

## **EXTENSION OF US / NATO MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN AND ITS EFFECTS ON PAKISTAN & THE REGION**

**Imran Khan**

M.Phil scholar

International Relations

University of Balochistan, Quetta.

**Abdul Qadir**

Assistant Professor,

Department. of International Relations,

University of Balochistan, Quetta.

### **Abstract:**

*The research paper aims to find out the reasons for the continued presence of US troops in Afghanistan. Even though talks with the Taliban regime are continuing but the presence of US troops and hurdles in peace talks with Taliban have created an unstable situation in Afghanistan. The extension of US troops in Afghanistan and no possible solution to the war has deep repercussion for Pakistan and the region. The article focuses of US troops presence in Afghanistan and impact on Pakistan. The paper has mainly used secondary sources for the conduct of the study.*

**Keywords:** Afghanistan, NATO, Pakistan, Region, War

### **Introduction**

1. The Trump administration decision of increasing US troops levels in Afghanistan raises questions about US strategy in its Afghan War.

Apparently, after 18 years of continued war effort, US is nowhere near a solution. Stated objectives of latest US / NATO surge in Afghanistan are “to seek an honourable and enduring outcome...” and “political settlement”. However, there seems to be no clear thinking or will to push further towards political solution of the conflict. Consequently, it has resulted in lingering US / NATO presence along with ever increasing instability in the region with no end in sight. Such situation created suspicion among regional stakeholders i.e. Russia, China, Iran and Pakistan about real motives of continued foreign troops deployment in their backyard. Being one of the key stakeholders, Pakistan is confronting multi-faceted challenges. It demands Pakistan’s earnest effort to deal with the difficult internal situation while responding to evolving complex Afghan end game. Stability in Afghanistan has direct consequences on Pakistan’s internal and external security. Thus, there is a clear need to identify the effects of extension of US / NATO mission in Afghanistan and its effects on Pakistan and the Region so as to proffer viable recommendations to formulate future course of action.

### **Aim**

2. To carry out an in-depth analysis of extension of US / NATO mission in Afghanistan and its consequent effects on Pakistan in particular and the region in general with a view to proffer viable recommendations.

### **Research Questions**

3. This study tries to answer following research questions: -
- a. What are the overall US objectives in Afghanistan and reasons of US / NATO extension?
  - b. What are the interests of major players in Afghanistan and perceptions about latest extension?

- c. What effects this latest extension will have on Pakistan and the Region?

### **Research Methodology**

4. A mixture of Qualitative and Quantitative method of research has been chosen for this study. Experimental methods of study were not suitable as they required actual field experience. In this study, different types of previous research studies were consulted to draw conclusion based on the known facts.

### **Scope**

5. The paper will restrict the research to following dimensions in given sequence: -

- a. Overview of Afghan War & current situation.
- b. US war objectives and reasons of US / NATO extension.
- c. Interests / Perceptions of major players in Afghanistan.
- d. Likely effects on Pakistan and the Region.
- e. Way forward for Pakistan.

### **Overview of Afghan War & Current Situation**

#### **6. US Invasion and Toppling of Taliban Government**

- a. **October 7, 2001** – Initiating Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), US and coalition troops started attacks on Taliban and al Qaeda hideouts inside Afghanistan.
- b. **November 13, 2001** - US airstrikes and ground attacks by the anti-Taliban Afghan Northern Alliance led to the fall of Kabul.
- c. **December 2-5, 2001** - The United Nations hosts the Bonn Conference in Germany. The resulting Bonn Agreement creates an Afghan Interim Authority and outlines a process

for creating a new constitution and choosing a new government. It also authorized creation of Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP).

- d. **December 7, 2001** – Kandahar, the city from which the Taliban movement started fell to the coalition forces.
- e. **December 20, 2001** - International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was given authority by United Nations to give security to the Afghans. The UK began to lead the force in the beginning.
- f. **December 22, 2001** - Hamid Karzai is chosen to lead the power sharing government in Afghanistan.
- g. **June 13, 2002** – The grand council, a gathering of Afghanistan's tribal leaders elects Hamid Karzai as president for two years.

7. **Takeover by NATO** . On August 9, 2003, NATO assumed responsibility for the ISAF mission. There were more than 26,000 coalition troops from twenty-five countries in Afghanistan, according to CENTCOM. The United States had roughly 20,000 troops in the country, with plans to draw down to about 16,000 by the end 2003. There were also some 7,500 coalition troops from allied nations. ISAF had about 12,000 forces in Afghanistan, with plans to increase to 20,000 by the end of the year 2003.

8. **Conversion of ISAF / OEF into RSM / OFS.** In December 2014, ISAF formally handed over security responsibilities to Afghan Forces. Resolute Support Mission, a NATO-led train, advise and assist mission consisting of over 13,000 troops in Afghanistan, began on January

1, 2015. For counter terrorism effort after termination of ISAF, US launched Operation Freedom's Sentinel parallel with formulation of RSM.

9. **Taliban Resurgence**

- a. During 2009 the Taliban regained control over the countryside of several Afghan provinces. During 2010, the Taliban were ousted from parts of Helmand Province by the ISAF Operation Moshtarak. In the meantime, the Taliban insurgency spread to the northern provinces of the country. The new policy of the Taliban was to shift from the south to the north, to show they exist "everywhere".
- b. 2015 saw the Taliban make various gains in Afghanistan in an attempt to fracture the fledgling Afghan government with success. The most prominent among these are Kunduz and Helmand offensives. Upcoming years saw a deadly surge in Taliban activities and their control improving in Afghanistan.

