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# **Military Aspects Af-Pak Situation: An Appraisal**

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## **Military Aspects Af-Pak Situation: An Appraisal**

### **General**

It is axiomatic that military aspects can not be discussed in isolation as many other factors have a direct impact on the given military situation. In the current Af-Pak scenario political and economic compulsions have a direct bearing on the behaviour of many players in the evolving Af-Pak imbroglio. Clausewitz opined that 'war is a continuation of politics' which in effect means that war or for that matter any military action can not be separated from political activity. Further, to execute any kind of national or military strategy adequate resources are required. With the US and European nations reeling under the adverse effects of global recession there is a clamour amongst them to reduce their commitment to the unending Afghan conflict. In addition with the rising toll of casualties both military and civilian the war in Afghanistan has become unpopular domestically in the US and Western nations. Yet, there is a degree of realization that the coalition troops can not withdraw or execute an accelerated drawdown of forces without putting in a place a government that has sufficient capacity and capabilities to deter interference by inimical forces and ensure peace and stability in the country in the long run.

Evidently, military strategy has to be part of the broader national or grand strategy but in the case of Afghanistan, pursuance and execution of strategy has become very complex and complicated as there are many players involved with competing objectives and strategies. Largely, ends, ways and means of the US and other players' strategy are at odds with each other that militate against arriving at a modicum of solution to the Afghan puzzle. Internally, there are ethnic and tribal divisions in the Afghan society besides the ascendancy of the Taliban which is dominated by the Pashtuns. Afghanistan's active neighbour Pakistan has increasingly become a part of the problem rather than a solution. And it is itself divided internally on many fronts and increasingly becoming unstable. Further, many analysts have pointed out that the US is also not following a coherent strategy and there are differences between the approaches of the State Department and the Pentagon. On another plane regional players have their own approaches to the Afghan quagmire. Thus, there are many moving parts in the ongoing battle in Afghanistan which have created much friction and therefore one

can only be cautiously optimistic in the short run about the future of Afghanistan.

Long term development of Afghanistan requires a stable environment, civilian and military capacity building and economic development. Clearly, security and stability is the foremost need of Afghanistan and is a necessary condition for making progress in other areas. Surveying the current situation in Af-Pak belt one can easily surmise that ensuring security, bringing the Taliban to the negotiating table either through military or political action, reconciling the interests of many groups and regional players, improving the capacities of Afghan government, comprehensive development of Afghanistan and ushering in peace and stability is not going to be an easy task.

### **Review of the Situation**

Overall military situation in Afghanistan can be best described as some kind of a stalemate where the Taliban have neither been defeated nor have the coalition troops been able to achieve a clear victory. The surge of troops by Obama administration enabled the coalition forces to make some gains in Helmand and Kandahar. However, because of the concerted effort of the NATO/ISAF forces in these provinces the Taliban directed their energies to the other erstwhile provinces in the North and the West. By the end of 2010 the Pentagon was of the opinion that “... the momentum achieved by the Taliban in recent years has been arrested in much of the country and reversed in some key areas, *although these gains remain fragile and reversible*”<sup>1</sup>. Before announcing a drawdown in June 2011 President Obama declared that the United States had *largely achieved its goals in Afghanistan*; evidently political and economic compulsions did play a large part in propelling him to make such an assessment. Yet, General Allen the commander of US forces in Afghanistan said in December 2011 that “a pretty virulent insurgency”<sup>2</sup> in Eastern Afghanistan remains a problem. He does not expect the level of troops to fall there ‘because insurgent fighters taking refuge in neighboring Pakistan can quickly deploy across the border’. Before hanging up his uniform in end September 2011 the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Adm. Mike Mullen, publicly expressed his reservations about

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<sup>1</sup> National Security Staff, “Overview of the Afghanistan and Pakistan Annual Review,” December 15, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Alissa J. Rubin, “U.S. General in Afghanistan Says Troops May Stay Past 2014”, *The New York Times*, 20 December 2011.

