

India's Role in Afghanistan Post 2014

Strategy, Policy and Implementation

Kirit K Nair



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Editorial Team

Editor-in-Chief : Col Vivek Verma
Managing Editor : Ms Geetika Kasturi

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Centre for Land Warfare Studies

RPSO Complex, Parade Road, Delhi Cantt, New Delhi 110010

Phone: +91.11.25691308 Fax: +91.11.25692347

email: landwarfare@gmail.com website: www.claws.in

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Preface

A strong and stable government in Afghanistan is essential to Indian security, trade, commercial and strategic interests as Afghanistan's unique geo-strategic location positions it as a viable land bridge to Central Asia, Iran and Afghanistan's energy resources. In the context of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) drawdown, India has a crucial role in ensuring long-term stability in Afghanistan.

This paper examines India's strategic, political and economic objectives in Afghanistan and the range of proactive measures undertaken by it to secure the objectives. It dwells on the positive trade-offs that Indian initiatives have derived so far, but argues that India needs to go further by adopting a more vigorous multi-pronged strategy: a strategy which seeks to deny space to potentially hostile states and non-state actors from undermining Afghanistan's stability and Indian interests while also restricting traditional fence-sitters like China from economically expanding in Afghanistan at India's expense.

First, the paper examines the Indian objectives in Afghanistan followed by an analysis of the initiatives undertaken by India in the country. Subsequently, it seeks to articulate why India needs a *de-novo* appraisal of its strategy and suggests measures to secure Indian interests in Afghanistan.

Keywords: India, Afghanistan, post ISAF drawdown, strategy, Pakistan, 2014, Taliban, trade route, Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline, Durand Line, Baluchistan, Northern Areas, undersea gas pipeline.

Abbreviations

ANSF	Afghanistan National Security Force
AQIS	Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent
ADB	Asian Development Bank
BSA	Bilateral Security Agreement
CAR	Central Asian Republics
EU	European Union
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas
FICCI	Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GWOT	Global War On Terrorism
HIG	Hizb-i-Islami Gulbuddin
HM	Hizbul Mujahideen
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICP	International Comparison Programme
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
JeM	Jaish-e-Mohammed
KPK	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
LET	Lashkar-e-Taiyaba
MNNA	Major Non-NATO Ally
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
PfP	Partnership for Peace
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
QST	Quetta Shura Taliban
SSP	Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan
SAARC	South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation
SOFA	Status of Forces Agreement
LEJ	Lashkar-e-Jhangvi
TAPI	Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India
UNCIP	United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
USGS	United States Geological Survey

Chapter I

Introduction

The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) drawdown in 2014 led to a cautious approach to the otherwise proactive policy India followed in Afghanistan. Pakistani intransigence, political duplicity and strategic obduracy resulted in the US and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) seeking a proactive role for India post the drawdown. This paper examines the Indian objectives in Afghanistan and initiatives undertaken by it in Afghanistan. It examines the Indian strategy in Afghanistan in the changing security environment of South Asia, the likely instability in Pakistan, and the security threats from non-state actors. This paper seeks to present a *de-novo* appraisal of Indian strategies to secure Indian interests in Afghanistan.

India has a longstanding cultural, historical, economic and military association with Afghanistan. In view of tangible measures taken by the Indian government in various fields of trade and culture, which have a substantial contribution to any ordinary Afghan citizen, India is viewed very positively in Afghanistan.¹

Indian military's non-involvement throughout Afghanistan's troubled past and the fact that the two countries do not share a common boundary also helps. Most of the leaders of the Northern Alliance whom India had supported in the struggle against the Taliban are now members in the Afghanistan government. India has also taken initiatives to engage a broad range of ethnic groups and to revive old ties with the Pashtuns. The consistently vocal support given to the ex-President, Mr Karzai (a Popalzai Pashtun) is a fine example of this policy of engagement. India has been consistently pushing for Afghanistan's early integration in regional and political entities, including the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC).²

Indian distrust of the Taliban stems from it being a proxy militant group employed by Pakistan for obtaining leverage against India, its linkages with international terrorist groups, its open support to Kashmiri militant groups and a history of anti-India activities at Pakistan's behest (attacks on Indian interests in Afghanistan and assistance to the hijackers of IA Flight 814 in 1999).³

Post the Taliban era, India has made significant inroads in Afghanistan and has carved out a special place in the economic, political and strategic space in Afghanistan. India's policy of unconditional support in the interests of establishing a strong and stable government in Afghanistan for enduring peace and economic prosperity has been well received by ordinary Afghans as also the international community. Besides being an important land bridge for Indian access to Central and West Asia, Afghanistan represents a confluence of India's vital strategic, economic, security and energy security needs.

Afghanistan Scenarios Post 2014 ISAF Drawdown

Prospects of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) drawdown are characterised by pessimism both within Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries and in the international community with respect to its future stability and security. Lack of political clarity in the Afghan leadership, the numerous non-state actors, the neighbouring countries and regional entities with their conflicting interests and stakes render it extremely difficult to arrive at a reasonably accurate prediction of Afghanistan's future post the ISAF drawdown.⁴ However, most analytical writings agree on three likely possibilities as the most probable course of future events:

- **Optimistic Scenario:** The Afghanistan National Security Force (ANSF) is able to retain control of all territory, restrict the Taliban to a non-existential problem and convince the Afghans of political stability by good governance and growth. Afghanistan continues to make progress in its quest for economic freedom and political stability.
- **Muddling Through Scenario:** The Taliban is able to achieve tactical success short of strategic gains in the south, denying it major communication centres, roads and utility grids. In the case of such an event, Afghanistan would revert to traditional community living wherein the tribes accept the nominal leadership of the central authority but continue to retain their independence. In the long run, this would adversely affect economic growth and political stability.
- **Pessimistic Scenario:** This envisages an inability of the ANSF to hold their own against the Taliban, resulting in a sequence of Taliban victories wherein they gradually capture strategic cities and assets, precipitating a departure from a stable, single polity, national institution to a chaotic

security situation based on ethnic, sectarian or regional entities. Extended Taliban gains would cause the Afghan state and economy to implode, with revival of old alliances leading to a civil war.⁵

Based on this discourse, the general view is that Afghanistan is likely to fall within the ‘muddle through scenario’ and ‘pessimistic scenario’ and that over an extended period of time, it is likely to see a repeat of the 1990s when the Taliban had overrun the country.

