

World Powers Rivalry in Afghanistan and Its Effects on Pakistan

Muhammad Karim*

Abstract

Afghanistan, a landlocked country, has been the focus of great powers since 19th century due to its strategic locations. Soviet Union and Great Britain were engaged in Afghanistan before the World Wars. After Soviet Union invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the U.S. led West with the support of Muslim countries compelled the Red Army to withdraw in 1988. The country became a battle field of proxy wars among the regional and extra regional powers, creating instability in entire region. In aftermath of the 9/11, Afghanistan once again attracted attention of the world powers. Nature and complexity of Great Powers' rivalry in Afghanistan has changed overtime. Instead of fighting against a nation state the world powers are fighting against the potential threats of extremism, terrorism and drug trafficking that makes the war more complicated, problematic and challenging. Currently, apart from Al-Qaeda and Taliban, Islamic State (IS) is also becoming an active stakeholder in Afghanistan. These developments make the Afghan problem more complicated and ripening the grounds for another civil war. The study argues that since Pakistan not only shares long borders but also history, culture, interests, happiness and sorrows with Afghanistan, therefore situation in Afghanistan always have direct bearing on the security matrix of Pakistan. US and NATO forces withdrawal from Afghanistan has provided an open field to Al-Qaeda/Taliban and IS in one hand and encourage regional and international players on another, creating security dilemma for Pakistan.

Keywords: World powers rivalry, Afghan war, Al-Qaeda, Taliban, Islamic State (IS), Pakistan.

Introduction

Societies of South Asia in general, Afghanistan and Pakistan in particular are tribal and feudal. Their peoples and cultures are heterogeneous, economies scattered with unstable, fragile and weak political institutions. The region is divided along religious,

* Muhammad Karim, PhD Scholar, Department of International Relations, Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad.

cultural, racial, and ethnic lines. Overall environment of the entire region has been polluted by the sectarian and ethnic violence. Continuing regional, religious, sectarian and ethnic aspiration and mistrust have caused “unbridgeable differences” among the states. These differences have resultantly, convinced the smaller states to believe that their sovereignty is being challenged by the major powers of the region. Mistrust among the states and its strategic location are the two main reasons responsible for involvement of extra regional powers in South Asia.

Strategic location of Afghanistan, which acted as a link between Central and South Asian regions, has continually coaxed great powers for competing with each other. Afghanistan, thus, has been the battleground for the world’s powers. World’s powers confrontation in Afghanistan, consistently affect security situation in the neighboring states.

In 1970s, Soviet influence increased in Afghanistan resulted in full scale intervention in 1979. Pakistan felt threatened by the presence of Red Army on its boarder and started taking military and diplomatic measures to ensure security. Actions taken by Pakistan were perceived by the Afghan and Soviet governments as detrimental to their interest. A chain of action and reaction was started resulted in internal instability, law and order and other security issues in Pakistan.

Again in 2001, threatening situation developed on Pakistan’s Western border, attracting attention of the US. The situation resulted into a full scale intervention by the US lead international forces. Taliban, ruling Kabul, were ousted and Al-Qaeda safe heaven were destroyed. The spillover effect was again devastating for Pakistan. The Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) region of Pakistan became a battle ground. Al-Qaeda and Taliban blamed Pakistan for helping the international forces in ousting Taliban from Kabul while the West accused Pakistan for playing a double role and allowing Al-Qaeda and Taliban to seek refuge in FATA. Internal situation of the country worsened and Pakistan once again found itself in the midst of security dilemma.

IS gaining ground in Afghanistan has further complicated the situation. After the planned drawdown of United States and its allies, Afghanistan is once again becoming sanctuary of IS, Al Qaeda, Taliban and battlefield for proxy war of the regional and extra regional players and their favoured warlords.

Focus of this article is world powers interventions in Afghanistan and its ripple effects on Pakistan. For objective analysis of the subject, historical perspective of Pak-Afghan

relation along with Pakistan's strategic interests in Afghanistan has been assessed first. Secondly, factors that elucidate causes for the world powers to be interested in affairs of Afghanistan are evaluated. Thirdly, effects of Afghan Jihad and subsequent war on terror in Afghanistan on security ambience of Pakistan are examined. Finally, future scenario with leading role of India in Afghan affairs is discussed.

