

Conflict or Cooperation? The Role of India and Pakistan in Post-2014 Afghanistan

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Abstract

As the coalition forces prepare to exit Afghanistan, concerns regarding peace and stability in the country and future power balance after their departure are becoming paramount. While there will be a considerable American presence, focus has now shifted to local infrastructure and services - civil, military and political and their ability to further peace and progress in the country. Owing to the geostrategic landscape of Afghanistan, in addition to its long conflict ridden history with a significant presence of the Taliban, concerns regarding revival of conflict and violence are coming to the fore – particularly from traditional South Asian rivals i.e. India and Pakistan. Through an in-depth study of the political, economic, cultural and regional dimensions of this tri-lateral relationship, the following paper examines how there is a significant clash of interests and how there can cooperation between India and Pakistan in Afghanistan.

Key Words: Afghanistan, Taliban, India-Pakistan relations, US withdrawal, new Great Game, Strategic Depth

Introduction

Dealing with the situation unfolding in Afghanistan and its ramifications present a formidable challenge, both for Afghanistan as well as regional and international players who have a stake in its future and have contributed significantly to efforts towards reconstruction of the war-torn nation. On May 27, 2014, US President Barack Obama announced that the last American troops would withdraw from Afghanistan by the end of 2016. However, this announcement needs to be further clarified. A Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) would permit a residual American military presence, some 9,800 US troops will remain in the country after 2014, with half of them slated to depart by the end of 2015. From 2015 onward, the remaining troops will train the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) for two more years, eventually leaving only a token force to protect the American embassy in Kabul (Grare, 2010). Nonetheless, the international community is willing to continue engagements in both civilians and military matters for ensuring economic development, security and political stability in Afghanistan (Yuasa, 2014, p.285).

The decision of the US and its allies to withdraw troops from Afghanistan is a reflection of domestic political concerns and the large number of casualties. From 2001 until February 2012, the US-led coalition troops lost 2,884 soldiers, including 1,895 from the US alone (Chesser 2012, p.1-4). Based on this data, 2010 and 2011 were the deadliest years in Afghanistan. The Afghan Army and Police have also suffered the loss of roughly 4,000 members (Caldwell 2011 online). In addition to military casualties, the conflict has also claimed the lives of 2,080 civilians just in the year 2010. Even though American forces are preparing for withdrawal, the conflict in Afghanistan is far from over. There is overwhelming evidence of the resurgence of the Taliban and attacks on civilians and state infrastructure are on a rise. In addition, the political and military structure of Afghanistan continues to be weakened by factionalism and tribal rivalries, further clouding prospects for a peaceful transition after the withdrawal of foreign troops. According to Saghafi-Ameri (Saghafi-Ameri, 2012, p.1), “the main causes of the present situation in Afghanistan include lack of proper planning, shifting policies, inattention to geopolitical realities and over-reliance on military power without the necessary attention to development and civilian assistance plans”.

In such an environment, the involvement of local actors becomes preeminent in shaping the course of future events in Afghanistan. A key ally in the US led military action in Afghanistan is neighbouring Pakistan. A former ally of the Taliban and a country, which faces direct repercussions of conflict in Afghanistan owing to a large number of refugees, Pakistan has been at the forefront of reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. It has also been instrumental in providing support to the US in dismantling the al-Qaeda and Taliban networks both within Afghanistan as well as within adjoining areas of Pakistan. Pakistan has been under tremendous pressure to clamp militant activities on its western frontiers.

In addition, India has now come to play a proactive role in Afghanistan with large aid packages, infrastructural and capacity building programmes. However, the increased role of India in Afghanistan has complicated the scenario and a “new great game” has now begun to exert influence and establish strategic clout in Afghanistan. This has been exacerbated by the American strategies as “the new Silk route” aimed at encouraging the sustainable development in Afghanistan by linking its infrastructure, energy transmission grids and pipelines to Central Asia. While most of these policies and future scenarios are geared towards development processes in Afghanistan, the involvement of India and other regional players is a potential problem for the strategic depth that Pakistan has so far maintained in Afghanistan. Both India and Pakistan fear the emergence of a power vacuum in Afghanistan following the departure of US troops (Grare, 2014, p.99). There have been differences regarding their future role in Afghanistan, regarding trade and other economic activities as well as power-sharing between the new Afghan government and militant groups like the Taliban. Further complicating this muddle of political interests is the involvement of other players like China and Iran both with their unique interests and relationship with the Afghan government.