However, there is reason to believe that Afghanistan may fall into a scenario somewhere between the ‘optimistic’ and the ‘muddle through’ probabilities. This is because Afghanistan in 2014 is drastically different from what it was in the 1990s and while the Taliban may be able to undermine the writ of the government in certain areas in the south and east, the ANSF will certainly not collapse.⁶ Afghanistan’s security and stability in the face of the ISAF drawdown is consolidated by the 2014 signing of the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) between the US and Afghanistan and the Partnership for Peace (PfP) Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with NATO, which although not a defence pact, obtains from the US and NATO a “strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, and national unity of Afghanistan”. It also obliges the US and NATO to “enhance the ability of Afghanistan to deter threats against its sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity”.⁷ The agreement designates it as a Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA) and provides for assured financial security and financial aid.⁸

Unlike in the 1990s, the Taliban is now devoid of any significant international support except from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia (financial aid). Saudi Arabia’s preoccupation with the Iraq-Syria-Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) crisis⁹ leaves it with little inclination to pursue its interests in Afghanistan. Saudi Arabia is concerned about the huge support base of 2,000 Saudi fighters in the ISIS ranks, and the ISIS’ declared intent to overthrow the royal family-led government in Saudi Arabia.¹⁰ Russia, China and Iran, for different reasons, would seek to prevent a return of the Taliban in Afghanistan. The Taliban also lacks popular support in Afghanistan as the brutal and oppressive policies practised during its reign are fresh in Afghan minds.¹¹

Given the prevailing discourse on the political and security situation in Afghanistan in view of the ISAF drawdown, most countries, including India, have adopted a cautious policy¹² with respect to further investments in Afghanistan, preferring to wait for clarity on security and stability in the country.

While concerns pertaining to enduring stability in Afghanistan in view of the ISAF drawdown are justified, India's cautious approach can severely undermine the progress made thus far while simultaneously providing other players the opportunity to influence events in Afghanistan. Considering the political, economic, diplomatic and soft power investments already committed by India in Afghanistan, this is the time for India to take calculated risks and proceed to enhance engagement on all fronts with Afghanistan: political, economic, diplomatic, infrastructure development, strategic and military (short of boots on the ground). It is imperative for India to pursue its objectives in Afghanistan with adequate safeguards to address adverse events.

Chapter 2

Indian Objectives in Afghanistan

The Indian calculus would also focus on Pakistan in view of its stated preference to seek a weak government in Afghanistan amenable to Pakistan's requirements. India faces considerable security challenges from terrorist organisations like the Al Qaeda, Taliban, Haqqani network, Lashkar-e-Taiyaba (LeT), Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) and others; all of them based in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) provinces and all of them operating with state support from Pakistan.¹³ Pakistan seeks a weak government in Afghanistan so that it can maintain strategic depth against India, inhibit India from projecting power in South Asia and permit its terror assets to operate from the Af-Pak border to launch non-attributable anti-India attacks on Indian soil and on Indian economic interests and personnel in Afghanistan. This probability can be obviated and regional stability and peace ensured only by preventing Pakistan supported militant groups from coming to power in Afghanistan and by countering Pakistan's political influence. India would seek to counter Pakistan's objectives to destabilise the democratically elected government in Afghanistan.¹⁴

India's interests in Afghanistan cover a wide range of issues to include trade, commerce, and security, and to ensure a stable government in Afghanistan. Countering Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan and its attempts to install a weak and pliable regime is one of the objectives. However, this is not the only and primary motive for India seeking a larger role. India seeks to project itself as a regional power beyond the confines of South Asia and sees the building of stable, long-term relations with the Central Asian Republics (CARs) and Afghanistan as crucial to its economic, trade and security interests.¹⁵ Of equal significance to India is securing access to, and obtaining an assured supply of, the natural and mineral resources found in abundance in the CARs and Afghanistan to fulfill the burgeoning demand for its industrial base and energy security needs.

Elimination of Anti-India Terrorism

Pakistan has a declared policy of using its terror assets to extract leverage over countries it considers inimical to its interests.¹⁶ Consistent with that policy, Pakistan has repeatedly launched anti-India, non-attributable terror attacks on Indian soil and on Indian interests in Afghanistan. When presented with evidence proving its involvement in the terror attacks, Pakistan has consistently resorted to denial and lies. The 26/11 Mumbai attacks and the attacks on the Indian Embassy in Afghanistan have strengthened the Indian resolve to prevent further attacks, by military means, if necessary.

Although imposition of *Sharia* is the stated goal of terror organisations like the Haqqani network, Hizb-i-Islami Gulbuddin (HIG), LeT, Quetta Shura Taliban (QST) and HM, these groups have (over time and with absolute power in their domains) evolved as commercial mafias with self-sustaining financial enterprises, including drug trafficking, kidnappings for ransom and smuggling, to name a few; and successive Pakistani governments have been unable to check these activities effectively on either side of the Durand Line.¹⁷ Groups like the Afghan Taliban and Haqqani network, if required, can take a course of action which may be unacceptable to Pakistan. The activities of these groups can be effectively neutralised only if Pakistan, their principal benefactor, is made accountable to the international community. Hence, rooting out terrorism and weakening its sponsors would be the primary aim of Indian involvement in Afghanistan.

Undermine Pakistan's Influence in Afghanistan

The transition of political authority from President Hamid Karzai to the newly elected government of Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah was marked by bitter acrimony and backroom manoeuvring for political ascendancy.¹⁸ But for the ISAF's presence in Afghanistan and remarkable US diplomacy (which did a commendable job by pulling Afghanistan from the brink of a potential civil war onto the road to stability), the outcome on the political and security landscape of Afghanistan could have been drastically different.

The present Government of Afghanistan is predominantly composed of elements from Northern Afghanistan. To make itself more inclusive, it is possible that the Afghanistan government may initiate negotiations with moderate elements among the Taliban or with Pashtun tribal leaders

of south Afghanistan. Pakistan would attempt to take advantage of these political compulsions and undermine all attempts at reconciliation talks by influencing the FATA and KPK based terror groups. India would seek to counter Pakistan's moves to dominate the political landscape of Afghanistan to ensure continued peace and stability. The fundamental incompatibility of the Pakistani perception and strategic approach vis-a-vis the international community¹⁹ with respect to Afghanistan has to be consistently highlighted and emphasised upon to deny political legitimacy to Pakistan's ulterior moves. But for Pakistan's operational duplicity, strategic obduracy and political ambivalence, the ISAF could have probably ended up with a comprehensively successful mission and with far fewer losses sustained in men and material.

