State Officials in Washington D.C. are worried. The military situation on the battlefield in Afghanistan has gotten worse and the momentum seems to be with the Taliban and their supporters. It is a situation which has deteriorated over the last six months in several ways. The U.S. efforts to degrade Al-Qaeda from Afghanistan and Pakistan have not met with success despite countless clandestine operations and open combats. Al-Qaeda and Taliban have been closely aligned ever since Osama Bin Laden came back to Afghanistan in the mid 1990s. The Taliban leadership under Mullah Omar has so far been unwilling to break up with Al-Qaeda. On the other hand, NATO partners are a bit squeamish by the consistency of losses and have been forced to change operational procedures which are making their task harder than ever before. Top NATO commanders are looking for a viable solution of this long-standing conflict through multilateral dialogue. Pakistanis are also beginning to wonder about the seriousness of the American commitment with Pakistan in the war against terrorism. The U.S. intelligence community is of the view that relationship between ISI and Afghan Taliban has not only survived and endured, but has also targeted the traditional Pak-US transactional strategic partnership. Pakistan's geo-strategic utility
to the U.S is now irritating them, despite the maximum services being rendered by Pakistan in the global war against terrorism. Therefore, this complex situation raises a number of questions. In particular, the question whether in the post Coalition-Taliban war, Afghanistan could be ruled by the pro-West Afghan Government of Hamid Karzai. This research paper is an investigation to look into the causes of U.S strategic failure in Afghanistan and its implications for Pakistan during 2001-2005.

Pak-U.S. ties with reference to Afghanistan: An overview

The content of Pakistan-US relations has remained primarily strategic. It was the military leadership in both the countries who tinted these relations in a colorful fashion. Over the years, the Pentagon, CIA and State Department established harmonious relationships with the monolithic structure of Pakistan's military establishment. The ruling elite in both the countries assessed and evaluated bilateral relations during the cold war in such a suave manner that they made it seem as if no differences ever existed. While the Far-East and the Middle-East were the traditional centers of US attention in Asia, South-Asia was the focus of key American security concerns during the cold war years. Pakistan joined a number of security alliances with US, while India found herself on the opposite sides of the fence, dividing the sub-continent into two superpower’s respective spheres of influence. This raised tension in the region and resulted in an arms race thus radicalizing territorial conflicts and wars. Gradually, the decades-old rivalry between India and Pakistan entered into a potentially more dangerous phase as the two countries developed their nuclear weapons and missile capabilities. Another, more immediate reason "the Soviet-Afghan war" further strengthened dependency of both Pakistan and the US on each other. The Soviet-Afghan war brought Pakistan and the US closer on a secure and cooperative basis pointing up the possibilities for a new strategic interdependence. It further indicated how strategic cooperation between both the countries could be expected to
have a profound effect on each other's domestic stability and the direction of their foreign policies. Over the years, Pakistan's military intelligence orchestrated much of the politics of resistance groups based inside Pakistan to oust Soviet Union and its allies from Afghanistan. Prior to the conflict, Afghan successive regimes seemed designed to keep the Pakhtoons away from Pakistan and claiming a large territory of NWFP (Khyber Pakhtoon Khawa) as its integral part. However, the Soviet-Afghan war gave ample opportunity to Pakistan to harbor and renew its influence in Afghanistan. The experience of Afghan refugees affected their perceptions about Pakistan as they found educational, health and employment opportunities in their Pakhtoon neighbourhood. Pakistan was then seen as the "Front line" state and given sizable aid and military assistance by the Americans. That enabled Pakistan to carry out the world's largest guerrilla operation, which provided the Afghan resistant groups an outlet to entail the complete ouster of Soviet troops. Although the Afghan - Soviet war posed a major strain on Pakistan's economy, politics and society, by introducing the risks of violence, drugs and the weapon culture, yet Pakistan firmly stood beside the Americans showing its traditional cooperation through physical support.

Following the defeat and pull out of Soviet forces from Afghanistan, the Soviet Union disintegrated, in 1991. This shift in the global political scenario created much space for India in the US foreign policy and both countries began sharing opportunities for economic development and greater security. The magnitude of Indo-US relations perturbed the Pakistani establishment. Signals of deterioration in Pak-US bilateral relations appeared as US put pressure on Pakistan to cap or freeze its nuclear program and contain Jihadi phenomenon in Kashmir.

