

THE NEED FOR STRATEGIC CHANGE IN REGIONAL POWERS' POLICY TOWARDS AFGHANISTAN FOR POLITICAL STABILITY

K. N. TENNYSON

We cannot expect to have peace in the region if we don't have peace in Afghanistan.

— Asif Ali Zardari

President, Islamic Republic of Pakistan

Afghanistan is home to a host of different ethnic, religious, linguistic and tribal groups, situated in Southern Asia. The country is surrounded by Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan in the north, Iran in the west, Pakistan [Baluchistan province, Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP), and Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK)] in the east and south and in the extreme northeast by the Singkiang Autonomous Region of the People's Republic (PRC) of China.¹ It is geographically landlocked and economically weak. Therefore, the country has little economic value to the outside world. Yet, it has played an important role in the politics of the region for many centuries

Dr **K. N. Tennyson** is an Associate Fellow at the Centre for Air Power Studies, New Delhi.

1. "Afghanistan," *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th Edition, Vol. 1 (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1977), p. 164.

because of its geo-strategic location.² It is because of the country's pivotal geographical location that the external powers frequently intervened in the politics of Afghanistan to take control of the strategic location. The reason being, "Anyone who controls Afghanistan, controls the land routes between the Indian subcontinent, Iran, and resource rich Central Asia. Almost every major power, therefore, wanted a slice of the pie."³

WHAT STALLED AFGHANISTAN?

In view of the fact that Afghanistan was invaded and occupied by external powers one after the other for centuries, successive migration of the people to and from Afghanistan took place. This, in turn, led some to integrate themselves with the indigenous population and they became part of the Afghans, thereby, transforming the ethnic composition of the country. As a result, today, we find the existence of a conglomeration of tribes and ethnic groups in Afghanistan like the Aimaq, Baluch, Hazaras, Kazibash, Nuristani, Pashtu, Tajik, Turkmen and Uzbek, etc. A disturbing aspect of the Afghan society is the different Afghan ethno-linguistic groups settled in different parts of the country, thereby, forming distinct unique socio-economic and political communities. For example, the Pashtuns, the largest ethnic tribal group in the country, settled in the eastern and southern parts of the country, where large numbers of them live across the Durand Line, in the Frontier areas of Pakistan. The Tajiks, the second largest ethnic community, are found in the eastern and northeastern parts, mainly concentrated in Badakhshan, around Kabul and Herat, and in Kohistan and the Panjshir valley. The Uzbeks have settled in the extreme northern plains adjacent to the Amu Darya (Oxus) river. The Turkomen are found in the northwestern corner. The mountainous central region of the country is inhabited by the Hazaras, and Nuristanis control the extremely rugged

-
2. Lt Gen K. Davar (Retd), "Afghanistan Conundrum: An Analysis and the Way Forward," *USI Journal*, vol. CXXXIX, no. 575, January-March 2009, at <http://www.usiofindia.org/Article/?pub=Journal&pubno=575&ano=309>, accessed on June 5, 2010.
 3. "Why Afghanistan is Important to India," August 30, 2005, at <http://www.rediff.com/news/2005/aug/30spec4.htm>, accessed on May 3, 2010.

northeast region, north of Jalalabad.⁴ In view of the fact that the different Afghans ethnic-linguistic groups settled in different parts of the country, they developed a strong feeling of ethnic affinity towards their own tribes. Rhea Tally Steward opines, "Since the world around [the Afghans] held so little of comfort, Afghans drew together toward the human beings they knew. The tribe was the world; the families were the microcosm...But beyond the jagged horizon out of the world of state and nation, an Afghan found little to grasp. Beyond his tribe, he gave his allegiance nowhere."⁵ Maj Gen Samay Ram, former Indian Military Attaché in Afghanistan (May 1982-March 1986) wrote that even to this day "[n]o Afghan calls himself an Afghan. While filling particulars for visas, they would mention their ethnic affiliation ([like] Pashtun, Tajik, Uzbek, and so on) against the column of [their] 'Nationality.'"⁶ As the Afghan ethnic communities have little association with one another, most of them do not have a sense of belonging to a larger common political platform. Thus, one often witnesses rivalry and armed conflict within and between different Afghan ethnic groups.