American withdrawal has the potential to destabilise the country by accelerating regional competition over Afghanistan's future. However, the role of both India and Pakistan is crucial for Afghanistan as well as their continued cooperation towards development and peacebuilding. Ameliorating their differences, it is perhaps also an opportunity for both India and Pakistan to put aside their bilateral differences and work together in Afghanistan which would have positive ramifications both for the scenario in Afghanistan as well as provide incentives for better Indo-Pak relations.

Afghanistan-Pakistan relations

Despite their geographical proximity and strong cultural ties, Pakistan-Afghanistan relations have historically been strained. Roots of troubled history go back to colonial Indian sub-continent, when in 1893 an agreement was reached between Afghanistan and the British Empire for creating the Durand Line.¹ Raising concerns on the validation of the 1893 agreement, in June 1947, the leadership in Afghanistan advocated for an independent *Pashtunistan*. The government in Kabul also took some symbolic steps to assure its commitment to *Pashtunistan*, for instance by institutionalizing *Pashtunistan* Day (14th August – the day of Pakistan's independence) and renamed a square in Kabul as *Pashtunistan* Square (Bezhan 2014, pp. 198-199). Bilateral relations thus began in an unpleasant environment and owing to disputes over *Pashtunistan*/Durand Line, Afghanistan was the only country to oppose the inclusion of Pakistan in the United Nations (Ahmed and Bhatnagar, 2007, p.159).

Several issues remain at the core of Afghanistan-Pakistan relations. The controversy over the Durand line continues to be a constant irritant between the two neighbours. Such a border demarcation has never been acceptable to any of the governments in Afghanistan. The border divides the provinces of Baluchistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (formerly North West Frontier Province- NWFP) and the Federally-Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in Pakistan from the Afghan regions of Nuristan and Nimruz (Rubin & Siddique 2006, p.4). Pakistan's position on the Durand Line issue is that being a successor state of the British administration in India it inherited any signed agreements by her predecessor. In contrast, the position of Afghanistan is that the Durand Line should not be treated as a permanent border because Pakistan is a state and not a successor of the British Empire (Rubin & Siddique 2006, p. 7). Although a dormant dispute, the issue has been a key factor influencing Afghanistan's foreign policy towards Pakistan, for example governments in Kabul have used the issue to bargain with Pakistan in relation to access to seaports because Afghanistan is a landlocked state. Nonetheless, the dispute increases Pakistan's insecurity. Consequently, Islamabad wishes for a friendly regime in Afghanistan to brush this issue under the carpet and to fulfil its schema of using Afghanistan as a transit country to enhance economic cooperation with Central Asian states (Malik 1994, p.1088).

The issue of *Pashtunistan* raised earlier also had implications for Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan. Created on the backbone of the "Two Nation Theory", Pakistan was meant to be an Islamic state. While the exact definition of an Islamic state has been the focus of many debates, at the time of independence in 1947, the elements supporting an Islamic state were strong. Consequently, the issue of *Pashtunistan* being pursued by Afghan leadership created insecurities for Pakistani policymakers and raised concerns of a further division of newly created Pakistan along ethnic and linguistic lines. Such thinking in Pakistani policymaking circles was also a deciding factor with reference to Afghan-Pak relations. (Hussain, 2010 p.55) Afghanistan's outright support for *Pashtunistan* gave rise to Pashtun nationalism in NWFP. Although, Abdul Ghaffar Khan had initiated Pashtun nationalism movements in the 1930s, their momentum increased in the post-partition era. Afghanistan's support for Pashtun nationalism created greater insecurities in Pakistan, thus leading to state action against such movements. In 1948, Abdul Ghaffar Khan and his brother were imprisoned on charges of subversion. The bitterness in bilateral relations reached its initial lowest ebbing in 1949-50 when there were numerous cross border skirmishes between the two neighbours (Hussain, 2010, p.65). Pakistan also shut down transit trade facilities for landlocked Afghanistan. Not surprisingly, this was also an era in which Indo-Afghan relations grew due to Indian leaders' strong connections with Abdul Ghaffar Khan and support for Pashtun nationalism (Hussain, 2010, p.69).