With the quiet departure of US from Afghanistan scene after the Geneva Accord, Pakistan was left behind to look after the strategic interests of its fair-weather friend. From 1992 to 1996, over half a million Afghans lost their lives in factional fighting for
control of Kabul. Nevertheless, the US Government deliberately paid no heed to the problems of victims of civil strife and kept herself at bay, proclaiming the new world order theory, which included Islamic revivalism as the next threat. Significant progress towards security, reconstruction, repatriation of refugees, combating narcotics and denying safe heavens to radical Muslim outfits was not made by the US, which ultimately led to the emergence of Taliban. At first welcomed by Washington, the Taliban did not have total control of Afghanistan Mujahideen factions held territory in the North. For this reason, to the Americans, the Taliban regime lacked "stability", the control required of all clients. The goal, actually, was the control through Afghans of the key routes to Central Asian Republics, a region rich in oil, gas deposits and minerals and of great strategic importance to competing powers, Russia and China. It was this lack of "stability" that deterred investors from continuing to finance oil and gas pipelines from the Caspian Sea, whose largely untapped fossil fuels of the Caspian Basin became central to American planning. In 1996, the US policy makers re-approached Pakistani power brokers by setting new priorities for South-Asia and in turn Pakistanis fully backed Taliban to capture the maximum of Afghanistan. In 1998, Dick Cheney, then a consultant on pipelines to several Central Asian Republics actively supported Taliban by saying: "I cannot think of a time when we have no presence in the strategically significant Caspian Region and stability in Afghanistan whoever brings, it will pave a way for US global reach in the Central Asia. President Clinton also wanted to see the former Soviet Republics reliant on western commercial and political investment and, therefore, Taliban (Muslim extremists) were not obstructed anywhere.

Not only were the Taliban welcomed by Washington, Taliban leaders were flown to Texas, then governed by George W. Bush, and entertained in Housten by senior executives of the oil company Unocal. The Unocal officials suggested paying Taliban fifteen cents for every thousand cubic feet of gas it would pump through the land they had conquered. One of the leading
journalists in U.S.A., John Pilger quoted in his article "The oil greed", the views of State Department that "Taliban are the players most capable of achieving peace in Afghanistan and Afghanistan would become like Saudi Arabia, an oil colony, with no democracy and legal persecution of women, but U.S can live with that". In fact, the Americans wanted to construct the pipeline from Central-Asia to Pak-Afghan border belt to increase oil production to 4.5 million barrels a day, but that dream could only come true until a recognized government was in place. When Unocal eventually signed a "memorandum of understanding" to build the pipeline from Turkmenistan to Pakistan via Afghanistan, it did so on behalf of a consortium of Enron, Amoco, British Petroleum, Chevron, Exxon and Mobil. The deal-makers also included Pakistani establishment's key figures, who wanted to see not only their Western borders secure, but in line with the strategic depth policy, also required to have Pakistan's participation for attainment of their long-term strategic objectives. However, the deal fell through when Al-Qaeda operatives in Afghanistan opposed to such an arrangement considering it injurious to its global agenda. After the bombing of two American embassies in East-Africa and US ariel strike on Afghanistan in 1998, "the tens of millions of dollars project" disappeared from US focus list. Following September 11, 2001, Pakistan the close political and strategic ally of America and the custodian of Afghan Jihad had to opt for "right lines of the history" by taking a U-turn on its previous Afghan Policy. For the West, the existence of Taliban's reinforcement channels was as dangerous as the presence of former Soviet Union. Therefore, Pakistan was brought in a more precarious position as it plunged into a crisis of trust deficit from all sides. Pakistan's paradigm shift was also aiming at securing a better position vis-à-vis India.