Another disturbing feature of the Afghan society is that most of the Afghan minor ethnic, linguistic and religious communities have sizeable populations (kinship) living in the different neighbouring countries, like the Turkmen in Turkmenistan, Uzbeks in Uzbekistan, and Pashtuns in Pakistan, etc, and they are more loyal to their ethnic, linguistic, tribal and religious identity than to the country they live in. Thus, the leaders of these groups often sought economic and military help and political support from those countries that are ethnically, linguistically and religiously related to them, rather than the nation's central authority. The external powers, taking advantage of the complex social and political structure of the Afghans, interfered in the political affairs of Afghanistan whenever their strategic and security interest were threatened, thereby, weakening the central (Kabul)

4. Nancy Peabody Newell and Richard S. Newell, *The Struggle for Afghanistan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 19; for a brief history of the origin of the Afghans, see Martin Ewans, *Afghanistan A New History* (Lahore: Vanguard, 2001), pp. 1-9.

5. Rhea Tally Steward, *Fire in Afghanistan 1914-1929* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1973), p. 3

6. Maj Gen Samay Ram, *The New Afghanistan Pawn of America* (New Delhi: Manas Publications, 2004), p. 24

Pakistan acted as a conduit of the US to the Taliban during the Taliban period and enthusiastically campaigned with the world community to legitimise the Taliban regime.

government, and at the same time, sowing the seeds of hatred and antagonism among the Afghans. For example, as most of the Taliban were from the Pashtun community with whom Pakistanis share ethnic and linguistic affinity, Pakistan acted as conduit of the US to the Taliban during the Taliban period and enthusiastically campaigned with the world community to legitimise the Taliban regime.⁷ To give another example, Uzbekistan backed Gen Abdul Rashid

Dostum, a former pro-Soviet fighter and the leader of Afghanistan's minority Uzbek community,⁸ while Ahmad Shah Masud (Lion of Panjshir) an ethnic Tajik was backed by Iran and Tajikistan, and Ismail Khan (Lion of Herat) of Tajik origin (member of the Jamaat-e-Islami Afghanistan) was supported by Iran to counter the influence of the Taliban.⁹ Because of such divisive policy adopted by the external powers in Afghanistan, there could not be any amicable political solution in the war-torn country.

Afghanistan is strategically located in Southern Asia, and it is through Afghanistan that most of the trade transit between the West and the Indian subcontinent took place in the olden days. Afghanistan's geographical location continues to hold an important place in the politics of the world even to this day. The major powers, therefore, wanted to take control of the country's geographical location for their economic and political interests. That is why the external powers frequently intervened in the politics of Afghanistan, but the disheartening fact about the attitude of the external

7. Pakistan supported the Taliban regime for two main reasons: (1) Pakistan wanted to install a pro-Pakistan regime in Kabul, as it wanted free access into the energy rich Central Asian countries through Afghanistan; and (2) Pakistan wanted to establish a strategic alliance with Afghanistan against India.

8. "Profile: General Rashid Dostum," at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/1563344.stm; also see "Abdul Rashid Dostum," at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/afghanistan/dostum.htm>, accessed on April 17, 2010.

9. "Ismail Khan," at http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/in_depth/world/2001/war_on_terror/after_the_taliban/i_khan.stm; also see, *Afghanistan's Other Neighbours: Iran, Central Asia, and China*, Conference Report, The Hollings Centre for International Dialogue and The American Institute of Afghanistan Studies, July 24-26, 2008, at http://www.bu.edu/aias/reports/aon_conference.pdf, accessed on May 13, 2010.

powers towards Afghanistan was that they were never committed to the welfare of the country and only sought their own interests. Marvin G. Weinbaum and Andrew Finkelman, pointing out one such example, wrote, "Russia and Great Britain focused their imperial attentions on Afghanistan in the 19th century, with each paying the nation's tribal leadership to hold the line against the other...However, when Afghanistan's strategic usefulness evaporated, so did the money."¹⁰ The policies of the Soviet Union and the US towards Afghanistan at the end of the 20th century were no different. The two superpowers, rather than devoting their resources to building peace and development in Afghanistan, were on the contrary, contributing to the escalation of war. And upon achieving their objective, "the [US] disengaged, the USSR disintegrated, and the international community turned its attention elsewhere."¹¹ Incidentally, the war on terror too seems to be moving in the same direction. The President of the US had assured the world community that the war on terror will not end "until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated," but ten years have passed since then, and the US is still at war against terrorism. What is disturbing is the fact that the Taliban and other militant groups have reemerged and have become destabilising factors in the country, but the US and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) countries are on the verge of withdrawing their troops from Afghanistan in response to the public support for the "war sapped at home," in their countries.¹²

AMERICA'S FRAIL AFGHANISTAN POLICY

On September 11, 2001, Islamic militants struck at the very heart of the US. The US stunned by the horrific attacks, expressed outrage and urged for punitive action. On the night of the terrorist attacks on America, President George W. Bush joined his countrymen in condemning the attack and

10. Marvin G. Weinbaum and Andrew Finkelman, "Rebuilding the Afghan State: The International Dimension," in K. Warikoo, ed., *Afghanistan The Challenge* (New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2007), p. 4.