Following the disintegration of Pakistan in 1971, Pakistan's foreign policy focus shifted towards the East, especially towards the Muslim countries for cooperation. In the 1970s, Pakistan established close ties with Syria and Libya, and began playing a central role in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, now known as the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). However, the attempt to connect with the wider Islamic community did not prove helpful in fostering better relations with neighbouring Afghanistan, and the issues of Pashtun nationalism and the Durand Line conflict continued to influence the relationship (Hussain, 2010, p.75).

The end of the 1970s and Soviet designs on Afghanistan offered Pakistan with opportunities and challenges both concerning its relationship with the United States and the Soviet Union. With US-Pakistan relations at a historic low, the involvement in the Afghan Jihad and the opportunity to be the front player for the US offered an opportunity for Pakistan to play a major role in Afghanistan and also helped counter Soviet threat to its national security. General Zia ul Haq, then leader of Pakistan openly accepted the offer of alliance with the US and Pakistan fought a decade long war in Afghanistan, which was also supported by frontline Islamist parties like Jamaat-e-Islami. It was mainly due to the support of Pakistan that the Soviets were defeated in Afghanistan (Ahmed, 2012).

Even though Pakistan played a crucial role in countering the Soviets in Afghanistan, it has never had a friendly regime in Kabul. This situation changed with the creation of the Taliban. During the Afghan jihad against the Soviets,

Pakistan had supported Sunni Islamist Pashtuns in Afghanistan; an alliance that helped Pakistan influence the Taliban government in the 1990s. During the Taliban, rule in 1996-2001, Pakistan “exploited Afghan territory as part of its infamous ‘strategic depth’ policy against India” (Yusuf, 2013, p. 1). However, events following the US led military intervention in Afghanistan in 2001 have warranted a drastic shift in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. In contrast to its support to the Taliban, Pakistan became a key ally in the military operations in Afghanistan and got intrinsically involved in the humanitarian consequences of the war across its borders.

A war-ravaged Afghanistan created all sorts of challenges for Pakistan. In the beginning of the Afghan-Soviet war in 1979, Pakistan hosted most of the 3.5 million Afghan refugees, posing a challenge to the country’s development and security (Weinbaum, 1991, p. 497). However, with the support of developed nations and organisations, such as the United Nations, Pakistan continued to host Afghan refugees even after war began in 2001. According to an estimate, roughly 3.5 million Afghan refugees returned home from Pakistan by March 2002, but as of August 2008, Pakistan was still home to 1.8 million Afghan refugees (UNHCR 2009, p. 272).

The atmosphere of war in Afghanistan also often became a concern for the government in Pakistan. There have been repeated accusations of cross-border terrorism from both sides and significant differences between Kabul and Islamabad on counterterrorism strategies. Due to a troublesome and difficult war against terrorists, the government of Hamid Karzai lost credibility at home and abroad (Rubin & Rashid, 2008, p.31). This could be one of the reasons that the Karzai government had often been found blaming terrorist safe havens in Pakistan for infiltration into Afghanistan (Zeb, 2006, p.70). Afghan-Pak relations reached their lowest ebbing when in 2008 Karzai said that he would send his troops to Pakistan to fight the Afghan Taliban (Roy-Chaudhury, 2011, p.170). After growing allegations of cross-border terrorism and pressure from the US to produce results from operations in the tribal areas, Pakistan decided to fence the border with Afghanistan to block the cross-border infiltration. However, Kabul strongly opposed the decision, because fencing the border would have legitimised the Durand Line as a permanent border with Pakistan (Zeb, 2006, p.72-73).

Since 2001, efforts have been made to resolve the issue of the Taliban militants. Rising above their bilateral tensions, the two neighbours initiated the Afghanistan-Pakistan Joint Commission for Peace in 2010 to initiate talks with the Taliban. The inaugural meeting of this process was held in 2011. However, the process ended abruptly with the murder of Burhanuddin Rabbani, chairperson of the Afghan High Peace Council in September 2011. Pakistan was accused of involvement in Rabbani’s assassination (Roy-Chaudhury, 2011, p.184). Since then, both countries have failed to initiate another attempt at peace.