Global Coalition against Muslim Extremism: Choices and Problems for Pakistan

Military historians and defense analysts say that a country in conflict is most vulnerable when faced with a two-front-war. Till
9/11, 2001, Pakistan faced belligerency on its eastern border - the Kashmir imbroglio involving India\textsuperscript{14}. Thereafter, a new, yet since long an imminent threat appeared in the West of Pakistan, from a contemporary ally. As the might of the West's military machine descended on the Taliban and the self-appointed defender of Islam, Mr. Osama Bin Laden, Pakistan landed into a situation which could not avert catastrophic consequences of such a conflict. The belligerence of the initial coalition government in Kabul (which later on became the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance) that led to its ouster by a Pakistan engineered Taliban movement, brought Pakistanis on a stage where they saw themselves in a vortex of events upon which they had no control and which were leading them towards an unknown future\textsuperscript{15}. In that hour of peril, Pakistan was left with only one option, the all out cooperation with the coalition against terrorism. Resultantly, the religious parties in Pakistan led the extremist reaction, particularly in the NWFP and Baluchistan's Pakhtun belt, as the US-led attack on Taliban gained more momentum and the "rogues" were driven to flee to Pakistani tribal areas. The religious parties and their "patrons" provided a significant proportion of raw recruits, material, hideouts and training facilities to the Taliban ranks, and in turn, have reaped large material benefits to maintain cognizable nuisance value in Pakistan's body politic\textsuperscript{16}. The previous allies of USA during the cold-war and in the Soviet-Afghan war, (the Gogs and Magogs of Pakistani religious parties) issued serious threats against US strategic interests and the Pakistan government.

The Jihadis, scattered by the US-led military occupation of Afghanistan found sanctuary in FATA area across the border belt in Pakistan. Therefore, the US-led ISAF troops in Afghanistan and Pakistan Army in the tribal belt began chasing and hunting Al-Qaeda operatives on both sides of the Durand Line, the one thousand six hundred-miles long border between the two neighbours. In retaliation to this military concentration, the Taliban and Al-Qaeda murdered thousands of coalition and Pakistani soldiers, intelligence officials, tribal elders and common men in both the countries. Among the refugees that came into
Pakistan were several groups of foreign funded terrorist who spread throughout the length and breadth of Pakistan to cause havoc and destabilization. Pakistan was at a severe disadvantage on two accounts. Firstly, intrusion into Afghanistan through uncharted routes from Pakistan's tribal areas could not be effectively checked, which provoked the US-led coalition on a number of occasions and resulted in the heavy deployment of Pakistani troops. Secondly, Pakistan's security apparatus seemed to be indifferent to curbing the local sources and reinforcement channels of terrorism. The sectarian blood-bath and mysterious killings, despite the much publicized crackdown and a ban on such groups with the dismal results of de-weaponization campaign, were ample reflections of that reality. Reports about the alleged involvement and dubious activities of some regular and former intelligence operatives of Pakistan sympathetic to Taliban and Al-Qaeda, mounted enormous pressure on Pakistan and in the year 2004, a massive military operation was launched in FATA. This was exactly at the time when the Indians, in collaboration with their Afghan friends, began adding fuel to the extremist fire inside Pakistan flaring up the whole situation for a geo-political gain.

In pursuing their strategic objective, the US-led coalition relied largely on anti-Taliban, particularly, non-Pakhtoon elements or war-lords to punish the "rogues". Punitive tools, such as bombardment, indiscriminate killings, use of poisonous weapons, mistreatment with civilians and ban on supplies to Pakhtoon population areas were used to flush-out Taliban from the whole of Afghanistan. Despite widespread operations to deal with "enemies", the success in achieving global coalition objectives over the last eight years has been checkered as the top figures of Al-Qaeda and Taliban are still far away from their reach. Credible intelligence reports denote that Al-Qaeda has not only continued, but also increased, its support for sister organizations...
and affiliated groups that are posing serious threats through violent means in all those countries who had joined the coalition. Covert actions, military force, economic sanctions and the shoring-up of enemies' neighbours with all possible punitive policies in achieving the goals proved to be less than impressive. Moreover, each tool used to advance "the strategic initiative" has involved substantial costs, but nevertheless has failed to produce the desired effect. Except regime change in Afghanistan, the coalition's military adventure has not only cost them billions of dollars, but has also raised questions about their professional capabilities as well as military and technological superiority.

Ironically, Pakistan's contribution in the war against terrorism has not been acknowledged by the allies in letter and spirit. Instead of appreciating Pakistan's paradigm shift which caused heavy losses to the society, the Western think tanks spawned a hypothetical scenario that Pakistan is vulnerable to prevent its nukes from falling into the hands of radical Muslim fundamentalists. The baseless and misleading conclusions regarding Pakistan's inability to handle its nuclear capability are, although, highly irresponsible unfounded claims, yet it has aggravated the situation by creating mistrust between the two allies. The international media has descended on Pakistan by holding it responsible for Western strategic failure.