11. Barnett R. Rubin, *The Search for Peace in Afghanistan: From Buffer State to Failed State* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 6.

12. Agence France-Presse, "Canada Heads for Afghan Exit," *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), July 8, 2011.

Peace remains a distant dream for the Afghans, the reason being that the US launched the war against terror in Afghanistan without taking into consideration the intricacy of the political structure in the country.

furiously vowed to bring to “justice” those responsible for the carnage.¹³ Nine days later, on September 20, 2001, President Bush in his address to a Joint Session of the US Congress stated that America’s war on terror “will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated.” He further added that America will use, “every means of diplomacy, every tool of intelligence, every instrument of law enforcement, every financial influence, and every necessary weapon of war” to defeat and eliminate the global terror network.¹⁴

Subsequently, on October 7, 2001, President Bush launched a military operation, Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) to eliminate, if not contain the Taliban regime and Al Qaeda militants from Afghanistan. Taking advantage of its superior armed forces and military technology (using its state-of-the-art technology), the US has successfully driven out the Taliban regime from power in Afghanistan, and Osama bin Laden, “the most wanted fugitive on the US list” was killed by the elite US Navy Seal team in a covert military operation from Pakistan¹⁵

Yet, peace remains a distant dream for the Afghans, the reason being that the US launched the war against terror in Afghanistan without taking into consideration the intricacy of the political structure in the country. The US policy-makers wrongly believed that with the removal of the Taliban regime from power and the installation of a Western democratic government in Afghanistan, the Taliban and Osama bin Laden’s Al Qaeda militants could be eliminated from the country. Thus, after the ousting of the Taliban regime from Afghanistan, the US diverted its policy towards Iraq without

13. Text of President Bush’s address after the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, September 11, 2001, at <http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/09/11/bush.speech.text/>, accessed on January 28, 2008.

14. “Text: President Bush Addresses the Nation,” September 20, 2001, at http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushaddress_092001.html, accessed on January 28, 2008.

15. “Osama bin Laden Killed in Pakistan,” May 2, 2011, at <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/americas/2011/05/2011522132275789.html>, accessed on September 4, 2011.

bothering to stabilise the economically poor, militarily weak and socially disoriented Afghans. This action of the US led one to agree with what Maj Gen Y. K. Gera opined, "[W]hether Mullah Omar and Osama bin Laden live or perish, their legacy will live on until sustained international efforts are made to address the problems faced by Afghanistan, which continues to bear the brunt of the last great battle of the Cold War era."¹⁶ The answer is not far to locate: since the Taliban were defeated, but not eliminated, they have regrouped, reequipped and came back to haunt Afghanistan. Today, there is no other greater challenge that the Afghans and the people of the region face than the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Ironically, the US and NATO forces used massive aerial strikes (drone strikes) to purge the Taliban and other militant groups in Afghanistan, but, on the contrary, these massive aerial strikes in Afghanistan led to an increase in the civilian casualties. Stephanie Nebehay, quoting UN reports wrote that more than 2,100 civilians were killed in Afghanistan in 2008, recording an increase of 40 percent from 2007 (in 2007 the figure stood at 1,523).¹⁷ The Afghan online newspapers and magazine *Khaama Press* reported that the number of civilians killed in Afghanistan in 2010 alone was above 2,400, which has been described as the "deadliest year for ordinary Afghans since the US-led invasion of 2001."¹⁸ The large scale civilian casualties have aroused strong resentment among the Afghans, which, in turn, has provided opportunities to the militants to exploit the suffering of the locals to strengthen their positions. Consequently, the fatalities of the US armed forces too have increased considerably from 2001, despite using the state-of-the-art technology. According to icasualties.org (formally the Iraq Coalition Casualty Count website) record, in 2001, only 12 US armed forces personnel were killed, but in 2007, the numbers increased to 117, and in 2010, they further increased to 499.¹⁹

16. Maj Gen Y. K. Gera (Retd), "The Situation in Afghanistan and the Way Ahead," *USI Journal*, vol. CXXXVIII, no. 574, October-December 2008, p. 540.

17. Stephanie Nebehay, "UN: 2,100 Civilians Killed in Afghanistan in 2008," at <http://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSTRE5123KR20090203>, accessed on March 22, 2010.

18. Ghanizada, "NATO Air Raids Killed 50 Civilians, says Hamid Karzai," February 20, 2011, at <http://www.khaama.com/nato-air-raids-killed-50-civilians-says-hamid-karzai>, accessed on September 21, 2011.