Undermine the Taliban and other Terror Groups

The Afghan terror groups operating from the Afghan-Pakistan border are likely to intensify their attacks on ANSF elements, government infrastructure and personnel within Afghanistan. Switching sides,²⁰ the patronage of a foreign power²¹ and foreign aid²² being the central aspects of the Afghan way of war, it must be borne in mind that only if any or all of these factors are violated, do the terror groups have any viable chance to destabilise the government. Indian interests would be best served by ensuring that the Afghanistan government is assisted in all ways necessary to ensure that it is never monetarily weak, and always seen as being backed by the international community.

Strengthen Ties with Iran

India and Shia Iran have common economic, strategic and commercial interests in Afghanistan. It would be in India's interests to further strengthen ties with Iran without in any way disturbing its equation with the US. India needs to engage the US and obtain political and diplomatic support for the development of Chabahar port which is crucial to the Indian quest for energy security and can also provide unrestricted commercial access to international markets off/for the Central Asian Republics (CARs). India's planned development of Chabahar port at an investment of \$ 85 million for the current year²³ is a positive development in its quest for securing its trade, commerce, diplomatic and strategic ties with Afghanistan, Iran and the

CARs. Chabahar port needs to be developed as an alternative access route for Indian commercial interests into Afghanistan and the CARs.

Enhance Ties with CARs

According to the World Bank ICP Report of 2011 released in April 2014, India is the third largest economy in the world by share of world Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and in Purchasing Power Parity (PPP).²⁴ India is also the fourth largest energy consumer in the world and its energy requirement is projected to escalate in view of its high growth rate, emphasis on modernisation and growing population.²⁵ A 2011 Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) report states that 78 percent of petroleum and 25 percent of natural gas consumption is met by imports and the same is likely to go up to 90 percent.²⁶ The natural resources that the CARs possess are huge and their assured availability would be vital to India's economic progress, energy security needs and regional presence.

For instance, Turkmenistan is the 4th largest gas reserve holder (265 trillion cubic feet) in the world and was amongst the 15 top natural gas producers in the world.²⁷ Similarly, Kazakhstan, with 30,000 million barrels, has the 12th highest reserves of oil.²⁸ Kazakhstan is a world leader in the reserves for coal, chromites, lead and zinc.²⁹ The Kumtor gold mines in Kyrgyzstan are among the largest in the world and contribute 1.5 percent of its GDP.³⁰ Tajikistan has huge reserves of gold, silver and uranium.³¹ Uzbekistan is rich in deposits of gold, uranium, coal, and lead, copper and zinc.³² India needs to adopt an assertive policy aimed at enhancing its investment profile in the CARs or risk being edged out by China which has already made tremendous strides in these countries.

India established a Military Hospital at Ayni Air Base (non-operational since 2009) in April 2013.³³ During the 1990s, India had established a field hospital at Farkhor in Tajikistan to treat wounded fighters of the Northern Alliance battling the Taliban, which it later closed down. The Indian request to the Tajikistan government for an air base has not yet materialised due to the Russians' objections.³⁴ Establishing new air bases in Central Asia on the lines of Ayni or Farkhor (Tajikistan) would, however, be required to monitor and secure Indian strategic interests in Afghanistan and the CARs.

Russia needs India much the same way as the US, to restrict the growing Chinese influence in Central Asia. Besides, the sanctions imposed by the US and European Union (EU) have significantly affected the Russian economy. India needs to tenaciously engage Russia to convince it of India's strategic necessity to have an air base in Tajikistan. Similarly, Russian influence over Uzbekistan can also be exploited to establish an air base there.

Apart from energy security, other initiatives undertaken in the CARs would ensure that China does not elbow India out of Central Asia and that Pakistan continues to be a lower priority nation compared to India.³⁵ India will seek to secure energy resources and stakes in the mining industry to further enhance its economic progress and, at the same time, bring economic prosperity to the CARs. Additionally, since the existing infrastructure in the mining and energy sectors is of pre-Soviet era vintage,³⁶ India can enter into an agreement to rebuild or refine these facilities for the mutual benefit of both countries.

Enhance Stake in the Natural Resources of Afghanistan

Afghanistan is well endowed with natural resources. Surveys conducted by the Russians during the 1980s and further refined by the US Geological Survey (USGS) post 2000 have conclusively established the presence of large deposits of minerals in Afghanistan.^{37, 38} The minerals include iron ore (2,200 million tons), copper (60 million tons), cobalt, lithium (substantially high deposits), niobium, uranium, chromites, granite, marble and other metallic and non-metallic minerals. Afghanistan is also blessed with 444 billion cubic metres of natural gas, 3.4 billion barrels of crude oil and 562 million barrels of natural gas deposits³⁹—a significant quantity of deposits by any yardstick.⁴⁰ The deposits also include precious gems and stones like emeralds, rubies and the largest deposit of lapis lazuli.⁴¹

The estimated value of these natural resources at \$1-3 trillion⁴² would completely alter the economic and social profile of Afghanistan. This can assist Afghanistan to achieve fiscal stability by adding considerable revenue to the economy, substantially lower its dependence on foreign aid, improve the balance of payment position due to increase in exports, and attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into the economy.

As part of its policy of having inclusive growth, India will seek to help Afghanistan in reaping the benefits of the natural resources by assisting in building infrastructure, undertaking mining projects and developing the distribution network. India's resurgent economy, fiscal management and developed human capital resources can play a pivotal role in facilitating Afghanistan's journey towards fiscal stability.

Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) Pipeline

The 2008 Agreement for the TAPI gas pipeline is an important development with far-reaching geo-strategic implications. Sponsored by the Manila-based Asian Development Bank (ADB) at a cost of approximately \$ 10 billion, the proposed 1,700-km-long pipeline will transport 33 billion cubic metres of natural gas annually.⁴³ The pipeline commences from Daulatabad gas field in Turkmenistan, through Herat in northwest Afghanistan to Kandahar, further to Quetta and Multan in Pakistan and, finally, terminating at Fazilka in India.

