

Pakistan's Policy Contours in Afghanistan in the Regional Dynamics

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Abstract

Peace and stability in Afghanistan is of vital importance for regional as well as broader global accord. Recent research has examined Afghanistan from a wide variety of peace and security dimensions; a great deal of knowledge about this country is available. However, in the prevailing literature, much less attention has been devoted to objective identification of the stakes that Pakistan holds in Afghanistan that are mutually inclusive, which draw on wider ownership and which will accrue long-term dividends, compared to those stakes which are exclusive and more competitive. The study finds that the Pakistan policy lines in Afghanistan are to work for peace and stability inside Afghanistan, to promote economic interests by having trade, transit, regional connectivity and most importantly the security of not only the two countries but of the whole region. Pakistan in the current Taliban government can better attempt to convince Taliban for inclusivity, observing human rights in order to gain international recognition.

Key Words: Peace and Stability, Diplomacy, National Interests, Natural Resources.

1. Introduction

Pakistan and Afghanistan are intertwined, whose sphere of relations is inclusive not only of neighborhood but encircling the longest border and 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 its access to not only Central Asian Republics but cordial strategic and

economic relations with China are also possible only due to stable Afghanistan. If a realistic look is taken of Pakistan and Afghanistan relations, then it comes to the surface that Pakistan and Afghanistan relations have been remained murky due to various reasons, among which Pashtunistan has been one of major troubling aspects 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. Due to these factors Afghanistan had refuted the validity of 1947 referendum and its foreign policy till 1980s revolved around Pashtunistan. The Afghanistan since long had been trying to change the Afghanistan-Pakistan border to greater extent. According to Lord Curzon, frontiers are sort of tension for all foreign offices in social and civilized world. It is a base on which matter of war and peace or life and death hinged on. There are myriad example of it, like Kashmir between Pakistan and India, tussle on Abkhazia between Russia and Georgia, Nagorno Karabagh has endangered terms of Armenia and Azerbaijan, border tussle of China and India, dispute of Cambodia and Thailand and most critical of all is Durand Line between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pakistan is averse to the Afghanistan claim on Pashtun inhabitants of Pakistan. 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.

Afghanistan's strategic location provides ready access to western Asia, the Middle East, South Asia and Central Asia, but that access depends on peace and stability inside Afghanistan. Since 9/11 (2001), the US had been engaged in Afghanistan in order to defeat, disrupt and dismantle Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. More than 15 years of US occupation, on top of the Soviet occupation which began in 1989, has left Afghanistan unstable, with conflict again being escalated by non-state actors in the shape of Al-Qaeda, ISIS and Fidayee Mihaz. The US-Taliban talks concluded with the basic agreement that all foreign forces would leave Afghanistan within a stipulated period. The US will have to withdraw from its military bases, leaving control to the interim government; a ceasefire will come into effect only after the withdrawal of foreign forces has begun. The US at the moment of writing this article has been withdrawn and the Taliban has control over all the Afghanistan by establishing the transition government.

Consequently, as the Afghan endgame approached hence Pakistan as a neighbour has stakes in peace and stability of the Afghanistan is working out strategies for how best to safeguard and promote her interests. Hence, the policy contours are to serve the very interests in the changing regional dynamics. Pakistan would benefit hugely from Afghanistan's reconstruction by way of providing skilled manpower, technology and capital; and access to central Asia would open doors to boundless

trade – Pakistan would benefit from the hydrocarbon resources of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. In addition, peace in Afghanistan would ensure Pakistan's western border is safe, ending a long history of instability. This research investigates the policy contours of Pakistan in Afghanistan in the regional dynamics and an emphasis on identifying the basis of the Pakistan stakes in Afghanistan's peace and stability.

Pakistan Policy Contours in Afghanistan

Pakistan is dependent on Afghanistan for access to the Central Asian Republics and cordial strategic and economic relations with China are possible only through a stable Afghanistan. But the matter of fact is that Pakistan-Afghan relations are complex, with multiple layers of ties linked to questions of ethnicity, border demarcation, institutional disconnect and dissonance at the people to people level. All this is made more complicated by systemic, state and domestic influences.

