

FUTURE PROSPECTS OF AFGHANISTAN PEACE TALKS THROUGH THE PRISM OF HISTORY

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Abstract

The resolution of a conflict for sustainable peace is akin to peaceful dialogue leading to the creation of win-win situation for all the stakeholders involved in a conflict. Holding of peace talks is an instrument for sustainable peace in the contemporary situation of Afghanistan. Four key players involved in Afghan conflict are the US, Afghanistan, Pakistan and China. Trust deficit between Pakistan and Afghanistan, coercive approach of the US towards various Taliban fractions is the major cause of hindering substantive progress towards the larger goal of peace in the region. Taliban, at the same time, demand a complete withdrawal of the foreign troops as a precondition for holding the peace talks that is unacceptable to other stakeholders. Pakistan's apprehensions about Indian presence in Afghanistan vis-à-vis its anti-Pakistan drives also render the efforts of peace talks as an ineffectual campaign. Hence, peace can only be achieved through win-win situation for all the stakeholders, paving the way for sustainable peace in the region that is analogous to affluence and prosperity. The paper essentially elaborates the various dynamics and implications of Afghan peace talks that have been held in the past with a focus to perceive the future prospects of peaceful settlement of Afghanistan. The paper examines the convergence and divergence of the interests of all the stakeholders involved in the peace process

Keywords: Afghanistan, Taliban, Peace Talks, Pakistan, Terrorism.

Introduction

In the contemporary world, many flashpoints around the globe are highlighted as the potential threat to the world peace. These conflicts are spread over large geographical canvass including Far East Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, Middle East, Africa and Europe. Conflict occurrence is not a new phenomenon; history has witnessed conflicts over different issues at different places and in time periods. Avoidance of worldly conflicts is next to impossible due to the nature of the conflicts based on the interests of various countries in their day-to-day affairs and their overlapping claims of territory or resources. By resorting to

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viable solution of these conflicting issues, they can minimize the chances of any military clash resulting in fatalities and destruction.

This necessitates the need to adopt peaceful ways to resolve their differing issues. The nature of the Afghan conflict is deep rooted in the context of history and it is not a new development. Though, history of conflict in Afghanistan is decade old and several attempts have been made in order to bring permanent peace in the country and region, but no desirable success was achieved. Sequel to the ongoing peace-making process, fresh efforts in this regard are being made to bring peace to the country ragged by the years of the armed conflict ever since the US invasion of October 2001.¹

Background of Afghan Peace Talks

In recent times, well orchestrated, inclusive and sustained efforts have been made for restoring sustainable peace in Afghanistan that was a mere dream in the context of history. This process of normalization was initiated at Urumqi talks arranged by Pakistan and China, between the Afghan government and Tehreek-e-Taliban Afghanistan (TTA). For the past ten years, several efforts have been made time and again to engage TTA on peace negotiating table for the sake of tranquillity, but nothing could achieve the purpose. TTA was engaged in formal talks by the Afghan government on July 7, 2015 and later at the Heart of Asia Conference held in Islamabad on December 9, 2015. However, the peace process was disrupted by the news of the death of Mullah Omer, the supreme Taliban leader. In recent development, Quadrilateral coordination group that includes Pakistan, Afghanistan, China and the US, met in January, February, and March 2016 to re-initiate peace talks between TTA and the Afghan government. TTA came up with some preconditions to resume peace talks; firstly, they demanded drawdown of US and NATO forces from Afghanistan; secondly, to undo the sanctions levied by the United Nations (UN) on Taliban commanders and thirdly, release of Taliban prisoners from the Guantanamo Bay prison.

TTA released a statement asserting their refusal to participate in talks scheduled on March 5, 2016.² The reason behind this rebuttal was the security dilemma within Afghanistan. Sensing the dire need of political settlement in Afghanistan, the US tried to keep its options open and tried to engage the Taliban in dialogue and also tried to keep Pakistan out of the exercise supposedly the two sides could not agree on power sharing formula besides other things.

