

Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS)

Seminar Report

TRANSITION IN AFGHANISTAN: FUTURE SCENARIOS

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Welcome Remarks: Maj Gen Dhruv C Katoch, SM, VSM (Retd), Director CLAWS

The emerging situation in Afghanistan will have an indelible impact on the region and has great relevance for India. Afghanistan is a relatively young nation state. The establishment of the Hotaki Dynasty in the eighteenth century, marked for the first time, the beginning of the creation of the Afghan state as also its armed forces. Numerous invaders across the centuries have exploited the peculiar geographical vulnerability of Afghanistan to establish and expand their own empires. The passes over the Hindu Kush Mountains gave access to the region, giving the land the moniker '*Central Asian Roundabout*'. The Medes conquered the land, followed by Alexander the Great and then in succession came the Sakas, Parthians, Kushans and Sassanids. The Sassanian Empire constituted the last great Iranian empire before the Muslim conquest and the adoption of Islam. The Islamic conquest of Afghanistan (642-714) began in the middle of the seventh century; the Islamic conquest of Persia was completed when Arab Muslims defeated the Sassanid Empire at the battles of Walaja, al-Qādisiyyah and Nahavand. Pockets of tribal resistance however continued for centuries in the Afghan territories. Part of the region was ruled by the Turkic Buddhist/Hindu dynasty called the Kabul Shahis since the fifth century AD and the Arabs were unable to succeed in converting the population of that area because of constant revolts from the mountain tribes. The complete conversion of Afghanistan to Islam was during the period of the Ghaznavids, in or about the 11th century. The Ghaznavids were followed by the Ghorids and thereafter by the Mongols who ruled for over a century (1258-1353). The Timurids and the Mughals followed, ruling parts of this land till the early part of the 18th century. The region thus has been at the centre of great power rivalry and the situation is no different today. The Great game played between Britain and Russia gave way in the modern age to cold war rivalries between the United States and the Soviet Union. An understanding of history then is also important to see the consequences of conflict in this part of the world and the role that the world's major powers will have to play if the region is to return to peace.

Session I: Current Scenarios and Factors affecting Transition

Remarks by the Chair: Lt Gen Ravi K Sahwney, PVSM, AVSM (Retd), Former DCOAS

The last decade has been relatively peaceful for Afghanistan because it is during this period that the Afghans were liberated from the Taliban. They had been suffering from the chaos, which started from the unfortunate invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union, which led to a proxy war against the latter by the United States. This destroyed the country and whatever was left was made short work of by different factions of the civil war. In the last 12 years they have gone through the process of modernisation and this country has changed in terms of its stability, education and infrastructure. With the withdrawal of the Americans, the country is going through the process of three types of transition. The first is a political transition, which involves the elections and is the most significant as it will decide who is going to govern Afghanistan. The second is the economic transition, which remains extremely difficult. For the last 12 years, Afghanistan has been financed by the United States and a lot of money has been thrown into the country which has transformed the country. Third is the security transition. Security is now solely in the hands of the Afghan security forces, with limited US backing.

Impact, Potential and Opportunities of the Political Transition: Mr Shakti Sinha, IAS, Former Chief Secretary, A&N Islands

The Afghan media is tremendously active; in the last six months they have been focusing on two issues: BSA and the presidential elections. It's not that the Taliban and security are not important but the whole atmosphere there is that these two issues are the key to the future of the country and the people have to make it the centre of their lives there. The Afghan presidential election front-runner, Abdullah Abdullah, has won the backing of a key rival, forming the contest's first major coalition. Zalmay Rassoul, the successor favoured by outgoing President Hamid Karzai, pledged his support for Mr Abdullah, the top candidate from the first round. The second and final round, due in mid-June, pits Mr Abdullah against Ashraf Ghani, a former World Bank economist. The vote comes as international forces prepare to leave at the end of 2014. Millions of Afghans defied Taliban threats to take part in the first round of the election held on 5th April.