Irrespective of economic aid from countries such as the US and India, Afghanistan continues to rely on its neighbours like Pakistan. According to the World Bank (WB 2008), half of Afghanistan’s trade is with its five neighbours

Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Pakistan realises the significance of friendly relations with Afghanistan and owing to favourable trade policies and bilateral trade agreements, the volume of bilateral trade is \$2.3 billion, but it has the potential of crossing the \$5 billion mark. (Subohi, 2014) In 2013, during Hamid Karzai's visit to Pakistan, Pakistani PM Nawaz Sharif increased aid to Afghanistan from \$385 million to \$500 million towards infrastructural development (Hourelid and Harooni, 2014). Provided there is stability in Afghanistan, full potential of bilateral trade can be enhanced, especially when there is the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement of 2010. In addition, in 2014, the two sides launched a construction project of the 75-kilometre Torkham-Jalalabad road. The construction of this road is crucial for trade between Peshawar and Kabul.

In addition to the economic and political costs, the war in Afghanistan has added to humanitarian costs for Pakistan. Sheltering a large number of Afghan refugees, terrorist attacks have also become a major threat to Pakistan's security since 2001. Owing to the American military operations in Afghanistan, the Taliban have shifted their bases to the neighbouring areas of Pakistan, particularly in the FATA region. Since 2006, Pakistan has had roughly 80,000 soldiers fighting in the tribal areas, and the expenses of keeping such a huge deployment are high (Zeb 2006:71). The economic costs of the war against terrorism are acutely disturbing for Pakistan.² In 2009, the cost of anti-terrorism operations was measured at over PKR 678 billion (Ahmed, S. 2011 online). The burden of terrorist attacks on Pakistan's economy has been over US \$40 billion (Roy-Chaudhury, 2011, p.177). This is in addition to an increasing number of civilian and non-civilian casualties in the tribal areas, either because of the operations by Pakistani security forces or due to frequent drone attacks. The poorly executed drone attacks have often resulted in civilians deaths. According to a report of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 957 civilians were killed in 134 US drone attacks during 2010 (HRCP, 2011, p.75). According to an estimate report of Pakistani intelligence agencies that was submitted to the Supreme Court, between the years 2002 and 2013; the war against terrorists in Pakistan claimed 49,000 lives – 24,000 killed during 2001-08 and 25,000 during 2008-13 (Raja, 2013).

Thus, peace and a stable government in Afghanistan, preferably sympathetic towards Pakistan, is a predominant concern for the current government in Pakistan. It seeks to re-establish its dominant position in Afghanistan and a peaceful Afghanistan would greatly benefit peace within Pakistan as well. However, the presence of other regional players particularly of India in Afghanistan has troubled Pakistan and is perceived as a direct threat to its strategic depth in Afghanistan. Peace and stability in Afghanistan hinges upon the role of traditional South Asian rivals – India and Pakistan – in post-2014 Afghanistan. The present policy in Islamabad is of more cooperation and engagement with Kabul, but international community sees that more with suspicion because

Pakistan's role is often seen as a hurdle in the Afghan peace process (Yusuf, 2013).

India and Afghanistan

Unlike Pakistan, India has traditionally enjoyed good relations with Afghanistan. The geographical location and its proximity to Central Asia have substantially enhanced Afghanistan's importance for India. New Delhi's relations with most of the Afghan regimes have remained cordial except the Taliban government. Apart from trade relations, India has also engaged in a number of economic and social projects in Afghanistan like rural electrification, irrigation and small-scale industries. During the Soviet incursion into Afghanistan, and later with the advent of the Taliban, India was sidelined from the political dynamics of Afghanistan, since it was seen as an ally of the Soviet Union and had been a strong supporter of the Northern Alliance. During the entire period of Taliban rule, India was nearly excluded from Afghanistan in direct contrast to Pakistan's close relationship with the Taliban regime.

India's engagement in Afghanistan has come a long way since the closure of its embassy in Kabul in September 1996 and its troubled relationship with the Taliban until 2001. India became a key player in post-war reconstruction in Afghanistan after 2001 even though it was not involved militarily. The US led military intervention in Afghanistan overthrowing the Taliban and the promulgation of the government led by Hamid Karzai opened the path for renewed engagement and partnership opportunities for India. With the objective of rebuilding its historical-cultural and political relationship with Afghanistan, India has adopted a "soft power approach" and provided financial and political support for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. (D'Souza, 2104) India's involvement in Afghanistan is also being viewed through the lens of India's emergence and acceptance as an extra-regional power and aspiring global actor. (Fair, 2014, p.28) In February 2013, Robert Blake, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia, stated during a Congressional hearing of the House Foreign Affairs Committee that "any discussion of South Asia has to start with India." Blake also highlighted the economic impact India has had on the Afghan economy (The Hindu, February 2013).