Fig 1: The TAPI Pipeline⁴⁴



Successful completion of the project would require enhanced inter-tribal cooperation and efforts to maintain stability and security in Afghanistan,

which would bode well for its people. It would also require the Afghans to increasingly seek peace with their neighbours. The economic revenues from the construction and development work of the pipeline, the transit facility it offers and the ancillary enterprises which can flourish along the pipeline would result in economic development of the region. It would also provide Afghanistan with an opening to the warm water ports for movement of their own exports. Most importantly, it would mitigate India's energy resource crunch and provide an assured supply at competitive rates. This would require India to overcome Pakistan's political duplicity and strategic obduracy as it endeavours to block progress on the execution of the TAPI pipeline project. In the recent past, Pakistan has regularly blocked transit rights to Indian goods in much the same way that it blocked transit rights for ISAF convoys.

Counter Chinese Influence in Afghanistan

China's practice of adhering to a non-interference doctrine during the Iraq War in 2003 paid huge dividends in the aftermath as it was able to reap the benefits of its soft power projection at the expense of the US.⁴⁵ Although during the initial phase of its Iraq engagement, China had to write off \$ 6.5 billion worth of debt, the trade volume between the two countries soared to \$ 17.5 billion.⁴⁶ China's contribution to Afghanistan of \$ 330 million pales in comparison to its status as an economic powerhouse.

With the ISAF drawdown, China is likely to intensify its commercial and economic initiatives in Afghanistan. India would seek to restrict China's inroads into the mining and construction sectors to mitigate China's potential rise as a major trading partner for Afghanistan.

Projection as a Regional Power

With its growing economy, its population and soft and hard power assets, India is gradually inching towards realising its ambition of being recognised as a global power or as a preeminent power in the regional context. India's size, human resources pool and economic growth, complemented by a robust military capability, qualify it for the status of a regional power. It is amongst the largest troop contributing nations in the UN peace-keeping operations. The Indian Navy has deployed and assisted in anti-piracy operations off the Somalia coast. Besides the air base and military hospital it operated at

Farkhor and Ayni in Tajikistan⁴⁷ during the Afghan War, it has demonstrated substantial airlift capability by transporting relief and construction material and other goods into Afghanistan since Pakistan blocked transit facilities for Indian transport. The Indian Air Force has conducted some of the biggest humanitarian disaster relief operations domestically and internationally on numerous occasions, proving its credible strategic airlift capability.

Achieving the Objectives

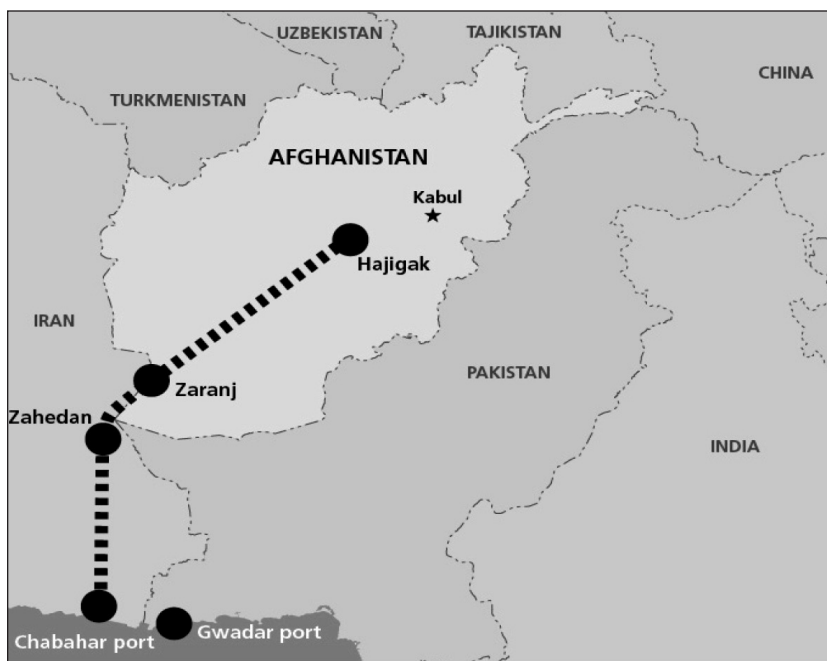
In the pursuit of these objectives, India has adopted a multi-pronged approach by engaging in diverse undertakings over a wide range of enterprises aimed to enhance economic development and promote peace and stability in Afghanistan. It has studiously avoided any military initiatives and has preferred to be involved in the development of soft power assets in Afghanistan. India's policy of engagement in Afghanistan has been largely successful in terms of goodwill and support from the Afghan populace and the government which view India as a reliable friend and trading partner.

Chapter 3

Indian Initiatives in Afghanistan

Post the Taliban era, engagement by India with Afghanistan witnessed a gradual shift in the Indian policy which, rather than being anti-Pakistan, had moved to a strong commitment for building peace and stability in Afghanistan. India's strategy in Afghanistan is guided by the desire to prevent an Islamist government that would readily provide Pakistan with strategic depth and a safe haven for terror groups rather than facilitating a pro-India government in Afghanistan.⁴⁸

India has opted to pursue a 'soft power' strategy⁴⁹ to engage Afghanistan, preferring to contribute substantially in the civilian sector rather than in defence and security. India is particularly active in the construction, infrastructure, human capital building and mining sectors. Besides, it has also identified the telecommunications, health, pharmaceuticals, and information technology and education sectors for cooperation. Within the framework of two bilateral agreements, India has pledged over \$ 2 billion in aid to Afghanistan. India has also agreed to build the 600-km-long Bamiyan-Herat rail link which will serve to connect the Hajigak mines to Herat and further to the Iranian port of Chabahar via the Delaram-Zaranj highway, which India had constructed in 2009.

Fig 2: Rail Link: Hajigak-Zaranj-Zahedan-Chabahar ⁵⁰

This makes India the fifth largest investor⁵¹ in Afghanistan's stability and quest for economic and social development. Some of the important projects of India, by cost, are:

- Supply of 250,000 tons of wheat.
- Construction of the Parliament building (\$ 178 million).
- Construction of the Pul-i-Khumri to Kabul power line (\$120 million).
- Salma Dam power project (\$ 130 million).
- Construction of the Delaram-Zaranj road (\$ 150 million)⁵²
- Food assistance to primary school children, and construction and rehabilitation of schools (\$ 321 million).