10. **Current Deployment**

- a. **NATO.** NATO Forces in Afghanistan comprised over 17,000 troops from 39 partner countries including United States. Currently, RSM operates with one central hub (in Kabul/Bagram) and four spokes in Mazar-e Sharif, Herat, Kandahar and Laghman (Nato, 2019). The deployment of NATO commands along with detailed breakdown of forces shown in figures below: -

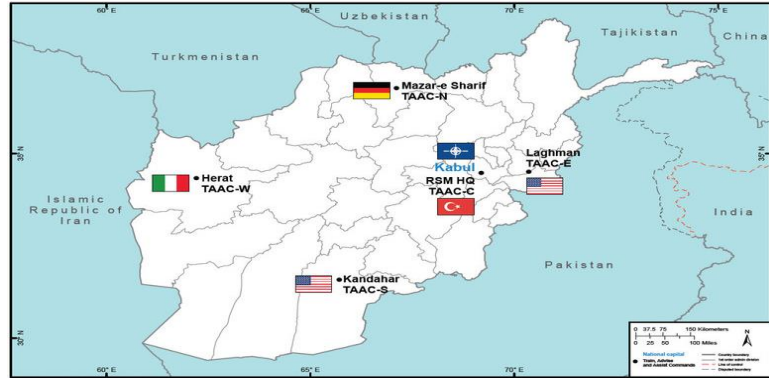


Figure - 1

	Albania	135		Germany	1,300		Portugal	193
	Armenia	121		Greece	12		Romania	733
	Australia	300		Hungary	93		Slovakia	36
	Austria	17		Iceland	3		Slovenia	8
	Azerbaijan	120		Italy	895		Spain	67
	Belgium	82		Latvia	42		Sweden	29
	Bosnia-Herzegovina	63		Lithuania	50		North Macedonia	47
	Bulgaria	159		Luxembourg	2		Turkey	593
	Croatia	106		Mongolia	233		Ukraine	16
	Czech Republic	357		Montenegro	29		United Kingdom	1,100
	Denmark	155		Netherlands	160		United States	8,475
	Estonia	39		New Zealand	13			
	Finland	24		Norway	54			
	Georgia	870		Poland	303			
						<b>Total</b>		<b>17,034</b>

Figure – 2

- b. **US.** As per latest strategy, US sent over 3,000 additional troops to Afghanistan in September 2017 thus bringing the total number of U.S. forces in Afghanistan to more than 14,000. These forces are distributed between the NATO's RSM and Operation Freedom Sentinel. US has following bases presently in Afghanistan: -

- (1) Bagram Airbase (Parvan Province)
- (2) Shindand Airbase (Herat Province) – Shared base
- (3) Kandhar Airport (Kandhar Province)
- (4) Camp Dwyer Marine Base (Helmand Province)
- (5) Camp Leatherneck Marine (Helmand Province)

- (6) FOB Delaram Marine Corps Base (Nimroz Province)

11. **Control of Areas.** About 56 percent of the country is under the control of Afghan government. However, independent sources contest this claim, citing a much lower figure.

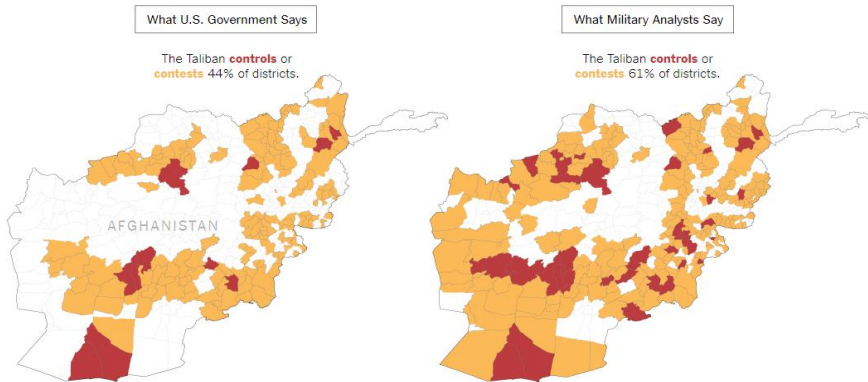


Figure - 3

## 12. Legal Dimension

a. **SOFA.** The NATO presence in Afghanistan is provided legal status by a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), which came into existence on January 1, 2015. The SOFA gave the terms and conditions under which NATO forces will be stationed in Afghanistan.

- (1) The agreement was signed on 16 December, 2014 by NATO Senior Civilian Representative and Afghan National Security Advisor.
- (2) It will remain enforced till 2024.
- (3) This Agreement can be terminated by mutual written agreement or by either party upon two

years' written notice to the other party through diplomatic channels.

b. **BSA.** In late September 2014 Ashraf Ghani was inaugurated as president and immediately signed the Bilateral Security Agreement, which authorized an international force of approximately 13,000 to remain in the country. Cardinals of the said agreement are as under: -

- (1) On January 1, 2015 the BSA came into existence and remains in force "until the end of 2024 and beyond" unless it is ended by either side with two years' notice.
- (2) The BSA is to "enhance the ability of Afghanistan to deter internal and external threats against its sovereignty."
- (3) The BSA is not a "defence pact which would commit the United States to defending Afghanistan if it were attacked by another state".
- (4) The BSA authorizes "U.S. forces to maintain existing facilities and undertake new constructions so long as they are agreed upon by both sides".

### 13. **Peace Endeavours**

a. In 2011, US diplomats held their first meetings with Taliban. An agreement to reopen the Taliban office in Qatar (first opened in June 2013 and closed shortly thereafter under U.S. pressure) also was reached in 2014, and that office remains the Taliban's sole official representation.



