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Pakistan's Afghanistan Strategic Policy: Post U.S. Withdrawal Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Afghanistan has always stood as a significant country at a crossroads of history due to its geo strategic and demographic environment. It is situated at the junction of three important states, i.e., China, Iran, and Pakistan. Afghanistan has remained an attractive state for all the major powers Like India, Russia, China, and the United States in the context of regional and global politics. Afghanistan-Pakistan relationship has always been a dilemma and complex object to understand. Since Afghanistan voted negative against Pakistan's admission to the United Nations in 1947, the Soviet invasion, the U.S war on terrorism, the U.S withdrawal, the fall of Kabul, and the Taliban's takeover in August 2021, to date, the relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan has never been smooth nor tough. However, on the other side, India's involvement in Afghanistan is deeply concerning to Pakistan in the context of the power struggle in South Asia. India's dual objective involvement in Afghanistan aims not only to aid reconstruction of the devastated Afghanistan by conflict but also to limit Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan. Pakistan has always perceived the growing Indian presence and increasing influence in Afghanistan as a security challenge on its western border. The descriptive, analytical and comparative methodology has been adopted to evaluate Pakistan's Afghanistan post U.S. withdrawal policy.

Key Words: U.S Withdrawal, War on Terrorism, Geopolitics, Soviet Invasion, Pakistan, Afghanistan etc.

Introduction

Afghanistan has ever remained more important country for different major and regional powers due to its demographic-geostrategic location because Afghanistan

stretches at the junction of the important states of South Asia, central Asia and Middle East. The United States, Russia, Pakistan, China and India considered Afghanistan as a key factor in their foreign policy making process, since the event of 9/11 to present. Afghanistan again stood an important area due to its two important wars i.e. Afghan-Soviet war during 1978-89 and the ongoing US war on terror since Oct 2001 to date. Furthermore Afghanistan remained a root passage of invasions and interventions for the intruders and the major political powers from Alexander the great to Ganghez khan up to the US intervention in Leo off global war on terror. The United States took a sufficient support from Pakistan during both Afghan wars due to Pakistan's historical, cultural and geographical affinity with Afghanistan. All the time Pakistan played a significant role of front line state for lasting peace and stability in the region being the front line state and the non-NATO ally of the United States. Pakistan's geostrategic, cultural, political and economic interests are vested across the Durand line particularly during 2001-20. Pakistan's strategic interests in Afghanistan are adhered to global war on terror led by the United States which can be connected through Operation Enduring Freedom 2002. Since OEF Pakistan adopted a valuable and effective counter terrorism strategy along with following the cooperative measures of peace making process in the region. Pakistan initiated certain military operation during 2001-16 to uproot the sanctuaries of the militants and terrorist groups coming across the Durand line. Pakistan collaborated with Afghan government and United States to demolish terrorism in the region and shared certain informative logistic and military programs with Afghanistan and US during 2001-20. Pakistan articulated its regional and global strategic interests in Afghanistan in the context of the role of regional actors and major powers in the contemporary regional and global politics. The Washington administration preferred its hegemonies design and power policy in Afghanistan. Whereas Pakistan sought to contribute its regional role in Afghanistan to acquire different social, economic, political and military oriented objectives. Pakistan has to deal an increasing Indian strategic role, interference and intervention which led certain definite imprints on internal and external security of Pakistan. The Indo-Pakistan strategic interests ever remained controversial in the context of Afghan crises, its prospects and implications. The emerging geostrategic environment of Afghanistan carries a divergent policy agenda of India and Pakistan, in the perspective of peace making process and troops withdrawal policy. Pakistan and India have organized their policy and objective according to their settled vested interests. Thus India and Pakistan become close concerns to the Afghan cause in the challenging contemporary environment even in the fourth coming situation ahead. Both India and Pakistan have been engaged in Afghanistan in Leo off their defined and definite interests particularly in the post 9/11 environment. Their a variant policy seems to be apply by India and Pakistan in Afghanistan i.e. attributed by peace keeping, countering terrorist activities, regional and global security and cooperation with global war on terror led by the United States. Whereas India believes to become more influential and hegemonies

power to perform its role in Afghanistan as the partner of United States coping with the Pakistan, Iran and china's presence in the region.