But the fact of the matter is that right from the beginning of the campaign in Afghanistan, Pakistan had maintained that it was important to focus on Al-Qaeda rather than the Taliban, the rationale being that whereas the former had a global agenda the latter were local people fighting to oust foreign occupation. Pakistanis were of the view that a meaningful dialogue through Saudi mediation could be a better option to detach Afghans from Al-Qaeda. However, the US arrogance did not allow it to accept that reasoning; it started accusing Pakistan of maintaining its old contacts with some influential Taliban groups. After eight years of an almost losing war, the US and its allies have come around to
recognize the worth of that logic. They now seek a negotiated peace with the Taliban and elimination of Al-Qaeda.

Similarly, when Pakistani officials briefed the coalition forces about the mischief making of some local allies of US, nobody took Pakistani reservations into consideration. Not only Pakistan's plea was rejected but it was pressured not to involve in Afghanistan's internal matters. In view of Pakistani's vast experience of Afghan issues, the coalition should have dealt with the insurrection by employing Pakistani suggestions but they preferred to work with tribal leaders whose vested interests made a hash of US strategy.

Undoubtedly, one of the major dilemmas faced by American policy makers in Afghanistan has been their dependency on several anti-Taliban tribes. The policy contended that in an Afghanistan that has never had a strong central government, nothing else will work than a centralized tribal system because it is the single, unchanging political, social and cultural reality in Afghan society. Therefore, US commanders sought help from Afghan tribes to chase and hunt down Al-Qaeda and Taliban insurgents by giving heavy "monetary support" and equipping them with sophisticated weapons. Later on, the Americans came to know that by arming the tribes, they were encouraging Afghanistan's old curse of warlordism. So after Hamid Karzai's election as president in 2004, they focused instead on developing Afghanistan's national army and police. They also persuaded the Tajik tribal militia and certain Uzbek groups known as the Northern Alliance, a key ally against Al-Qaeda, to lay down its weapons.

Unfortunately, this top-down strategy left the tribes vulnerable to the Taliban, who were rebuilding their network. As the Taliban's influence spread, tribal elders decided to go with Taliban, thus increasing the number of anti-coalition insurgents. Although the US strategists looked again to the tribes to use a counter-insurgency force, but this jumble of adhoc ideas is no longer popular. As the United States has often moved in the opposite directions in the recent years, the warlordism has come...
back in a real fashion. Now the poppy producer war-lords are going in several directions. In some situations, they look for game-changing opportunities to halt the Taliban’s advance. Elsewhere, they rearm new Taliban fighters. This complex situation has made Americans realize that the fight in Afghanistan is not worth the human, economic and political price. Even the recruiting and training program for Afghan National Army and Police, the community defense initiative ventures and counter-insurgency assistance blueprints have failed to produce the desired results while young Afghan Soldiers and ex-volunteers are fleeing from their centers and joining the ranks of Taliban.

There is an after repeated diché in intellectual circles that a stable Pakistan would contribute to a stable and secure Afghanistan. But at the same time, there is also a question of to what extent the coalition has contributed to the security of Pakistan. The Americans and allies want Pakistanis to do the fighting and dying for them. To cover-up their failure the coalition begins blaming Pakistan of deliberate inaction regarding Al-Qaeda leadership’s presence in the country. Pakistan has also been accused of not sharing classified and exclusive information and giving safe passages to Afghan insurgents like Haqqani group. However, Pakistani government has repeatedly been denying from such allegations. On the other hand, when Pakistan began hammering terrorist outfits in its Federally Administered Tribal Areas, instead of having its forces act as an anvil on the other side of the border and catch the fleeing insurgents, the US-led coalition forces decided to move its existing checkposts to a safer point. This is a patent indicator of US intentions and seriousness in strategic partnership with Pakistan. Although, Pakistan may be still tempted to play big brother to Afghanistan. Yet it is imperative that Pakistan should strive to retreat from its past perceptions and adopt new policy treating Afghanistan as a regional equal whatever political arrangement may appear in Kabul in future.
There is no denying the fact that Pakistan’s strategic aims revolve in great measure around trying to ensure its security and quest for economic progress, however, Pakistan must not attempt to keep Afghanistan off-balance or toe the line of Americans as both strategies have been failed. Furthermore, the plan to send 30,000 additional US troops to Afghanistan have stirred concerns that it would push militants in Pakistan, creating troubles in its ongoing offensive against militants and an influx of refugees would further burden its already fragile economy. These concerns must be addressed by the US before implementation of its New Policy. The US must be made to understand that the Afghan problem cannot be resolved without Pakistan’s help, but that this will not be at the cost of it’s security and integrity.