Obama's withdrawal plan, observing that the draw down plans were "*more aggressive and incur more risk than I was originally prepared to accept.*"<sup>3</sup>

In short, while much of the political leadership did paint an optimistic picture about the situation in Afghanistan the military leadership was not so sanguine. Even when the gains of the surge both civilian and military were recounted these observations were qualified by a number of caveats. For instance, while addressing troops in Paktika Province in mid-December 2011, the U.S. Defence Secretary Leon Panetta remarked that "We're winning this very tough conflict in Afghanistan... There is no doubt that over the last two years Afghan and international forces have been able to seize the moment from the Taliban insurgency and establish security in critical areas, such as the Taliban's heartland in the south."<sup>4</sup> But then he went on to state that "We have not won". Further he forecast that there would be more high-profile bombings and major, if sporadic, armed attacks on public buildings.

Even in NATO's Chicago Summit in May 2012 the NATO members and ISAF nations were generally in agreement that the security conditions in Afghanistan were conducive enough to continue with the draw down plan. Earlier in February this year the US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta had indicated that U.S. military involvement would transition from combat to a training and advisory mission by mid-2013 which has been endorsed by the Chicago Summit.

The US and Afghanistan also concluded a Strategic Partnership Agreement in early May which envisages that a portion of the US troops (numbers not indicated but could vary between 20,000 to 30,000) would be stationed in Afghanistan for training and other purposes to support the ANSF. The Agreement aims at protecting and promoting shared democratic values, advancing long-term security, reinforcing regional security and cooperation, social and economic development, and strengthening Afghan institutions and governance. To enable a long term framework for security and cooperation Afghanistan will also become a 'Major Non-NATO Ally'. This agreement is

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<sup>3</sup> Jim Michaels, "Military Leaders: Draw Down Plans Aggressive", USA Today, 27 June 2011 available at [http://www.usatoday.com/news/military/2011-06-23-obama-drawdown-afghanistan-troops-withdrawal\\_n.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/military/2011-06-23-obama-drawdown-afghanistan-troops-withdrawal_n.htm)

<sup>4</sup> Tom Shanker, "Panetta Says U.S. has Edge on Taliban", The New York Times, 14 December, 2011

valid for a period of ten years after 2014 signaling the fact the US could continue to stay committed on long term basis for ensuring security and stability in Afghanistan. As long as the US troops stay in Afghanistan it is unlikely that the Taliban and its supporters would have a free run in Afghanistan.

With the drawdown that commenced with effect from July 2011, serious questions have been raised about what the future holds for Afghanistan. Will the current state dispensation be able to function effectively and remain in control or will it crumble under the onslaught of the Taliban? Does the reintegration and reconciliation process have any chance of success or will Afghanistan once again descend into a civil war? How long will the international community continue to financially and militarily support the Afghan government, more so in light of the global economic recession? Will the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) be able to secure the country against the insurgents once the ISAF withdraws? What role will the regional stakeholders and international community play in Afghanistan? Can the countries of the region and international community remain insulated from the rippling effects of an anarchic, or as the case may well be, Talibanised Afghanistan? Will Afghanistan once again emerge as the epicenter of global jihad? The ground situation does not inspire much confidence in the ability of the still fragile Afghan state and its fledgling institutions to take on the onerous responsibilities of maintaining security and ensuring stability in the country. Uncertainty about the future is fuelling the anxiety in all stakeholders – the US and its allies who have spent money and spilled blood in Afghanistan, regional players who will have to bear the consequences of a destabilised and radicalised Afghanistan, and most of all, the anti-Taliban Afghans who dread a repeat of the Taliban era.

The drawdown plan, in a way, has put paid to the military gains made by the ‘surge’ and has created a climate of uncertainty that is making all players hedge their bets. The imperative of survival post ISAF withdrawal is in turn further undermining the efforts to bring security and stability in Afghanistan, something that was evident during the spectacular incidents of terrorism in 2011 – the assassination of Karzai’s half-brother, of the Mayor of Kandahar, and of the Chairman of the High Peace Council, Burhanuddin Rabbani, as well as the attack on the US embassy in Kabul. Another member of the

High Peace Council — Mullah Arsala Rahmani, a former Taliban minister who was an important go-between in potential peace talks, was assassinated in May this year thus complicating the issue further.

The future course of events in Afghanistan will depend critically on how the ANA and ANP shape up and whether or not they are able to assume, and discharge, the security responsibilities that will befall on them once the drawdown of ISAF troops is complete. Despite a tendency among many analysts to write off the ANA, the fact remains that there is an excellent chance of the ANA managing to fulfill the role envisaged for it, provided it continues to receive the necessary support in terms of money, material and training from the international community. Notwithstanding some glaring shortcomings in the ANA, none of which are insurmountable, the performance of the Afghan soldiers has been much better than expected.