Research Questions

1. How has Afghanistan influenced foreign policies and served as "strategic depth" in global politics?
2. How Pakistan has articulated and acquired its certain interests in Afghanistan?
3. What India has played its role in Afghanistan during recent years?

Pakistan's Policy Perspective and Interests in Afghanistan

Afghanistan has ever remained the pivotal determinant of Pakistan's foreign policy in South Asia due to its long border sharing strategic environment of 2250 km across the Durand line. Afghanistan situated on the junction of important major powers of the region and world i.e. Iran, Pakistan, China and the Central Asian states. Therefor it has been considered a great course of the invaders from ancient time to the modern politics. The land and soil of Afghanistan had has been exploited by different major powers like Russia, United Kingdom and the United States during 19th and 20th century.

Like major powers Pakistan has played an important role being the neighboring state to Afghanistan during both Afghan wars due to the strategic depth of Afghanistan and Pakistan's status as a front line state. Although Pak-Afghan relations were attributed in the form of up and down, Pashtun stunt incorporated by different Afghan regime and Russian involvement in Afghanistan's policy making process in the pre Russia-afghan war of 1979-88. Pakistan articulated its vested strategic interests in Afghanistan after the Russian invasion in Dec 1979. The American state department and intelligence agencies extended regional cooperation and importance to Pakistan and the later was emerged as a strategic partner front line state in the region. Then the United States decided not to led Afghanistan to become the client state of Russia and started provide diplomatic military and economic assistance to Pakistan to control and deal with the emerging circumstances of the region. (Mattinudin, 2002, 160)

Since the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan, Pakistan adopted decisive policy towards Afghanistan. Pakistan was able to manage a long struggle and series of diplomatic dialogue during 1980s which led the Geneva agreement to be concluded in April 1988. The Geneva peace process decided to pullout the Russian troops from Afghanistan not later than April 1989. (Malik, 2008, 74)

Pakistan's Strategic interests in Afghanistan

One of the top priorities of Pakistan is to contain or preventing India from getting any important foothold in Afghanistan. Pakistan has always remained doubtful of the India's influence in Afghanistan and considers India's deep presence in

Afghanistan is a direct threat to its national security. Pakistan believes that mitigation of Indian influence in Afghanistan is one of essentials for Pakistan's national security.

Pakistan has always considered Afghanistan's support for Pashtunistan as a threat to national security. During the 1950s and 1960s, Afghanistan sponsored a Pashtun separatist movement in Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK).

Furthermore, in 1979, the Afghan Prime Minister, Hafizullah Amin, explicitly stated Kabul's aspiration for a 'greater Afghanistan'. The Durand Line, he said, 'tore us apart'.

Pakistan claims that both India and Afghanistan have a hand in fuelling the insurgency. Pakistan's top civil and military leadership believes that India is fueling the separatist movements in Baluchistan and Pakistan consider India's presence in Afghanistan or involvement in Afghanistan close to Pakistan's borders not as humanitarian but to threat to Pakistan's national security. Detention of kalboshan Yadhav is well enough to prove Pakistan's claim that India is involved in to destabilize Pakistan and distort peace in Pakistan. (Jamal & Bangash January 17, 2016)

Pakistan's economic interests in Afghanistan are well set up. In recent years, the unexplored or unexploited energy resources in Central Asia, largely untapped, have started a race and battle for pipelines amongst the big powers for gas and oil pipelines in and around the region. Moreover, Pakistan and Afghanistan's geostrategic setting between the energy-loaded Middle East and Central Asia, and the energy-keen and growing economies of India and China naturally triggers some strong potential drivers for economic development in both Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In addition, Pakistan needs energy for its own economic revitalization and the completion of Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline (TAPI).The pipeline was expected to complete by 2019. So the security situation in Afghanistan, whether worsens or stabilizes, directly impacts Pakistan's economic interests. (Rashid, 2001)

It was reported in 2018 that the government of Afghanistan has shifted over 70 percent of its trade to Iran, India and China. Pakistan has lost more than a 50 percent share in the Afghan market in the last two years, and Afghanistan also threatened Pakistan to close Pakistan's transit route to central Asia. This will have a huge bad impact on Pakistan's economy and that's all because of "the Indian influence".