Research questions

During the discourse, answers to following queries have been sought.

- i). Why Afghanistan, a landlocked, backward and impoverished country is focus of attention for the world powers?
- ii). How continued conflict, instability, insecurity and involvement of the foreign forces effects security matrix in Pakistan?
- iii). Who would be the major regional and international players in the near future setup in Afghanistan and how would it effect security calculus of Pakistan?

Theoretical perspective

Pakistan lives in a security nightmare today. There are multifaceted factors responsible for Pakistan's security situation; key factor is the spillover effects of great powers rivalry in Afghanistan. This study evaluates Pakistan security situation on the face of spillover effects of repeated involvement of great powers and regional powers in affairs of Afghanistan, using theory of "security dilemma".¹ Spade work of the study is based on the analysis of books, documents, scholarly papers, journals and information available on electronic media. Overall approach of the study is historical and based on secondary data.

Significance of the Study

Developments in Afghanistan always have direct bearing on Pakistan's internal security and its external relations. Pakistan's vital interests connected with internal situation in Afghanistan makes this study valuable and interesting one for students/ scholars and practitioners concerned with the subject, alike. The study would take a step further in understanding of the subject and would be an increment in the prevailing knowledge on the Afghan dilemma.

Pak-Afghan Relations: A Historical Review

Pakistan's relations with its neighbors, India and Afghanistan, historically, have been marked by cynicism, interference and mutual distrust.² For Pakistan, Afghanistan has been one of the vital factors in terms of political identity, ideology, domestic politics, and most importantly the security. For Pakistan, throughout in its history, particularly, in the last three decades, engagement in Afghanistan has been problematic. In security milieu, Pakistan has always tried to protect its Afghan border because of insecurity on its Eastern border with India. Afghanistan thus remained an important element of Pakistan's India policy.

Primarily two historically correlated causes are responsible for Pakistan's perceptions: firstly, the "Durand Line" issue, a Pak-Afghan disputed border; secondly, Afghanistan's support for the "Pakhtunistan" movement in North West Frontier Province (NWFP) of Pakistan.³ The province is now renamed as Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa.

To demarcate borders of British India and Afghanistan, a boundary known as "Durand Line" was drawn in 1893. The border cuts arbitrarily the huge tribal zone of Pashtuns dividing them in Afghan and Pakistani segments. The long unmarked border is mountainous and has persistently been contested by Pashtun tribes living along the "Durand Line".⁴ These Tribes follow their own code of conduct and customs. Their customs and traditions also include provision of protection for those who request for the sanctuary.

About two thirds of Pashtuns live in Pakistan and the remaining one third in Afghanistan.⁵ In 1947, after partition of Indian dominion into two independent states of Pakistan and India, the issue of border between Afghanistan and Pakistan reopened, as consecutive Afghan governments claimed the 1893 agreement was between British India and Afghanistan, not with Pakistan.⁶ All the Afghan governments in the past regarded the "Durand Line" conflict as unresolved.

Soon after the creation of Pakistan, issue of Pakhtunistan became a controversial subject and remained mainframe of the foreign policy of Afghanistan for the coming decades. Numerous Afghan scholars claim that it was Afghanistan's support for the movement of Pakhtunistan that instigated its political and economic dependence on the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) from 1950s to 1980s. It was the Afghanistan dependence on the Soviet that resulted in its invasion in 1979.⁷

Pakistan has five main interests in Afghanistan. Firstly, Pashtuns world over draw maternal links with Afghanistan and more than half of Pashtuns live in Pakistan. Pakistan therefore has to cater for their sentimental affiliations. Secondly, stability of Afghanistan is vital for stability and prosperity of Pakistan. Thirdly, Pakistan is hosting 3 million registered and unregistered Afghan refugees,⁸ since Soviet war; their return will be made possible if there is peace in Afghanistan. Fourthly, Pakistan is facing worst kind of energy crisis. These crises could be overcome by transporting oil and gas from Central Asia, via pipelines passing through Afghanistan. Fifth, reduce Indian influence and render its Western border safe.⁹

Afghanistan as a Focal Point of Great Powers

Afghanistan's geographically strategic location links Indian Ocean with Heartland of Eurasia. Historically, Great Powers considered these regions important for development of their respective naval and land strategies. These areas also provided entrée to vital gas, minerals and oil resources for the Great Powers. Moreover, weak government, nonexistence of communication, health, education and administrative infra-structure attract, time and again, attention of the world powers.