### **Reconciliation and Political process**

Ultimately, there has to be a political solution and not a military one though a strong military action should have been able to bring the insurgents to the negotiating table. A negotiated outcome has the potential to usher in peace and stability in Afghanistan. However, a forced reconciliation is unlikely to lead to a sustainable peace. Further, reconciliation should not become a code word for surrender or handing over power to the Taliban. Currently, the ground realities – military, cultural, ideological and attitudinal – however militate against what is otherwise a very laudable objective. As things stand, none of the Afghan protagonists seem to be really keen on pursuing this course. The non-Pashtuns view the reconciliation process with great suspicion and consider it a Trojan horse to hand over Afghanistan to the Taliban. For their part, the Taliban have neither any incentive nor any compulsion and certainly very little trust in the reconciliation process which they see as a ploy to sow divisions in their movement. Further, the Taliban have not been defeated militarily; they have calculated that the time is on their side and playing the waiting game would be more beneficial to them. And they continue to receive support from across the Af-Pak border.

Despite efforts for a couple of years now, the reconciliation process has remained stalled. Except for some low level representation (not to mention embarrassing misrepresentation by one ‘negotiator’) there is little, if

anything, to show for the ‘reconciliation’ track. It is also difficult to say how opening of a Taliban office in Doha/Qatar would help the reconciliation process. While the US has facilitated opening up of the Taliban’s office in Doha, Afghan government has opened its own channel for talks to the Taliban through Saudi Arabia. It is well known that Pakistan’s interests would be better served with Saudi Arabia as the mediator. There is a history of close cooperation between the two and the establishments of both the countries generally identify with the conservative elements of the society.

Nevertheless, to cover all flanks, the ISI Chief Lt. Gen. Pasha was in Qatar in end December 2011 supposedly talking to the U.S. officials. The U.S., Karzai and Pakistan’s security establishment all want to be in the driving seat while negotiating with the Taliban; the objectives of each of these players are at odds with the other two. In the bargain, only the Taliban stands to benefit in the long run.

The assassination of Burhanuddin Rabbani has not gone down well with the non-Pashtuns. While non-Pashtuns and anti-Taliban forces might still pro forma participate in reconciliation talks, the chances of their actually putting faith and trust in the process are next to negligible. Notwithstanding lip-service being paid to the reconciliation process being Afghan-led and Afghan-owned, the fact remains it is neither.

Without ending malign external influences on the reconciliation process – either militarily or diplomatically (through the use of sanctions) – a peace process in Afghanistan will remain a pipedream. Reconciliation needs to be pursued as an Afghan led process, the Taliban’s willingness to abide by Constitution, renouncing of terrorism and giving up arms. The Istanbul Conference held in November 2011 and Bonn Conference II in December 2011 endorsed the above conditions including principle of non intervention but there is no enforcement mechanism to ensure these principles are practiced on the ground. The Chicago Summit was more concerned with the funding for security framework and ensuring long term commitment of NATO members and ISAF partners.



## Strategies and Operations

While the US and coalition strategies have been well articulated since Obama administration took over the Taliban strategy can largely be seen in the manner in which they have pursued their campaign in the last few years. Mullah Omar, ensconced in Quetta continues to guide the Taliban activities with the help of his sponsors i.e. the ISI. In beginning of January 2012, Mullah Omar appealed to the Pakistan Taliban and other groups to stop fighting the Pakistan Army and instead unite with the Afghan Taliban to fight foreign forces in Afghanistan. Earlier in July 2010, he had issued a five point directive to the Taliban; to fight coalition forces to the death; to capture or kill any Afghan who is supporting or working for Afghan government, including women who provide information to the Afghan government or the coalition; to actively recruit workers with access to coalition facilities; and to acquire more heavy weapons<sup>5</sup>. In the earlier directives he had ordered the Taliban to refrain from killing civilians.

As part of their overall strategy the Taliban has been targeting key officials of the Afghan government and vulnerable military and civilian installations. The key objective of the Taliban is to continue to expand their areas of influence and operations with a view to acquire a predominant position if and when negotiations take place.