Terrorism emanating from Afghanistan has the potential to inspire Islamists, with extremism spilling over into Pakistan in general and into the ex-tribal areas and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in particular. Going back into history the interests of Pakistan in Afghanistan have been converted to challenge for Pakistan foreign policy as Pakistan security has been deteriorated from the last four decades. During Soviet invasion in Afghanistan Pakistan role was applauded for curbing communism by freedom fighters (Mujahedeen). Besides, Pakistan was in great fear that this imbroglio and Soviet military forces might stretched to Pakistan province Balochistan and further to warm water of Arabian Sea, which has been proved as paranoid only by Politburo. Pakistan President General Zia availed this juncture as an opportunity to secure his goals in the garb of Islamization and established Mujahedeen training camps on the soil of Pakistan. This paved the way to not only Afghan refugees, drug trafficking, Kalashnikov but also to sectarianism which led to numerous evils in society. The matter did not stop here, after Soviet exit from Afghanistan, there arose various challenges for Pakistan foreign policy as Pakistan embassy was set on fire by forces of Ahmad Shah Masood, who deemed that Pakistan has backed Taliban in capturing Herat.

The Afghan war and terrorism spill-over had ruined Pakistan's economy and internal security. Almost every day there happened acts of terrorism in most parts of country. The end of Afghan Jihad was start of Pakistani extremism which is still on rise – there is no religious tolerance which has led to serious sectarian conflicts. Much of this has happened because of our involvement in the Afghanistan conflict. We are in a difficult, complicated and despicable situation from which it is hard to escape. Afghanistan turmoil has caused Pakistan with myriad security threats in shape of restive FATA, illegal infiltration, consequently refugees deluge, spike in

drugs trafficking, uprising in Pashtun nationalism. The Torkham border has remained closed most of the time because of the troubled security situation.

Economic Perspectives

The fast growing Asian region has dictated the canvas of regional cooperation not only in security but economically, especially energy policies. Afghanistan is significant for multiple purposes with particular mention of investment, energy routes, trade and above all for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and Belt and Road Initiative. CPEC is an integral part of the Silk Route vision, running from Gwadar to Kashghar and being part of China's One Belt, One Road, connecting Central Asia with South Asia.

As the world's second largest economy, China wants to use its economic leverage in the region to facilitate shipping routes; if ships pass through the Straits of Malacca, the journey takes 45 days, but a trade route through China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) will take only 10 days. China will fight for the maritime passage that connects North Africa, South Asia, the Northern Mediterranean and Southeast Asia, providing a vital link for South Asia to the world at large. Economic collaboration is important for regional peace and CPEC will, of necessity, lead to the convergence of interests and resolution of regional conflicts.

Pakistan and China cooperate for peace and stability inside Afghanistan because only that will guarantee regional connectivity and economic integration through CPEC, alongside other economic plans. Pakistan's location at the crossroads of Gulf countries, China and Central Asian Republics makes its role of prime significance. The oil reserves of Gulf countries are expected to expire in 40 years, so the exploration of those in the Central Asian Republics is essential and that will give new import to the economic corridors through Pakistan, providing a backdrop to the US containment of China's and India's designs for regional supremacy.

It is envisaged that trade through Pakistan and Central Asian States could enhance Chinese and Central Asian GDP by 2.3%, where Xinjiang alone would have a GDP growth of approximately 2%. China sees Afghanistan like Pakistan to be a conduit of roads, rail and energy supply from the Indian Ocean and Eurasia. Pakistan is planning to link Gwadar port with Central Asia for movements of energy and gas, which will open the European market through bilateral trade with Central Asia. Their diplomatic relations stretch over six decades and regional geopolitical dynamics have tied the countries because geography has provided routes that link China with the Middle East and Central Asian Republics.

Inclusion of Afghanistan in the CPEC project is a far-fetched prospect as long as US/Western interests are aimed at limiting China's growing influence in the region. China's use of Iran for the transit of goods to western destinations could keep China within the evolving scenario. The situation is fluid and Pakistan has to keep all its options open. Pakistan must focus on using its trade, transit and economic potential for connecting a number of regions, as long as it ensures that security concerns do not outweigh economic interests. These economic considerations keep regional relations stable because they are interdependent. However, Asian energy demands have intensified competition within as well as outside the region, as protagonists protect their resources and control energy transportation and infrastructure. The quest for increased energy resources exercises minds considerably across Central Asian Republics, the Middle East and China, and is integral to future geopolitical relations among regional states.