19. "Coalition Military Fatalities by Year," at <http://www.icasualties.org/OEF/Index.aspx>, accessed on November 26, 2011.

The above makes clear that a counter-insurgency operation like the one in Afghanistan can never be won by brute force alone. "War in Afghanistan" did not originate with the Taliban coming to power and it is unlikely to end with their removal.²⁰ Historical evidence proves that military action has never brought about an amicable solution in Afghanistan. The British and the Soviets failed and the US is not likely to win either. Lt Gen Dr. D. B. Shekatker (Retd.), an Indian military expert on counter-insurgency, wrote, "Success in counter-insurgency operations should never be quantified by the number of insurgents killed but by the number of people brought back to normal life and the national mainstream."²¹ The external powers must know that "[n]o amount of military power [use of brute force], foreign or domestic, will gain much unless the Afghan government improves its capacity to control its territory, win the trust of the [local] people, and prevent infiltration and subversion from abroad,"²² because the goal of thwarting the militant might does not lie in using military force but in winning the hearts and minds of the locals. The US-led coalition forces failed to address this very pertinent issue of winning the hearts and minds of the Afghans in the war against terrorism in Afghanistan. Gen Stanley McChrystal, the then Commander of the US Forces Afghanistan (USFOR-A) and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), admitting the short-sighted policy of the US in his confidential briefing paper written to US President Barack Obama in 2009, stated, "The weakness of state institutions, malign actions of power-brokers, widespread corruption and abuse of power by various officials, and [the US and] ISAF's own errors, have given Afghans little reason to support their government."²³ Of late, the US has realised that the use of high-handed techniques has exacerbated the political crisis in the country.

20. Adam Pain and Jonathan Goodhand, *Afghanistan: Current Employment and Socio-Economic Situation and Prospects*, InFocus Programme on Crisis Response and Reconstruction, Working Paper 8, March 2002, p. 44, at http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_emp/@emp_ent/@ifp_crisis/documents/publication/wcms_16403.pdf, accessed on May 29, 2007.

21. Lt Gen Dr. D.B. Shekatker (Retd.), "Genesis of Insurgency," *Defence and Security Alert*, vol. 1, issue 9, June 2010, p. 17

22. Ali A. Jalali, "Afghanistan in Transition," *Parameters*, vol. XXXX, no. 3, Autumn 2010, p. 18.

23. Quoted in Peter Beaumont, "Same Old Mistake in New Afghan War," October 18, 2009, at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/oct/18/afghan-war-soviet-invasion-mistakes>, accessed on July 13, 2010.

But the problem before the US policy-makers is how to regain the trust and confidence of the disgruntled locals (Taliban) and bring them to the negotiating table.

PAKISTAN AS A DETRIMENTAL FACTOR

Afghanistan and Pakistan are the two closest Southern Asian neighbouring countries that share ethnic, cultural and linguistic similarity, and are economically interdependent and geographically linked. However, the hope for friendly cooperation was blighted from the very beginning of the establishment of the Pakistani state because of the Pashtun issue. Thus, Afghanistan-Pakistan relations oscillated between hostility and close cooperation throughout the Cold War period. With the launch of OEF (onslaught on the Taliban and Al Qaeda militants) by the US armed forces in October 2001, most of the Taliban and Al Qaeda militants escaped to Pakistan. The irony of Pakistan's Afghanistan policy is that Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf had assured the US of Pakistan's "unsplintered cooperation" in the fight against terrorism;²⁴ but Pakistan covertly assisted and protected the Taliban and Al Qaeda militants by providing them sanctuary (safe havens). In this way, Pakistan's government misled the US policy-makers. Osama bin Laden having his hideout in Abbottabad in Pakistan, located just 61 km north of Islamabad, is a classic example.

Pakistan not only assisted and protected the Taliban and Al Qaeda militants, but also considered Afghanistan its legitimate sphere of influence, and, thus, tried to restrain other regional powers, especially India, from playing an active role in the rehabilitation and reconstruction work in Afghanistan. Pakistan actively campaigned with the world community to "stonewall" India's involvement in the politics of Afghanistan, despite the world community and Afghan President Hamid Karzai urging India to play

Musharraf had assured the US of Pakistan's "unsplintered cooperation" in the fight against terrorism; but Pakistan covertly assisted and protected the Taliban and Al Qaeda militants by providing them sanctuary.