The killing of Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Mansoor in Baluchistan as a result of US drone strike has further complicated the matter of peace talks.³

Over the years, Taliban have been successful in accomplishing their objectives on major portion of Afghanistan. Currently, there are safe havens of Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which athwart the bordering side and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is also aspiring to establish itself in the contiguous areas. Furthermore, Indian intelligence agency Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) and the National Directorate of Security (NDS) of Afghanistan are coordinating and doing organized teamwork to press Pakistan directly and indirectly, for the purpose of increasing Indian influence in the region. Resultantly, Afghanistan-Pakistan trust deficit is escalating despite the fact that both countries are willing to establish sustainable peace in the region. At bilateral level, both countries with the support of the US are trying to pave the way for peace talks to bring solid solution to this multidimensional and multifaceted problem. In the backdrop of US stipulated intentions for the success of peace talks in Afghanistan, killing of Mullah Akhtar Mansoor by the US raises many questions, which Mullah Mansoor was ready to come to negotiating table, but with some pre-conditions, which were not conceded by the US because the latter had some reservation over the demand of withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan as one of the primary pre-conditions.

Player-Specific Interests in the Talks

At present, there are four players in Afghan peace talks, i.e., Afghanistan government, Pakistan, the US and China. However, TTA is the most important player to whom all the above mentioned parties want to pacify and persuade it to come to negotiations. The interests of these players vary from cooperation to competition in terms of International Relations (IR) theories. Their interests mould their stances in the negotiating processes for peace in the region.

Tehreek-i-Taliban Afghanistan (TTA)

Taliban claim to have been engaged in Jihad (holy war) with an objective to re-establish a Sharia based government entrenched in a primitive interpretation of Islam. Having been engaged in a dialogue process for some time, Taliban remained indifferent to establish sustainable peace in Afghanistan rather inclined to establish their flawed dictum of imposing Sharia of their own choice. Mullah Akhtar Mansoor, the slain leader of TTA, was against the

unconditional peace talks, which became one of the prime reasons for his elimination.⁴ Mullah Haibatullah became Mullah Mansoor's successor and took the reign of Afghan-Taliban, who is also against the peace talks.⁵ Apparently, Taliban have put forward some pre-conditions for the peace talks that include withdrawal of the foreign forces, elimination of Taliban from international blacklist and release of imprisoned Taliban.⁶ However, in reality, there are compelling reasons that forbid Taliban to be the part of peace talks i.e. their resilience to withstand the US invasion for 15 years and intact operational capacity. In the circumstances, where Taliban are still in a position to hit the Afghan government and Western troops with ease, they consider it a folly to lose a war on the table, which they think are clearly winning in the battle field.

United States

The US interests in Afghanistan are quite multilayered and multidimensional. According to the US narrative, Afghanistan is destined to be a country having sustainable peace and internal security, because of the reason that lacking of the above mentioned factors provided vacuum and safe haven to the extremist elements like al-Qaeda in 1990s. Therefore, the US wants to thwart all chances of Afghanistan to become a safe haven for al-Qaeda and any other extremist, terrorist or militant group. After declaring the US war on terror, in particular, the US cannot afford any future government in Afghanistan to act as the collaborator, supporter or facilitator of the anti-US terrorist groups. Thus, it emphasizes peace talks in the country to fortify the present pro-US Afghan government. The ultimate objective of the US in the peace talks is to bring Taliban to the dialogue table and to convince them to play their due role in the regional peace process in general and in Afghanistan in particular. The main idea behind this is to devise a mechanism convincing Taliban to accept something less than complete control of Afghanistan commonly known as power sharing mechanism in terms of IR.⁷ The US has realized in past 15 years that governance and law and order situation in Afghanistan cannot be improved without an effective role of Taliban, who still have an extensive support and influence among the masses in the rural Afghanistan—predominantly among Pashtuns.⁸ The US has lately admitted, “the US was not eager to talk to Taliban in the past and was relying on the military power to search a solution of Afghan crisis” but now it wants to play the role of an observers and a guarantor for the actions of Afghan government to ensure its influence in this region. Now, with only a few thousand troops on the ground, the US is more interested in finding a workable

solution to the Afghan conundrum through diplomatic means and peace talks. Despite a few boots on the ground, the US seems to be on a weaker side as it has not been able to convince Taliban for talks. Therefore, the US, like Afghan government, is also relying on Pakistan's cooperation and facilitation to bring Taliban to the dialogue table.