Imperial interests of Russia competed with the interests of British Empire in the so-called "Great Game" of the 19th century. Since Afghanistan was situated between these two great powers therefore, the impulse was for gaining influence in Central Asia in general and Afghanistan in particular. Afghanistan thus had to act as a buffer between the Russian and British interests.¹⁰

Cold War between the USSR and the US was focused in Afghanistan, during the last quarter of 20th century. As the two great powers clashed for supremacy, Afghanistan became a battleground once again. Though the West was a greater advocator of the principles of separating church from the state but during the Cold War, religion was used to counter the Soviet moves in Middle East, Afghanistan and other Muslims' dominated regions.

Islamic movements and political parties/ groups supporting Islamic ideology were scattered all around the world in Muslim populated countries, regions and areas, before the Afghan War. These groups though had the aspirations to challenge their governments but were without power to do so. An armed resistance with the help of religious individual and group was organized to corner the Soviet forces in Afghanistan. Resistance against the Soviet was labeled as "Jihad" by the US led anti-

communist Western allies and all the Muslim countries.¹¹ With the passage of time jihadi culture spread over to other countries and regions of the world with long terms taunting effects.

To defeat Red Army in Afghanistan and check spillover of communism, both the U.S and Pakistan not only courted but also managed Islamist groups, during 1980s, at the height of their relationship. For their respective national security interests, this phenomenon continued even after the Soviet withdrawal, without giving any heed to the impact of the Afghan jihad on their own countries.¹² The starting point from where Pakistan viewed the outcome of the Pak - US relations and the “legacy of bitterness” that had followed used to be defined by the Afghan jihad, for the next few decades.

Since withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Afghanistan was “beginning of the end of the Cold War”, US along with its allies therefore, benefited from the withdrawal. Pakistan, on the other hand, was left alone, after the Soviet pullout, to deal with the “jihadi blowback”. Though, Soviet forces pulled out from Afghanistan in 1989 but civil war continued as various war lords and mujahedeen factions started fighting for filling the power vacuum. The country was thus left in the throes of chaos and anarchy.

In this situation of anarchy, in 1994, the Taliban also entered the fray. In no time they swept through the entire Afghanistan and brought under control over 90 percent of the country.¹³ During this time, on a range of issues Pakistan found itself at odds with the US. Main differences were on Pakistan support for Taliban, the US old trustees and friends. Pakistan being the neighbor of Afghanistan and hosting millions of Afghan refugees, could not extricate itself from its policies supporting Taliban.

Invasion by the former USSR, followed by three decades long civil war and instability in Afghanistan imperiled security of the whole region. As the rival groups were engaged in the civil war, regional countries joined their proxy in Afghanistan to further their respective interests. Keeping in view its strategic concerns, Islamabad tried to limit influence of New Delhi in Afghanistan. At same time India endeavored for establishing a strong foothold in the country to squeeze Pakistan.

At the time of Soviet invasion (1979 to 1988) Pakistan provided all out support to the Mujahedeen resistance. Pakistan therefore had comparatively more influence over the fighting factions during “Afghan Jihad” and events that followed. In this

ambiance four main factors originating from the Afghan Jihad contributed in creating security dilemma for Pakistan.¹⁴

Firstly, throughout the Red Army occupation and the “civil war” that followed, Afghan refugees entered into Pakistan, in millions, and spread all over the country. Provinces of Baluchistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and FATA area adjacent to Afghanistan became hub of the refugees’ activities. A momentous census held in 2005, revealed that there were more than three million Afghan refugees in Pakistan. Majority of the refugees were either in their second or third generation of supplanting. More than 75% of the refugees were under the age of 28 years.¹⁵ These refugees also included radicals that in fact ultimately increased radicalization of the Pakistani society and subsequently harmed the religio-social, environmental, political and security situation in Pakistan.

