopes of success are also on account of
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Pakistani threat to arrest or expel Taliban leaders if they do not negotiate with Kabul. The TTP’s massacre of 132 students in December at Army Public School in Peshawar gave impetus to Pakistan’s interest in an early resolution of the Afghan conflict so it can deal with the terrorists without any cross border support. Despite this new glimmer of hope difficulties still plague the peace process. The Afghan Taliban have both pro and anti-peace initiative factions, led by Akhtar Mohammad Mansour and Abdul Qayum Zakir respectively. Efforts to resolve their differences have not been successful so far. The demands for complete departure of NATO troops and sharia implementation may also kill the peace negotiations in the bud. There are opponents of peace negotiations in the Afghan political mainstream as well. For instance Chairman of the Meshrano Jirga, (Senate), Fazl Hadi Muslimyar criticized the secretive hasty decision of peace talks with the Taliban, stressing that the Taliban would never renounce violence and would continue their insurgency under the name of ISIS. In view of such polarised views finding a middle ground acceptable to both sides, though highly desirable, may prove actually difficult to achieve.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Pakistan must be watching the post drawdown period with both a mixed sense of optimism and anxiety. The unpredictable future holds both promise and problems for Pakistan depending on how the situation in Afghanistan takes its course. Using scenario analysis it can be concluded that one possible emerging scenario may see Afghanistan finally making progress and living in harmony with its neighbours and the world. A second scenario may see Afghanistan plunging again into a long civil war between the government and Taliban while in the third scenario Taliban may again seize Kabul and establish its rule in a significant part of Afghanistan. Due to important developments like paradigmatic changes in Afghan policy of Pakistan and a Pakistan friendly administration in Kabul and resumption of Pakistan-China mediated peace talks between Afghan government and Taliban there is however now a greater room for optimism.

Pakistan is faced with many domestic problems that require an urgent and sustained attention. While it is grappling with the worsening energy crisis many proposed megaprojects with the association of Central Asian states, e.g a gas pipeline from Turkmenistan via Afghanistan, would not be possible if the security situation in Afghanistan remains poor. Without a peaceful and stable Afghanistan, Pakistan would also fail to achieve its imagined geographical pivot of Eurasia linking it with West Asia (Friedman, 2014). The economic effects of drug proliferation in Afghanistan would also tax Pakistan heavily in future. The number of drug addicts is increasing by 7% annually, leading to a rise in crime. It is a known fact that 60% of drug supply depends on Pak-Afghan routes which in turn gives rise to crime syndicates and drug smugglers in both countries (Janjua, 2009). The drug money has not only financed criminal gangs but also contributes to the activities of sectarian and ethnic miscreants (Rashid, 2008). The impact of militants’ activities near Pakistan’s border would aggravate the drugs trafficking problem, as the UNODC’s report regarding cultivation of 70% of Afghanistan’s
opium in five Afghan provinces bordering Pakistan clearly establishes (Afghan Opium Trade, 2010). The losses to business, tourism, and industrial activity in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in particular and in Pakistan in general are phenomenal. The foreign exchange earnings from tourism and related economic activities have also been showing a continued downward trend (Asia Pulse, 2008). The economic cost to Pakistan due to backlash of terrorism is therefore also quite considerable.

The following recommendations are made in the wake of drawdown of troops from Afghanistan.

1. Pakistan needs to play its facilitator role more effectively so that it can focus on its own domestic problem with various deadly variants of extremism.
2. Respect for mutual sovereignty and relation on the basis of mutual goodwill and addressing each other’s concerns of security
3. Adopt a policy with emphasis on trade and economic development and establishing trade links with Central Asia
4. Pakistan must also explore the possibility of forging friendly relations with all the countries of the region to complete the paradigm shift

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Dynamics of NATO Drawdown from Afghanistan and Future Implications

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The NATO/ISAF drawdown from Afghanistan scheduled through various tranches has drawn the attention of the whole world. The drawdown taking place through five phases is a matter of great importance as Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan destined Afghanistan for civil war, power vacuum, and continuous power struggle between the various ethnic groups and the ascendance of Taliban to the throne of Kabul. This paper discusses the dynamics of NATO drawdown from Afghanistan and its repercussions on Afghanistan. It will focus on schedule for security transition, different stages of drawdown, security assessment and future size and strength of the residuary forces in the post 2014 scenario. Withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan testifies the fact that the latter may once again be faced with certain chronic issues such as power vacuum, future threats and challenges. This will also analyze Afghan-US bilateral security agreement.