- b. Murree Peace Process started in July 2015. The QCG members and Taliban participated in talks. However, due to news of Mullah Omar's death and subsequent struggle for succession in the Taliban leadership lead to failure of talks.
- c. In June 2017, Afghan Government launched the Kabul Process on Peace and Security, the first Afghan-led forum to work toward a negotiated settlement. President Ghani offered direct talks with the Taliban "without preconditions" and proposed confidence-building measures. However, Taliban refused to talk with Afghan Government terming it as US puppet. Instead they showed willingness to directly negotiate with US.
- d. Under Zalmay Khalilzad, the 1<sup>st</sup> round of peace talks started in Dec 2018, in UAE. Saudi Arabia, UAE and Pakistan along with Taliban and Afghan Government negotiators also participated in these talks. The three-day talks are viewed as a crucial step to begin peace talks.
- e. In February 2019, Russia hosted talks between the Taliban and Afghan High Peace Council at Moscow aimed at holding comprehensive discussion on finding a peaceful solution for Afghanistan. Afghan Government did not participate in these talks.
- f. In March 2019 at Qatar, nearly two weeks of talks produced two draft agreements between the Taliban and the U.S. government on a withdrawal timeline and effective counterterrorism measures.

#### 14. **Cost of War**

- a. Afghanistan has costed the U.S. \$1.07 trillion since 2001. As of 5 August 2018, there have been 3,458 coalition deaths in Afghanistan as part of ongoing coalition operations since 2001.
- b. Over 31,000 afghan civilian deaths due to war-related violence have been documented.
- c. Pakistan suffered 75,000 casualties in this war and suffered a loss of over 123 billion dollars to its economy till end of 2017.

15. **Impressions about War and Current Situation.** Only about 1/3 of Americans think that it is a success. The country also appears to be divided over whether it was a good idea to use military force at all. Majority of populations “wants the United States to pull troops out of the country, and would like their leaders to exercise more restraint when it comes to getting involved in conflicts around the world”. In Afghanistan, public is weary of deteriorating security situation and inability of Afghan Government for provision of basic utilities / public services.

#### **US War Objectives and Reasons of US / NATO Extension**

16. **US War Objectives.** U.S. military intervention in Afghanistan was intended to decimate Al-Qaeda and its protectors “in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations, or persons” ( Vladeck, 2018). This aim had originally mandated the defeat of the Taliban, but as success on this count proved elusive, U.S. strategy evolved by 2010 to focus on transitioning the conflict’s resolution to be an Afghan responsibility, with Washington

underwriting its financial costs. “Given Afghanistan’s poor infrastructure, its weaknesses in state capacity, and the intensity of the insurgency, the other initial aim of stabilizing Afghanistan—through robust economic development and transformed governance - was increasingly seen as infeasible by the beginning of Obama’s second term” (Tellis & Eggers, 2017). The BSA signed in 2014, reaffirmed US-Afghan commitment to strengthen long-term strategic cooperation in areas of mutual interest, including: advancing peace, security, and stability, strengthening state institutions, supporting Afghanistan’s long-term economic and social development, and encouraging regional cooperation.

17. **Operation Freedom Sentinel.** After termination of Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Freedom Sentinel was launched with two complementary missions: -

- a. “U.S. counterterrorism mission against al Qaeda, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria-Khorasan, and their affiliates in Afghanistan”.
- b. “U.S. military participation in the NATO-led Resolute Support mission to develop the capacity of the Afghan security ministries and to train, advise, and assist Afghan security forces”.

18. **US National Security Strategy 2017.** President Donald Trump thus inherited a U.S. policy towards Afghanistan that was focused on building Afghan security forces while maintaining a modest unilateral counterterrorism capability against transnational threats. One pillar of Trump’s strategy in Afghanistan was “the integration of all instruments of American power-diplomatic, economic, and military- towards a successful outcome.” Its focus is to end the conflict on terms acceptable to the Afghan

people and their international partners; its aim is to preserve the achievements in Afghanistan that, first and foremost, contribute to American security.

#### 19. **NATO Objectives**

- a. **ISAF.** ISAF's primary objective was to enable the Afghan government to provide effective security across the country and develop new Afghan security forces to ensure Afghanistan would never again become a safe haven for terrorists. In support of the Afghan government, ISAF assisted the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) in the conduct of security operations throughout the country, helping to reduce the capability of the insurgency. An important priority for ISAF was to increase the capacity and capabilities of the Afghan forces. This became the focus of the mission from 2011 onwards, as responsibility for security was progressively transitioned to Afghan lead.
- b. **RSM.** Resolute Support Msn was launched to provide training, advice and assistance to the Afghan security forces and institutions. The Resolute Support Mission works closely with different elements of the Afghan army, police and air force. Key functions include: -
  - (1) Supporting planning, programming and budgeting.
  - (2) Assuring transparency, accountability and oversight.
  - (3) Supporting the adherence to the principles of rule of law and good governance.

- (4) Supporting the establishment and sustainment of such processes as force generation, recruiting, training, managing and development of personnel.

20. **Reasons for Extension of US/ NATO Mission in Afghanistan**

- a. **Deficiencies in Security Sector.** Security reforms and reconstruction projects undertaken by the Alliance have not achieved desired outcomes (Sajid, 2011). US / NATO operations made an effort to stabilize the situation in troubled areas but Afghan forces failed to hold the cleared areas especially in Southern and Eastern regions. Despite the large number of ANA and ANP, security and reconstruction could not be achieved. The reason behind the failure of an effective ANA and ANP is that both are under armed, inefficient, oppressive and corrupt. Consequently, NATO had to share more burden of providing security as well as development and reconstruction reforms.
- b. **Taliban Resurgence.** An inevitable outcome of the ineffective NATO-led coalition is the Taliban's resurgence. Time has been a significant factor in this regard, which provides Taliban the opportunity to reorganize and adapt. Even with superior technology, the allied forces were unable to counter Taliban tactics who adopted innovation to overcome technological differential. Suicide bombing has increasingly been used by Taliban causing considerable losses to men and material for the allied forces. To counter, allied forces used air power to confirm alliance's victory.