The Afghan Government

The Afghan government is fighting for a war of survival and to hold on power in order to avoid the further worsening of the situation. Therefore, the Afghan government is busy in laying the foundation to convince Taliban to come to the negotiating table and present a power sharing mechanism to put an end to the long turbulence in the country.

Negotiating the terms for Taliban engagement is by no means contradictory to the cause that the Kabul government advocates.

However, Afghan government is emphasizing Taliban to surrender themselves before coming to the table. Opinion polls show equally positive indication inside Afghan society for a bargain and compliance to bring Taliban back into mainstream by giving something less than a leading position. Therefore, negotiating the terms for Taliban engagement is by no means contradictory to the cause that the Kabul government advocates. Conciliation between Afghanistan's strength of character focuses on the natural history of several power-sharing arrangements on probable amendment to the Afghan constitution, on social customs, and on the role of Sharia law.

Knowing the centralized nature of the Afghanistan government, it is assumed that the negotiation would be feasible rather, it would prompt some positive movement of change, by method for exchange, in sub-national governance. Nevertheless, this would demand the Taliban leadership as well as Kabul to make improvements in their past preferences for a unitary, Kabul-centric constitution.

The basic concerns are the drawdown of NATO forces, the enduring commitments and measures for combating terrorism, an assurance from the parties of Afghanistan for not allowing their area to be used against any other country (neutrality). In the same manner, Afghanistan can enjoy shared assurance of neutrality by the neighbouring countries for not allowing their territories to knock off the balance in Afghanistan (non-interference). It can also

get a guarantee of enduring the US security backing, presence of the United Nations peacekeeping forces, an obligation by the regional actors and Afghanistan for the cooperation and crackdown against drug trafficking, measures for power sharing among various factions of Afghanistan, the role of Sharia and Islam, and assurance by the international community to continue financial backing to Afghanistan.

The fundamental concerns are the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan and to develop Afghan government's capability to fight against terrorism on its own. Moreover, through peace talks, the Afghan government wants to take guarantees from neighbouring Pakistan for whole hearted cooperation for peace in Afghanistan by not allowing its territory to be used for any anti-Afghanistan activities. The government of Afghanistan also wants to ensure that great powers such as China and the US are completely committed to financially support the country in future.

Pakistan

Pakistan shares the longest and porous border with Afghanistan and infiltration from Afghan territory to Pakistan is effortless. Hence, Afghan terrain can be used as a base to operate in Pakistan quite easily. Pakistan, to preserve its national interest, wants to counter Indian efforts to gain strong foothold in Afghanistan. Pakistan, due to its traditional rivalry and historical experiences, considers India's pronounced presence in Afghanistan as a direct threat to its national security and interest. As a counter narrative, Pakistan's narrative of Indian threat from Afghanistan may be termed as threat yet the apprehension of Pakistan cannot be rightly ignored. The best solution to address the apprehensions of both countries and to produce a positive outcome for the strained Indo-Pakistan relations is through providing equal chances to both countries to work for peace and stability in Afghanistan. Another established significance of Afghanistan for Pakistan lies on economic grounds. Pakistan and Afghanistan are strategically located between the energy rich region of Middle East and Central Asia and the energy famished areas of India and China that actually triggers some solid potential drivers for economic development in both countries.

Lately, the unexplored energy resources in Central Asia have set off a race amongst the big powers for gas and oil pipelines in and around the region.