Mr Rassoul, a former foreign minister, is no longer in the running for the presidency, having come third in the first round with just over 11 percent of the vote. An influential power-broker, he is expected to boost Mr Abdullah's chances. The Taliban have been trying to derail the election process. Their website claims that taking part in elections is anti-state and anti-Islam and participants are only "western slaves" and puppets. The thrust of the Taliban was in portraying that democracy is not compatible with Islam as it would push out *Sharia* and lead to emancipation of the women. Post elections, the thrust has changed as the people were not supportive of the earlier Taliban view. Now, the Taliban say that Afghanistan is under occupation so elections cannot produce

legitimate leadership: in other words they are moving away from attacking democracy to attacking democracy as it has been practiced at present in Afghanistan. Surprisingly, the Afghan media on its own decided not to publicise Taliban attacks because this would create insecure circumstances and frighten people off. The people of Afghanistan have reacted in a very self righteous aggressive manner, in a way of professing their rights. A number of people have expressed their opinions that it's not advisable to have a second round of elections. There is a fear of the Taliban hampering the process which could lead to loss of lives of the common citizens, security personnel and election staff. Also, there is a fear that the second round could be divisive. There were six million votes cast and that's a strong mandate for democratic governance and against insurgents. They need to move ahead and form an all inclusive government.

2009 was a bad year. Abdullah withdrew and large scale protests were seen amid a lack of confidence in the election process. The election itself was problematic and millions of votes were invalidated. It got a lot of ill will for Karzai from the United States of America. The process now must go on; any deal would be a costly mistake. Elections have mobilised millions of voters, re-legitimised the constitutional order, the eviction of Taliban and critical confidence in the ANSF. The causes for concern are very legitimate. The question which arises is that will there be a second round at all? There is a very strong urge within Abdullah and his team for political leadership and Ashraf Ghani has refused to throw the towel just yet.

The need for a second round is absolutely imperative. The Taliban has lost legitimacy and a successful second round will further add to the credibility of the new government.

Interests and Role of Global and Regional Players: Shri Ashok Sajjanhar, Former Ambassador to Sweden and Kazakhstan

The presidential and provincial elections have been a watershed as far as Afghanistan is concerned. The last ten to twelve years might have been a time of relative peace but there are no shortage of naysayers and doomsday predictions that after the withdrawal of the United States and NATO forces the situation is going to be extremely despairing or dire. All these predictions have to a significant extent been laid to rest and in that context the presidential elections have been a milestone. The feeling of confidence and well being that one can see and observe as far as Afghanistan is concerned is much better than what it has been over the last five to six years whether it is at the international level or even within the country. With the elections, the pessimism of the people has gone away to a certain extent. The current elections have to a significant extent have been being organised in a transparent, relatively free and fair manner.

There are several challenges that confront the country as it moves forward whether it is the economic challenges, security challenge or whether it is the challenge of narcotics cultivation and export, whether it is the challenge of providing employment to the youth. This will be the test for the new government. It needs to be recognised that internationally there has been a sense of fatigue as far as Afghanistan is concerned, whether it is the United States or the other allied powers who have been providing both the security or financial support to the country over the last 12 years. There is a sense

that they have done what they could have and now it is time for them to move out. In that context it is all the more reason that the regional countries need to step up to the plate and to assume the responsibility. Although countries like China, Russia and to a lesser extent countries like Iran have been wary that the US forces and the NATO forces are so close to hand but they also recognise that they have been significant beneficiaries of the presence of the international security contingent there. It is these countries which have had the opportunity to concentrate and focus on their own economic development and not be overly involved in what has been happening. There is a huge potential as far as Afghanistan is concerned, potential that it can serve as a land bridge of connectivity between Central Asia, South Asia and West Asia. If there is peace restored in the country, there is a great possibility and potential that transportation and transport networks can be put in place, it can serve as an energy corridor and it can also enhance free flow of people and ideas. These possibilities can be realised if peace is restored in the country.