However, these aerial bombing resulted in collateral damage and created resentments among public towards NATO forces.

c. **Incompetent Leadership and Governance Constraints.**

The Major challenge at domestic level, which is the main source of concern, is leadership crisis and governance constraints. Although necessary steps have been taken towards building a stable political structure for the country but performance of judiciary, parliament and presidential bodies is not satisfactory. The Afghan Government is unable to extend its control beyond Kabul, especially in Eastern and Southern parts, which still remains troubled areas being contested with Taliban.

21. **US Intent in Afghanistan – Key Takeaways.** Ups and downs in US strategy towards Afghanistan indicate that there is no exit plan. However, the most crucial cardinal in US strategy appears to be a semblance of stability in Afghanistan and thus a face saving for World's sole super power at the end of the hostilities. Apparently, US is also concerned about space for other extremist groups i.e. ISIS inside Afghanistan. BSA indicates US desire for medium to long term presence in Afghanistan to counter re-emergence of threats and geo-political reasons. However, responsibility of continuous US/ NATO failures in Afghanistan has expectedly once again fallen on Pakistani shoulders when President Trump stated that Pakistan is "safe haven" for terrorists of Afghanistan. Hence, the current US approach is: -

- a. The mission be based on current security conditions instead of timetables of withdrawal.

- b. The extension will be a combination of all US instruments of power i.e. military, diplomatic and economic.
- c. Consistently asking Pakistan to do more on terrorists' safe havens poses serious challenges to the region and beyond.
- d. Strengthening partnership with India for involvement.
- e. Expanding the US authority to target the terrorists and their networks.
- f. Initiatives to cut a deal with Taliban for cessation of hostilities and mainstreaming the Taliban.

### **Interests / Perceptions of Major Players**

22. “Afghan political elites have concerns over dissolving regional consensus on Afghanistan, with powers like China, Iran, and Russia beginning to hedge against perceptions of an ascendant Taliban. Pakistan continues to believe that only a negotiated settlement between the Taliban and the Afghan government will end the war in Afghanistan, since it has no faith that the United States will muster the commitment and resources to defeat the insurgency militarily” (Tellis & Eggers, 2017). An understanding of these interests and perceptions, especially their relative importance to the parties, and whether they converge or diverge, should inform any future efforts to resolve or mitigate the conflict.

#### **a. Afghanistan**

- (1) The foremost interest of the Afghan government, is in preserving political, economic and military power. Other interests are as under: -
  - (a) “It has a vital interest in upholding government authority, containing the insurgency, seeks sufficient stability for

mineral extraction and requires robust security forces.

- (b) Consolidating and expanding power is the central interest of leaders from northern, as well as central and western Afghanistan.
  - (c) They want greater influence over national and local level political decision making, secure access to resources and economic rents, the decentralization of power and a more representative electoral system.
  - (d) They have a clear interest in seeing the Taliban subdued or at least contained and if negotiations with the Taliban take place, they want a seat at the table” (Waldman & Wright, 2018).
- (2) On latest extension, Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani thanked President Trump and the American people appreciating US commitment to Afghanistan. It was expected that there will be an increase in training, advising and assisting Afghan security forces as well as the country's air force and special forces. In Afghan Government view, implementation of Trump's strategy will help stabilise the region.
- (3) **Afghan Taliban.** “As a composite movement, the Taliban’s interests vary. However, most Talibs share an interest in the withdrawal of foreign troops,



the establishment of a strict ‘Islamic system’, and action against corruption. The Taliban has a clear interest in acquiring a measure of power especially in justice, religious affairs, anti-corruption, social affairs and education – but may conditionally be prepared to enter into a political settlement. As per Taliban, latest surge will have no effect on their operations and population support enjoyed by them” (Waldman & Wright, 2018).

- (4) **Afghan Population.** “The Afghan population’s interests vary immensely but they have an interest in peace and security. They want to live, work, travel and go about their lives in safety and a desire to end the conflict. Given the widespread abuse of power, corruption and impunity, most Afghans want to see fair and inclusive government, professional policing and the effective administration of justice. Given widespread poverty, Afghans have an interest in continuing international assistance and a functional government that provides essential services, especially in health and education” (Waldman & Wright, 2018).

b. **Pakistan**

- (1) Pakistan interest lies in peaceful and stable Afghanistan. Other interests can be as under: -
- (a) “Maintain influence in Afghanistan and preventing the emergence of Indian aligned government in Kabul”.

- (b) “Pakistani leaders have long perceived a threat from India, deriving from successive conflicts, and seek to deny India the ability to use Afghanistan as a base for threatening or destabilizing Pakistan”.
    - (c) “Leadership in Pakistan are increasingly concerned about the use of Afghanistan as a sanctuary by enemies of Pakistan, including the Pakistani Taliban and Baloch militants”.
  - (2) According to Pakistan blistering criticism by US President Donald Trump was "disappointing" and denied accusations of supporting terrorist groups. As per Pakistan, there is no military solution to Afghan Problem and solution lies in Afghan owned and Afghan led peace process.
- c. **US.** “Despite internal differences, the paramount interest of the United States is ensuring that Afghanistan does not revert to being a safe haven for extremists who seek to target American or Western interests” (Ali).
  - (1) US has sought to build a functional Afghan government and substantial national security forces, seen as necessary to contain the Taliban and avoid full-scale civil war.
  - (2) For both security and reputational reasons, it has an interest in a successful Afghan political and security transition.