Key Words: NATO, drawdown, Afghanistan dynamics.

The 9/11 episode was a landmark in the history of the world in general and the United States, Afghanistan and Pakistan in particular. Soon after this tragic incident by a non-state actor, the United States and its allies started the war against terrorism under the umbrella of NATO/ISAF. Now, since their mission has been a fait accompli, the drawdown of NATO/ISAF from Afghanistan is in the offing as has been reiterated by President Obama of the United States and President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan through many occasions. The word dynamics encompasses the drawdown of NATO forces from Afghanistan through five different phases, timetable for drawdown, likely size of the residual forces in the post-2014 scenario and security assessment.

The United States is the key actor in the whole scene of drawdown of NATO forces from Afghanistan which fact is crystal clear from the statements of the US President Obama whose Administration emphasized that the transition process beginning in July 2011 would provide greater chances of opportunity to the Afghan forces to be trained so as to cope with the security challenges. This transition is looked upon as a rapid decrease in the internal affairs of Afghanistan by the US (NATO/ISAF, 2009). The transition of NATO drawdown from Afghanistan has raised many issues inside the Obama government and has become a debatable issue. Addressing this controversy, the Obama administration clarified the situation on 31st August 2010 stating that the future of Afghanistan is to be determined as per ground realities. (Katzman 2013: 24) However,
the controversial debate over deadline of July 2011 further aggravated the NATO Summit held in November 2010 in Lisbon wherein it was decided that the period of transition regarding giving power to the Afghan leadership would begin in July 2011 and would culminate by the end of December 2014. The view of transition was further verified by the president of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai stating that the transition of NATO forces would be conducted in five tranches. (Katzman 2013: 25) The announcements were made by Hamid Karzai with the first one in March 2011, the second one was made in November 2011, and the third announcement was made in May 2012. The fourth tranche was made on 31st December 2012 that included 52 Districts, while the fifth and last one was made on 18th June 2013 pertaining to 92 Districts along the border of Pakistan. The process of transition was scheduled to take 12-18 months with 2014 as its culminating point where authority would be transferred to the Afghan government. The Bilateral Security Agreement between the United States and Afghanistan left a contingent of a few thousand forces in Afghanistan beyond 2014.

**Time Table for Security Transition**

The NATO Summit that was held in May 2012 in Chicago in furtherance of the Lisbon Summit held in 2010 determined the future line of action for the ISAF contributing nations in Afghanistan, urging that the ISAF mission would culminate on 31st December 2014 as per prescribed program of transition. The process of Drawdown of U.S. forces from Afghanistan commenced in 2011 and would undergo through five different phases of transition culminating in December 2014. Schedule for the drawdown of NATO forces from Afghanistan was determined in the Chicago Summit clearly indicating that the NATO forces will ultimately shift from combating practices to that of training, advising, assisting and supporting role to the Afghan National Army. The main responsibility for the security of Afghanistan and law and order situation would remain with the security forces of Afghanistan as enshrined by the Chicago Summit Declaration on Afghanistan held in May 2012. According to Hamid Karzai:

“In the history of Afghanistan 2013 would mean that the lead of the Afghan government and security would be handed down to them save for a few provinces or areas where the presence of foreign forces is still needed? But 2014 is the year where everything will be completely handed over to the Afghani people, everything is likely to be completed, and transition to be completed with the ISAF leaving Afghanistan” (Karzai, 2012).

Group Brigadier of ISAF Strategic Transition Group, Gen. Richard Crip-well, stated in these words:

“Till date no regressions in prospects of security or governance or development has been observed in tranches one and two during this period but there are challenges in the way of the next tranche, I have observed no point that the Afghan National Forces would not be in a position to combat or they would question the timetable of transition of drawdown“ (Cripwell, 2012).

**Phase One**

On 22 March 2012, the first phase of transition handing over the security of Afghanistan to the Afghan Security Forces and was announced by Afghan President, whereby listing seven districts and provinces (Brook, Louisa, & Claire 2012: 9). This phase particularizes seven key provinces where security responsibility would be transferred. However, an attack was made by insurgents on the UN compound on 1st April 2011 in Mazar-e-Sharif Killing Seven UN workers that aggravated the security situation, which in turn, overshadowed its transition. The
gradual shift of responsibility for security began in May 2011 in each of these areas and was completed in mid-July. Bamiyan Province was handed over on 17 July, Lashkar Gah on 20th July while Punisher on 24 July 2011.

