

## **General**

A Round Table discussion with Mr Shuja Nawaz Director, South Asia Center, Atlantic Council was held at Conference Hall, CLAWS Office, on 29 August 2013. The RT was attended by faculty from CLAWS, think tanks and universities.

### **Opening Remarks: Maj Gen Dhruv C Katoch, SM, VSM (Retd), Director, CLAWS**

The Director welcomed Mr Shuja Nawaz and introduced him to the audience as the author of "*Crossed Swords: Pakistan, Its Army, and the Wars Within*" and "*FATA: A Most Dangerous Place*". He is a graduate of the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, where he won the Henry Taylor Award. He was a television newscaster and producer with Pakistan Television from 1967 to 1972 and covered the 1971 war with India on the Western front. He has worked for The New York Times, the World Health Organisation, as a Division Chief for the International Monetary Fund, and a Director of the International Atomic Energy Agency, and has widely written and spoken on military and politico-economic issues on radio, television, and at Think Tanks. He was Editor of Finance & Development, the multilingual quarterly of the IMF and the World Bank. He is now Director, South Asia Center, The Atlantic Council of the United States. The Director then invited Mr Nawaz to speak on "Afghanistan-Pakistan relationship and managing trans-border challenges".

### **Mr Shuja Nawaz**

2014 is a misnomer for the drawdown, as the President of the USA has basically checked out of Afghanistan for quite some time. Domestic pressures in the US have precipitated a withdrawal as early as 2013 but it is difficult to complete the shifting out of materials which would require a longer presence. In terms of actual fighting operations, however, there has been a return to a much smaller footprint of 38-40,000 troops which before the next fighting season in 2014 will make it much harder for the US and coalition forces, many of whom have already said that they want out.

Pending discussions between US and Afghanistan called as a Strategic Agreement are important. Karzai has delayed this announcement till next year but is believed to be using this future agreement to safeguard or enhance his own interests or that of his family. A dark mood prevails in the US and there is emphasis on having no more involvement in Afghanistan. On the size of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) –much more open discussion is going about numbers. The NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan (NTMA) is creating false numbers in many ways. There are doubts about the capacity of the ANSF especially when it would experience the lack of Coalition forces or logistic support provided by them post withdrawal. Attrition rate is very high, around 20-25 percent. Preparing and training the officer corps is a far longer process

than preparing soldiers. The process has started very late, but has gathered momentum in the last three years. Throwing in more money is not the solution.

Seven billion US dollars are required for sustaining the security forces annually. President Obama's own heart is not in this. The staff is being rotated out from these regions. A relatively low priority is being accorded to this issue in the White House and unless the National Security Advisor takes charge, no coherent policy is coming out of Washington. There is no centre of gravity and the US is stumbling its way out of Afghanistan.

The fall of Saigon would appear to be a garden party when compared to the exit from Afghanistan, revealing a lack of confidence in the process. Afghanistan prepares for a chaotic transition in the background of elections. India remains the lynchpin for decision making about the region. US has the ability to gather information but is unable to transmute it into knowledge and action. Regarding the departure planning from Afghanistan, on 3 December two years ago, Obama made a speech at West Point stating that the US would be leaving. After this speech, the tribal *maliks* who were supporting the Afghan government said that since the US was leaving, they were done with them. The President thus gave the game away. The US withdrawal is similar to the Soviet experience of their pullout. In the politbureau meeting held on the matter, the depth of discussion was very frank and open. Some issues discussed therein hold similarity with Obama's situation in Afghanistan. There are lessons to be learnt from the Soviet experience. That history should be revisited, and it should be seen what factors need looking into. The questions to be addressed are regarding whether money will come from the West and the US, can it make up for logistic support, and should mobile forces be created.

There is also the question of who the security forces are fighting. The Haqqani group has two sanctuaries in the areas of Paktia-Khost-Paktika region and they also keep coming from North Waziristan. The Coalition is mistaken in taking the Taliban as the single enemy and as a single entity. The reality is different, as there are a number of entities like the Quetta Shura, local commanders and various others fighting on the basis of their tribal rivalries and affiliations. There is no national approach. According to the reconciliation efforts, the Taliban becomes the representative of the opposition and of all Pashtuns. This approach is going to create serious problems in dealing with local and regional leaders who are also Pashtun, and do not like Mullah Omar and those who are supported by Pakistan. The Afghans are united in their distrust of the ISI as they have undergone bad experiences earlier.