- (3) US officials see an interest in keeping the presence of troops in Afghanistan to facilitate their efforts to reach Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA).

d. **United Kingdom and US Allies**

- (1) The US has a range of important European and international allies in Afghanistan. Their interests are as under: -

- (a) The interests of UK have mirrored those of the US, in containing extremism and avoiding the spread of instability to Pakistan.

- (b) The demonstration of support for its most important ally, the United States as has been for many other NATO troop contributors.

- (c) Minimizing inflow of Afghan refugees in Europe.

- (2) Though European Allies were supportive of US decision to increase troops level. However, there were calls to consult with Europe on how to make Afghanistan "more peaceful and more secure" So as people from Afghanistan don't have to flee to Europe. They view further migration destabilising not just Afghanistan but also Europe.

- e. **Iran.** "Iran has a strong interest in having a friendly, stable government in Kabul. However, given uncertainty about Afghanistan's future, and multiple sources of Iranian foreign policy, Iran is hedging its bets: it is not only

cultivating allies in Kabul and maintaining good relations with northern factions, but is also giving limited support to the Taliban” (Waldman & Wrigfht, 2018).

- (1) Iran’s geostrategic interest is in expediting the complete US military withdrawal from Afghanistan.
- (2) “No interest in seeing the ascendancy of the Saudi Arabia linked Sunni Taliban nor in escalating the conflict as either scenario could threaten Iran’s cultural and economic interests in west and southwest Afghanistan being home to Hazaras.
- (3) Strong interest in combating extremism and in cross border cooperation with Afghanistan, especially on narcotics and migration.
- (4) Iran has a strategic interest in complete withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan. However, Iran may also like to keep US embroiled in Afghanistan so as to keep avoiding anger of US militarily” (Ali).

f. **India.** “India blames the perpetuation of the Afghan conflict entirely on Pakistan’s uncompromising support for the Taliban. In New Delhi’s eyes, the Taliban may represent a genuine Afghan protest against the Kabul central government but its endurance is entirely due to Pakistani support that is intended to coerce Afghanistan” (Tellis & Eggers, 2017).

- (1) In Indian view even as Rawalpindi plays a double game with the United States by accepting US

assistance in targeting transnational terrorism while effectively shielding the Taliban.

- (2) Indian officials see an alliance with Kabul as a means of gaining regional advantage over their rival Pakistan.
- (3) India Having historical ties to Afghanistan's northern groups, and seeing the Afghan Taliban as a geopolitical instrument of Pakistan and Pakistan as the driver of anti-Indian militancy – India is staunchly anti-Taliban.

g. **China.** “Reflecting its increasing demand for raw materials, China has mineral-related interests in Afghanistan, especially the copper and oil concession. China also wants to avoid spill over from the Afghanistan conflict, and to avoid the possibility of Uighur militants from neighbouring Xinjiang gaining refuge in Afghanistan” (Waldman & Wright, 2018).

- (1) Over the longer term, China has an interest in expanding its geopolitical influence in Central Asia, especially as the Western presence recedes, and in averting any confrontation between India and Pakistan.
- (2) China doesn't want the permanent US presence in Afghanistan; However, she also doesn't want US to end Afghanistan mission abruptly.

- (3) China wants stability and negotiated settlement which requires gradual drawdown of US forces.
  - (4) China is wary of US containment of China policy and is firmly against any increase of troops in Afghanistan. China was also supportive of Pakistan for its counter terrorism efforts in the wake Trump's tirade against Pakistan.
- h. **Russia.** Given increased rivalry between Russia and the US as a result of the crises in Syria and Ukraine, Russia sees Afghanistan as an arena where it could enhance its influence at the West's expense.
- (1) "Despite having concerns about the spread of Islamic militancy and narcotics trafficking, Russia does not want the West to abandon Afghanistan to its fate. It has strengthened diplomatic relations with Kabul, planning major reconstruction efforts, and may eventually invest in oil and gas.
  - (2) Mindful of the Soviet and American experience in Afghanistan, Russia is likely to expand its presence in the country in collaboration with China and its Central Asian allies.
  - (3) Russia does not believe that Trump's new strategy on Afghanistan will lead to any significant positive changes in the country" (Waldman & Wight, 2018).

23. **Convergence / Divergence of Interests**

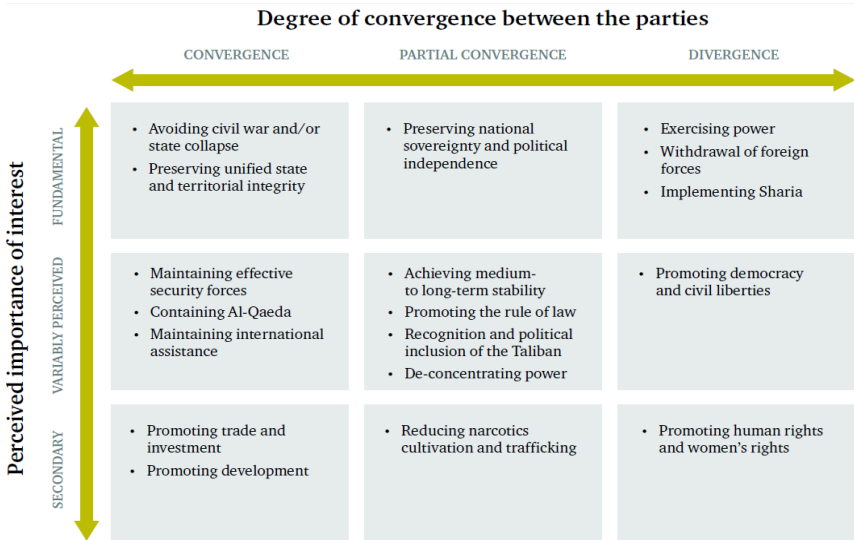


Figure - 4

**Effects on Pakistan & the Region**

24. **Pakistan.** Extension of NATO Mission in Afghanistan is likely to impact Pakistan both positively and negatively. This stems from the fact that instability in Afghanistan has already costed Pakistan profoundly and with continued presence of foreign troops it may linger on till the success of peace talks / consolidation of Afghan National Defense Forces (ANDF) control in the entire country. Few of the important aspects are highlighted below: -