Furthermore, Pakistan is also an energy deficient country and needs energy for its own economic growth and development, Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline [TAPI], with all its obstacles and backdrops, can give an energy source that will add to Pakistan's capital energy stock for at least coming fifty years. The expected time frame for the completion of the pipeline is 2019. The largest economic project in the history of Pakistan, the China Pakistan Economic Corridor [CPEC] also has akin stakes in Afghanistan. The CPEC, which is a part of the China's One Belt, One Road development initiative guarantees to connect South Asia with Central Asia and beyond through road infrastructure in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Hence, the security situation in Afghanistan directly affects development of the economic situation in Pakistan.

Moreover, the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan is extremely porous and the security management of a porous border is really a prodigious task for both countries. The hardness and length of the area really makes it impossible to control the movement across the border, allowing easy access to militants through connected and isolated routes. This is basically the mutual problem of both countries; Afghanistan lacks operational capacity on its side of the border, making border areas vulnerable to the infiltration across the Pak-Afghan border, an issue which creates deficit of trust between the two neighbours. Without taking stern measures for border monitoring and management between the two countries, the cross border infiltration cannot be checked effectively, which will continue to affect the bilateral relations and ultimately the peace process of Afghanistan.

The construction of dam on the River Kabul is underway without addressing the reservations of downstream country i.e. Pakistan. There are likely chances that this project will further deteriorate relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Though, endeavours have been made to renegotiate the 1921 water agreement on dispersion of water between the two countries; the issue of water sharing between the two states has the potential to badly affect their bilateral ties.⁹

There are constant concerns of each side regarding odd behaviour of other country in the context of mutual relations. The trust deficit between the two countries is one of the main hampering factors of unsuccessful peace talks. Therefore, there is a need to guarantee the goodwill for each other by ignoring the history of bitterness to make peace talks a success.

China

During the Soviet-Afghan war, the relationship between China and Afghanistan was cut off, however, it was restored in 2001 after the fall of Taliban regime.¹⁰ When it comes to China, it has its own economic, regional, strategic and political interests in Afghanistan peace process. Afghanistan is a rich country as far as natural resources are concerned, therefore, many Chinese companies have secured tenders of many projects such as mining of copper, gold and gas etc. Moreover, the conflict in Afghanistan has a spill over effect in China, where the separatist movement has been launched by the Uyghur Muslims of Western Xinjiang province. Many Chinese separatists Muslims are accused of getting training of subversive activities in Afghanistan. Therefore, sustainable peace in Afghanistan will have a positive effect on peace and security situation in Western China.¹¹

The “One Belt One Road” policy of China to extend trade and development relations to the Eurasian region was unveiled in 2013. Under this policy, a network of roads and maritime routes would be extended towards the Eurasian countries.¹² Therefore, to effectively materialize the “One Belt One Road” plan, peace and stability in Afghanistan is of immense importance for China.

Moreover, Pakistan is a time tested friend and neighbour of China. Under the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) plan, China aspires to reach to the Indian Ocean through Gawadar Port of Pakistan, which will reduce the cost and time for Chinese goods to reach African and European markets. Additionally, it will also help China to develop the Western Chinese areas such as Xinjiang that are vulnerable to terrorism. However, this dream can be efficiently materialized only if there is peace and stability in Pakistan and peace in Pakistan cannot be ensured without peace in Afghanistan. Over the past one and a half decades, Pakistan has been engulfed by the wave of terrorism and deteriorating law and order situation emanating from Afghanistan through FATA and Baluchistan.¹³ Thus, the success of peace talks acceptable to all the stakeholders will bring peace not only to Afghanistan but also to Pakistan, and will make it easier for China to fulfil its vision of development and trade with Eurasia and Africa through Gawadar.¹⁴