**Phase Two**
On 27 November 2011, Phase two to transition was announced by President Hamid Karzai. This phase covered many important Provinces and Districts where responsibility of security would be shifted to the security agencies of Afghanistan. In pursuance of this transition, the Afghan forces will take the responsibility for the security of the country and this could be completed in a span of twenty four months. Following this phase of transition, the ANSF will be responsible for the security of 50% of the Afghan population. So, the second phase of transition made the Afghan Security Forces responsible for the 50% of population of Afghanistan.

**Phase Three**
The phase of transition was announced on 13 May 2012 and would include all the provincial headquarters and metropolitan cities of Afghanistan. On this occasion the government of United Kingdom (UK) urged that 75% of the population of Afghanistan will remain under the auspicious control of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) “once tranche three begins” (Afghanistan, May 2012). The number of Provinces in this phase is increased to eleven and marks an important phase of the security transition. In this phase all the administrative units in the provinces of Uruzgan, Kapisa and Parowan are included.

**Phase Four and Five**
No proper schedule has been fixed regarding the beginning of the fourth phase. General Allen, Commander General of the International Security Assistance Force has stated that he anticipates the fifth and final tranche to be announced by the government of Hamid Karzai in summer 2013. (NATO Secretary General 2012) The Chicago summit declaration on Afghanistan states:

“On 13 May 2012, President Hamid Karzai announced the third wave of provinces to enter the transition process. According to this transition 75% population of Afghanistan would live in the areas where security responsibility would be taken by the Afghan National Army. It was further enshrined that all areas of Afghanistan will have commenced transition by the mid of 2013 and the Afghan forces will be in the lead for all security nation-wide (Summit, 21 May 2012).

As a result of the transition process, Afghan National Security Forces have taken the responsibility of Afghanistan from the NATO/ISAF. In November 2009 NATO Training Mission (NTM-A) was set up in Afghanistan which bonded together NATO and national training efforts under a single security umbrella to which pledge was showed by 38 nations (Factsheet, 2012).

Now, the lead in Afghanistan is taken by ANSF while the ISAF has been assigned the duty of training, monitoring and operating purposes in the most sensitive areas. NATO states that both the police and army are on the same track and no divergence occurs anywhere. (Factsheet, 2012) This cooperation and coordination show their confidence on Afghan National Army for taking control of security matters.
Afghan Security Forces Assume Leadership Role

NATO Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen has made it clear that leading role has been assumed by the Afghan Security Forces in the country and security has been controlled very well by the local security forces. The transfer of role was in line with the security plan of President Obama announced by him on 15th March 2012, which was formally announced by both the presidents on 11 January 2013 in a joint statement. The U.S forces ceased to patrol the areas and villages of Afghanistan through this joint statement. U S President Obama also stressed that the death of Osama Bin Laden (OBL) as a result of military operation represents a major achievement for the United States and now it was very necessary to reduce the budget deficit of the U.S. He also announced that ten thousand U.S. Forces are going to be withdrawn by the end of 2011, while twenty three thousand forces would be withdrawn by September 2012. After his drawdown, the strength of U.S. Forces will be reduced to sixty six thousand (Katzman 2013).

Upcoming milestone in Afghanistan

According to the U.S. President Obama 34,000 US forces would be withdrawn from Afghanistan by the end of February 2014 in furtherance of handing over the security of Afghanistan to the Afghan government. The remaining portion of the NATO Forces that will exit by the 2014 transition deadline are likely to be withdrawn after the April 5, 2014 i.e. after Afghan Presidential Elections. A few thousand of the 34,000 have been withdrawn leaving about 63,000 US forces still in Afghanistan (Katzman 2013). These moves of drawdown further support the views of the various reports that U. S. combat mission in Afghanistan is going to wind up by the end of 2014 with a few contingents of residuary forces. Most of the Airbases of the United States have left Afghanistan urging that their work has been a fait accompli now (Chivers, 2012). As compared to 150 US run bases, only 50 bases remained operational by the end of 2014 while many are being closed down or handed over to the Afghan forces and their number will still be reduced. This reduction in the bulk of the security forces coupled with the closing down of most of the US airbases in Afghanistan and the reduction in the size of vehicles is indicative of the fact that Afghanistan is moving towards a self-styled democratic government through elections conducted by their security agencies.