a. **Effect on Pakistan Brokered US-Taliban Peace Talks.**

Pakistan has been playing an active role in renewed US-Taliban Peace Talks, in which substantial progress has been made in the last round held at Doha in March 2019. In case, of extension of NATO Mission at least till 2020 and beyond (which is in the current mandate), the peace talks are likely to be at a stalemate which is against the primary

demand of Taliban of abrupt withdrawal (within five-six months) of US led NATO troops, thus, undermining the role of Pakistan and ultimately causing surge in Taliban attacks in Afghanistan.

- b. **Blame Game.** Although US had extended herself to Pakistani authorities for assistance, yet in case, Afghan Peace talks fail, Pakistan will have to bear the blame, which has been the US stance since the beginning. Thus, strained relations of Pakistan-US and Pakistan-Afghanistan is expected, creating instability in the region.
- c. **Increased Indian Role.** The Indian Role in Afghanistan is likely to increase with the extension on NATO mission as the US has given greater space to India according to 'Trump's' New South Asia Policy'. India has been using Afghan soil through sub-nationalist Balochis and terrorist organizations for creating instability and sabotage all over Pakistan. This is a concern for Pakistan for which appropriate steps need to be highlighted at diplomatic and political level with the US.
- d. **Violation of Sovereignty by US Drone Strikes.** With the extension of NATO Mission, a serious security concern for Pakistan is the violation of sovereignty of Pakistan by drone attacks which US has been carrying out in erstwhile FATA and Balochistan. Though such strikes killed many terrorists but also resulted in casualties of innocent people and children. Pakistan always protested against such strikes at different world forums. Since 2004 till 2018, 408 drone



attacks were carried out killing 2,806 people while injuring another 353. These events not only created anti-US sentiments amongst the locals but also made the writ of Pakistani government and credibility of government orgs including armed forces doubtful amongst locals with a feeling that government has failed to protect its population.

- e. **Security Situation in Border Areas.** Though instability is still there with the presence of NATO troops, but they need more time to train, advise and assist ANDF, to bring them at some par for gaining control over ground and carrying out operations independently. Thus, extension of NATO mission may stabilize security situation in Afghanistan and ultimately border areas of Pakistan. However, in case of total collapse of peace talks, security situation may worsen.
- f. **Inflow of Violence.** The extension of NATO mission, primarily for increasing the capacity building of Afghan Security Forces, is likely to consolidate hold on ground in Afghanistan with in next three years. This will help in reduction of inflow of violence towards Pakistan. However, in case of security situation worsens, inflow of violence may increase. Inflow of violence will also be contingent upon foreign support to terrorists operating side Pakistan.
- g. **Issue of Refugees.** With the help of extension of US led NATO mission for increasing capability of Afghan Security Force and development of understanding with Taliban in the peace talks, the security situation might

improve in the next two to three years. Thus, paving way for the partial return back of Afghan refugees. However, with increase in fighting with Taliban, additional refugees are likely to enter Pakistan thus straining the already struggling economy.

- h. **Resumption of US Security Assistance Aid.** In January 2018, President Trump suspended the security assistance and aid, worth \$255 Million annually to Pakistan on the pretext of inability of Islamabad to take action against Taliban and Haqqani network. The active role of Pakistan in current US-Taliban peace talks and extension of NATO mission timeframe, provides Pakistan an opportunity for negotiating resumption of suspended aid.
- i. **Economic Impact.** Pakistan has been supporting US / NATO forces through GLOCs which costed Pakistan in terms of infrastructure. With extension of mission, such losses will likely continue.

## 25. Region

### a. **Afghanistan**

- (1) **Impact on ongoing Peace Process.** US continuous stance on extension of NATO Mission is against the primary demand of Afghan Taliban in the peace talks. In case, of disagreement over the timeline of withdrawal of troops, peace talks are likely to be sabotaged and Taliban are likely to increase their attacks against Afghan / NATO forces.

- (2) **Semblance of Political Stability.** The Afghan National Unity Government under President Ashraf Ghani is weak and corrupt. Currently, it is struggling to provide security and basic civic facilities to Afghan People. With increase in NATO troops, this Government is likely to exploit the situation to its own advantage specially if some achievements in security sectors can be realized. With additional financial support, it may be able to improve civic facilities at some places provided issue of corruption is handled effectively.
- (3) **Reduced Space for ISIS.** Lawlessness coupled with poor governance is always a breeding ground for extremism and consequently terrorism. After being largely defeated in Middle East, ISIS is on the run for geo space and may find refuge in ungovernable parts of Afghanistan. Keeping in view differences between ISIS and Taliban, the extension of mission coupled with capacity building of Afghan Forces will deny any operating space to ISIS to a large extent.
- (4) **Economic Survival.** Afghanistan is totally dependent upon foreign aid through US, UN and allied countries for her budget. Approximately 20 percent of budget is contributed by Afghan Government and rest by US and allies. In case, of extension of mission, this aid is likely to prevail till

the generation of funds through trade, taxation and foreign investment.