Secondly, the huge influx of refugees also brought drugs, militants and weapons with them to Pakistan and contributed a fair share in “rise of Pakistani militancy and terrorism”. In Pakistani society, new kinds of crimes, mostly related to modern weapons and drugs, have been introduced since 1980s.¹⁶ Criminals have substantively greater firepower than law enforcing agencies. The Kalashnikov automatic rifle has become a prevalent challenge to the law and orders and also became a status symbol and pervasive item in society. These weapons are used by the gangsters to rob people/ banks and create harassment by indiscriminate firing in markets and crowded places. Official Law Enforcement Agencies, by contrast, are armed with outmoded and outdated weapons. As per a credible report, over a million automatic weapons mostly, Kalashnikovs, are being used, unlicensed, in Pakistan.¹⁷

Thirdly, in the garb of ‘international jihad’, as the West termed it, youth from Muslim populations around the globe volunteered and brought to Afghanistan, to fight on the ‘name of Allah’. This phenomenon gave impetus to the concept of ‘global Jihad’ and politico- religious movements. Blowback of this notion led to the War on Terror. Pakistan being the forefront state of the Afghan Jihad had to face the chunk of the blowback. Jihadists introduced a new culture of extremism, fundamentalism and intolerance, coupled with other national, regional and international developments ultimately steered the country towards a security dilemma. Presence of foreigner Jihadists also adversely effected basic fabric of the tribal society in Pak-Afghan tribal area.

Fourthly, spread of religious seminaries of all sectarian factions took place during Zia-ul-Haq regime. Seminaries though

served short term interests of Pakistan during the Afghan jihad, yet, at same time they also contributed to the political and sectarian wrangling amongst the different schools of thoughts and their leaders. Successive Pakistani governments in Pakistan, after the sudden death of President Zia-ul-Haq, continued to be hostage to the politico-religious parties and sectarian groups for a host of domestic and geopolitical reasons.¹⁸ The subsequent US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were also exploited by the Jihadi organizations. They used collateral damage and war related miseries of the Afghans and Iraqi general public for motivating youth in Pakistan to wage jihad against the West.

In the 1950s, there were 137 traditional Sunni and few Shi'a madrasas in Pakistan. The numbers grew to about 900, with over 30,000 regular students and about 3000 teachers by late 1970s.¹⁹ Religious motivation for preventing the flood of communism was boosted during the Afghan war and the number of seminaries increased manifold, in Pakistan. Estimates of 2008 put the overall figure at over 45,000. In Punjab, the numbers of madrasas are 26,000. The NWFP have 10,000, Sindh 4,000, and Baluchistan 5,000.²⁰ These seminaries accommodate approximately 6.2 million students and 2.5 million teachers. Madrasas serving for Shia population are estimated to be 4-10%. Unvaryingly, students qualified from the religious institutes are more committed and motivated and committed as compare to the products of secular schooling system.²¹

The rise of extremism and fundamentalism in Pakistan can, by and large, be accredited to the United States' misusing Islam as a Cold War weapon. After the Cold War, the liberal and democratic forces in Pakistan failed to create conducive environment for polity, democracy, liberalization and justice to flourish. Islamic militants on the other hand offered an alternative for the dissatisfied strata of the society. Local disputes and other issues in the FATA and adjoining areas were being sought by the militant leaders. Militant organizations also run welfare and public services wings that were in some case more efficient and effective than the government services.

It was perceived by Pakistan that interests of the US in Afghanistan were identical to its own. International community including US, however, forgot about Afghanistan, after withdrawal of the Red Army. Reason being that involvement of the US in Northwest Asia was essentially a function of Cold War interests.

War on Terror a Blowback for Pakistan

Pakistan, once again occupied center stage of the US security and foreign policy concerns, soon after the 9/11. Because of Pakistan's proximity to Afghanistan, the US sought General Pervez Musharraf's explicit support to oust Taliban from Kabul. General Pervez Musharraf decided to join the coalition that was to be labeled as "global war on terror", regardless of the fact that demands of the US for cooperation in this war were sure to become unpopular in Pakistan.²²

In the fall of 2001, US-backed Northern Alliance expelled Taliban from Kabul. Meanwhile the US forces started pursuing Taliban and Al-Qaeda leadership and their remnants into Pashtun regions of Eastern and Southern Afghanistan.²³ Spillover of the Afghan war also created ripples in tribal areas of Pakistan. Tribes across the Durand Line consider themselves as a single entity but divided by an unnatural line. They have tribal, religious, cultural and linguistic links with each other and share their sorrows and happiness. Whatever occurs on one side of the border equally effect their fellow on the other side.