It has been estimated that Afghan Taliba's strength is between 25,000 to 30,000 fighters with various degrees of commitment to the cause. Haqqani's network operating in the North-East Afghanistan with launch pads in North Waziristan Tribal agency of Pakistan has strength of about 3000 personnel while Hikmatyar Gulubdin's group is estimated to have 1000 fighters.

One of the major tactics employed by the Taliban is the use of IEDs; US military commanders have been increasingly concerned by the number of deaths caused by the use of IEDs. Year 2010 saw a considerable jump over the number of fatalities over 2009 due to IEDs. Year 2011 saw some decline yet the number of total fatalities (492) and the portion (252) of fatalities due to IEDs was quite large. According to the U.S. military the ingredients used for the IEDs come from across the border with Pakistan and that is one of the reasons why the U.S. Congress has frozen \$700m in aid to Pakistan

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<sup>5</sup> [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2010/07/mullah\\_omar\\_orders\\_t.php#ixzz1hvGYgnsQ](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2010/07/mullah_omar_orders_t.php#ixzz1hvGYgnsQ)

in December 2011 ‘until it gives assurances it is tackling the spread of homemade bombs in the region’<sup>6</sup>.

### IED Fatalities<sup>7</sup>

Period	IED	Total	Percentage
2001	0	4	0.00
2002	4	25	16.00
2003	3	26	11.54
2004	12	27	44.44
2005	20	73	27.40
2006	41	130	31.54
2007	78	184	42.39
2008	152	263	57.79
2009	275	451	60.98
2010	368	630	58.41
2011	252	492	51.22
2012	61	130	46.92

Other tactic used by the Taliban has been to increase the use of infiltrators into the ANSF and cause maximum casualties to both ANSF and coalition troops. Further, according to the Pentagon estimates there is a large core of the Taliban which remains loyal to the Taliban insurgency headed by Mullah Omar headquartered at Quetta. A leaked secret NATO report titled “State of the Taliban” of January 2012 has stated that Pakistan via its intelligence agency ISI, is "intimately involved" with the insurgency<sup>8</sup>. According to the BBC the report was based on material from 27,000 interrogations of more than 4,000 captured Taliban and Al-Qaeda operatives.

Further, a UN report on civilian casualties in Afghanistan indicates that 3,021 civilians were killed in 2011 which was 8 percent increase over the previous year. Of the fatalities recorded, 77 percent were caused by the insurgents despite their pledges to avoid causing civilian casualties. The UN

<sup>6</sup> “US Congress Panel Freezes \$700m worth of Pakistan aid” 13 December, 2011  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-16157631>

<sup>7</sup> See <http://icasualties.org/oef/>

<sup>8</sup> “Pakistan helping Afghan Taliban-Nato”, BBC News 01 February 2012, available at  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-16821218>

report believed that the fighting was worsening and that, for all the talk about peace efforts and a drastic increase in the number of insurgents that NATO had killed and captured day-to-day dangers for Afghan civilians were rising<sup>9</sup>.

### **U.S. Plans for 2012 and Beyond**

In an interview with The New York Times in December 2011, General Allen said that he expects more military trainers and mentors to come into Afghanistan to work with Afghan troops starting in 2012. Still more would arrive in 2013 as the Afghan security forces were asked to do more. Currently, most Afghan units are partners with NATO forces, and in a number of places the NATO troops still have a dominant role. The idea is that the gradual departure of NATO forces would be cushioned by some Western military support for the Afghan forces in the field. It needs to be remembered that President Obama had announced in June 2011 that ‘surge’ troops of 33,000 would be withdrawn in phases; 10,000 troops by end 2011 and additional 23,000 by end September 2012. Thus out of the total of about 100,000 or so troops it was planned to keep around 67,000 in Afghanistan. The manner and schedule of drawdown of the 67,000 troops had not been spelt out clearly though some military and political leaders have mentioned that such a drawdown would be at ‘steady pace’. Neither the US-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Agreement nor the Chicago Summit has specified the likely number of foreign troops staying beyond 2014 in Afghanistan. Chicago Summit has concluded that transition process is on track and would be concluded by the end of 2014. The Summit document on Afghanistan says ‘ISAF is gradually and responsibly drawing down its forces to complete its mission by 31 December 2014’<sup>10</sup>. However, strengthening of ANSF and funding for the same have been indicated; these are discussed in the succeeding pages.