In addition to its initial commitment towards financial assistance made at the January 2002 Tokyo Conference on the reconstruction of Afghanistan, the committed Indian assistance to Afghanistan amounts to USD 2 billion, making it the fifth largest bilateral donor after the US, UK, Japan and Germany (Price, 2013, p.5). In 2011, India and Afghanistan signed an Agreement on Strategic Partnership (ASP) formalizing cooperation in the following areas:

- political & security cooperation;
- trade & economic cooperation;
- capacity development and education;

- social, cultural, civil society & people-to-people relations” (Price, 2013, p.5).

The political relationship between India and Afghanistan has strengthened since 2002 and there have been a large number of high-level bilateral visits between the two countries, most recently of outgoing Afghan President Hamid Karzai who attended the swearing-in ceremony of newly elected Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in May 2014. Over the years, India has supported the political establishment in Afghanistan and articulated its interest in building stability and peace in Afghanistan and assisting the landlocked country with any means possible. Renewing diplomatic relations, India was able to reopen its embassy in Kabul and its consulates in Herat, Jalalabad, Kandahar and Mazar-e-Sharif. Afghanistan’s bid of becoming a SAARC member was fulfilled in 2005 mainly due to India’s backing, further strengthening ties between India and Afghanistan (Singh, 2010).

India has also aided in providing the people of Afghanistan access to medical and educational facilities in India. In its most recent humanitarian move, on 30 June 2014, India announced a new liberal visa policy for Afghani nationals allowing them to stay in India for upto two years and exemption from police reporting for senior citizens and children.

A crucial aspect of India’s engagement with Afghanistan has been assistance towards economic empowerment of Afghanistan. A Preferential Trade Agreement was signed between India and Afghanistan in March 2003 (Ahmed and Bhatnagar, 2007). As per the terms of the agreement, custom duty on various items was reduced to encourage bilateral trade. Consequently, the bilateral volume of trade has steadily been on the rise. In 2013, the volume of trade was \$600 million, but its full potential is estimated to be around \$3 billion, which significantly depends on peace and stability in Afghanistan (*The Economic Times*, 28 August 2014).

In addition to trade, economic integration with Afghanistan has also been on the Indian agenda. The Agreement on Strategic Partnership was a move in this direction and both countries committed “to deepening and diversifying co-operation in sectors such as agriculture, rural development, mining, industry, energy, information technology, communications, transport, including civil aviation. Two Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) were signed for the development of minerals and natural gas in Afghanistan, which is said to hold mineral deposits worth \$1 trillion” (D’Souza, 2014).

In addition, several Indian public and private sector companies have invested in the development of the Hajigak iron ore mine in the Bamiyan province in Afghanistan. With a planned investment of US \$6.6 million, the project is led by the Steel Authority of India Ltd (SAIL), and has committed to build the mine, a six million tonne steel unit and an 800MW power station (Price, 2013, p. 7). Through the ASP, India reiterated its assurance to Afghanistan's economic progress and also its development as a link between South Asia and energy-rich Central Asia, which India promotes in an effort to establish itself as a regional

economic power. The strategy of gaining access to the Central Asian/Caspian sea resources is part of what is often termed as the “new great game” and Afghanistan offers a crucial link to accessing Central Asia. As an emerging regional power with its ever-increasing energy needs, Afghanistan’s connection with the Central Asian republics is crucial for India. With this in mind, the government in India has provided a US \$17 million grant for the modernisation of a hydropower plant in Tajikistan and has signed a memorandum of understanding with Turkmenistan for a natural gas pipeline that will pass through Afghanistan and Pakistan. The agreement that was signed by Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India (TAPI) in 2008 envisaged over a thousand miles of pipelines connecting Turkmenistan’s natural gas fields with energy-deficient South Asia. (D’Souza, 2014). The pipeline project offered potential benefits to all concerned states however, the pipeline project has been stalled owing to India-Pakistan rivalry.³