Most of the countries with the possible exception of Pakistan would not like the resurgence of the Taliban after the withdrawal of the international forces. The positives are that the Afghanistan of today is not the Afghanistan of the 1990s or even early 2000. This has been shown in the recent elections also. For the first time the transfer of power will take place through a democratic process. Pakistan wants to ensure its strategic depth when it comes to Afghanistan and thus desires an important role and influence in Kabul as far as decision-making and government formation is concerned. It desires to safeguard its own interest and deny any role to India. In this context, it uses Taliban as an instrument of its own foreign policy. It wishes to maintain its influence in Afghanistan by proxy through the use of Taliban. However the Taliban of today is not the Taliban of late 1990s or 2000s. It is a very different Taliban and it is a very debateable point whether Pakistan will be able to control Taliban today, as it was able to do in the 1990s. It also suffers from a huge drawback in terms of activity and the presence of the Tehrik-e-Taliban-Pakistan (TTP) within its own country in the north western region. After the withdrawal of the forces possibly the greatest beneficiary could be the TTP, as it might be able to establish a set of linkages with the Afghan Taliban and move freely across the border. Pakistan continues to be an important player but its credibility in terms of Afghanistan is extremely low. It is seen as a promoter of insurgency, militancy and of harbouring terrorist attacks in Afghanistan.

Looking at Central Asian countries there are three states that border Afghanistan. Tajikistan is the most vulnerable to instability in Afghanistan; it has neither the military capacity nor political stability. The second state is Uzbekistan. Though Afghanistan doesn't have a very significant Uzbek population but possibly in terms of trade, commerce and movement of people it is Uzbekistan which has the most vibrant relations with Afghanistan. The third is Turkmenistan which continued its policy of neutrality in the 1990s when the formal leader Saparmurat Niyazov was there, after that a similar policy is being followed by the current government of Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow and it is likely this policy will continue. Two aspects are important here; one is the possibility of a rise in extremism and fundamentalism after the withdrawal of the US and NATO forces if terrorist and fundamentalist forces have to move up north. This would give rise to several of the other local terrorist organisations

like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, which has been lying dormant for some time and they could be re-energised to create problems and carry out attacks in these Central Asian states.

Kazakhstan has no border with Afghanistan but is large enough and over the last twenty years of its independence, has been able to make itself economically so prosperous and reasonably stable that it is the only country which has a programme of assistance to Afghanistan. It has provided assistance and support in terms of construction of schools, roads, hospitals and it has provided free wheat supplies. It has also helped in terms of capability building. While talking about Afghanistan and Central Asia, the one issue that has not received significant attention is the issue of water. This is going to become an important issue when we go through the following years. The Amu Darya, one of the largest rivers of Central Asia, starts from Afghanistan. It is fed by snow melting, glacier waters and rivers from Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan. For the time being Afghanistan which is really the water head of the Amu Darya is getting very minimal flow and supply of water for irrigation. As we move forward and peace is restored, the demand for water will increase and will pose its own challenges, being a finite resource.

China, which shares a small border of about seventy odd kilometres with Afghanistan, has been termed as a free rider so far because it has taken benefit of the peace which has prevailed in the last twelve years but has not contributed to the process. It remains wary of the NATO forces there. In terms of interest, the possibility of instability can lead to a very serious concern for China. For its economic engagement with Afghanistan, it would like to use Afghanistan as a part of network of energy and economic corridor. China has been showing keen interest to engage itself with providing security. In 2012, Afghanistan had been inducted as an observer country in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. China has also focused on the several trilateral and multilateral processes.

Iran has played a very significant and important role in Afghanistan over the last 12-13 years. Notwithstanding the problems with the United States, Afghanistan was able to work and use its influence in the Northern Alliance in 2001 to install the Karzai government. Its engagement with the United States suffered a setback when it was designated as an Axis of Evil country in 2002. However, Iran's role has been realist, pragmatic and in many ways, visionary. While Iran does not seek reestablishment of Taliban rule, it supports the Taliban to a limited extent, largely to create problems and difficulties for the United States and NATO forces. Its major area of interest has been the western part of the country where it has provided support and assistance in terms of development of infrastructure, water conservation projects, schools and hospitals. It has signed a Strategic Cooperation Agreement with Afghanistan.