Political Perspectives

In Afghanistan, the role of Pakistan is mainly to focus on regional peace and stability. Pakistan would certainly like to help end the conflict; it has stakes in peace in Afghanistan. But Islamabad also wants to restrict the role of India in Afghanistan – something that causes huge resentment in Afghanistan. Indian hegemonic status in Afghanistan is strategic defeat to Pakistan. India had reopened embassy in Kabul soon after Taliban was toppled after 9/11 US invasion in Afghanistan. It has also opened four consulate offices in major Afghan cities of Qandahar, Mazar-e-Sharif, Herat and Jalalabad. Prior to that there were none of consular offices.

Pakistan has doubted Indian consulates at Qandahar and Jalalabad that these are not for commercial purposes but are used by Indian intelligence agency, Research and Analytical Wing (RAW) for covert activities inside Pakistan. India had established its consulates on multi ethnic basis as two consulates in Pashtun region (Jalalabad, Quetta) and two in non-Pashtun (Mazar-e-sharif and Herat). Her reconstruction projects in Pashtun belt are pertinent to erase the label of anti-Pashtun from her. There is mistrust between Pakistan and India and both are accusing each other.

Pakistan wants more economic and strategic cooperation with China on account of the Indian factor. However, many Afghans continue to harbour a feeling of animosity towards Islamabad because they presume Pakistan wants to have a role in Afghanistan's internal politics and policies. Eventually, it will have to accept the reality that a free Afghanistan may initiate policies of enduring friendship with its neighbours and regional countries, including India; and Islamabad must insist that Afghan soil would not be allowed to be used covertly or overtly by any country against Pakistan's interests.

This would not only stabilise Pakistan internally but enable Pakistan and India to work together to strengthen relations. It would also improve the situation on both the eastern and western borders of Pakistan. By contrast, the continuation of the conflict would jeopardize all hopes of reconstruction and there would be increased destabilisation in the region. Daesh, Fidayi Mahaz and Turkistan Islamic movements would garner additional support and would launch further attacks, and China's western border would become more insecure. Attacks across the Oxus would increase and Iran would not be immune to the threat of Daesh striking targets deep in the country. Pakistan would also have to confront the menace of border incursions.

Pakistan Role in Current Afghanistan Peace and Stability

Pakistan like the past has facilitated the transfer of all nationalities persons with documentation who wished to leave Afghanistan. Pakistan has facilitated the evacuation of more than 7,000 foreigners through 400 special flights.

Pakistan also assisted Qatar in making Kabul airport working. Despite our limited resources and economic crunch Pakistan has done her best by providing more food and medical equipment etc. to the Afghan. Pakistan International Airlines was the first airline to carry medical supplies to Afghanistan on August 30. The plane flew from Dubai to the city of Mazar-i-Sharif, carrying 12.5 tons of supplies. This actually manifests Pakistan intentions of good will towards Afghanistan and that Afghanistan's stability is indispensable for regional stability and in particular for the tribal areas now merged with KP. Accordingly Pakistan has fenced most of its border with Afghanistan and remaining part is in completion. Pakistan is always considered have leverage on Taliban, however the coming time will show the reality of such influence. Because looking back into the previous Taliban regime the Pakistan did not convince Taliban for recognition of Durand Line which remained as major security threat for Pakistan throughout. Besides, Pakistan could not pressurize them on observing human rights which clearly define Pakistan limitations. As today Taliban have more strength than of 90s decade and emerged as somewhat stable political force in reins of government. Major developments of past years as exclusion of Kabul government of Ashraf Ghani from Doha talks with consequent US withdrawal and abrupt fall of Kabul to the Taliban have boosted the morale and energies of Taliban.