Fig 3: Indian Projects in Afghanistan⁵³

Enhanced Indian Involvement in Afghanistan: Hurdles/Current Scenario

Since the US/ISAF commenced its involvement in Afghanistan 11 years ago, Pakistan was considered a vital ally in its fight against Al Qaeda and the Taliban, and its cooperation had been highly valued. Towards this end, the US and NATO respected Pakistani sensitivities on security issues, thereby, restricting, and occasionally even sidelining, India's foray into Afghanistan while having to accommodate Pakistani indiscretions like active support to the Afghan militant networks on Pakistani soil and undermining US efforts for a negotiated settlement with the Taliban.⁵⁴

However, with the ISAF drawdown, increasing evidence of Pakistani support for terrorism, its political duplicity and tendency to undermine the ISAF's concerted attempts to arrive at a negotiated settlement have caused a sea-change in the US perception of Pakistan as a valued ally in the Global War On Terrorism (GWOT).⁵⁵ The US increasingly views India as a reliable and responsible player that can be depended upon to close the gap created by the ISAF drawdown. The US is increasingly encouraging India to develop

further on the progress it has made in the economic, construction and mining sectors. The US prefers a robust role for India in Afghanistan as it views the Indian contributions in the economic, commercial and security aspects of Afghanistan as highly significant and relevant to ensuring stability and progress for Afghanistan.⁵⁶ This dilution in the strategic importance of Pakistan is likely to reflect in the reduction of military and administrative aid which, until recently, Pakistan could assume as a foregone conclusion.

Pakistan is unlikely to support a bigger role for India in Afghanistan or the US advocacy for this role.⁷² It is likely to retaliate by conducting non-attributable militant attacks on Indian soil or on Indian interests in Afghanistan. In this context, an attempt to intensify support and encouragement to proxy terror groups to conduct terror attacks should not be ruled out.

Need for Change

The Indian strategy till mid-2014 had focussed primarily on building political influence in Afghanistan, providing development aid to enhance economic influence, regionalising solutions to its security and stability problems, and providing military assistance and projecting power. Rather than pursue interests solely to facilitate its own agenda, India has preferred to undertake an inclusive form of engagement so that Afghanistan stands to gain in equal measure.⁵⁷ India's approach thus far has led to significant progress in the relations between the two countries. But the tangible benefits accruing to India have not been commensurate with the efforts that it has put in. The ISAF drawdown and its implications for Afghanistan dictate certain changes which need to be incorporated in the Indian strategy in Afghanistan.

Chapter 4

Proposed Strategy and Implementation

Reduce Political Space for Pakistan

Post the ISAF drawdown, Pakistan, and to a lesser extent, Saudi Arabia, are the two countries which would like to see a change in the composition of the Afghanistan government. Pakistan, in particular, will seek to undermine Indian presence and influence in Afghanistan by launching attacks on Indian interests in Afghanistan. India has to contain Pakistan politically to ensure it refrains from undermining Indian interests. The suggested changes in the current strategies are enumerated in the succeeding paragraphs of this chapter.

Strategic Depth vs Pashtunistan: Durand Line

In Pakistan, proponents of the “Strategic Depth” concept believe that ensuring a weak and pliable regime in Afghanistan would provide it with the requisite depth to move its crucial assets deeper into Afghanistan in the event of a comprehensive conventional war with India.⁵⁸ Sceptics of this concept point out that in the modern era of nuclear deterrence and the global reach of strategic assets, this is becoming increasingly irrelevant.⁵⁹

Notwithstanding the merits and demerits of the strategic viability of this concept, there is little evidence on the ground in terms of concrete development measures undertaken by Pakistan to follow up on this concept that serve to prove Pakistan’s genuine interest or intent to further this premise. For instance, FATA, where Al Qaeda and other terrorist organisations have firmly established roots, is characterised by poor governance, extreme poverty, negligible development, scarce infrastructure and a volatile security environment.⁶⁰ FATA is governed by a different set of regulations, and an administrative and judicial mechanism different from the rest of Pakistan.⁶¹ Pakistan’s claim of obtaining strategic depth in Afghanistan is not matched by a commensurate, visible and viable inclination to develop infrastructure, social stability and security along the borders in FATA. The condition in KPK

(although one of the most neglected provinces in Pakistan), is slightly better. However, KPK has traditionally got less than its fair share of government infrastructure projects and private sector investments. The infrastructure that exists is adequate only to facilitate defence logistics.⁶² The situation across the border in Afghanistan (within the immediate sphere of Pakistan's political and military influence) is equally dismal. Pakistan has not facilitated the creation of the requisite infrastructure in the border areas of Afghanistan nor in FATA and KPK that would facilitate speedy removal and subsequent securing of strategic assets.

The Durand Line which demarcates the boundary between Pakistan and Afghanistan has never been recognised by any government in Afghanistan, including the pro-Pakistan Taliban regime.⁶³ It is time the international community reconsiders its perspective towards the Durand Line, if a permanently enduring peaceful solution is the desired end state.⁶⁴ The international community has tended to favour the Pakistani position on the basis of the principles of *Uti possidetis juris*. Certain aspects about the agreement merit closer scrutiny and oversight with respect to the interpretations of the *Uti possidetis juris* principles, and violations of the provisions of the Durand Line.⁶⁵ The Line was deliberately drawn to suit British India's interests and has been detrimental to the interests of the Pashtuns from the outset. The Pashtuns are the primary constituents of all the Pakistan-based Afghan terror organisations based in KPK and FATA.

The concept of strategic depth propagated by Pakistan is an elaborate bluff on the international community with the ulterior objective of keeping the unresolved Durand Line dispute on the backburner. The international community needs to dispassionately reexamine the contours of the Durand Line agreement and resolve the demarcation issue in the interests of maintaining enduring peace and stability in the region.

The Pakistani propensity to shirk responsibility for cross-border violence emanating from its soil in KPK and FATA areas on the grounds of them being autonomous and ungovernable is untenable. This premise deserves tougher scrutiny as Pakistan has never taken adequate measures to integrate the KPK and FATA areas into the political and legal framework of Pakistan.

India needs to proactively engage the international community in this regard and champion the cause of bringing about a permanent resolution to

the Durand Line problem. Internationalising the resolution of the Durand Line serves the following purposes:

- It will antagonise the Pashtun majority in case Pakistan rejects the proposal or seeks to repudiate it. For Pakistan, it would be a 'lose-lose' situation, irrespective of whether it agrees or disagrees.
- India can consider giving recognition to the claims for Pashtunistan to internationalise the issue or if it is perceived to be against our immediate interests (Northern Alliance), we can bring it to the notice of certain other countries which share similar concerns about Pakistan.
- Call Pakistan's bluff about strategic depth vis-a-vis India which in reality is a front to divert international attention from the real issue of resolving the Durand Line.
- It serves to keep Pakistan engaged in quelling instability in KPK and FATA.
- India's support for the Pashtunistan cause is an added bonus which would facilitate the safe pursuit of its economic agenda.