Iran

Iran was significant beneficiary of the US intrusion of Afghanistan, toppling Taliban government. It has greater influence over the Shia and non-Pashtun groups in Afghanistan. Iran has always tried to influence and control Afghanistan through financial resources to win goodwill/support in Afghanistan to get its strategic, economic and regional benefits. Afghanistan heavily relies on Iran for trade and economy as 40 percent trade of Afghanistan is currently being carried out through Chahbahar port so Afghanistan cannot afford any misunderstanding with Iran. As economic influence brings in political influence, Iran's influence on Shia and non-Pashtun groups in Afghanistan made it really important factor in Afghanistan. According to Iran's perspective, it also has stakes in Afghanistan, which demand peaceful and sustainable resolution of the turmoil. Iran has also engaged India to develop Chahbahar Port to provide the latter an opportunity to carry out transit trade with Afghanistan and Central Asian states, bypassing Pakistan for the same purpose.¹⁵

Russia

Russia is one of the major donors for Afghanistan, extending all out support and assistance in rebuilding of the war-torn country. Russia maintains vigorous position in the economic and political domain of Afghanistan. It has good ties with the Afghan government and is nearly blending with the US and other powers involved in the process. By eliminating terrorism, extremism, radicalism and separatism concurrent to Islamic revivalism and forestall permanent US military bases and installations in Afghanistan, the Russian interests draw in achievement of a planned politico-economic footing in the future Afghanistan.¹⁶ Russia is well aware of the spill over effect in case of extension of the current turmoil, to avert an untoward situation. It is in the best interest of Russia to support and facilitate the peace process of Afghanistan. Secondly, the aim to get to the warm waters can only be achieved through the peaceful situation in Afghanistan. So, to preserve its own interest, Russia is showing concern in facilitating the peace process in Afghanistan.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA)

The KSA was amongst the significant financiers of Afghan Jihad in 1980s. Be that as it may, the KSA has expected to embrace a low profile position following 9/11 attacks, except for giving financial backing to the Afghanistan

government. Saudi interests consolidate acquiring security and stability in Afghanistan through other allying states, especially Pakistan, checking Iranian influence and fortification of pro-Saudi Sunni groups in Afghanistan.¹⁷ In the perspective of Saudi-Iran rivalry, there is an undeclared competition of securing more space. In Afghan context as whosoever is going to do more in promoting peace, will get more influence in the region. For this purpose, Saudi Arabia can facilitate peace talks by using the influence over Taliban Commanders, who had been under Saudi influence in the past.

India

India intends to vigorously pursue its agenda of having greater influence in Afghanistan to counter Pakistan to gain its political interests. To achieve this aim, India is persistently investing in humanitarian assistance and development projects of Afghanistan. To diminish Afghanistan's reliance on Pakistan for exchange and transportation, India has made strategic investment for connecting Afghanistan to the Arabian Sea through the port of Chahbahar in Iran.¹⁸ Additionally, it is also providing military hardware and intelligence support to Afghanistan. Furthermore, India's interests are served by Afghanistan through support of RAW¹⁹ and NDS agents in shape of proxy war being waged all through FATA and Baluchistan.²⁰ Pak-Afghan differences on various issues drew the Afghans closer to India, like border security.²¹ India also wants to become a part of the Quadrilateral group, a desire upheld by Hamid Karzai, the former President of Afghanistan.²² Therefore, India has been playing an implicit role in sabotaging Pakistan's centric peace efforts in Afghanistan.

The role of India in Afghanistan is not confined to merely development and rebuilding endeavours rather to a certain degree, it looks to practice its presence in Afghanistan to advance lawlessness and instability in Pakistan, particularly in FATA, Karachi and Baluchistan. The issue of trust deficit from Pakistan's point of view can be addressed only if Pakistan sees concrete steps taken for curtailing Indian role in Afghanistan.

Implications

- The commencement of the result oriented peace talks is still a matter of anonymity, therefore, the announcement of truce may be exceptionally troublesome. There might be a possible outcome that relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan might be crumbling, because the perception

in Afghanistan and other stakeholders is that Pakistan can pressurize Taliban to sit on the negotiating table and find a solution to the problem through dialogue.²³ Besides, the relations between Pakistan and Taliban may get flawed. In addition, habitual mudslinging played by the US and the Afghan government will further tarnish Pakistan's image in the international community.