For India, it is well known that the relations have been historical. In the current context, Afghanistan occupies a very important position because of strategy, security and also because India looks upon Afghanistan as a land bridge to Central Asia. India supports Afghanistan by promoting and financing large infrastructure projects, humanitarian assistance, capacity building and also by focusing on smaller projects. Iran and India

can work together, because the access that India has not been able to get through Pakistan, it aims to get through the development of the Chabahar port. Both Afghanistan and Iran would like to seek the support and engagement of India and Russia in promoting stability. It needs to be noted that Pakistan in this context has not been mentioned. Iran is also wary of the role of Pakistan in terms of the support that it provides to the Taliban. Iran has an important role to play; India doesn't have the luxury either of exiting the region or affecting a drawdown in the region. It needs to work through the international organisations and multilateral organisations. India is an active member of the Heart of Asia programme.

Russia has an important interest both in terms of the drug traffic coming in from Afghanistan if the government is not able to establish control over the territory and the terrorist elements coming to Russia through Tajikistan and other neighbouring states. Going by Russia's past experience, it would like to collaborate and partner with other countries of the region and use the intergovernmental forums to extend whatever assistance, help and support it can. It is a provider of security for the Central Asian states and it would be in a position to work together with Central Asia to bolster its capacity. There are other actors like Turkey which has been proactive; it has started the trilateral effort with Afghanistan and Pakistan. Turkey wants to play a much more proactive role not just in Afghanistan but also Central Asia and Afghanistan would provide it this opportunity. All these countries are looking forward as to how they can engage themselves but the challenge is that the countries will need to act collectively rather than pushing and pulling for their own interest.

Discussion

The pessimism regarding Afghanistan comes from their financial situation. If money doesn't come in, the economy won't immediately suffer but the Afghan National Security Forces start getting impacted immediately. Some focus is needed to be brought on money. Another issue is the role of Taliban and in particular the Haqqani network that has so far been untouched. Thus, their potential must be factored when peace and security of Afghanistan are discussed. Has the time come to steer the regional cooperation? Why hasn't there been a peace-building commission of the UN in this region, particularly for the developmental aspect and is there a role for a neutral body in the area?

There may not be an immediate impact on the Afghan National Security Forces but their strength will not be the same as now once the money stops coming in as the government will not be able to sustain such a large standing army. Money and finance are crucial for security and economic and democratic development. Internationally, there is a sense of fatigue as large sums of money are promised at conferences but in terms of delivery, a great deal is left to be desired. There is going to be depletion in the financial resources and it must now be the responsibility of the countries of the region to cover the shortfall for the money from the West. It should not be in terms of support of assistance but in

terms of investment. Apart from the money, there has also been shortage on the front of support to the forces in the battlefield and intelligence data. The real significance of 2014 is purely psychological or emotional as most of the security in Afghanistan is currently being handled by the ANSF.

Gender equality plays a very important role in conflict resolution. Over the last decade, a great deal of work has been done in women empowerment especially in the field of education of the girl child. Is there a likelihood of that continuing under the new government? What has been the reason behind the vote shift of Hazaras from Pashtuns to Abdullah Abdullah?

Attempts to formalise and legalise gender equality in conflict and to eliminate violence against women had to be done through an order by President Hamid Karzai because the Parliament refused to go through with it. However, significant amount of progress has been done but the challenges are huge. The society in the past was such that only a handful of elite had access to education. Taliban rule and the civil war give immense strength to the patriarchal section of the society and even post-collapse of the Taliban, it is difficult for women to progress. Education for girls has made a massive comeback and health sector has also developed. Setting up a Ministry of Women's Affairs was a bad idea and there should have been push for education, health, access to justice but making gender an issue has inadvertently raised opposition against it.

The Hazaras shifted their vote base in favour of Abdullah because he represents a non-Pashtun ticket and probably due to the fear of exploitation that have suffered for more than a century at the hands of Pashtuns. The voting was not on ethnic lines but on the basis of economic and political interests. The Hazaras are amongst the more educated and developed sections of the society now.

What could be the role and interest of Saudi Arabia in Afghanistan, particularly from the angle of ideology in terms of expanding Wahhabism in the region?