Baluchistan

Baluchistan is the largest and most underdeveloped province of Pakistan and much of its hinterland remains unopened and unadministered.⁶⁶ Baluchistan was forcibly annexed by the Pakistan Army in 1948. The apathy of successive Pakistani governments has alienated the Baluchis rather than integrating them into the national fabric.⁶⁷ Pakistan's track record when dealing with the cause of Baluch nationalism has been extremely poor, replete with human rights violations and is characterised by utter disregard for the people's right to dignity and life.⁶⁸ The Human Rights Watch (HRW) report of 2013⁶⁹ has highlighted the plight of the Hazara Shias who are victims of targeted killings. Worse is the plight of Baluch nationalist workers who are targets of the most brutal form of torture, humiliation and forced disappearances. India should support the cause of Baluch nationalism through diplomatic channels and internationalise the issue.⁷⁰ The wanton killing of Hazaras in Baluchistan would not be acceptable to Iran.

For decades, Pakistan has actively followed a policy of using proxy groups to exercise leverage over other countries. It has been championing independence and freedom related causes in neighbouring countries with utter disregard to the debilitating consequences it has on the host country. Afghanistan, Jammu

and Kashmir (J&K) in India, Uzbekistan and Iran are a few instances which immediately come to mind. In case India does not advocate a diplomatic offensive on the issue, it should aggressively assist in creating the logistics support, infrastructure and financing for the Baluch cause for independence—a befitting Indian response to Pakistan’s use of *jihadi* groups on Indian soil.

Pakistan does not shirk from employing unacceptable means to undermine India’s progress; neither does it spare any diplomatic opportunity to embarrass India. Pakistan’s Prime Minister (PM), Mr Nawaz Sharif’s Kashmir centred speech at the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in 2014 is a case in point. It is time India rakes up and internationalises certain forgotten issues to which Pakistan is highly sensitive and vulnerable to.

Balawaristan: The Northern Areas

Balawaristan is the historic name of Gilgit-Baltistan which includes Gilgit, Skardu, Hunza, Ishkoman, Puniyal and Yasin. Bounded by the Wakhan Corridor in the north, Xinjiang (China) in the northeast, J&K to the south and Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) in the southeast, the region has a population of approximately two million. Pakistani has been in occupation of this region in violation of the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP) agreement since 1949.⁷¹ Termed as the Northern Areas in Pakistan, its political status within the Pakistan framework is undefined—a state of political incognito.⁷² The area has witnessed a rise in nationalistic aspirations and the people of the area have been regularly expressing their dissent to Pakistani rule. The formation of the Balawaristan National Front in 1992 was a political expression of the aspiration of the people asking for complete cessation from Pakistan.⁷³ The Pakistan government’s policy of changing the demographic profile of the area by settling people from the mainland, the ethnic violence targeting the Shias and their lack of say in governance are the principle reasons for the discontent.

Independence of Balawaristan needs to be supported by India and all measures need to be initiated to internationalise the issue. International attention should also be brought on the repeated gross violations being perpetrated by various state sponsored Sunni terror groups, the prominent one being the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) and its militant arm, the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ).

Fig 4: Balawaristan-The Northern Areas⁷⁴

ISIS: An Indirect Threat

The spectacular gains of the ISIS in Iraq and Syria make it the richest, most popular and potent terrorist organisation in the world.⁷⁵ In the Islamic world, it has displaced Al Qaeda as the premier organisation representing Islamic interests and spearheading the cause for establishing *Sharia* in the Muslim world.⁷⁶ Even if the spread of the ISIS is restricted to Iraq and Syria, the immense popularity and stature it has gained in the Islamic world relegate Al Qaeda and its affiliates to a secondary status, a position that Al Qaeda is not entirely comfortable with. The Al Qaeda leadership would feel compelled to initiate actions leading to visible achievements that would rival the ISIS in terms of attracting international attention, *jihadi* volunteers, funding and respect in the Islamic world.

Ayman Al Zawahiri's September 2014 announcement on the creation of the "Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent" (AQIS) needs to be viewed in the context of the growing popularity of the ISIS with a commensurate decrease of Al Qaeda's stature. Within India, the AQIS is unlikely to gain traction⁷⁷ as India's democratic dispensation provides Indian Muslims freedom, liberty and media exposure to a level unheard of in most of the Islamic world. Lack of appeal for the Caliphate cause and Darul Uloom Deoband's condemnation

of the formation of the AQIS serve to discourage an overwhelming majority of the Indian Muslims from joining such a cause.⁷⁸

The ideal and obvious targets for launching spectacular attacks would be the US and Western assets and interests, followed by India, Israel and non-Sunni Islamic countries. Of these potential targets, India, by virtue of its proximity and security vulnerabilities, presents the most easily accessible and exploitable target. Pakistan, due to the consequences of its own domestic state of ISIS-related turmoil, selective anti-terror campaigns and its anti-India policy, will readily oblige the terror groups with logistics, financing and security cover. This probability is very real and India needs to enhance and integrate its internal security capabilities to a new level which seeks to preempt any such enterprises.

However, such attacks, no matter how spectacular, inherently lack territorial, financial and population control gains which would be the outcome, if an organised attack to retake Afghanistan were to be undertaken. For reasons already discussed earlier, any organised Al Qaeda-Taliban attempt to retake Afghanistan would be neutralised by the ISAF and ANSF restricting their gains to southern Afghanistan. Hence, it would make more sense to look south of the Durand Line into Pakistan, where the conditions are more favourable for such an initiative. The radicalisation within the Pakistan Army, ongoing sectarian conflict, proliferation of militant/terrorist organisations and simmering ethnic rivalry that characterise present-day Pakistan comprise a volatile concoction, waiting to be exploited.

A stalemate in southern Afghanistan would make the ISIS appear more attractive to the younger Taliban-Al Qaeda generation. In that event, Pakistan and Afghanistan would be faced with a “far more radicalised, militarised and extremist youth movement due to which Pakistan and Afghanistan would end up ceding territory to extremist groups”.⁷⁹

India’s Internal Security Preparedness and Strategy to Counter Terrorism from AF-Pak Region

The current lull in *jihadist* activities in the Kashmir Valley is more to do with the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and its proxy terror groups having shifted focus westwards to Afghanistan in order to replace the Afghanistan government (post the ISAF drawdown) with a more subservient proxy government.⁸⁰ Drawing lessons from recent history, it would be fair to assume

that Pakistan will subsequently attempt to divert its proxy terror groups to foment trouble in J&K and in the hinterland. India needs to ramp up its counter-terrorism preparedness to deal with these terror groups: Al Qaeda, Haqqani network, LET, Jaish-e-Mohammad (JEM), Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HUJI), HM et al whose ideological motivation, battle experience, training and equipment are much more enhanced and formidable as compared to what has been the experience so far.