In the context the three incidents will indicate Pakistan evolving terms with the Taliban as first, the Taliban freed Pul-e-Charkhi prisoners comprised a senior TTP commander Maulvi Faqir Muhammad. Secondly, is the Afghan Taliban's discontentment on fencing of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border and thirdly, are the Afghan Taliban's stance that Pakistan has to deal the issue of

Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and not Afghanistan, albeit Islamabad has long complained that TTP militants have shelters on Afghan side of the border.

The most significant perspectives in Pakistan security calculations towards Afghanistan will be determined through mutual border management, repatriation of Afghan refugees from Pakistan, and an earnest commitment by the Taliban government to human rights. For Pakistan the parameter of relations short of Afghan Taliban's active role in taking on anti-Pakistan militants operating on Afghan soil and mutual border management should be unacceptable. However, the Pakistan policy makers must be cautious in bilateral relations with new Afghan government as handling the TTP be in according with sensitivities and their capacities. The same be dealing with Durand Line to be managed cautiously and avoiding delusional strategic clichés.

Pakistan will be perturbed over the Indian endeavor inside Afghanistan but the matter of fact is that Pakistan cannot impose the wish of excluding India because in the Taliban government in order to cope with requirements will have an interest in taking Indian assistance. Economic interdependence will cause a shift on geopolitical approaches and most importantly some strategic tough decisions and compromises.

The theory of national interests is of prime significance in aspects of foreign policy. The national interests, a concept which could be used to describe, explain and assess the foreign policies of nations. National interests is a basis for evaluating the appropriateness of foreign policy. Each state plots the course it thinks will best serve its interests. 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 an anarchical world. Anarchy determines the national interests, if not power based but, at least, to serve material ends. The states internal preferences run up against challenges of anarchy, which reshape national interests. Under anarchy, the primary national interest is security, to defend territorial integrity, protect citizen militarily, either by having adequate means to launch war or by cooperative defence and security arrangements.

Pakistan's foreign policy stands for cordial relations with immediate neighbors, especially Afghanistan on the western border, a country which is religiously, culturally and strategically connected to Pakistan. Pakistan's interests in Afghanistan have stretched to political interests, where Pakistan not only desires to have a favorable Afghan government but also to have peaceful western border, to counter Indian enhanced influence, and to relegate Pashtunistan issue to the background. Economically, Pakistan wants to have trade and commercial

agreements with Afghanistan, whereas Afghanistan is also dependent on Pakistan for transit route to the outside world. Through Afghanistan, as channel, Pakistan can access to the Central Asian Republics, which are rich in oil and gas. Afghanistan has strategic significance for Pakistan in terms of defense industries and military training.

When Pakistan and Afghanistan relations are contemplated, one finds national interests of the two inter-connected because stability of one is the stability of another. Both are minor states, where their main national interests are security, survival and to defend territorial integrity. As the national interest theorized by neo-realist conceded that international order is anarchical and national interests should serve material ends. Considering Pakistan-Afghanistan terms, it is apparent that despite the host of opportunities, these bilateral relations are acrimonious. The US engagement in Afghanistan has instigated a series of mistrust and accusations by the two states for the sake of national interests. In this background, across the border infiltration has muddled security in Pakistan's tribal areas and her interests have transformed into strategic challenges. The national interests demand that for defense of territory and population, a state has to wage war in case of having adequate means, Pakistan had no other option but to launch military operation in ex-FATA as the area had turned hubs of militants and imminent threat to the state. The use of military force is still continued with ongoing suicide blasts and extremism. Moreover, the turmoil in Afghanistan has led to the radicalization of Balochistan, where segregation ideology is flourishing with regional and international conspiracy.

On October 6, the Taliban unilaterally closed the Spin Boldak-Chaman border crossing suspending people's movement and regular Pakistan-Afghanistan trade. Subsequently, on October 14, Pakistan International Airlines also halted its flight operations to Kabul over the Afghan aviation authorities' demand to slash airfares. The two incidents have brought into sharp focus the issue of Pakistan's influence over the Taliban and the nature of their relationship once again. (Abdul Basit khan, Pakistan influence over Taliban) A dispassionate and deeper analysis reveals that the Pakistan-Taliban relationship is more complex and conflict-ridden than a linear patron-proxy equation. Arguably, Pakistan's symbiotic influence over the Taliban has been neither unlimited nor friction-free. On the contrary, notwithstanding some tactical convergences, the Taliban only listen to Pakistan when it suits their strategic and ideological interests. Pakistan's reluctance to immediately recognize the Taliban government, unlike the 1990s, highlights the changing dynamic of their ties. Instead of approaching its ties with the Taliban unilaterally, Pakistan is adopting a regional approach. Similarly, the Taliban's desire to forge constructive relations with India and unequivocal stance not to be dragged into the India-