For the first time in mid-2002, Pakistan deployed a large number of troops, in FATA region. Aim of this move was to seal the Afghan border. This move was not taken well by the tribal people and the country's powerful religious strata. They therefore turned against the General Musharraf's government.²⁴ A countrywide campaign was also launched in Pakistan against Al-Qaeda and Taliban that disabled Al-Qaeda through the policy of "capture and kill". Al-Qaeda, Taliban and other terrorist groups reacted and created nightmare situation for Pakistan. They resorted to destroying states property/ installations and institutions, target killing of military/ paramilitary personnel and high profile civilians and indiscriminate suicide bombing.

Pakistan achieved a few successes in war against terrorism, but had to pay a high price by opting for the policy of "military action". Pakistan's civil population and security forces have suffered heavy casualties because of its leading role in the global antiterrorism effort. As of May 2017, Pakistan has to pay a price of \$123.13bn dollars and 54,458 lives including 19,505 civilians, 5,935 armed personnel.²⁵

As an ally in the war against terrorism, an obvious conclusion is that Pakistan has apprehended more Al-Qaeda operatives, provided more intelligence support and troops than any other country of the alliance. Furthermore, casualties suffered by Pakistan in war against terrorism are far more than the combined

casualties of 41 countries' coalition forces in Afghanistan. In spite of Pakistan's herculean efforts in this war, Washington's concerns on the willingness and ability of the country to control terrorism continue to impair relations of the two allies.²⁶

In the new environment, Pakistan is not as satisfied with its role as it was in the pre-9/11 period when it acted as the vital link between the West and Afghanistan. Moreover, Pakistan is wary about increasing Indian influence in Afghanistan. Because of the domestic environment and security concerns, Pakistan can hardly afford Indian influence or presence of any strange forces in its backyard. Therefore feverish presence of India in Afghanistan, particularly establishing a huge number of consulates there is a matter of serious worry for Pakistan. It is being suspected that the consulates are involved in "undesirable acts". Pakistan believe that these consulates are involved in spreading Indian influence, helping to fuel anti Pakistan sentiments in Baluchistan and FATA and moreover, supporting terrorism in Pakistan, famous RAW agent, Kulbhushan Sudhir Jadhav conviction is case in point. India gaining open hand in Afghanistan means backstabbing Pakistan. Islamabad continually claims that it shares objectives of the US and its allies in Afghanistan, saying that "it is committed to a strong and stable Afghanistan. Pakistan would be the only country that could benefit the most from stability in Afghanistan".²⁷

Future Scenario and its Likely Ramifications

After the U.S. and NATO looming military withdrawal from Afghanistan, in 2014, Washington's engagement in South Asia enters into a new era. As the United States is shifting its focus towards Asia Pacific and netting alliances with India, Japan, Australia and South Korea there is a lot of uncertainty about the most relevant strategy for keeping stability in the South Asian region. Alarming situation in the Middle East, Saudi Arab – Iran rivalry, marginalization of Qatar by Saudi Arab and its allies, Russian interference on behalf of Assad regime in Syria and other development in the region created skepticism.²⁸ Regional countries, expected to be adversely effected by the foreseeable instability is looking for alternate options. Pakistan, Russia and China warming relations and U.S. support of Indian role in Afghanistan crisis could be seen in this background.²⁹

President Ashraf Ghani had won 2014 elections on the popular slogan of bringing peace in Afghanistan. The Ashraf Ghani led 'Unity Government' in Kabul extended hand of friendship to Taliban and initiated peace process. Pakistan with the

blessing of US and China mediated the process in a hope to end over 13 years of war in its neighbor. The process however, proved short lived as news of the death of Mullah Omar, surfaced on 29 July 2015. It was perceived that struggle for the leadership within ranks and columns of Taliban, after the death of Mullah Omar, and divergence of opinions over peace talks might drive some fighter groups into the IS fold. Some of the Taliban elements have accused its mainstream leadership of “being soft” for flirting with the government of Afghanistan on the name of “peace talks”. It was also expected that after Mullah Omar, Taliban central authority will be weakened and their strength will be diluted because of infighting for power but they reassert with more gravity and aggressiveness.³⁰