India's forays into Afghanistan have so far been influenced by a desire to accommodate Pakistan's sensitivities to growing Indian influence in Afghanistan and to avoid provoking Pakistan from launching its proxies to attack Indian interests in Afghanistan or in the Indian hinterland. But the point is that these attacks will take place irrespective of the scale of India's involvement in Afghanistan and will only increase as India continues to rise.⁸¹

India needs to fight these irritants on its own terms and with weapons and equipment systems that are commensurate to its status. There are two reasons for this: it permits optimum utilisation of assets thereby obviating the need to pump in more troops into J&K. Secondly, post Operation Vijay, the country is better informed about casualties and losses sustained in terror attacks in J&K or in the hinterland and, hence, is unlikely to ignore deaths and collateral damage (civil and military alike).

This is not to suggest that the current weapon systems held by our security forces are inadequate, but we can certainly improve the stand-off distance for engagement of ground forces when fighting terror and simultaneously reduce the deployment figures by acquiring certain assets which are proven force multipliers. For a nation that aspires for recognition on the global stage and one which merits it (the yardstick being its rising economy and the development index), it makes little sense to get bogged down in a proxy war unleashed by a neighbour whose political duplicity and strategic obduracy inhibit rationality. For India, it conveys a negative image of the security and stability situation which, in turn, bodes ill for potential Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) entry into India. More importantly, it serves to hyphenate India at par with Pakistan, a tag which India has left far behind.

Lastly, it is essential that all counter-terrorism assets are well integrated, accountable, monitored and led by an entity which has the responsibility, authority and accountability for decision-making.

Intensify Economic Activities

The drawdown of the ISAF, the signing of the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) between the US and the Government of Afghanistan and the coming to power of an elected government in Afghanistan that is backed by the international community comprise a major setback for Pakistan.

From India's perspective, the agreement is virtually a green signal to intensify its activities in enhancing involvement in the economic, reconstruction, construction and mining sectors of Afghanistan. The US and its allies are the principle donor nations to Afghanistan. India should take advantage of the growing healthy relations with the US to garner maximum projects in Afghanistan as wholly owned Indian projects or joint ventures. India should take advantage of the political and economic rivalry between the US and China to further its own economic and commercial goals. Of course, this also serves to restrict China's role in Afghanistan.⁸² Indian efforts will find active support from the US as it sees India as a viable counter to Chinese attempts to expand their footprint in Afghanistan⁸³ and by extension, with the CARs; and also because the Indian involvement in the various sectors promotes an enduring environment of peace and stability in Afghanistan. The US also benefits in the sense that a robust role for India in Afghanistan serves to reduce US involvement in the country as well as the resources required to bring stability to Afghanistan.

The transition impact on the economy of Afghanistan can be mitigated in large measure by strengthening the institutions, building up sub-national administrative capacity for delivering key services (water, education, health and roads), installing durable civil services and developing expertise in technical services. India has a healthy presence in most of these sectors. However, it is now necessary to vigorously follow up on the initiatives and make major inroads into these sectors with the objective of absolutely dominating the 'soft power' sectors. India, with its highly developed human capital, industrial framework, technical institutions, medical facilities, training institutions and educational infrastructure can be a prominent player in the sustainable development of Afghanistan, post transition in 2014.

Intensify Creation of Alternative Infrastructure

In the absence of direct land access to Afghanistan and the CARs, Indian initiatives to acquire energy security and enhanced trading ties with Afghanistan rely heavily on the premise of Pakistani goodwill and the commonality of commercial interests as also on the availability of a stable security corridor in Pakistan and southern Afghanistan. This factor endows Pakistan with a geo-strategic significance which it employs to the detriment of Indian interests in Afghanistan. Pakistan's potential for obstructing Indian progress can be drastically reduced by developing an alternative route to facilitate trade and commerce with Afghanistan and the CARs.

For instance, completion of the TAPI project depends largely upon the availability of political and security stability in southern Afghanistan and Pakistan. The proposed pipeline passes through the volatile areas of Herat and Kandahar in southern Afghanistan and through Quetta and Multan in Pakistan. In that context, in the near future, Pakistan, in view of domestic consequences emanating from the current sectarian conflict in the Islamic world (ISIS) and its ongoing anti-terror war in Waziristan, is likely to face a deteriorating security situation which may spill over into neighbouring Afghanistan and Iran. Management of religious minority communities and ethnic minority groups, which has always been a contentious issue in Taliban Afghanistan and Pakistan, is likely to exacerbate irrespective of whether the ISIS threat continues or is dismantled. The spectacular success of the ISIS has already inspired large numbers of militants and young volunteers from Pakistan and Afghanistan to join the ISIS cause. The return home of these volunteers is likely to cause extensive sectarian strife, principally in Pakistan, which has simmering sectarian tensions even in the best of times, with spillover effects on Afghanistan.

The already delayed pipeline construction is likely to be delayed further, thereby leading to cost escalations. Besides, even if the pipeline is completed, Pakistan is unlikely to refrain from employing it to extract leverage for its political goals unless there is a viable alternative. Another factor undermining the TAPI pipeline is the Chinese proposal of a rival pipeline connecting China-Afghanistan-Turkmenistan.⁸⁴

For the sake of ensuring its energy security needs and promoting assured commercial ties with Afghanistan and the CARs, India needs to develop an alternative gas pipeline and an alternative trading route, giving access to the

markets of Afghanistan and the CARs, which will be immune to political volatility and security instability in Afghanistan and Pakistan. India needs to make rapid progress on the planned 1,300-km-long deep sea gas pipeline, at a cost of \$ 5 billion from Oman, which can transport 31 million cubic metres of gas per day.⁸⁵ More importantly, this pipeline facilitates transport of gas from Iran and Turkmenistan by feeder links to the main pipeline through Chabahar port.