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<sup>9</sup> UNAMA Report on Protection of Civilians in Afghanistan 2011 available at <http://unama.unmissions.org/Portals/UNAMA/Documents/2011%20Midyear%20POC.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> See Chicago Summit Declaration on Afghanistan available at [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_87595.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_87595.htm)

American Special Operations forces, which are heavily involved in many intelligence-driven raids as well as larger and often more dangerous operations, are expected to remain at current levels or increase even as conventional troops are reduced. Evidently, this is the counter-terrorism strategy which had been earlier proposed by Vice President Joe Bidden before the surge took place. ‘Surge’ involved more boots on the ground as part of the counter-insurgency strategy.

In the run up to the Chicago Summit, it was reported that the US troops may be ending their combat role in 2013, a year before than earlier planned. This had caused confusion among the allies; however, at the NATO Defence Ministers meeting Leon Panetta clarified that “American troops would not step back entirely from combat in Afghanistan next year”. He also hoped that “the A.N.S.F. forces will be ready to take the combat lead in all of Afghanistan sometime in 2013”<sup>11</sup>. Special Forces and military trainers will continue to support the ANSF efforts even after the ANSF take a lead role in combat operations. Yet, Panetta’s equivocal remarks had created apprehensions about the U.S. intentions. At the meeting the French proposed that all NATO nations fighting in Afghanistan should consider ending their combat roles in 2013 to give the Afghan forces more time to prepare for the departure of most foreign troops the next year. “We must not leave the most difficult for the end”. Such frequent changes in the US plans obviously do not inspire much confidence amongst the coalition partners and in the bargain help bolstering the morale of the Taliban and its supporters. However, for the time being the Chicago Summit has resolved to end the combat role of all coalition partners by end December 2014 and period till then has been termed as ‘transition period’. Yet, there is a certain degree of ambiguity in the Chicago Summit’s document on Afghanistan<sup>12</sup>.

### **Strengthening the ANSF**

The size of ANSF, especially ANA, is required to be determined based on internal as well as external threats to the country. One of the means to achieve the economic scale for the security forces would be to ensure that

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<sup>11</sup> Elisabeth Bumiller, “U.S. Will keep Fighting as the Afghan Troops Take The Lead Says Panetta”, *The New York Times*, February 2, 2012

<sup>12</sup> Chicago Summit’s document on Afghanistan says “As transition of security responsibility is completed at the end of 2014, NATO will have made the shift from a combat mission to a new training, advising and assistance mission, which will be of a different nature to the current ISAF mission”.

such threats, which essentially come from Pakistan based and supported insurgents, is reduced by regional and global initiatives.

In so far as the strength of ANSF is concerned a new target of 352,000 (195,000 ANA and 157,000 ANP) to be reached by November 2012 was set by the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board. Presently ANSF is growing and it roughly totals about 312,000 (175,000 ANA and 137, 000 ANP). Apparently, General Petraeus had recommended a size of 378,000. The Chicago Summit has indicated that *“the preliminary model for a future total ANSF size, defined by the International Community and the Government of Afghanistan, envisages a force of 228,500 with an estimated annual budget of US\$4.1billion, and will be reviewed regularly against the developing security environment”*<sup>13</sup>. Currently, the ANSF levels seem to have reached the figure of 352,000. NATO meet was also flexible in indicating that the pace and the size of a gradual managed force reduction from the ANSF surge peak to a sustainable level will be conditions-based and decided by the Afghan Government and the international community.

In any case, there is an immediate need to create/strengthen as well as institutionalize a cohesive security structure which should evolve policies regarding important questions such as ultimate force size, equipment as well as infrastructure expenditure. At the moment such vital decisions are being taken mostly on ad hoc basis. There is a requirement to further prepare Office of national Security Council (ONSC), an Afghan institution; capabilities and capacity as a lead coordinating body in charge of prioritizing security sector policies and expenditure. Established in 2002, it advises the President on security matters. It has, however, not been staffed with persons of requisite talent and further there is a reluctance on the part of president to allow it to evolve to its full potential.