Saudi Arabia has not been very active in promoting its interests in Afghanistan but it has been operating through Pakistan, through support to the Sunni Taliban so that it can ensure that the Shias from the West are not able to establish some sort of dominance in the region.

What has been the role of the army considering their involvement in the coups in the country in the past?

The army should not be a threat as it is mostly infantry and is not seen as a potent force in the country politically. The army is not used for any local purpose other than security.

Looking at history, societies are best when left alone in their own cultural backdrop and environment. Afghanistan has seen thousands of years of fighting. Will the exercise of last 10-14 years of promoting democracy succeed?

Afghanistan will succeed as a democracy if its neighbours allow it to succeed. The governance has to be more accommodative and try to be a Parliamentary democracy to include both the President and the Prime Minister. If there is a sense of fatigue in the international community, there is also a sense of fatigue domestically within Afghanistan as they want peace and security but much depends on the leadership. The youth in the country is keen to start working and is looking for jobs. There is greater hope than despair.

Has India provided any assistance in the elections that are taking place in Afghanistan? Before international intervention, there was a local economy of Afghanistan based on agriculture besides the mineral and natural resources. What is the current status of the local economy of the country?

Afghanistan was an agricultural country but since 1870 it has survived on foreign money. If international money stops coming in, the economy will have serious consequences. Money is also a cause of insecurity on account of logistics and in terms of security. The productivity in the Kandahar region is half of what it was 30 years ago. Due to the insecurity, investment has also stopped coming in.

Afghanistan is keen to expand its economic interests northwards. Pakistan plays an important role primarily due to the presence of the NATO forces. But Afghanistan wants to establish relations with its northern neighbours and its policies are not Pakistan and Taliban-centric.

Afghanistan is not itself Pakistan-centric but it is Pakistan's own interest that will not allow it. Let Afghanistan look beyond Pakistan for economic interests but Pakistan will continue to meddle in Afghanistan. It will have to contend and deal with Pakistan while also looking northward in terms of developing its economy and getting all the investment it can.

Session II: Future Scenarios

Opening Remarks by the Chairperson: Lt Gen Aditya Singh, PVSM, AVSM (Retd), Former GOC in C, Southern Command**

Firstly, nothing is ever as good or as bad as first reports ever indicate. Secondly there is a general tendency amongst all of us when we talk about Afghanistan, as we are burdened by the western media, to be greatly pessimistic and consider the worst case

scenario. Last December when President Karzai was here in Delhi, he too asked this pertinent question – why is that we always consider the worst case scenario. The Afghans are a poor people and they have lived in this manner for a long time. If they don't have the money they still continue to live in this manner, so for them there is no worse case scenario. They are used to it all. In Kabul, the city is throbbing with growth; multi storied constructions coming up, everybody going about their work. Yes there are blasts but it cannot be compared to Iraq. The Afghans take pride in being Afghans and see a positive future for themselves, especially the youth. However, the youth is not happy with the leadership but they too have accepted the fact that this is the best option available until a new generation builds up.

Future Scenarios: Probability and Prognosis: Shri Rana Banerji, Former Special Secretary, Cabinet Secretariat

Abdullah, in a recent interview has said that appointments cannot be based on pure merit but will also have to take in consideration the ethnic factor. June 14th is the likely day to the run off and both the candidates are not very Pakistan friendly as of now. The Hazaras were responsible for the high turnout. They favoured Abdullah. Whether the Karzai factor has become weak or not is still a question that remains unanswered. Fraud in 2014 was much less than before. Whether Pashtuns voted less is another unanswered question. In any case the Taliban have declared the elections irrelevant. Violence was less than expected in the first round but more threat has been predicted for the second round. The new President will most likely sign the BSP. The problems that had been there in the signing of the BSP- what Karzai was bargaining for is not very clear.