Security Assessment

Assessments of the security situation in Afghanistan and the performance of the local security forces was an encouraging point for the ISAF as they were relegated to the status of a supporting role. According to an assessment conducted in August 2009, by the Afghan Interior Minister, it was calculated that the Karzai government was functional in thirty percent of the country, while the insurgents represented four percent i.e. thirteen out of three hundred and sixty four Districts and influenced or operated in another 30%. According to that estimate, Shadow governors (self-styled) were made by the Taliban in 33 out of 34 provinces of Afghanistan. The assessment further stated that minimum representation is possessed by the Taliban in the Northern Afghanistan (Katzman 2013).

Surveys conducted by the Security Agencies supplement the view that NATO/ISAF has been successful in maintaining law and order in Afghanistan during its stay. A survey report that was published in July 2013, pinpointed the following points (Katzman 2013).

1. Territorial influence of Taliban has been decreased during the stay of NATO.
2. The Afghan National Army has been successful in maintaining law and order and no major areas or bases have been lost by the ANA.
3. During the period the basic goods and services have been quite accessible and easy.
4. The shift of responsibility for the security of the country to the Afghan National Security Forces has negated the view that Taliban can portray itself as an obstacle to the foreign troops.

The provinces of Wardak, Faryab, Farah and Herat are some of the areas that are prone to insurgency and terrorism. The provinces of Faryab and Wardak have been the worst areas where irreparable loss was caused after a short span of time by some suicide bombers (Katzman 2013). Despite bringing in stability in most of the provinces of Afghanistan where law enforcement agencies have been successful in maintaining law and order situation but fears still haunt the minds in some of the areas. The hard areas include provinces of Wardak, Faryab, Farah and Herat where security situation has deteriorated a lot and a sense of insecurity pervades everywhere.

**Likely Size and Structure of Post-2014 Force**

The United States along with its allied partners are formulating plan for the future size and structure of the residual forces in Afghanistan in the post-2014 scenario and also to assist the ANSF and carry on military operations against the most wanted terrorists in Afghanistan. Only such a security force can have the capacity to ensure peace and stability in Afghanistan wherever and whenever required. Gen. Dunford, top U.S. and ISAF Commander has expressed his deep concern in the current state of affairs in Afghanistan saying that the U.S and coalition forces are still required in Afghanistan to ensure that insurgency does not expand further in the country. General Dunford also rebutted the concept of Zero Option for Afghanistan as this would mean a complete withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan as was believed to be under consideration by the US Administration as per reports of July 2013 press (Katzman 2013). While Afghan President Hamid Karzai looks at the concept of zero option from different angle and says that this would completely guarantee peace, stability and security in Afghanistan.

General Allen in November 2012, while addressing the White House, presented three options: 6000, 10000 or 20000 forces. Of the three options, the first one opted for operations in the most sensitive areas particularly where the high value insurgents seek refuge. The second one was meant for the assistance and training of Afghan Security forces. The last one provided for US patrols in highly contested areas without any break. (Eric, 2012) The NATO meeting of Brussels held 21st February 2013; the United States suggested having about 8,000 to 12,000 in the form of mentors and trainers in the post-2014 scenario in Afghanistan. Out of these, 2/3rd are to be US forces while 1/3rd are to be non US force-plus a still an unspecified contingent of mostly US counter terrorism forces. (Jim, 2013) Sources also prognosticates that the post-2014 US forces would be just a bridging force between the ANSF and the United States, only to assist the Afghan forces in the performance of their responsibilities. The main duty of that force would be to provide support to the Defense and Interior Ministries of Afghanistan but the name of the remaining force in Afghanistan would be changed to the “Resolute Support” for which some of the allied countries of the ISAF have shown willingness. (Katzman 2013) Germany has also consented to be part of the post-2014 allies in the war against terror (Reisinger, 2012)

**Power Vacuum**

Withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan in 1979 created a huge gap in the internal politics of Afghanistan and was struck by civil war that continued till 1996 as a consequence of which Taliban emerged on the landscape of Afghanistan. In the wake of current drawdown, it is
feared that a situation worse than that may emerge. Keeping in view the past history of Afghanistan, it can easily be deduced that fears of civil war may overpower the country as was witnessed in 1979. (Chandran 2012: 131) It is also important to note that the new government of Afghanistan would be faced with numerous challenges particularly in the sphere of governance and administration (Harach & al, 2012).