The Punjabi Taliban movement has risen in Pakistan and all the different insurgent groups are working with each other and with Al Qaeda. Taliban control in the border areas of Pakistan can lead to the phenomenon of reverse sanctuaries. Pakistan will

experience problems in fighting insurgents having sanctuaries in Afghanistan if the Coalition support funds dry up. Supporting 140,000 troops on the border is economically very difficult given the country's economic situation.

Indirect military cooperation between India and Pakistan is possible, and opportunities in the economic sector are arising. Because of the impending elections in India, it would be very hard for the Government of India to take actions regarding trade. Nawaz Sharif has missed the opportunity by a long shot. His policy is being held hostage by the Punjabi feudal groups who are against subsidies given to India on the grounds that they would swamp Pakistani agriculture.

The opportunity cost of India-Pakistan conflict is tremendous. An annual trade of 40-100 billion a year can raise per capita income in both countries. Pakistan's defence spending is also a matter of concern. While Pakistan's defence budget is much lower than India's, in percentage terms, it forms a much higher part of the country's GDP and is a drain on the nation. By 2030, Indian economy will be 16 times the size of Pakistan. Gap will increase and if Pakistan is to improve its economy, it should go back to history. In the 1960s, Pakistan's economy rose tremendously because money was not diverted disproportionately to defence. Consequently, with an improved economy, Pakistan was enabled to double its defence budget. Political transition and transition in the military mind-set regarding its role has to happen in Pakistan, which as of now is not taking place. Most people in Pakistan's Defence Ministry are retired military personnel. The moot question now is whether the ISI, which reports exclusively to the Army Chief, will be able to do so to the PM and will the civilians be able to assert supremacy. As of now, Sharif as prime Minister also heads the ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence. If he is unable to play all these roles simultaneously, then it is likely that the concerned Secretaries would be exercising power on his behalf. The transition would then be delayed and history would repeat itself.

There is a process of transition going on in the military in Pakistan. Gen Kayani is leaving after six years along with a whole slew of old generals and a younger breed is coming in. Hopefully, they would have a new outlook and would be able to reshape the doctrine to enable it to face multi-faceted threats and not just be India-centric. Sharif should exercise his prerogative and announce the next Joint Services Chief, who would be his choice and not the Army's. Since the Chief Justice is leaving in December, the erratic and autocratic behaviour that has characterised the relations with other organs of government would be removed and there would be a smooth relationship between the Parliament, judiciary and the army. This can bode well with Pakistan and its neighbours.

## **Interactive Session**

- *The most fundamental issue between Afghanistan and Pakistan is that ISI and the Pakistan Army can choose to terminate the conflict in a few weeks. What is the extent of their role there and over the various Taliban factions and Mullah Omar?*

The ISI is estimated to have a greater control than it actually does over the Taliban, otherwise it could have delivered a lot more. The Taliban kidnapped people in North Waziristan whom the army and the ISI wanted to free but were unable to track them or get them released. The Army chief has been given wrong feedback; therefore incorrect decisions have been taken. Only ten percent of the attacks in Afghanistan have been traced to the Haqqani group. It has no influence outside the Kabul area. Afghans have used these perceptions to garner additional support especially for funds and training.

- *What will be India's position post-withdrawal of the Coalition troops? What are the indirect implications for India? Some American policy objectives attempt to bring India and Pakistan together but others state that India should be out of Afghanistan. What is the American viewpoint about India before the US leaves and whether India figures in the calculation?*

Pakistani troops cannot be moved to the eastern border, and there is an added influence of the Punjabi Taliban who are using Afghanistan as a training ground for Europeans, Chinese and Central Asians which is a matter of concern. 200 Germans who have gone missing from Germany would in all probability be found in FATA. Pakistan cannot afford that and no other buffer is possible like the one it has managed in Swat and Malakand. Rotation of troops prevents regular training exercises, as a result of which the soldiers suffer professionally. Troops in forward areas also thereby become prone to indiscipline. There are constitutional problems in providing military aid to civilian power.

The biggest challenge for Kayani and his generals is to fight the war within the country with an enemy which is not a ragtag bunch of insurgents but proper forces. Upping the ante against India is difficult as troops have to be thinned on the eastern border and to be moved to the west as was done earlier in the case of Swat. Pakistan is not in a military position to provoke a serious confrontation with India. The civilian government under Sharif has a hold over Parliament, can yank some activities back but the question is that will it do so.