Other players in the “new great game” are Russia, Iran and China. India has been working on its connections with Iran, Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Russia through the development of the southern trade corridor. It has been involved in the rehabilitation of the Zaranj-Delaram road project as well as the establishment of the Chahbahar Free Zone Authority which provides access to India as well as helps in reducing Afghanistan’s dependence on Pakistan for transit facilities. In contrast, Pakistan has been working with China to gain access to Central Asia. Although not a part of the military operations in Afghanistan, India has been involved in several capacity building initiatives. India’s contribution in the training of Afghan diplomats, judges, police officers, doctors; developing Afghanistan’s civil aviation and transport sectors; construction of roads, dams, hospitals, educational institutions; and in establishing telecommunication and power transmission lines is noteworthy (Ahmed and Bhatnagar, 2007, p.166). India agreed to increase training for Afghan soldiers and police within India following the strategic partnership agreed in October 2011. The agreement however does not include the deployment of Indian combat troops in Afghanistan.

Post 2014 Afghanistan – Clash of Interests or Potential for Increased Cooperation

While the scale of International Security Forces (ISF) presence in Afghanistan is gradually decreasing, there are mounting concerns of peace and stability in a nation that has been dependent on external support for security both political and economic. Afghanistan’s future also lingers on the convergence of interests between international and regional players, particularly the US, Pakistan, and India. The United States in all likelihood will sign a Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) with Afghanistan soon. Negotiated in 2013, the BSA would determine the nature and presence of US troops in Afghanistan after the drawdown of American led military forces. However, for any realistic and sustainable solution for Afghanistan, there has to be a level of agreement among the key regional players, particularly between India and Pakistan. Many academics trace the rivalry between

India and Pakistan in Afghanistan as one of the causes for the current state of conflict with ramifications for the future status of Afghanistan.⁴

In addition to conflicting interests, a peaceful and stable political scenario in Afghanistan could offer considerable advantages to all regional players particularly India and Pakistan. Although, many view Indian and Pakistani involvement in Afghanistan as an extension of the “new great game”; “a new proxy war”, Afghanistan also offers significant security, governance and economic advantages for both countries should they attempt to find common ground and improve their bilateral relationship (Hameed, 2012). Building on cultural commonalities, there could be renewed efforts to encourage people-to-people contact, increase trade and better diplomatic relations. However, before analysing the nature of India-Pakistan involvement in Afghanistan in the post 2014 scenario, it is important to identify the various issues – military, economic and political - that have brought this trilateral relationship into focus in the recent years.

While Pakistan has served as the military ally of the US in its initiative in Afghanistan, India also has a stake in the state of security in post 2014 Afghanistan. Pakistan’s concerns with cross-border terrorism to and from Afghanistan have been dealt with in the previous section. India also has persistent security concerns that emanate from Afghanistan, as well as Pakistan. Most of the militant groups that have terrorized India since the early 1990s – e.g. Harkat ul Jihad Islami (HuJI), Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) – have trained in Afghanistan with varying degrees of connection to the Afghan Taliban. Another threat is the Haqqani network, a group allied with the Taliban under the leadership of Jalaluddin Haqqani that draws support from the Pashtun-dominant areas of the country. It has also long been suggested that the group receives support from Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), a connection made explicit in the past by U.S. officials as well as by the Afghanistan government as highlighted by Sadika Hameed (2012, p. 7). Several of these groups have come into the radar for carrying out attacks against Indians in Afghanistan. Most recently, investigations blamed Lashkar-e-Taiba for the May 23, 2014 attack on the Indian Consulate in Herat. Thus, in the post 2014 scenario, India would be wary of any extremist government in Afghanistan that could cause terrorism and violence and spill over into India. In addition, a secure Afghan environment is also essential for the protection of various ongoing infrastructural and financial projects being conducted by India.

As mentioned earlier, India has been involved in some security sector activities in Afghanistan including the training of Afghan police forces, a role that it could continue in the training of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). One of the primary concerns after the withdrawal of the US-led troops is the viability and strength of the local Afghan army. Afghanistan is keen for an Indian military involvement and has made repeated requests for acquiring military hardware from India, Russian-origin fighter jets and tanks that include MiG-21 fighters and T-72 tanks, apart from Bofors howitzers and equipment vital for

command and control (Aneja, 2014). Though initially reluctant to provide weapons assistance to Afghanistan for fear of antagonizing Pakistan, the Indian government seems to have shed its hesitation and has recently signed a deal with Moscow, agreeing to pay for military equipment sourced from Russia to Afghanistan (Betkerur, 2014).