After the draw-down scenario, there seems to be a great power vacuum and continuous struggle of various political and ethnic groups to gain access to power of the country which will ultimately lead to violent conflict of interest between the various sects and ethnic groups. (Rutting, 2009) Even presently, the unpopularity of Karzai’s government allows the insurgents, as Mao put it, “to swim like fish in the Inn”. In the absence of drastic change of course, post-2014 prospects of Afghanistan seem bleak water (Tung 1937). The Bonn Conference and Chicago Summit were quite in consonance with the demands of the common people of Afghanistan as they focused on a stable political, financial and practical support while keeping in view the inherent structural weaknesses of the Afghan government (Declaration 20 May, 2012).

Challenges before Afghan Government

The drawdown of foreign forces from Afghanistan would provide an equal chance of opportunity to the neighboring countries to play their role in filling the gap of power vacuum and would help in taking the country towards stability and prosperity. Moreover, they should also contribute towards the decentralization of the country as this would be a great step towards the power sharing formula on the basis of their ethnic representation. (Destradi, 2012: 2) Some incidents of hostages and bombing in the most luxurious places such as near Qarga Lake in June 2012 are the evidentiary proofs that Taliban still reside the area. Gilles Doronsoro foresees three crises that are going to haunt Afghan government in the aftermath of drawdown scenario. There are fears of economic crises; institutional crisis and security crisis as Taliban are expected to launch attacks with new fervor and zeal in the summer of 2013 (Doronsoro: 7). Western spending that stood at more than $100 billion in 2011 that was contributed by the United States only, will be reduced will be reduced to less than $5 billion a year after 2014.

The Afghan government needs to focus more on the security measures of the country as Taliban are now more than a military or religious class and has assumed the role of a political class or party seeking to take control of the territories and topple down the regime in Kabul (Doronsoro, 13) According to an estimate, out of the 398 districts in Afghanistan, about a quarter (¼th) of these could fall to the insurgency totally or partially, including the capitals of the Districts in a period of two years. There are apprehensions that main roads will also be threatened by them. The Taliban are likely to form a state within the state with their self-styled Islamic government based on their own perception of Islam.

Future Threats

Ian Lye is of the view that security situation in Afghanistan can adopt a worst form and seem to remain far from being stable in the post -2014 scenario. He foresees threats from the Taliban, the Haqqani network, Hizbi-Islami Gulbadin and Pakistani factor resulting in the political instability. (Ian) Of all the insurgent groups, Taliban are supposed to be the most detrimental group operating in Afghanistan under the command of Mullah Umar with their strong foot holds in the provinces of Helmand and Kandahar. The death of Mullah Umar recently circulated in the news circles, will put the Taliban on a weak point as problems of cohesion may arise which in turn may divide the Taliban into many groups and dissentions. The Haqqani Network is another threat
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to the security of Afghanistan having close ties with both the Al-Qaeda and Taliban. The group is
currently led by Sirajuddin Haqqani and has established close links with the Taliban and its
leadership. The Hizb-i-Islami of Gulbadin Hekmatyar is another group that poses threat to the
stability of Afghanistan. Gulbadin has acted to be an ally of the U.S. who fought against the Soviet
Forces in 1979 during the intervention of Soviet forces in Afghanistan. But presently this group
has been instrumental in engaging itself against the ISAF in the key areas of the Northern part.
This faction operates in the North-eastern provinces of Kunar and Nuristan. The current flaring
situation in Afghanistan and presence of many insurgent groups, it can be argued that Afghanistan
may be faced with significant challenges such as state-building, Rule of Law, fixed deadline for the
complete withdrawal of the US and NATO forces from Afghanistan, drug economy, and corruption
and above all, the insurgency of Taliban.

British Defense Secretary, Phillip Hammond and many other observers are also
uncertain about the likely future of Afghanistan and state that nobody can say with certainty what
the future of Afghanistan will be. On the basis of this uncertainty, one can deduce that three
factors comprising economic, political and security will shape the future and overall trajectory of
Afghanistan in the post-2014 (Oskarsson, 2013).

Afghan-US Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA)
In the face of high security risks, both the United States and Afghanistan circulated a
draft of a Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) that will extend the presence of U.S. forces in
Afghanistan beyond next year’s combat troop draw-down. (Pakistan Observer, 2013) The
document of the agreement resolves the dilemma of immunity of American troops from being
prosecuted by the Afghan government. The United States will have the exclusive legal jurisdiction
over the law enforcement personnel working in Afghanistan and the Afghan government will have
no power over the American troops. The document of the BSA will determine the size of the
residual force in Afghanistan and is greatly concerned with the security agreement to be
concluded between the two countries. Some circles argue that the Obama administration will
have 5,000 to 10,000 residual forces in Afghanistan in the post-2014 with the sole purpose of
providing training and advice to the local forces of Afghanistan. Former President Hamid Karzai
refused to sign the document of the BSA. But in September 2014, just one day after the oath
taking ceremony of the president Dr.Ashraf Ghani, the document of the BSA was signed by the
new president.