The Afghan security forces are going to continue to depend upon international assistance for foreseeable future, there is a requirement to revamp the current organization called Combined Security Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A) led by the US which looks after funding, expansion and development programme for ANSF. While retaining its character and role, the US and NATO countries may consider converting this body into and an International Military Assistance Commission for Afghanistan and

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<sup>13</sup> See Chicago Summit Declaration on Afghanistan available at [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_87595.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_87595.htm)

reconstituting it to oversee the evolution of ANA into a more professional, trained and equipped army for at least next 10 to 15 years. This must, however, be done with explicit concurrence of Afghan government.

The regional dimensions as well as lack of resources impose serious limitations on ANA's ability to respond to threats on its own at present or in foreseeable future. It is unlikely for example that ANA would be able to confront the threat from terrorist safe havens in Pakistan's border area without significant assistance from US intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance assts in the region. In addition ANA just cannot afford a modern air force. U.S and NATO forces would be required to provide air cover for quite sometime to come.

The ultimate shape and composition of ANA would also require to be reassessed. At the moment it is predominantly an infantry force or a glorified "constabulary". Despite a clear recognition from a number of senior US/NATO officers of need for more balance between combat and specialized combat arms like armoured corps, artillery, engineers etc., no tangible action to address this issue has been taken so far.

Clearly, Afghanistan would not be in a position to bear the financial burden of a modern army for quite sometime to come and would require international support/grants for maintaining its security forces. Rough estimates come to USD 3 to 4 billion a year. This amount would be insignificant compared to savings that would accrue especially to the US after drawdown of their forces. NATO and ISAF nations would also have significant savings with the withdrawal of their combatants from Afghanistan. The Chicago Summit has resolved to garner US dollars 4.1 billion per year for the ANSF budget post-2014. Afghan government is expected to meet the expenditure of at least \$ 500 million annually on the ANSF. NATO nations have promised around \$1.3 billion annual contribution to the ANSF budget; the US would have to bear the major portion of the expenses with balance of the international community also chipping in. NATO has also envisaged that 'As the Afghan economy and the revenues of the Afghan government grow, Afghanistan's yearly share will increase progressively from at least US\$500m in 2015, with the aim that it can assume, no later than 2024, full financial responsibility for its own security forces'. This could be a tough call for the Afghan government.

As far as the human resource aspects are concerned the recruitment and retention policies as well as attracting suitably qualified, committed and educated individuals both in the ranks as well as in the officers' cadre would continue to pose difficulties. Given the low levels of education facilities in Afghanistan it is not surprising to find that approximately 70% of ANA is functionally illiterate. To mould them into an effective army would be a challenging task. There is also an essential imperative of having an ethnically diverse army. A rough estimate indicates that while the presence of Pashtuns at all levels corresponds to their general proportion of the population, Tajiks continue to dominate the officer and NCO ranks. In contrast, Hazaras, Uzbek and other minorities are significantly under represented. These discrepancies fuel factionalism and deepen politics of patronage.

The existing logistics systems are, to say the least ineffective, under developed and less than efficient. Insufficient logistics and supply chains often hinder operational effectiveness. This serious lacuna must be immediately addressed.

In their quest to have a modern army, Afghan legislature and executive must be assisted in adopting a comprehensive body of law or decrees to define army's role as well as its administrative structure. In November 2008, the lower house of parliament introduced draft legislation on reform, regulation for military personnel, including recruitment and hiring criteria and procedures, discipline/rewards mechanism as well as death and compensation packages etc. The assignment of ranks, transfers, benefits, leave, resignation, retirement and reserve status for NCOs and officers were also addressed. This draft is still pending in legislature and requires immediate attention.

### **Pakistan as a Factor**

Adding to an already complicated security and political situation is the Pakistani obsessive quest for 'strategic depth' in Afghanistan in its confrontation with India. In order to counter India's growing but also benign influence inside Afghanistan and to prepare against any eventuality that India might use Afghanistan to catch it in a pincer, Pakistan has been hand in glove with the terrorist networks like the Quetta Shura and its affiliated

organisation, Haqqani network, that are active in Afghanistan and other outfits linked to the Afghan Taliban which are active against India. In a sense, the Taliban by itself may not be so much a problem; but the support provided by Pakistan to them most certainly is.