Pakistan bilateral dispute over Kashmir also underscores the evolving nature of Pakistan-Taliban ties. Pakistan-Taliban ties have remained fractious and patchy. For instance, like all other Afghan governments, the Taliban did not recognize the Durand Line as an internationally recognized border during their first regime from 1996 to 2001. Likewise, despite repeated demands, the Taliban refused to hand over Pakistan's then most-wanted militant and head of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi Riaz Basra, who masterminded several high-profile terrorist attacks in Pakistan from Afghanistan. Basra lived in Afghanistan under the Taliban's protection. The same was the case in the immediate aftermath of Al-Qaeda's September 11, 2001, attacks in the US. The Taliban turned down Pakistani requests to hand over Al-Qaeda chief Osama Bin Laden to the US to avoid military intervention. Pakistan's cooperation with the US, after facing the "with us or against us" ultimatum, created a lot of resentment and mistrust in the Taliban. Pakistan needed a partner to minimize and eventually eliminate Indian influence in Afghanistan. Islamabad holds Delhi responsible for supporting and funding Baloch insurgent groups in Afghanistan for militant operations in Balochistan. Meanwhile, the Taliban needed a space to regroup, revive and relaunch their insurgency against the US. The Taliban's ethnic and geographical linkages in Pakistan, the porous nature of the Pak-Afghan border, and around four million Afghan refugees provided the Taliban with enough depth in Pakistan to successfully relaunch and manage their insurgency in Afghanistan. Taliban's decision to open their political office in Doha, Qatar, in June 2013 was a move to break free from the already limited Pakistani influence and negotiate with the US independently. The Taliban's Qatar office enabled them to diversify their ties with other regional countries, further minimizing their dependence on Pakistan.

Recommendations

- Afghanistan must be taken as an independent sovereign state who can better decide her relations with any regional country or with world at large.
- To avoid any action or issuing any statement that generates impression of interference in Afghanistan internal affairs.
- Scarlet thread in a Pakistani-Afghan relationship is to have a friendly Afghanistan or, at the very least, a neutral Afghanistan. Pakistan must not have favorites inside Afghanistan and not to invest in any group or party there. Afghans should be left to support the form of government they want.
- Pakistan must play a constructive neighbor country role in assisting Taliban government in Afghanistan reconstruction and rehabilitations.
- Pakistan must use its good offices in convincing the Taliban government on issues of Inclusivity, Human Rights and counter-terrorism which can only lead towards the international recognition of Taliban government.

- Pakistan should play a major supportive role in stabilising Afghanistan. This can be in the shape of facilitating trade to and, at a later stage from, Afghanistan; technical assistance for establishing public and private departments and infrastructure; and offering favourable terms of bilateral trade. Pakistan's interests would be better served by increasing diplomatic approaches to India, calling on the US, EU and others to support these endeavours. Pakistan would also best benefit from adopting policies grounded in the existing realities and determining priorities within that realm. Influence can be sustained or built through soft power, mutual cooperation and an outlook that would strengthen areas of convergence. Diplomacy through media hype should be minimised.
- Border management issues have great significance. Once Pakistan has physically and politically established its writ over international borders, the situation could incrementally tilt in Pakistan's favour, though this is, presently, a tricky issue.

Conclusion

Afghanistan must have neutral foreign policy towards neighbouring countries; an effective administration, proper media projection and above all, strong diplomatic relations with economically strong countries are viable policy options for Afghanistan. Ethnic strife has undermined any political and military headway made, the Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras and anti-Taliban, or at least moderate Pakhtuns, to agree on power-sharing arrangements and changes in the constitutional structure. Pakistan could play a role in bringing a consensus on these points; and, rather than being obsessed with India's part, it could focus on resolving the conflict.

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