Since opium and drug-trafficking across the Pak-Afghan border has created huge
security concerns for Pakistan as a result of which the entire region is affected. The United
Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has estimated that opium cultivation in Afghanistan
covered an area of 200,000 hectares in 2013 which saw an increase of 36% in the year of 2014.
This increase calls for alarming bells for the international community as well as the immediate
neighbors of Afghanistan. Yuri Fedotov, Executive Director of UNODC has called for a more
comprehensive strategy towards this nuisance. Strict counter-narcotics efforts are required to be
adopted to do away with this problem forever. Joint efforts by both Pakistan and Afghanistan
would be of great help to redress the issue particularly across the border region.

The timeframe for the drawdown of NATO forces from Afghanistan scheduled through
five phases is indicative of the fact that the United States and its allies have been successful in
achieving their stated objectives in the region. But as has been reiterated on many occasions that
even after 2014, the strength of residual forces under the Resolute Support program in
Afghanistan would be from 8000-9000 which is indicative of the fact the United States is not leaving the region for reasons better known to them. On the other hand it also leaves a question mark on the weak security system of Afghanistan that high profiled areas in Afghanistan would still remain under the direct protection of the NATO forces out of which two-third would be US while one one-third would be non-US forces.

Security situation in Afghanistan has also remained far from being stable despite strict measures by law enforcement agencies in most sensitive areas. More than 5,000 (five thousand) local security forces have lost their lives only during 2014, which is the highest total since the war began in 2001. On the other hand, the coalition partners have suffered a total of 3,485 casualties since 2001 which further supplement the view that security situation may worsen after the drawdown of US forces from Afghanistan. The number of civilian casualties either killed or wounded in Afghanistan during 2014 is round about 10,000. This fact is supported by the UN report and 2014 has been termed as the bloodiest year for Afghanistan since 2001. So, the Afghan National Security Forces are going to face serious security challenges in the post-drawdown scenario. A few remedies would contribute to make Afghanistan a stable and democratic country.

Firstly, a fragile oligarchical system would help to resolve the issue of power vacuum to a great extent. This system needs to be based upon the interplay of the Afghan President and co-opted multi-ethnic Afghan groups and regional power brokers through joint venture would help to prevent civil war in Afghanistan and have access to power and patronage. Under this scheme, the Taliban would not be given any share in the power structure but would have indirect control over the rural areas while the central government will have control over the urban centers. This aims at a strong central government eliminating the role of Taliban at central level while giving them share in the rural areas in an indirect way.

Secondly, the power oligarchy would be shared by all the groups and parties including the minor factions as they are to become partners in the formation of the government. In both of these two cases the political system would continue to be coupled with a power sharing formula through a proportionate way catering to their representation in the parliament on the basis of their population. This would bring stability to Afghanistan to a great extent.

In the post 2001 scenario a strong personalized and centralized government was established in Afghanistan which lacked the system of checks and balances. The result was nepotism, corruption, malpractices and lack of coherence among the multi-ethnic groups which further exacerbated the ongoing security situation. To overcome these problems, there needs to be a decentralized government representative of all ethnic groups with their proportionate share in the set up. Proper system of checks and balances coupled with transparency and accountability would resolve the issue to a great extent. Thirdly, the Taliban could become the sole governors and could seize control of the capital and large parts of the country. In case Taliban comes into power there are chances for a transitory stability with greater fear that Afghanistan could descend into a civil war. Fourthly, the Bilateral Security Agreement should be extended to include security personnel from the regional powers such as Pakistan, Iran and India beside Afghanistan and the United States in order to avoid any future conflict of vested interest in Afghanistan.

Conclusion
In the wake of draw-down scenario, Afghanistan is amid transition which will set the stage for its future destiny. Perspectives of civil war and instability seem to overpower the country
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with the persistent threat of Taliban’s rising into power. A combination of factors comprising rise in the drug-trafficking across the border, events of insurgency and militancy, weak security system, lack of coherence among the various ethnic groups and political instability seem to shape the future trajectory of Afghanistan. But coherence among all the stakeholders in Afghanistan could save it from civil war, political instability and make it a strong democratic country.

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Received: April, 20th, 2015
Revisions Received: Sep, 14th, 2015
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Key words The authors must provide the preferred key words for the study.

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