- (5) **Drug trafficking.** Afghanistan being the largest producer of opium (90%) has the negative effect in terms of drug trafficking and drug addiction. With continued instability, opium production is continuously on rise every year and remains a source of concern for neighbouring countries.
- b. **India.** Indian wants to emerge as regional power for which its role in Afghanistan is quite significant. With the ongoing US mission, India would continue using Afghanistan as an intelligence base against Pakistan. It would utilize its consulates for Baloch separatists, TTP and other terrorist outfits in Pakistan. India is already assisting in training of ANSF and Afghan Police. Moreover, over the last decade India has developed significant infrastructure in Afghanistan. Now India is in the process of establishing trade routes through Afghanistan to exploit the CARs.
- c. **Iran.** Iran is strongly against the presence of NATO troops in Afghanistan due to her strained relations with the US. Extension of mission is likely to further cement the Iranian idea of covert support to Taliban so as to hurt US where possible. Exposure of such acts may also risk deteriorating regional situation with respect to US and Iran.
- d. **CARs and Russia.** Russian wants a peaceful and gradual withdrawal of NATO troops until Afghan Security Forces are capable enough to take charge. However, latest

extension is not in line with Russian policy. Hence, Russia will try to counter it geopolitically by supporting Peace Process and thus providing an alternative regional political support to Taliban. has been actively engaging Afghan Taliban to bring them in mainstream of Afghanistan. Security and Economic interests of Russia are contingent upon stability which can be sought through involvement of Taliban in formal / informal peace initiatives.

- e. **China.** With the extension of NATO mission, semblance of stability may return in some parts of Afghanistan and China is likely to exploit such achievement to provide protection to Chinese interests. However, NATO extension is not in line with regional aims of China and hence, China is strictly, against the permanent bases / lingering presence of US in Afghanistan and likely to support the peace initiatives envisioning political power sharing and withdrawal of foreign troops.

### **Way Forward for Pakistan**

26. The ongoing US war effort in Afghanistan is seriously lacking positives with no end in sight. Huge cost of war has been paid by both Afghanistan and Pakistan as a consequence of US Afghan War. It is in supreme interest of Pakistan that Afghanistan situation be resolved through a long-lasting sustainable process which is not possible without contribution of joint efforts by all stake holders. To this context, the recommendations are proffered in subsequent paragraphs.

27. **Afghan Peace Process.** Afghan owned and Afghan led Peace process should be pursued through a comprehensive dialogue taking all

stake holders on board towards a common cause is the recommended way forward. The proposed methodology is ensued as under: -

- a. Cessation of hostilities with immediate effect across the country to bring security, stability and allowing peace a full chance.
- b. **Peace Talks**
  - (1) Peace talks should be held with more frequency for formulating a cohesive way forward.
  - (2) Flexibility from the previous rigid stances has to be adopted by US by allowing the role of Taliban. On the other hand, Taliban should also let go on their standpoint by allowing US presence and imposition of Shariah.
  - (3) US should influence Afghan government and India for ensuring that no interference of any sort is made to sabotage this peace effort.
  - (4) Pakistan along with other regional players should participate and accept each other's role for persuading towards one common objective.
- c. Absolutely fair elections under monitoring and supervision of UN and OIC should be conducted for letting the Afghan people to decide their leaders.
- d. Full support and assistance be extended by the international community to elected government and everyone should give time for the building process to take its course.

## 28. **Pak Afghan Relations**

- a. Relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan are preoccupied by a trust deficit and a practice of interfering in each other's' affairs. A fluid foreign policy should be ensured for swift adaptation and using appropriate forums for significantly shaping global opinion in favour of maintaining cordial relations.
- b. Both sides should encourage economic cooperation, mitigating the humanitarian situation of refugees and displaced people, and jointly addressing commonly-held misperceptions and stereotypes.
- c. **Engagement with Afghanistan National Unity Government (NUG).** Pakistan must take NUG on board/ confidence about Pakistan's role in peace talks under going in Doha and UAE between US Special Envoy to Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad and Taliban leadership in assistance of Saudi Arabia, UAE and Pakistan.
- d. **Expand Diplomatic Reach in Non – Pashtun Areas of Afghanistan.** Pakistan must expand its diplomatic reach to others areas in Afghanistan by opening additional consulates in non-Pashtun areas as well to curtail growing Indian influence and curbing anti Pakistan sentiments provoked by India and other elements in Afghan Government.
- e. Shape relations through amplified exchanges at all levels i.e. political, cultural and commercial. Regular and increased visits of business, cultural, educational /

scientific, parliamentary delegations, and programmes for scholarships / training in multiple fields.

f. **Common Objectives.** Afghanistan and Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APPAPS) has been successful framework which needs to be further expanded through following measures for addressing mutual concerns: -

- (1) Eliminating terrorism and achieving stability in region.
- (2) Prosperity and development of the people of the two countries.
- (3) Offer assistance for improving upon socio economic index.

g. **Formulation of a Trade Policy.** Pakistan should enforce the already formulated trade policy (APTTA), further aimed at easing the move of goods and explored minerals from Afghanistan. This will not only boost the relations; rather own economy will also be strengthened.

h. **Refugees.** Pakistan and Afghanistan should evolve a phased program for settlement of the Afghan refugees. Few suggestions to this effect are as under: -

- (1) An organization for this purpose, comprising of Pakistan-Afghan officials may be made, as an immediate step.
- (2) International bodies may also be asked to assist Afghan government in rendering economic support for the rehab.



- (3) Registration of all refugees.
- (4) Police verification on 6 monthly bases.
- (5) Job incentives be given on the basis of their positive profile track.
- (6) Issuance of Permanent Residence based on their contribution in society.