The domestic political landscape remains polarised between Karzai's government forces and Western allies on one side versus Taliban, Hizb-e-Islami (Hikmatyar) and the Haqqani network on the other. The warlords were disarmed only superficially under the DDR process. They dominate other positions in the judiciary, bureaucracy and the factional alliance security forces (ANA and ANP). There are linkages between both the warlords and the Taliban. As per UNDP, the area under opium cultivation goes on increasing. There has been a sanctioning of US aid; new business empires have come up after the return of the diaspora. Widespread corruption, however, continues.

The capabilities of the ANSF have increased; they are now better able to fight against the Taliban. The response of commando units against terror modules has been good; they can retain control of city centres. But the composition remains ethnically unbalanced. The officer class has more Tajiks; Pashtuns are being brought in but integration is slow. Desertions and seasonal attrition rates remain very high. Logistic capabilities remain dependent on West.

The Afghan local police, a force of about 23,550, is a more corrupt force and is not popular in rural areas. They have believed to have indulged in human rights violations. There are many other local militias, some of which are effective and anti-Taliban, but are liable to switching loyalties.

Pakistan still basically wants strategic depth with a slightly modified manner. A high priority for it is to prevent encirclement and block/exclude Indian influence. It would like to undermine Afghan claims on Pashtunistan that is the recognition of the Durand Line. They are afraid of the Afghan Taliban ganging up with TTP and reversing the strategic depth inwards. This is why there is some lip service to the talk of inclusive outreach to other ethnics - Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras. The sincerity of such an outreach is doubtful. Pakistan has tried to control the reconciliation talks and prevent and disrupt India's aid programmes/ influence, if necessary by using proxies like the Haqqani network to attack the Indian embassy, and other Indian establishments through suicide attacks.

The Taliban has demanded the release of all Guantanamo Bay prisoners - about 20 such personnel, including Mullah Khairkhwa; release of prisoners inside Afghanistan (Bagram); removal of UN sanctions; acceptance of itself as a political movement; a comprehensive guarantee of a substantive role in governance; acknowledgement of *Shariah*/ dilution of Constitution; purge of existing ANA/ANP, altering ethnic composition of the ANSF and maintaining of their own mobilised armed personnel in some amalgamation. The Taliban approach village elders and local clerics with a mix of ideological persuasion, monetary inducements and intimidation. They offer efficient, quick and non-partisan judicial mechanisms including mobile courts for justice. They have also opened ranks to non-Pashtuns in the north and north east. Evidence of continuing factionalism among the Taliban also persists.

For the purposes of reconciliation/ re-integration, preliminary contacts were made at several levels including direct Afghan to Afghan talks through the Karzai administration. The problems and pitfalls that still remain pertain to the question of the talks being between and with whom? It also remains to be seen whether the Haqqani's will act as bridge for the Afghan Taliban and what will be the cumulative impact on the Pakistani TTP. The following scenarios could evolve:

Option A (Best-case scenario for Pakistan):

Maximise Taliban influence in a weak Kabul Government in the initial phase of transition and curtail infighting. The advantages are that it provides strategic depth, safe havens for extremists and reduces/ excludes Indian influence. The disadvantage is it could lead to a resurgence of Pashtun nationalism and act as an outlet for disgruntled factions.

Also it could lead to greater independence of Afghan Taliban factions from ISI control. Link ups with TTP could lead to strategic depth in reverse.

Option B (Medium case): Possible but not likely. Inclusive power sharing with all ethnic groups/power brokers.

This could facilitate government formation with US help and could bring in Pashtuns (pro-Taliban, Hel, others including pro-Karzai), Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras and other warlords. This could lead to an uneasy stability. However, it could also be a precursor to civil strife.

Option C (Worst case option) Intensifying civil strife between ethnic power brokers, leading to civil war.

This implies intensification of factional splits among Pashtuns (Taliban , Hizb-e-Islami, pro-Karzai elements, Haqqani network). There would be a spill-over impact on the TTP and could lead to a strategic depth in reverse. Tajik factions could take sides and regional players such as Iran, Russia and others could re-enter the fray

Implications for India

Option A. Indian influence would stand reduced and scope of continued development aid/ programmes could be jeopardized. Fanning of Kashmir- centric terrorism is possible but unlikely.