Conclusion

The purpose of the US-led NATO and coalition mission in Afghanistan was to ensure that Afghanistan does not become a safe haven for international terrorism that would endanger security of the Western countries and their allies, in particular, the USA. Rather, the coalition invasion of Afghanistan was an act of collective retaliation in response to the 9/11 attacks. The long-term strategy was to prevent further devastation by disrupting and destroying Al-Qaeda forces operating out of Afghanistan, flushing out transnational Muslim extremist networks, their training centers and hideouts and overthrowing the Taliban regime that supported them. Therefore, the coalition remained in Afghanistan under UN authority to establish security in the country, in the face of a simmering insurgency. In 2001 and 2002, the US went everywhere inside Afghanistan with fast, high-powered and overwhelming armed forces, blasting to shreds whatever was in its way. It was, of course, a success in getting to Kabul but the enemy had not been interested in fighting and opted for a tactical retreat. Despite the heavy alignment, consisting of anti-Taliban Pakhtoon, Uzbek, Tajik and Turkmen political factions, Sunnis and Shias or Hazaras, NATO forces, drug producer warlords and world’s "sole superpower" the USA, Al-Qaeda and Taliban reemerged with a
better organizational setup and are potentially operating since 2004. Coalition has failed to deprive Al-Qaeda a base in Afghanistan. Despite its top command having been decimated, the survivors are largely in the country and its surroundings. Now suicide bombers appear from anywhere to reach their targets and inflict significant damage upon their enemy. Large-scale military operations and heavy pounding have brought only unlimited devastation in the country. The coalition strategy seems to be a dismal failure.

In sum, one can argue that it is high time for Washington to realize the implications of its continuous follies, to regain the trust of its critical strategic ally, and not to erode the dwindling residue of good will. Has not Pakistan proven its capability in Swat and Waziristan, a fight more difficult than any USA ally has ever faced in Afghanistan? The Americans will have to reiterate its complete confidence in Pakistan while making important decisions on evacuation of coalition forces and future political setup of Afghanistan. There is now an urgent need that a viable solution is found which brings peace in Afghanistan and enables Pakistan to overcome extremist contamination of its society. Americans must understand that any opening towards Central Asia cannot be earnestly made without Pakistan's role in Afghanistan. Although the recent cease-fire in various Afghan provinces, dialogue offer to soft Taliban and peace mission initiative through Arab countries seen reasonable, there are some lingering doubts about Indo-Afghan perception regarding the settlement of disputes. Afghanistan, at the moment, has become home to many anti-Pakistan intelligence networks creating dissension inside Pakistan in the presence of US-led coalition. The coalition-Afghan war could be preceded by whipping up propaganda against Pakistan's nuclear program, its alleged involvement in the spread of transnational Muslim extremism and the acts of subversion and sabotage, and by intensification or destabilization attempts within Pakistan both from its Eastern and Western borders. As a beleaguered state, Pakistan is today split with an unstable and bickering public opinion, rocked by sabotaged activities of foreign
outfits, rising pressure from strategic tie-up of Indo-Afghan nexus and dubious role of western allies.

To sum up, if the real goal is to achieve peace and progress in the region and containment of terrorism, then fixations, prejudices, blind spots, myths, pre-conceived notions and delusions will have to be put aside by all parties concerned and serious efforts made for working out an endurable compromise, without further hiccups.

Last but not the least; Afghanistan has a long history which reveals that the war-torn country cannot be subjugated by military might alone. Let us also not forget that those who have no history have no future as well.

Notes and References


22. For more on this point, see Khawaja Mureed-ul-Hassan, High Intensity Conflict Environment in Afghanistan, Times of India, New Delhi, 4 March, 7.