Speedy development of Chabahar port will serve to open up alternative trading links to Afghanistan and the CARs. Economically and politically, it also serves to provide Afghanistan an alternative port to conduct its commerce at much lower tariffs compared to Karachi port which consequently loses its position of preeminence. In turn, it opens up a safe and reliable trade corridor for Indian trade and commerce with the CARs along the Chabahar port-Herat-CARs route. While road connectivity already exists from Chabahar into Afghanistan, India and Iran need to expedite the completion of the North-South Transport Corridor connecting Iran, Afghanistan and the CARs.⁸⁶ Stationing a few Indian naval vessels in Chabahar port can neutralise the strategic advantage derived from Gwadar port by China and Pakistan.

Financial and Military Aid

The ANSF is crucial to retaining stability in Afghanistan and is the only organised indigenous military element capable of keeping the Taliban out of power in Afghanistan. The ANSF's success is also vital to ensure that Indian economic, political and industrial interests in Afghanistan continue to flourish.

The budget for the ANSF, with a strength of 2,28,500 personnel is approximately \$ 4.1-5 billion⁸⁷ per year and the total aid requirement for Afghanistan is \$ 10 billion per year for the next decade. The US being the principle donor has asked other nations to enhance contributions for the ANSF.⁸⁸ The presumption is that this aid is likely to decrease annually as the Afghanistan government stabilises and its financial condition shows consistent improvement.

The Strategic Partnership Agreement of 2011 between India and Afghanistan obliges India to assist Afghanistan in the “training, equipment and capacity building programmes” to strengthen the ANSF.⁸⁹ Accordingly,

India has extended extensive support for Afghanistan's desire to train, arm and equip its military. As the drawdown of the ISAF got closer, India had increased the number of Afghan officers being trained in India to 1,100 per year in 2013.

In a recent development, India has signed an agreement with Russia under which it will pay Russia to supply arms and ammunition to Afghanistan.⁹⁰ The deal calls for the supply of light artillery and mortars, air support helicopters and armoured vehicles. The deal also finances the resumption of an old armaments factory near Kabul and identifying and retro-fitting Russian military equipment.⁹¹ Afghanistan's request for T-72 tanks, 105 mm howitzers, AN -32 transport planes and Mi -17 helicopters along with bridge laying equipment and trucks should also be facilitated and the requisite training should be given at the earliest. So far, short of having boots on the ground and direct supply of Indian arms and equipment, India has delivered on its assurances made to Afghanistan.⁹²

India should continue to provide all assistance necessary to build a strong Afghan National Army capable of taking on the Taliban. Provision of direct military assistance to Afghanistan must be considered for the simple reason that if India does not oblige Afghanistan, it is only a matter of time before other countries step in. If China or Pakistan do so, it would seriously undermine Indian policies, investments and interests, painstakingly built up over the past decade. Direct sale or gifting of weapons, ammunition and communication equipment should be pursued. India should provide more seats for Afghans in Indian military training institutions or alternatively consider sending trainers and advisers to Afghanistan. The Indian presence should be seen and heard to build up the image of a friendly and reliable country.

Projecting Power

India needs to pursue a policy of gradually establishing its military presence in the CARs. Old ties need to be revived and then maintained (even in times of peace) to ensure an enduring presence. Russian reservations about India having a base in Tajikistan can be overcome by diplomatic overtures and negotiations. India can also offer to provide logistic and base facilities for US/ ISAF troops, if asked for.

Establishing an air base in Tajikistan or any of the CARs apart from providing India with a visible military presence, enhances its stature as a regional power. Strategically, it provides India with the capability to monitor and secure its assets in Afghanistan and future interests in the CARs. It increases India's range of options in terms of rapid reaction capabilities towards India specific adverse events or security emergencies occurring in the region. India's limited options during the hijacking of IC 814 are a case in point. India's strategic airlift capability could be employed to conduct emergency evacuation of Indian personnel working in future conflict zones in Afghanistan or in Iran. Strategically, it would serve to neutralise Chinese presence in Gwadar and along the Karokaram Highway as also provide Pakistan an additional factor to consider before undertaking anti-India activities unilaterally or through its proxies.

Economic might and prosperity alone will not provide India with regional power status. That claim gets strengthened only if India is seen to be participating militarily at both regional and global levels. India should seek to fill the vacuum created due to the ISAF drawdown by providing military aid (short of boots on the ground) and support to Afghanistan in addition to being intensely involved in the economic spheres.

Conclusion

India needs to significantly scale up its operations in Afghanistan, especially in the economic, industrial, communications, Information Technology (IT), human capital developments, construction, reconstruction, diplomatic, intelligence and military fields. The vacuum created by the ISAF drawdown should not be permitted to be exploited by other regional players, notably China.

Considering the inevitability of militant attacks by Pakistan's proxy groups and their negative implications on India, all out efforts need to be undertaken to have a robust, well integrated, counter-terrorism infrastructure in place to restore balance with minimal cost to human life and property, and in the shortest timeframe possible.

Pashtunistan, Baluchistan and Balawaristan are ideal examples of Pakistan's absolute disregard for human rights and democracy. The fallout of Pakistan's selective war on terrorism in Waziristan and the ISIS impact will,

in all probability, lead to exacerbated tensions and a highly volatile security situation in Pakistan along ethnic, sectarian and religious lines, which has the potential of spreading to the east and south of Pakistan. Such a situation provides India numerous possibilities to keep Pakistan indefinitely engaged in resolving its domestic issues. It is also time India calls Pakistan's bluff of strategic depth vis-a-vis the Durand Line. Arm twisting Pakistan on the Indus Waters Treaty is also an option that India should consider to derive leverage over the issue of transit facilities to India.

As our commercial enterprises and private sector participation increases in Afghanistan, India will have to consider inducting troops for protection of Indian interests, especially on projects, reconstruction activities and in the mining sector. Developing Chabahar port in collaboration with Iran and making it operational in the earliest timeframe is crucial to the economic interest of both India and Iran.

At the same time, India should continue to engage elements of the erstwhile Northern Alliance and retain the goodwill and support of the northern ethnic groups. For the same reason, India needs to maintain and enhance its ties with Iran which has a similar interest (for different reasons) to ensure stability in Afghanistan. In that context, India should continue to maintain strong ties with the CARs and existing good relations with Russia have to be nurtured and their security interests respected.

India stands to make tremendous gains in the political, economic, strategic and resources sectors if it makes a well calculated assertive move in Afghanistan at this juncture in its history. India needs to quit the fence and get on with the task of proving to the world that it has indeed arrived—and that it is quite capable of assuming regional roles and resolving issues in its backyard.

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