Option B. Leverage remains with ethnic groups but constant competition for maintaining influence; does not augur well for stability.

Option C. Not good for India as capacity to woo power brokers would become dependent on relations with and role of other regional actors.

India's Options

- Continue political & diplomatic engagement with whoever comes to power.
- Continue economic aid and explore back-up options.
- Re-engage old friends within Afghanistan – revive ethnic card. Find new Pashtun friends.
- Establish commonality of security interests with other regional players — Russia, Iran.
- Explore regional security umbrellas — Turkey, United Nations.

- Continue training & military aid on request of new Afghan government in regulated manner, but no boots on ground.

Indian Concerns and Options: Prof S.D.Muni, Distinguished Fellow, IDSA

There are three transitions going on in Afghanistan: Political transition, security transition and economic and development transition. All three have areas of concerns for India. We would very much like to continue economic engagement with Afghanistan and see that Afghanistan is integrated with the South Asian economy such that it then becomes a bridge for South Asia and Central Asia. Concerns for protecting India's investments and presence in Afghanistan and pursuing India's aspirations to connect with Central Asia and play a larger role in South Asia will all depend on the state of Afghanistan.

There is a concern arising out of the security situation. While the Taliban appears determined to take over control of Afghanistan, India would not like that to happen. While on the one hand there is gradual escalation of violence, there is also an erosion of financial economic resources to Afghanistan. In some rural areas, locals are standing up against Afghan forces and there are minor clashes. The security structure which India wants to sustain and ensure stability however remains a matter of serious concern. If the Taliban gets into a dominant position not only would investments and stakes come under severe trouble but in that situation, Pakistan in order to continue playing an increasing role may activate groups on the Kashmir front as it would not like India to be supportive of the Afghan security forces.

Pakistani press shows a mortal insecurity vis-a-vis what India can and will do. They fear that if India manages to consolidate Afghanistan, Pakistan's Western front will become vulnerable. It is time to reach out to Pakistan and bridge the huge trust deficit that exists between the two countries. Many international commentators have said that the real war in Afghanistan in the coming decade would not be a Shia-Sunni war but a India-Pakistan cold war. India has time and again reiterated that it wants an independent and sovereign Afghanistan which is stable and peaceful. The underlying words being that we do not want an Afghanistan controlled by Pakistan (directly or by proxy.) One of the factors for that would be a strong authority in Kabul which is more secular and moderate. It is in India's interest that a deal is stuck and that no final round of elections takes place.

When it comes to options, we can think at three levels:

- At the international level, India would very much like to see a continuing engagement of the international community (US and NATO), both in terms of military presence and the continued financial assistance. There is a lurking fear that if the Taliban dominates Afghanistan, the fear of anti-West terror in one form

or the other would continue. This reason itself will push the West to continue to engage with Afghanistan. We would also want the BSA to be concluded as it can provide a legitimate structure for the continued commitment of the international community.

- Another option that is being talked about, but may not be viable is to see if the international community would accept Afghanistan as a neutral country or that it is brought under UN peacekeeping. India is not very pro this option, but this whole idea is to ensure that it is not Pakistan dominated. It is not very exciting but an available option.
- Regionally the continuing concern is that the heart of Asia countries must ensure that Taliban do not get sanctuaries in neighbouring countries including Pakistan. However, it is doubtful if Pakistan, even after giving commitment, would actually follow through or not.

In the heart of Asia, there are so many countries involved but from India's perspective, the key countries involved are Pakistan, Iran, China, Russia and India. Pakistan is not very confident of controlling the Taliban. The Taliban too want to get out of the Pakistani umbrella. Is there any scope for getting the linkages between Pakistan and Taliban weakened? Apparently there are no signs of hostility between the Taliban and India. Taliban feel that India is more tied to the Northern Alliance and ethnic groups. Is there a scope for us to reach out to them and try if this nexus if not broken it can be weakened at least. When the Taliban are on their own, we do not face any major problems by them.