24. Pervez Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2006), p. 201.

a more proactive role in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the war-torn country. The reason being that the Pakistani leaders fear that India's active participation in Afghanistan would be detrimental to Pakistan's strategic, security and political interests. The exclusion of India from the Istanbul Regional Conference on Afghanistan (January 26, 2010) at the instigation of Pakistan and Pakistan's clandestine action of trying to minimise India's role at the London Conference (January 28, 2010) are two such examples. There were also news report which stated that even on the eve of the November 2, 2011 Istanbul Conference on Afghanistan, Pakistan was trying to block "the establishment of a regional monitoring group to oversee cooperation on Afghanistan's economic and security future," because, Pakistan does not want to have "so many countries—primarily India—enjoy similar status [with Pakistan] in the contact group on Afghanistan."²⁵ This does not mean that Pakistan does not want a strong and stable government in Afghanistan; in fact, the policy-makers of Pakistan were aware of the spillover effect of the political crisis of Afghanistan on its domestic and foreign policy, but they want a friendly government in Kabul as a defence against India. Because of such aggressive policy adopted by Pakistan, the countries of the region too could not play any effective role in the Afghan peace process.

WHAT AILS AFGHANISTAN?

Afghanistan is undergoing a protracted political and humanitarian crisis. The reason being that decades of political crisis in Afghanistan have seriously challenged peace, stability and the socio-economic development of the Afghans, which, in turn, creates "widespread insecurity resulting from the conflict, with resulting displacement and reduced humanitarian access, limited institutional capabilities, destroyed health and education, non-cohesive partnerships, market volatility and Afghanistan's landlocked status."²⁶ Today, Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world,

25. Indrani Bagchi, "Pak Resists Regional Solution in AF," *The Times of India* (New Delhi), October 30, 2011.

26. WFP, Executive Board First Regular Session Rome 8-11 February 2010, *Projects for Executive Board Approval*, Agenda item 9, at http://one.wfp.org/operational/current_operations/project_docs200063.pdf, accessed on August 19, 2010.

its basic infrastructure such as communication, transportation, health services, and education is at the world's lowest standing. The ranking of Afghanistan at 170 out of 174 countries in 1995 in the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP's) Human Development Index²⁷ is a manifestation of this point. The condition of Afghanistan did not witness any significant change even in the late 2000s: Afghanistan stood as low as 181st position, just above Niger at 182, in all measures of human welfare in the 2009

A whopping 40 percent of the [development] aid that flowed into Afghanistan is returned to the donor countries in the form of corporate profits and consultant salaries.

Human Development Index.²⁸ What is disheartening is the fact that ten years have passed since the US launched Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan, yet, the country remains as chaotic, fragile and poor as ever before. Despite the world community investing billions of dollars in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Afghanistan, the basic living conditions of the Afghans such as availability of clean drinking water, food and medical care are not available to most Afghans. The result of a Afghanistan national opinion poll commissioned by ABC News, BBC and ARD in 2010,²⁹ in which the Afghans expressed unhappiness about the overall socio-economic conditions of their country, speaks volume.

As the voice of dissent against the presence of the external armed forces in the country grows louder day by day, Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai reaffirmed to the international community on July 20, 2010, at the one-day international conference on Afghanistan at Kabul, that Afghan national security forces will take charge of the country's security by 2014, and "urged the international backers to distribute more of their development aid through the government."³⁰ President Karzai's declaration was not very

27. UNDP, *Human Development Report 1995* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 146, at http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/hdr_1995_en_indicators1.pdf, accessed on January 26, 2010.

28. UNDP, *Human Development Report 2009* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 170.

29. See Afghanistan National Opinion Poll conducted for ABC News, the BBC and the ARD by the Afghan Centre for Socio-Economic and Opinion Research (ACSOR) based in Kabul, at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/11_01_10_afghanpoll.pdf, accessed on February 23, 2010.

30. "Karzai Reaffirms for Afghan-led Security," *The Times of India* (New Delhi), July 20, 2010.

surprising, because there were reports of large scale corruption and misuse of funds by the external powers, contractors and Afghan leaders. A report pointed out that “a whopping 40 percent of the [development] aid that flowed into Afghanistan” is returned to the “donor countries in the form of corporate profits and consultant salaries.”³¹ Pointing out how a substantial part of the funds given for the reconstruction in Afghanistan is misused, Kristina Wong, citing the audit reports of the Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), wrote, “[S]ix Afghan National Police facilities funded by the US Army Corps of Engineering in Kandahar and Helmand were so poorly constructed, they are currently unusable.” And further added, “[T]he US invested \$ 5.5 million to build the stations, and it would take an additional one million dollars to make the building usable.”³² It’s a sad reality; the war on terror is fought in Afghanistan and the Afghans bear the wrath of the war silently, while the external powers thrive.