To build relations with Afghanistan based on mutual trust is another interest of Pakistan because after 2001, there is an uncertainty in Afghan-Pakistan relations. There is mistrust between both the governments and often blaming each one another for sponsoring terrorism.

The other important Pakistan's strategic interests are vested to support a political and suitable institution building process along with social, education and economic development peace and stability and containment of increasing Indian

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role in the context of the balance of power and regional security issues generated by the Indo-US strategic partnership particularly during the ongoing Biden-Modi regime. On the whole Pakistan dynamical involvement becomes an essential factor for the normalization in Afghanistan with respect of the future perception of socio-political, economic and security environment of Afghanistan because the United States and international community acknowledges Pakistan's diplomatic and strategic regional role in the peacemaking efforts and the application of conflict resolution approach in the regional politics.

Indian Strategic interests Policy in Afghanistan

The relationship between Kabul and New Delhi had been remained up and down throughout the phases but India is pursuing its objectives i.e. security and economic interests and the regional hegemonial ambitions by using soft power or by establishing itself as a partner in strategic and economic development cooperation. That comprises infrastructure building, medical services, roads and telecommunication, military training, establishing diplomatic ties, agriculture and irrigation, transport, industry and rural development. According to Upadhyay and Zafar "India is building in Afghanistan structures from public toilets to transmission lines" (Kamal, 2019)

India yet remained involve to promote anti- Pakistan sentiments and conspiracies through its continual propaganda campaign. New Delhi ever promoted its blame game theory towards Pakistan in respect of afghan cause. The Indian intelligence agencies and political authorities occasional declared Pakistan as the epicenter and terror promoting country in the region which has enhanced militancy and extremism across the Durand line. On the other side Indian electronic and print media has always targeted Pakistan through its blame game policy and conspiracy theory to protect and provided safe haven to Taliban and trying to establish a public narrative that Pakistan is not the solution but a cause of the instability in Afghanistan. Furthermore the New Delhi administration ever encouraged to American political decision makers to adopt a punitive and coercive military stance against Pakistan and Afghanistan. Consequently the US administration articulated a new strategic afghan road map under the changing and global political circumstances with an active regional role of India. The leading objectives of new Afghan strategic policy designed between India and United States remains to combat china's role and influence from the region and to bring India on the driving seat in the regional politics.

Pakistan's Role as "Facilitator" In Afghan Peace Process

The fundamental principles of Pakistan's afghan policy are to build up healthy and strong people to people contact, enhance economic activities, mutually fight against terrorism to bring peace in Afghanistan, jointly working on containment of their territories to be used against each other and Pakistan firmly stick to his Policy of non-interference in internal matters of Afghanistan.

Pakistan is stick to his policy i.e. prophecy of a “peaceful neighborhood” and working on building close, obliging and good-neighboring relations with Afghanistan based on mutual respect and considering their sovereignty and territorial integrity (Ministry of foreign affairs Pakistan 2021).

Pakistan has played a very important and constructive role to bring Afghan Taliban in negotiations with US to end decade’s long war in Afghanistan that resulted in Doha Accord in february 2020. US and Taliban signed an agreement with the facilitation of Pakistan that leads to US peaceful withdraw from Afghanistan in August 2021 and clearly indicates Pakistan’s policy i.e. vision of a “peaceful neighborhood”.

On the other hand Pentagon Chief have acknowledged and appreciated Pakistan’s role in Afghan peace process and Loyed J. Austin (US defense secretary) have telephonic conversation with Pakistan’s then Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa and praises Pakistan’s constructive and positive role to bring enduring peace in Afghanistan. According to a statement of the conversation issued by US Military headquarter pentagon “expressed gratitude for Islamabad’s continued for the Afghan peace process”

Pakistan’s former army Chief Gen Bajwa said in a ‘Security Dialogue’ held in Islamabad 2021 “our robust role in current quest for peace in Afghanistan is a proof of our goodwill and understanding of our global and obligation”(Dawn 2021, Jan 18).