The India-Pakistan bilateral dynamics continue to be reflected in Afghanistan. Pakistan has serious concerns over the role of the Indian consulates in Jalalabad, Kandahar, Mazar-e-Sharif and Herat in Afghanistan. In 2005, Pakistan discussed with Afghanistan the issue of the involvement of the Indian consulates in fuelling violence in the Baluchistan province of Pakistan (Zeb 2006, p.70). Pakistan also has serious reservations over the role of the Indian intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), in Afghanistan due to RAW's apparent support for insurgency in the province of Baluchistan and Waziristan (Grare 2010, p.18). Similarly, India accused ISI of two terrorist attacks on its embassy in Kabul in July 2008 and October 2009 (Mukhopadhaya, 2010, p.28). In effect, India and Pakistan are again fighting an emerging proxy war in a war-torn Afghanistan (Ahmed and Bhatnagar, 2007, p.174). In July 2009, on the sidelines of the Non-Aligned Summit (NAM), Prime Minister of Pakistan Yousuf Raza Gilani presented an intelligence report to his Indian counterpart Manmohan Singh outlining the alleged role of India in destabilising Pakistan by fuelling insurgency in Baluchistan (Rashid, 2009, para. 4-5).

Pakistan is also uncomfortable with greater India-Afghanistan cooperation, therefore, it continues to refuse India a transit facility to expand its bilateral trade with Afghanistan (Ahmed and Bhatnagar, 2007, p.168). Further exacerbating Pakistan's concerns, the semi-military Indian Border Roads Organisation has built the Zaranj-Delaram road connecting Afghanistan with Iran for trade via the Chahbahar Port, constructed also with Indian investment (Rubin and Siddique, 2006, p.14; Sachdeva, 2010, p. 180). This has direct economic implications for Pakistan, which has invested millions of dollars with Chinese support to construct a deep seaport in Gwadar. As Gwadar and Chahbahar ports are constructed for the same purposes; therefore, there is naturally a competition between Pakistan and India over winning relations with Afghanistan – the unavoidable transit route to Central Asia.

The Way Forward

After months of deadlock following the controversial Presidential Elections in April, on 21 September 2014, a new leadership appeared in Afghanistan. Rival presidential candidates, Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, signed an agreement for a National Unity Government. While the partnership is unclear, questions on political stability have been settled for now, however the future direction of the Afghan state remains clear, thus placing higher expectations on regional and international players.

South Asian Studies 30 (1)

In India, the international community and the US see a most suitable partner for peace in Afghanistan. New Delhi shares the same goals of the war in Afghanistan, for example, to avoid the return of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda (Mukhopadhyaya, 2010, p.28). India wants to expand the scope of dialogue processes in Afghanistan by including other important countries, such as Iran, Russia and the Central Asian republics, for minimising Pakistan's control over this matter that might lead to bringing the Taliban back in Kabul (Mukhopadhyaya 2010, p.29). India has been caught off guard by recent developments in Afghanistan. Despite being Washington's most important South Asian partner, New Delhi was not informed of US intentions to engage the Afghan Taliban in "peace talks". India rejects the notion that there can be a disaggregation of the Taliban into good and bad factions that the US can variously engage and isolate. It views such efforts as outsourcing American involvement to Pakistan, which is seen as detrimental to Indian interests in Afghanistan (Fair, 2014, p.30).

On the other hand, a friendly regime in Kabul provides Pakistan with greater strategic depth that it has been seeking since its independence, especially after a series of wars with India (Narayanan 2010, p.4). Thus, Islamabad is wary of developments in Afghanistan that might lead to anti-Pakistan or pro-Indian government and thus in losing its strategic depth. In addition, Pakistan bears the direct brunt of hostilities in Afghanistan owing to the shared border and the arrival of thousands of Afghan refugees. Since the military operations started in 2001, the Taliban have re-established in Pakistan sharply increasing militant activity and leading to a deteriorating security situation in Pakistan. The rise of Islamic militancy within Pakistan could alter Pakistan's policies towards Afghanistan changing priorities to secure fallout instead of the previous dominating position being to undermine Indian influence. In May 2014, the Pakistani military launched an offensive in the Waziristan region to destroy Taliban strongholds and infrastructures.