AFGHANISTAN, AN INDISPENSABLE NEIGHBOUR

Hedayat Amin Arsala, former Vice President and senior adviser to the President of Afghanistan argued, “[T]here is little doubt that Afghanistan’s [geo-strategic] location will [cease] to have a significant influence on the [Asian] country’s future political and economic prospects.”³³ Amin Arsala’s statement is supported by the fact that Afghanistan is strategically located in Asia, and since the socio-economic and political conditions of the people of the region are inextricably intertwined with those of their neighbours, none could escape the spillover effect of the political crisis in Afghanistan. This indicates that if Afghanistan is in trouble, the countries of the region as a whole will be affected regardless of their location and government. For

31. Sonali Huria, “Failed States and Foreign Military Intervention: The Afghanistan Imbroglio,” *IPCS Special Report*, February 2009, at <http://www.ipcs.org/publications-spacil-details.php?recNo=237&pT=4>, accessed on May 22, 2009.

32. Kristina Wong, “Afghan Civilian Surge Lacks Integration with Military,” at <http://abcnews.go.com/International/afghan-civilian-surge-lacks-integration-military-report/story?id=11978132#.Tsy04Vbixkg>, accessed on September 4, 2011.

33. Quoted in K. N. Tennyson, “Reassessing India’s Role In Afghanistan,” *Centre for Air Power Studies, Issue Brief*, 53/11, July 29, 2011, p. 3.

example, the political condition of Afghanistan is in a flux and Pakistan is in chaos, a clear indication that "any worsening of the security situation" in one country (Afghanistan) will "directly spill over" to another country (Pakistan) in the region by "encouraging" the local militants in the neighbouring countries.³⁴ Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh on the eve (May 11, 2011) of his recent visit to Afghanistan acknowledged that India too cannot remain unaffected by the political turmoil in Afghanistan. He said, "India cannot be immune to instability in Afghanistan as it will affect our progress, development and security."³⁵ Ironically, despite the Pakistan's military intelligence (ISI) being actively involved in carrying out covert activities to destabilise Afghanistan, Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari too had expressed the view that peace cannot be expected in the Southern Asian region "if we don't have peace in Afghanistan."³⁶

Today, the most serious soft underbelly of Afghanistan lies in the security domain. Despite the fact the US and NATO forces have been in the war against terrorism in Afghanistan for about a decade, nothing seems to have changed much. The political crisis in Afghanistan continues to present a great challenge to regional peace and stability. Therefore, the need of the hour for the regional powers is to restructure their policies and engage more aggressively in Afghanistan, if they genuinely want the region to be stable and peaceful. Without peace and stability in Afghanistan, there can never be substantial peace and development in the region. What the countries of the region can do in these circumstances is assist the Afghan government in building strong and competent Afghan national security forces; without which, the country will remain weak and unstable, which, in turn, would impede peace, a prerequisite for socio-economic development of the people of the region. Therefore, mere use of soft power (materials and economic help) alone will not suffice. The regional powers need to help the

34. Melanie Hanif, *Indian Involvement in Afghanistan: Stepping Stone or Stumbling Block to Regional Hegemony?* GIGA Working Papers, no. 98, April 2009, at http://www.giga-hamburg.de/dl/download.php?d=/content/publikationen/pdf/wp98_hanif.pdf, accessed on June 5, 2009.

35. Sandeep Dikshit, "Indo-Afghan Ties to Reach a New Level: Manmohan," *The Hindu* (New Delhi), May 12, 2011

36. "Pakistan President Zardari Meets Afghanistan's Karzai," June 10, 2011, at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-13723251>, accessed on July 8, 2011.

Afghan government through the use of hard power (by providing logistic and military help, training of the Afghan National Army and police forces, etc) without interfering in the political affairs of the country. The external powers should not interfere in the political affairs of Afghanistan because the Afghans resent such actions in the political affairs of their country. It is because of this reason that Pakistan and the US are looked upon with suspicion and hatred by the Afghans though President Hamid Karzai has often described Pakistan as the twin brother of Afghanistan.

THE NEED FOR A STRATEGIC CHANGE OF REGIONAL POWERS' POLICY ON AFGHANISTAN

The Afghans view the presence of the US and NATO forces in their country as occupying forces, enabling the Taliban to extend their influence among the local Afghans by “successfully [framing] the war [against the external forces] as a *jihad* and a liberation war against (non-Muslim) foreign armies.”³⁷ Therefore, the only solution to the present political problems and crises in Afghanistan lies in the hands of the regional powers. Without the active support and cooperation of its neighbouring countries, mainly India, Iran, Pakistan, China and Central Asian countries, there can never be long-term peace and stability in Afghanistan. Hence, the regional powers need to cooperate rather than compete over Afghanistan, join together and help in improving the security and economic well-being of the Afghans. Today, what the Afghans need are not bullets but bread, butter and security. An early amicable political solution to the Afghan crisis is the only real guarantee for peace and security in the region. Until Afghanistan is stabilised and the Afghans are secured socially, economically and politically, the region as a whole will be affected.