Further and as mentioned earlier in the paper Pakistan and its security establishment have different and competing objectives in Afghanistan as compared to the US and coalition troops and the regional players as well. There have been any number of reports originating from the US and the Western sources which have highlighted the double game being played by Pakistan military and the ISI. Recent NATO report mentioned earlier has pointed out that "Pakistan's manipulation of the Taliban senior leadership continues unabatedly". It also says that Pakistan is aware of the locations of senior Taliban leaders and "Senior Taliban representatives, such as Nasiruddin Haqqani, maintain residences in the immediate vicinity of ISI headquarters in Islamabad." In first week of June Al Libi the Second-in-Command of Al Qaeda was killed in Northern Waziristan in a Drone strike by the US forces. Pakistan has been impervious to repeated appeals from the US and ISAF to take action against terrorist groups hiding in its territories. Such groups have taken a heavy toll of US, NATO and ISAF troops- at times aided and abetted by the ISI.

Elimination of Osama Bin Laden, drone strikes across Af-Pak border and increasing casualties of Pak regular troops has impacted US-Pak relations. Pakistan has closed NATO supply lines passing through its territory many times as a reprisal for Drone attacks/other type of military action across Af-Pak border wherein a number of Pak troops/civilians have been killed. The current closure has been the longest which was enforced in the wake of Salala post attack by the US forces in end November 2011 when 24 Pakistani troops were killed. Though Pakistan's President attended the Chicago Summit indicating that there might be some modus vivendi reached between the US/NATO and Pakistan the exorbitant demand of charging USD 5000 per truck and a demand for apology from the US on Salala has queered the pitch.

Pakistan continues to provide sanctuaries for the Taliban across the Durand Line to support Pakistan's strategic interests; it has no compunctions in supporting the Taliban. Pakistan's strategic establishment's long term view is that a positive outcome is unlikely for the US and coalition allies.



Considering the domestic political and fiscal compulsions combined with war fatigue Pakistan's military views that 'NATO & US may not be able to bring Afghanistan war to successful conclusion'. Eventually, foreign forces would have to leave and therefore Pakistan wants to be in the driving seat for the ensuing endgame. The overall strategic scenario which existed at the commencement of Afghan conflict in end 2001 has changed significantly; earlier Pakistan was forced to cooperate but now according to Pakistan military's view this equation has weakened over the decade.

### **India's Approach**

India shares the collective commitment of international community to build a peaceful, stable and prosperous Afghanistan. Principal objective is to build indigenous Afghan capacity and institutions covering all the sectors. Reconstruction and development programmes have been designed to support the priorities of Afghan government and people. India is also investing in mineral, industrial, agricultural and other sectors of Afghanistan to help build a sustainable economy. India is also in favour of promoting regional economic integration with Afghanistan as a hub. This has been endorsed by the regional summit on Afghanistan at Istanbul in early November 2011 and Bonn II Conference on Afghanistan in December 2011.

In October 2011, India and Afghanistan signed a Strategic Partnership Agreement. The key objective was to increase developmental aid to Afghanistan. India has agreed for training, equipping and capacity building of ANSF so that India could support the overall objective of ANSF to acquire sufficient capacity to deter and safeguard Afghanistan's interests against an onslaught of the Taliban. During the visit of Foreign Minister of Afghanistan to India an Indo-Afghan Partnership Council was set in motion to effectively implement the Strategic Partnership Agreement.

## Conclusion

The military aspects of Afghan situation are only a part of the comprehensive strategy needed to solve the Afghan imbroglio. The international community which has invested blood and treasure in Afghanistan for over one decade can not walk away suddenly without stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan. Indeed, military action is needed to bring the insurgents to the negotiating table but the pernicious influence of Pakistan military and ISI is preventing an Afghan solution to be reached in an acceptable time frame. Regional stakeholders are also not helping the matters much by pursuing their own narrow interests. A neutral Afghanistan which becomes a hub for regional trade and economic integration would be beneficial to all the stakeholders yet many stakeholders only pursuing their short term interests. Drawing down of coalition troops due to political compulsions and economic turn down has released its own dynamics. The Taliban have not been defeated and the coalition troops have not achieved a clear victory. And Pakistan continues to support the Taliban despite many remonstrations by the US and its allies. In the short term, it does not appear that there would necessarily be a positive outcome. The possibilities of a civil war can not be ruled out. Bringing Pakistan's military and ISI on the right path is a necessary condition for any positive outcome.



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