It is perhaps safe to assume that under the present circumstances, it is likely that both India and Pakistan will continue to hold a central position in Afghanistan. At the international level, the US and the Karzai government have been open to reconciliation with the Taliban, and Pakistan is willing to be a mediator in this process, however India is wary of the dialogue process with the Taliban. Many in India see New Delhi's ability to shape events in Afghanistan as a litmus test for the aspiring international power. Amid speculation that it may step up its security ties with Afghanistan, India seems most steadfastly committed to maintaining an assistance program focused on economic investment, human capital development, and the rebuilding of Afghan institutions. There is also a new military leadership in Pakistan under Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and internal dynamics have prompted Pakistan to take severe actions against the terrorist networks with possible implications for future engagement in Afghanistan.

In addition to conflicting interests, a peaceful and stable political scenario in Afghanistan could offer considerable advantages to all regional players

particularly India and Pakistan, moving beyond the rhetoric of the “new great game”. Primary among the advantages is trade that offers opportunities for increased cooperation in Afghanistan. All three countries could build on existing bilateral trade partnerships. Efforts have been renewed by Indian diplomats to convince Pakistan to accord most-favoured-nation (MFN) status to India, which would benefit both countries through improved employment and investment, lower prices and better access to cheaper raw materials. The improvement in Indo-Pak bilateral trade relations would also benefit Afghanistan, removing hurdles on the free and uninterrupted transfer of goods and services. In addition, work has also begun on TAPI (Turkmenistan -Afghanistan –Pakistan- India) pipeline project, which will export up to 33 billion cubic meters of natural gas a year from Turkmenistan to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. While the pipeline project will take care of the emergent energy needs of the South Asian countries, it will also provide a viable incentive for India and Pakistan to collaborate with each other in Afghanistan.

While Indian military assistance and support to Afghanistan is often perceived to be a threat to Pakistani interests, the security cooperation efforts could be expanded and India and Pakistan could provide joint training to Afghan security forces. The problems of terrorism and drug trafficking through networks operating within Afghanistan are common to both India and Pakistan. Cooperation in counter-terrorism and counter-narcotics operations could assist in dismantling the networks of nefarious organizations prevalent in all three countries.

Any success in cooperation efforts in Afghanistan would not be possible without a stable and sustainable dialogue process between India and Pakistan. Bilateral dialogue, could then serve as a model for use in Afghanistan. The international community, including the United States, can assist by providing a forum for dialogue, but successful collaboration in Afghanistan will depend on the active leadership of the Indian and Pakistani governments (Hameed, 2012 p. x). In addition, the level of US engagement in Afghanistan post 2014 as well as the strength and capability of the new Afghan government would play a crucial role in the future political and economic strength of Afghanistan and the continuing role of India and Pakistan within it. Initially, it is also a viable option for a bilateral dialogue process initiated between India and Pakistan for resolving their concerns with reference to the future of Afghanistan. This process may help in producing much-needed solutions for ensuring peaceful co-existence of the two South Asian rivals in Afghanistan. Moeed Yusuf is of the view that, in such a bilateral process, “India could consider moving its development presence further away from the Pakistani border areas” (Yusuf, 2013, p. vi). However, for the success of this bilateral process, both sides will have to make compromises on their present stance on Afghanistan for coming up with a win-win situation beneficial to all, especially to the people of Afghanistan.

Notes

1. Durand Line is the 2,640-Kilometer demarcation separating Afghanistan and Pakistan. There are roughly 43 million Pashtuns living on both sides of the Durand Line (Yusuf, 2013, p.4)
2. In 2002, soon after Pakistan joined the US coalition against terrorism, the head of Pakistan's Tourism Development Corporation, Masood Ali Khan, predicted an enormous decline in tourism of 80-90 percent (Hayes, 2002 online).
3. In the most recent union budget, India has proposed an India-Pakistan pipeline supplying natural gas to Pakistan as a pilot project and a step towards reviving the TAPI project. <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/indiapakistan-gas-pipeline-may-be-completed-in-a-year/article6246232.ece>
4. William Dalrymple in his essay, "A Deadly Triangle- Afghanistan, Pakistan and India" *Brookings Essay*, 25 June, 2013 says "The hostility between India and Pakistan lies at the heart of the current war in Afghanistan"

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South Asian Studies 30 (1)

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