However, in order for this to be achieved, the external powers must listen to the Afghan voices and allow space for the Afghan national leadership to take their own decisions and continue to build Afghanistan. The news report of the US and NATO forces repeatedly ignoring the request of President

37. Gilles Dorronsoro, “Focus and Exit: An Alternative Strategy for the Afghan War,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Policy Brief*, January 2009, p. 13, at http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/afghan_war-Strategy.pdf, accessed April 21, 2010.

Karzai to stop air strikes in Afghanistan to avoid killing of civilians is very disturbing.³⁸ Gilles Dorronsoro of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, having analysed the effect of the presence of external powers in Afghanistan wrote, "[T]he mere presence of foreign soldiers fighting a war in Afghanistan is probably the single most important factor in the resurgence of the Taliban."³⁹ This fact has been realised and

even admitted by Adm Michael Mullen, Chairman, US Joint Chiefs of Staff, in his address to the House Armed Services Committee in September 2008. He said, "No amount of troops, in no amount of time can ever achieve all the objectives" the US seeks in Afghanistan. He added that the US armed forces "can't kill [their] way to victory."⁴⁰ This highlights the need for a strategic change in the policy of the external powers. A change from the use of force to winning over the heart and minds of the Afghans is needed, and one such way to win over the population is to provide them with a certain measure of security, and strengthen local governance.

Adam Pain and Jonathan Goodhand have commented that today Afghanistan faces three major challenges, which they describe as "a triple transition;" i.e., security, political and socio-economic transition. They are of the opinion, "There is a need for an overall peace-building framework in which these triple transitions should be linked to one another and occur simultaneously."⁴¹ This brings about major responsibilities on the part of the Afghan government to work earnestly and zealously with all the neighbours (China, India, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) for lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan. Afghanistan's neighbours have a

Today Afghanistan faces three major challenges described as "a triple transition;" i.e., security, political and socio-economic transition.

38. "Karzai Issues 'Last Warning' to US," *The Times of India* (New Delhi), May 30, 2011; and "Won't Tolerate Strikes on Homes, Karzai tells Nato," *The Times of India* (New Delhi), June 1, 2011.

39. Dorronsoro, n. 37.

40. AnnScottTyson, "Top Military Officer Urges Major Change in Afghanistan Strategy," September 11, 2008, at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/09/10/AR2008091001396.html>, on accessed May 1, 2010.

41. For a brief discussion on "Afghanistan Post-War Reconstruction and Employment" see, Pain and Goodhand, n. 20, p. 45.

large stake in ensuring the stability and development of the country. Since Afghanistan's political crisis is very complex, it requires "regionally focused solutions, addressing issues such as strained political relations, strategic vulnerability, and economic integration and cooperation in the spheres of [communication,] transport and energy" in the region.⁴²

But the problem with the regional powers (especially India and Pakistan) is that they are never united. It is for this reason the Brig Rahul K. Bhonsle, a senior defence security analyst, wrote that stability in Afghanistan and peace in the region will "predominantly depend on Islamabad's positive contribution translated in the form of improved Pakistan-Afghanistan and Pakistan-India relationships."⁴³ Expressing a similar view, Barnett R. Rubin, a leading expert on Afghanistan, and Ahmed Rashid, a renowned Pakistani journalist urged, "Unless the decision-makers in Pakistan decide to make stabilising the Afghan government a higher priority than countering the Indian threat, the insurgency conducted from bases in Pakistan will continue. Pakistan's strategic goals in Afghanistan place Pakistan at odds not just with Afghanistan and India, and the US objectives in the region, but with the entire international community."⁴⁴ Acknowledging this fact, President Karzai said in his speech at a Joint Press Conference on March 11, 2001, during his visit to Islamabad that "India has gone out of the way to help Afghanistan but Pakistan is the twin brother of Afghanistan. Without cooperation from Pakistan, there could be no stability in Afghanistan."⁴⁵ This is so because prior to the dethronement of Taliban regime, Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda militants were "protected by an Afghan (Taliban) regime that was, in turn, supported [and protected] by the Pakistani military and intelligence services [ISI]."⁴⁶ And with the launching of OEF, Pakistan furtively provides sanctuary to the

42. William Maley, "Stabilizing Afghanistan: Threats and Challenges," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Policy Brief*, October 2008, p. 7, at http://carnegieendowment.org/files/stabilizing_afghanistan.pdf, accessed on April 21, 2010.