29. **Narrative Promotion.** Despite continued refuting by Pakistan, a general perception prevails that terrorists' sanctuaries exist in Pakistan. Although changing this perception is an uphill task but we must continue our efforts to make the situation favourable for us. Pakistan's nation and security forces have rendered matchless sacrifices in the fight against terrorism which must be highlighted to reassert its intent and commitment in fighting the menace of terrorism and bringing peace in the region. Efforts must continue to highlight Pakistan's positive role and sacrifices through integrated efforts of foreign office and media. Pakistan must reach out utilizing all its diplomatic resources and investing on foreign media to highlight Pakistan positive image at international forums and in the world.

- a. Lobbying efforts and constant engagements with think tank bodies in relevant countries should be done on deliberate basis for understanding on mutual basis is likely to produce a very positive effect.
- b. Buy air time on international channels to effectively project own narrative.
- c. The state should introduce defamation laws through PEMRA for maturity of the content being displayed on private channels.

30. **Countering Indian Ingress.** Pakistan should stay relevant and vital to interests of international forces through a balanced yet proactive approach. The same would also counter Indian ingress in Afghanistan denying any chances of instigation or agitation with diplomatic projection of own narrative regarding Indian negative role in Afghanistan having no other objective but to patron terrorist activities in Pakistan. Confessions of RAW agent Kulbhushan Yadav is a case in point. Having a thaw in relations with India is in the interest of Pakistan at this point in time. While keeping the situation under control and without compromising on core issues, Pakistan should put in concerted efforts to limit Indian role in Afghanistan only in the economic domain. Pakistan must firmly oppose any political or military role of India in Afghanistan. By playing its role in peace process, Pakistan can reduce Indian influence in Afghanistan and make it irrelevant.

31. **Diplomatic Endeavours**

a. **Continuous Engagement with US**

- (1) Pakistan's initial reaction to the new US strategy has been upright and according to the aspirations of the people. However, a pragmatic approach must be followed and we must not let the bilateral relations fall below the acceptance level. Despite sharp rhetoric by the president Trump, many high-level US officials have visited Pakistan, which signifies that US is also keen to maintain engagement with Pakistan.
- (2) Pakistan must highlight its concerns regarding US policy using leverages that it can exercise over US.

Leverages available to Pakistan under current circumstances are as under: -

- (a) The lurking threat of AQ/ IS remains major security concern for mainland US. US is relying heavily on Pakistan for intelligence gathering and sharing. Pakistan must use this leverage selectively and intelligently to keep the US dependent, favourable and engaged.
  - (b) US forces in Afghanistan are dependent on GLOCs provided by Pakistan for logistic purpose. Without escalating the situation to the closure of these lines, Pakistan must raise its cost for US to address our concerns.
  - (c) Pakistan should make US realize that it can help US in a peaceful settlement of 17 years long war in Afghanistan and play its positive role in bringing all the stake holders on Peace table and helping in reaching out a peace deal ensuring that Pakistan interests are also looked after.
- (3) US decision making is significantly influenced by lobbying. Pakistan must systematically engage these lobbying firms to influence the decision making in own favour.
- b. **Engagement with Other Regional Players.**Engagement with regional players i.e. China, Russia, Iran and CARs

should focus on formulating the common stance on presence of extra-regional forces in Afghanistan, long term stability / peace plan and facilitation of peace initiatives at every level. Engagement with India should focus having leverages on Indo-Afghan trade and neutralising hostile influence while catering for Indian sensitivities.

### 32. **Recommendations for LEAs**

a. **Western Border Management.** Pakistan must complete the border fencing to avoid any trans-border ingress from Afghanistan to Pakistan. A clear policy should be formulated with Western Neighbours especially with Afghanistan which should be vigorously pursued by Diplomatic efforts. Illegal crossings by terrorist organizations and hostile intelligent agencies should figure out prominently in bilateral relationship.

b. **Assistance in Training ANA / Afghan Police.**

Despite numerous training missions which are being carried out in Western countries and India for training of Afghan forces, Pakistan must make an endeavour to be part of this activity. The action will ensure tangible assistance in establish peace, and may also be utilized to keep a check on foreign negative influences about Pakistan. Few suggested measures are as under: -

- (1) Sending training missions to Afghanistan for short durations of 2 – 3 months.
- (2) Restarting training of Afghan officers and cadets in Pakistan Army and Police training institutions.

- c. **Close Coordination with ANA / RSM.** Pakistan must maintain a close coordination with ANA / RSM in Afghanistan so that neither they should intrude in our area nor turn a blind eye towards infiltration of miscreants from Afghanistan into Pakistan. Few suggested areas of joint cooperation are as under: -
- (1) Joint patrol of border fence along international border.
  - (2) Establishment of joint check posts at remote locations along the border.
- d. **Implementing National Action Plan and Neutralising Proscribed organizations.** All efforts should be made to neutralise the proscribed organizations during its incubation phase, failing which it develops the roots in masses.

**Conclusion:**

33. Issue of Afghanistan can neither be ignored by Pakistan and other regional players, while resolving respective internal problems; nor it could be deferred for any longer. Afghanistan has been epitome of chaos for the last three decades resulting in exhausted economy and unstable political fibre. Successive global powers have endeavoured to extend their domains of influence in Afghanistan. Being epicentre of global war on terrorism, it also remains most affected by this peril. After 18 years of continuous war, seemingly US has no way out and is applying same strategy again and again. Latest extension casts shadows on the US stated objectives, have negative impact on the region and above all, adds to misery of Afghan people. Besides various lessons which Afghan phenomenon highlights,

peace treads on path of reconciliation and understanding, and not in continuous violence.

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