As the U.S and NATO forces began to withdraw, number of terrorist attacks increased. Since 2015, in an endeavor to rupture the fledgling government, Taliban made major gains in Afghanistan. They have increased suicidal attacks and have also made numerous territorial incursions across the country.³¹ As of March 2017, over 20% of Afghanistan was under the control of Taliban and rate of casualties increased manifold, number of important state’s building and institutes including the supreme court, Parliament House, diplomatic area, military bases and police installations became targets of the terrorist attacks.³²

Since 2015, activities of the Islamic State in the Eastern Afghanistan are also increasing. The Islamic State carried-out some bloody assaults while targeting innocent civilians at many places including Kabul. It is emerging as a severe security threat.³³ Presence of IS fighters have further complicated the scenario. Now, as the frequency and lethality of terrorism incidents rise, there are chances that Ashraf Ghani might loosen his grip on the government and the country further plunge to chaos.³⁴

The uncontrolled Pak-Afghan border regions have long been a sanctuary for insurgents. As power struggle and tensions among Taliban increases, the IS may appear more attractive alternate for the insurgents. As Taliban itself is the result of post-Afghan Jihad confused situation, IS or any other group in Afghanistan may surface to add into violence in the volatile region. One should learn lesson from the Iraq prevailing crisis. Emergence of ISIS in Iraq is an indication that Afghanistan will have the similar fate, where a determined Taliban are waiting for an opportunity to regain control. After the drawdown, Afghan situation is likely to be turned more violent than Iraq on following grounds.³⁵

- Infrastructure of Afghanistan is much weaker as compared to that of Iraq, which could be exploited by the Taliban and their supporters.
- Iraq had the resources to support its defence forces whereas, Afghanistan is a poor country and depends on foreign donations to train and equip its forces. Donor countries would have their own interests and preferences that would further complicate the situation.
- Afghanistan is in the state of war since last about three decades, war lords are more powerful and draw their strength from regional, linguistic and sectarian influences & linkages. After the departure of U.S troops, internal fight of war lords for the quest of gaining influence would put Afghanistan in a more dangerous position as compare to Iraq at the time of U.S forces departure.
- Afghanistan has the history of regional and international powers intervention, U.S drawdown would tempt regional and international powers once again to fill in the vacuum.

Diplomacy of China is also active in enhancing its influence in the region especially in Pakistan. China is playing a leading role in getting Afghanistan and Pakistan closer and stabilize Afghanistan. Experts like Paulo Casaca, Executive Director and founder of South Asia Democratic Forum at Brussels is in the view that efforts of China in Afghanistan are intended to restrict influence of the United States in the region it is therefore, natural that it is getting closer to the Taliban.³⁶

China has three main interests in the region – firstly, to curtail separatist tendency in the western Xinjiang province, where the separatist groups are naturally inclined to take strength from the Islamic groups in the region. Secondly, China really wants carbon resources of the central Asian states to fulfill needs of its 1.3 billion populations and for its economic modernization. Thirdly, China is interested in economic and trade deals in the region.³⁷ China, while maintaining its non-interference ideology has avoided taking up anti-Taliban role. China's plea is that such role might effect Uyghur insurgency in Xinxiang province.

Russia is strengthening control over its near abroad and also trying to improve its diplomatic contacts with Afghanistan and Pakistan.³⁸ Russia is attempting to realign its interests in Afghanistan, engage with the Taliban and forge a strategic partnership with China and Pakistan. Russian's attempts are motivated by a sole objective of confronting the United States

where it is possible.³⁹ Central Asian states have an abundance of natural resources. China and Russia are heavily involved Central Asia. War on terror has provided a common ground for Russia, China and Central Asian countries to work together. Probably prompting by the new development in the region, the United States, under Trump administration, considered increase in the troops' level despite President Trump's urge for total withdraw during his election campaign.⁴⁰

Interests of New Delhi in Afghanistan are virtually diametrically opposed to that of Pakistan's. Since its inception, India tries to contain influence of Pakistan in Afghanistan. It had therefore established very close relations with successive governments in Kabul. Taliban period was the only exemption. Influence in Afghanistan provides an opportunity for India to enhance its strategic outreach to central Asian states. In the past, United States though hailed efforts of India in institution building, development and reconstruction sectors of Afghanistan but kept ambiguity on its role in security related issues, but Trump administration is seemingly more interested in promoting India's role in security of Afghanistan.⁴¹ During Indian PM Modi recent visit to the United States, apart from reaffirming their strategic relations, United States also assure India of due role in the Afghan security affairs.⁴² India, to a greater extent has merged its Afghanistan's policy with that the objectives of the United States' Af-Pak policy.