43. Rahul K. Bhonsle, *The Impact of Geo-Politics of Southwest Asia on Afghanistan: A Medium Term Perspective*, CLAWS, No. 1, 2008, Kartikeya Paper, p. 26.

44. Barnett R. Rubin and Ahmed Rashid, "From Great Game to Grand Bargain," *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2005, p. 40.

45. "Karzai: India Close Friend, Pak a Twin," *The Asian Age* (New Delhi), March 12, 20100.

46. Strobe Talbot, *Engaging India Diplomacy, Democracy and the Bomb* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2004) p. 117.

Taliban militants, thereby, enabling the Taliban to carry out covert actions against the US led anti-terrorist coalition groups from Pakistan.

Even to this day, the Taliban and other militant groups continue to cause disasters in Afghanistan with the covert assistance from Pakistan's military intelligence (ISI). Thus, one witnessed the non-state actors (Taliban and other religious fundamentalist groups) becoming extremely radical and aggressive, not only challenging the authority and legitimacy of the established government in Afghanistan, but in other countries of the region as well. Today, Afghanistan faces a variety of internal and external security challenges. Therefore, there is urgent need of peace and development in Afghanistan to save the country from further deterioration. But to bring about peace and development in the country, the external powers have to understand the unique composition of the social, economic and political conditions of the Afghans. The domestic politics of Afghanistan is very complex and highly fragile, because it is composed of various different ethnic and sub-ethnic groups. The world community, especially the US, therefore, needs to accept the unique political diversity and autonomy of the Afghans and "[e]ngage the tribal leaders across Afghanistan for their support in the reconciliation process in the political arena that is not based necessarily on Western democracy."⁴⁷ US Secretary of Defence, Dr. Robert Michael Gates rightly admitted, "It is neither necessary nor feasible to create a modern, centralised, Western-style Afghan nation-state—the likes of which has never been seen in that country."⁴⁸ A Western democratic political system imposed on the Afghans will be inherently weak and unstable. The collapse of the Soviet backed Najibullah government after the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Afghanistan needs to be seriously kept in mind while formulating any future plans for Afghanistan.

Further, the international community needs to realise that peace and stability in Afghanistan do not lie with the central (Kabul's) authority

47. K.N. Tennyson "US Surge in Afghanistan," Centre for Air Power Studies, *Issue Brief*, 10/09, 15, May 2009, p. 4.

48. Quoted in Mata Chorev and Jake Sherman, *The Prospects for Security and Political Reconciliation in Afghanistan: Local, National, and Regional Perspectives*, A Workshop Report, May 2010, at <http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/files/reconciliation-afghanistan.pdf>, accessed on November 12, 2010.

alone. The external powers should accept the diverse geographical location, complex ethnic and tribal identity and not force the Afghans to adopt a unitary form of government. Without adopting a more pragmatic policy in Afghanistan, the international mission (which aims at rebuilding and stabilising the country) will remain fragile and unsuccessful. One such pragmatic approach could be the decentralisation of power between the central and provincial government and not the proposed plan of Robert Dean Blackwill, former US Ambassador to India (2001-03) and Deputy National Security Adviser for Strategic Planning (2003-04); to divide Afghanistan.⁴⁹ Such a partition plan is “dangerous and unfeasible.” The world community needs to know that though the Afghans have a strong feeling of ethnic and tribal affinity, none of the Afghan ethnic groups including the Taliban, or provinces has sought to bifurcate from the country.⁵⁰ The Afghans always joined hands together and violently resisted the external force whenever any external power intervened in their political affairs despite their internal differences. “Neither the heirs of Alexander the Great nor those of Genghis Khan, Timur, or Ahmad Shah were able to subdue the tribes permanently.”⁵¹ The British and the Soviet Union too came and left, having failed to subjugate the Afghans. The Afghans have never been suppressed nor has any external force been able to change their unique social-political-structural set-up.

49. Blackwill has elaborated in his article, “Why a De Facto Partition [of Afghanistan] is the Least Bad Option,” see Robert D. Blackwill, “Plan B in Afghanistan,” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 90, no. 1, January/February 2011, pp. 42-50.

50. Pain and Goodhand, n. 20; and Jalali, n. 22, p. 23.

51. Centre for Joint Warfare Studies, *Afghanistan Past, Present and the Way Ahead*, Synodos Paper, p. 1.