India had been sounding Russia to work together on Afghanistan since the last four years but Russia was not keen. They are now willing to provide relatively heavy equipment like helicopters, tanks etc. through Indian financing. There are obvious constraints and limitations in this option. Similarly there are constraints in working with Iran. China has equal stakes in Afghanistan. We need to persuade China to work together on Afghanistan. For China, the situation in Xinjiang is far more critical and they would not like to be wholly dependent on Pakistan. The Chinese however, have to be persuaded to give greater financial commitment to Afghanistan's stability.

Besides these bilateral options, SAARC is another option, though possibly the weakest and the most fragile. We are trying to lure the Pakistanis economically, catering to a constituency that wants to flourish economically and integrate with the South Asian and Central Asian markets. This would only be possible through linking trade and investment channels. This is entirely an internal matter and depends on whether such constituency will have any influence over the more dominant army.

Remarks by the Chairperson-

General Joseph Dunfar, commander of ISAF at the American Senate stated:

“After watching the Afghan forces respond to a variety of challenges since they took lead in security operations in June, I do not believe that Taliban insurgency represents an existential threat to the government of Afghanistan or the Afghan security forces.”

This is a far cry from what is normally being heard. Another point made in the American Senate was that American assistance and resources have to be provided to sustain the Afghan security forces because if they don't there is bound to be a resurgence of terror. This apprehension of resources, in the long term will be provided for, and will be contingent to the BSA. Another apprehension is that of arms provided to forces falling in the hands of the Taliban. The arms that are being provided in any case are of low technology, and the line of thought is that even if an odd tank does land in the hands of the Taliban, it is not a major concern as the chances of it entering Kashmir are low.

Reaching out to Pakistan is very valid and has been mentioned on many occasions. It also must be conveyed that we understand that if three super powers- the British, the Russians and the Americans could not control Afghanistan, it would be beyond presumptuous to presume that anyone else can do it, let alone Pakistan. On the aspect of Taliban not being hostile to India, let us not forget all that happened after the Russians left in 1989. China needs to have a role in ensuring Afghan security. But India must also be careful in the manner that China reaches out. There are informal reports that there is an offer by the Chinese to train the Afghan army. This is something that India would not want to happen. India trained 1200 Afghan soldiers in 2013 and are commissioning about 150 Afghan officers every year. I think we can carry on. There is always a country like Tajikistan for setting up a training team however setting up a training team in Afghanistan is not recommended.

Lastly, the interference from Pakistan is something that India is going to expect and accept and therefore the bluff has to be called. India must also expose them to the world as a pariah state because that is the only way some understanding can be established. Talking politely in cogent and reasonable terms is not a logic that works with Pakistan. What will dictate the future of our relationship is new policy under the new NDA government. So far, India has had a very nuanced and balanced policy but a clear statement of intent in building up security forces, which is a pre requisite to any economic and political transition will dictate to the future to a very large extent.

Discussion

The status of the safety of the nuclear arsenal in terms of strategic depth.

The concept of strategic depth was devised in 1989-90. It is an outdated because Pakistan now has a nuclear arsenal. Pakistan now believes that it has better security through their strengthened bunkers plus they have a deployed strategic command. Strategic depth in reverse affecting Pakistan is more in terms of Pashtun intent.

The British training academy in Kabul will not run beyond 2016, should India fill in those shoes?

India should not get into training in Afghanistan.

Will Taliban be as offensive in its operations now that its going to be killing Afghans rather than ISAF soldiers? The context of operations was different earlier.

Afghans have never successfully worked in Kashmir. Pashtuns from Afghanistan have never really wanted to prosper in Kashmiri territory. They have only come when the Pakistan army has egged them on. These conditions have not changed. Afghan Taliban have independently signaled that if they are able to come to power they will have no desire to sponsor terrorism to other countries. They seem to have learnt their lesson from 1996 onwards. They will try to stay away from the Arab elements of the Al Qaeda and even Punjab based terrorist of Pakistan who may still want to use areas inside Afghanistan to train.

There is no military planning for the best scenario, how is the void of arms in Afghanistan post the American withdrawal going to be addressed.

It is a different transition as compared to the past. The Americans are likely to stay. Economic involvement will remain until 2024 so will the NATO help.