Iran interests in Afghanistan include firstly, countering Saudi Arabia's influence in the region. Secondly, maintaining strong ties with Tajik and Hazara communities of Afghanistan to further its strategic influence in Central Asia and achieve the aim of establishing transit route to Europe. Thirdly, be a partner in regional economic and trade integration and capture Afghanistan's oil market. Fourthly, Iran shares 582 miles long border with Afghanistan and several rivers flow from Afghanistan to Iran. Iran is therefore interested in safeguarding its borders and solving the rivers issues. Fifthly, Iran wants to make return of Afghan refugees possible. After the nuclear deal coming in force and Iran is free from the international sanctions, it might follow more assertive strategy in Afghanistan and beyond.

Converging and conflicting interests of the regional and major world powers in Afghanistan coupled with unstable conditions of the country present a scary picture. Virtual presence of foreign forces, (United States and other allied troops) in the wake of 9/11, has altered equation and power balance in the region

that is viewed with doubt by some of the regional players. On the other hand, planned withdrawal of the United States forces, without militarily, politically and economically stabilizing Afghanistan would create vacuum and will be cause of temptation for the regional and world players.

Role of Pakistan in the Afghan war seems to have come full circle. Pakistani leadership opposes complete withdrawal of the U.S and its allies' forces. This shows a reversal of perception in Pakistan, because in the past the establishments in Pakistan hold the presence of allied forces in Afghanistan responsible for growing violence in Pakistan.⁴³ Since Afghanistan is not yet stabilized, Pakistani leadership therefore, believe that after the withdrawal of the U.S. and allied forces from Afghanistan, Pakistan will face the blowback once again. Consequences of U.S withdrawal will be severe then the 1989 Soviet withdrawal.⁴⁴

Increasing the U.S and allied troops in Afghanistan, is a welcoming development. Assessment of this development needs a separate study. The prevailing assumptions however are that Afghanistan is no more a focal point for the U.S and it is likely to shift its attention toward other rising challenges in Middle East and East Asia. United States security challenges include increasing assertiveness of China in South and East China Seas, Russia's regaining control in Crimea, North Korea's provocations, and threat pose by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria for the U.S interests in Middle East. Issues of the Middle East, Asia-Pacific and Ukraine are likely to effect U.S involvement in Afghanistan.⁴⁵

President Trump, on 22 August, has announced its long awaited Afghan policy. He extended role of the US military in Afghanistan, appealed to India for help in Afghanistan, accused Pakistan of "harboring terrorists" and threatened to stop all economic aid if Pakistan fails to do more in stopping the flow of terrorists into Afghanistan . He also advocated Intelligence Based Operations against terrorists inside Pakistan might increase, which set off alarm bells in Pakistan.⁴⁶

Conclusion

Geographic strategic location, weak government, tribal division, and absence of worthwhile communication/ administrative infrastructure in Afghanistan repeatedly attract major powers' attention. Event of the 9/11 could best be described as the blowback of U.S. Cold War policies towards Afghanistan.

Pakistan at the present faces a security dilemma. Military and diplomatic measures being taken by Pakistan, to ensure its

security, are viewed with suspicion by its neighbours, regional and extra regional powers with interest in the region. FATA people also look into such measures with suspicions and doubts. Politico-religious parties and militant outfits act as catalysts to deepen the dilemma.

Pakistan is convinced that India is working with the US-backed Afghan government to give Pakistan a hostile western border that, paired with the Indian border on the east, would trap Pakistan in a geostrategic pincer. India remains one of the key factors in foreign and security policy calculus of Pakistan, therefore, growing Indio-US and Indo-Afghan relations, in milieu of the war against terrorism, are seen with distrust and uncertainty in Pakistan.

After the withdrawal of allied forces from Afghanistan, struggle among the major regional powers might increase for gaining influence which is likely to lead to another civil war.

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