Pakistan’s Post U.S. Withdrawal Concerns

After the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021, the Taliban returned to Kabul and took over power. Pakistan placed its hopes that the Taliban’s takeover would help Pakistan secure its western border, but it seems Pakistan’s expectations remain mere expectations as there is a significant increase in border tensions and terrorist targets on Pakistan’s security forces. UN security council’s analytical support and sanctions monitoring team reported “ Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan benefited the most of all the foreign extrimist groups in Afghanistan from the Taliban takeover” (Lodhi, 2024)

Pakistan repeatedly conveyed its security concerns over Tehrik Taliban Pakistan’s cross-border activities and warned Taliban authorities in Kabul about their consequences, but the contemporary regime in Afghanistan showed no affirmative commitment to mitigate Pakistan’s grievances.

Pakistan considers the Afghan leadership’s unwillingness and reorganisation of TTP in Afghanistan a potential security threat. Over the past year, the Afghan government’s reluctance to act against TTP and the regrouping of TTP in the Taliban’s regime have significantly strained bilateral relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

In recent years, a significant rise has been seen in terrorism activities by TTP. In January 2023, the TTP attacked a mosque in the police line in Peshawar,

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causing around 100 deaths. leadership have to evaluate it's priorities and ease Pakistan's concerns over Tehrik-Taliban- Pakistan's cross border activities.

Policy Recommendations

Following are the recommendations to engage with Afghanistan for constant peace and stability.

Trust Deficit to Trust Bridge

Although Pakistan and Afghanistan share religio-ideological and cultural affinities, but they also have a long history of conflict over the Durand Line and cross-border proxies that leads to mutual reluctance. Pakistan and Afghanistan need to take extreme measures to turn trust deficits into trust-building. In this regard, empediments must be examined in realistic perspective to bridge the gap.

Problem Identification and Orientation Approach

Pakistan and Afghanistan not only need to adopt a "solving problem approach" to resolve their bilateral issues, but a constructive and prescribed way forward also needs to replace blame game politics.

Friction to Inter-State Cooperation

Both neighbouring states immensely need to gear up interstate cooperation to promote economic development and enhance political and social cohesion.

Radicalization to Deradiclization

Pakistan and Afghanistan are victims of radicalization, extrimism, and violent extrimism. Both states direly need to take extreme measures to decentralise their sociopolitical structure and adopt a reasonable intermediate policy to discourage drivers of radicalization.

Continues Knocking Taliban

Pakistan must continually knock at the Taliban to honour its commitment to not using Afghan soil against any other country.

Inclusive Leadership Engagement

Pakistan must continue its efforts to engage with all particular ethnic groups and the Afghan public in general to convince them to seize the peace opportunity.

To Involve Regional and Global Actors

Pakistan and Afghanistan must also involve major regional and global powers like us, China, Russia, Iran, and central Asian states to facilitate the current peace process. With Pakistan's support and assistance, a variety of platforms for engagement between and among states will significantly boost the peace process in Afghanistan.

Step in the Right Direction

On its part, Pakistan has fenced its Afghan border to protect its lands and to contain militant movements, illegal trade, and drug dealings. On the other side of the border, Afghan leadership must honour its commitment to not supporting any outlawed organisations.

Conclusion

Afghanistan has ever been stood a valuable country due to its regional geostrategic importance. It is situated at the junction of major powers like China, Iran, India, Russia and Pakistan with an active role of the United States. The United States has played important role in Afghanistan due to its interests and recognized different challenges and issues and applied multifaceted policy for peace making, troop's withdrawal, combating terrorist activities, maintenance of law and order and to contain the influence of china and Russia from Afghanistan and in the region. India and Pakistan have adopted respective policy agenda to articulate and acquire their interests. The Afghan cause remains a leading determinant of Pakistan's foreign policy due to socio cultural, ideological, historical and geographical affinity with Afghanistan. Pakistan has extended a huge level of effort both in

diplomatic and logistic form since the events of 9/11 to date. Pakistan costs more than 70 thousand military and civil lives being the non-NATO ally of the United-States global coalition of the war on terror. The prime policy objective has been design to bring lasting peace, infrastructure, and socio-economic development in Afghanistan. Whereas on the other side India remained staged to its targeted objectives i.e. the containment of China's role and replacement of Pakistan under the new afghan strategic road map coined with U.S administration.

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