- *What is the importance of institutional strengthening in Afghanistan? What is the role of India vis-à-vis building Afghanistan and its infrastructure and the tremendous objection from Pakistan?*

The status of regional cooperation vis-à-vis Afghanistan is an open question. Assurances can be worked out if the aim is to strengthen institutions, to assimilate the

Taliban and achieve the transition to peace. Economic payoffs will be more if stakeholders mutually work together. Misperceptions however bedevil relationships. The Grand Trunk initiative to link Kabul to Dhaka is an attempt to revive an economic relationship that existed even before India and Pakistan. If cheaper renewable energy is made available from Kyrgyzstan, then everybody wins. But at present, political obstacles based on purely historical memories are blocking the processes. The civil society in Afghanistan, Pakistan and India is talking about these issues. Till the time the Parliament can take up issues other than changes in government, civil society and government will remain on different tracks and misconceptions will continue. US is involved in behind the scenes work. Quiet diplomacy is influencing thinking on both sides. Current situation will not yield positive outcome and both countries are being denied opportunities of trade, energy and prosperity.

- *Is there clarity regarding what Pakistan wants in Afghanistan? What are the links between the establishment and terror groups?*

There is no clarity to what Pakistan wants in Afghanistan. Afghan aims in Pakistan are not known either. There is no single view of Afghanistan in Pakistan and the Pakistani army. There is an active debate among the Pakistani corps commanders, with chances of a fresh debate arising in 2014.

- *What is the impact of the Arab Spring on Afghanistan? Is it not time to confront the large issue as indicated by the recent happenings?*

Post-Arab Spring, the situation is much more volatile. Former USSR had already speculated about what could happen in Afghanistan in the future. Gorbachev had suggested that the US should not go into Afghanistan and begin talks with Pakistan. The answer to the present situation lies in the political transition in Pakistan.

- *What is the radicalisation level of Pakistani army officers?*

The Pakistani military supported the granting of MFN status to India. It was the Punjabi agriculturalists who fussed over it and stopped it. There is no way to know the indiscrepancies in the system. ISI handlers could have gone over to the militants. Pakistani society is much more conservative now with global trends, media and education system causing these changes. There is influence of the so-called spiritual networks which is very detrimental to military discipline. The military personnel affiliated with such networks or *pirbhais* report to their spiritual leader or *pir* who is outside the chain of command. This is very worrying, for what he says supersedes the seniors' commands and everyone is treated as equals regardless of military rank. The extent of such groups is not known but such circles do exist.

- *What is the Afghan view?*

A stable Afghanistan according to Karzai implies an extension of his influence, with friends like Dostum. The polity's use of youth has widened and women's participation should also be gained. The Taliban have no geographical spread in the north and the west. Indian investments are located there. The Turks are also spending a lot of money there. The Iranians are focussed in the west as it is totally reliant on them and they can do anything. A solution will emerge and Afghans will be able to work out their differences and live with each other and realise that fighting wars is difficult. Pakistan and Iran cannot consider Afghanistan as their client state. It is a much older country and should be respected as such.

- *American aim in Pakistan has been met in Abbotabad. What are Pakistani aims?*

There was no US grand strategy when it went into Afghanistan. Clear aims are required for achieving military success. Change in commanders has led to chaotic situations. Now US is looking for people who can help them. China has invested in resources, is waiting and will come back to invest in Afghanistan once peace returns. Pakistan should be internally focussed to have economic growth. Nuclear power, force levels etc are irrelevant. The middle class should wake up. A 53 million strong class should define better goals for Pakistan.

- *Are the recent incidents along the Line of Control an attempt to keep Sharif on the backfoot.*

The use of the LoC is not a good strategy for Pakistan. Media can play both good and bad roles. It was the Indian media that raised a hue and cry and should be criticised. Pakistani media was quieter.

- *Your views on the Pakistani concept of Strategic depth?*

Strategic depth is a bogus idea, which died after Gen Aslam Beg stepped down. The Western media however kept it alive. The question is that even with strategic depth, how and with what Pakistan will fight to really make a use of it. Kayani had stated this concept to mean a stable and prosperous Pakistan.

### **Concluding Remarks: Maj Gen Dhruv C Katoch, SM, VSM (Retd), Director, CLAWS**

The fundamental challenge in Pakistan remains the ability of the elected government to rein in the military. The emerging military leadership is the one that was recruited in Gen Zia's time, so it cannot be said with certainty how it will act. One has to look at the larger construct of a Sunni-Shia conflict for supremacy being waged by Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shia Iran, leading to large scale sectarian violence in the region which is now playing out in Syria. Pakistan would have to confront the sectarian challenge as also address its

ethnic faultlines, growing radicalisation and a worsening economy. The task for the new government is indeed challenging and only time will tell how it faces up to them.