- After 9/11 incident when the US attacked Afghanistan, it gave an impression that it would accomplish its goals by hunting Taliban. It also promised to revamp and support the Afghan government. However, none of the aims were achieved. The power of Taliban has been rarely checked-ever since 2002-every year the spring offensive is launched against the US and the Afghan government. The situation did not change even with the news of death of the founding leader of the Taliban, Mullah Omar and the new leader of the Taliban, Mullah Mansoor launched Operation Omari in spring 2016. Moreover, the death of Mullah Mansoor did not affect the resolve of Taliban to fight the US and the Afghan government as the incumbent leader Mullah Haibatullah also refused to pursue the path of negotiation. He, instead, chose to intensify attacks on his adversaries in Afghanistan.²⁴ Warlordism, poverty, lawlessness, opium cultivation and rising insurgency are some of the issues, which shape the modern day Afghanistan. These issues are disturbing omen for both the outside world and the local people. The increased influence and power of Taliban can be seen in Baghlan and Parwan provinces, while the Haqqani Network-headed by Sirajuddin Haqqani also joined hands in Taliban operations under Haibatullah in the Eastern provinces of Paktia and Khost.²⁵ It is also contemplated that they have more operational bases in Tajik and Uzbek possessed areas of Afghanistan.
- Indeed, the provinces that fall under the control of Taliban are more peaceful, when compared with the others. Afghan people and the Afghan government have come to a conclusion that peace can be achieved only with the withdrawal of outside troops from Afghanistan and with fusion with Taliban by giving them their due share in the government.
- The Northern Alliance leaders and supporters have enough representation in the Afghan government. They have made tremendous gains in Kabul, which they do not at any cost want to lose in a long war

with Taliban. Accordingly, they will demonstrate courage and try to make plans to contact all available members of Taliban and other factions for peaceful settlement of the Afghan imbroglio.

- Moreover, Washington is considering various options as it does not have room for further experiments with respect to the Afghan problem. It needs to move towards a transitional methodology for Afghanistan that is acceptable for all the parties involved. Besides, sudden withdrawal of the US troops is not the outcome that will be welcomed by Pakistan and Afghanistan. The menace of Talibanization is spreading and if the US withdraws, without settling the Afghan issue once and for all, the whole region will be destabilized by the wave of extremism.
- However, as an observer, one cannot help suspecting that there is no possibility of rapprochement sooner than later as the US has taken an exceptionally inflexible position on Taliban and al-Qaeda. Such rigidity by the US at this stage only worsens the situation. As from the Taliban's point of view, they would not lose their gains of the battlefield over the negotiation table. The US should understand its weakening position in Afghanistan and allow the peace process to proceed in an unhindered manner. If the US wants to weaken Taliban before peace talks, it will require at least one more decade to do so. However, the killing of Mullah Mansoor shows that the US is oblivious of the fact that coercion will only push away Taliban from the peace process as is visible in the continuation and unabated nature of operation Omari even after the fall of Mansoor. Along these lines, unless the US accepts its weakening position, it cannot offer the possibility of a peaceful settlement of talks with Taliban and its associates.

Way Forward

- The Afghan government ought to put its cards on the table. It should stipulate what maximum it can provide or what it cannot provide to Taliban as the solution will fall between the two extremes. What is in their domain and what is definitely not? In this way, the Taliban would get some incentives. The four requests by Taliban can be considered as the pre-conditions that they talked about in Qatar. The Taliban detainees held at the Guantanamo bay and Afghanistan should be released to show goodwill for the peace process.

- The Afghan government should likewise introduce their preconditions and present it to Taliban. At that point, should Taliban be given their view of what they can do? Can they proclaim truce or release individuals held by them? Then, again, they can make Taliban concur for not attacking the public places. In short, Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) should be initiated among Taliban, the Afghan government and the US.
- Stable Afghanistan is in the interest of China, Russia, Iran and Pakistan, without stability in Afghanistan this region cannot be prosperous. The civil war in Afghanistan began as a civil war between Afghans and it will end as an agreement between Afghans. So, the neighbouring countries should stress to the ruling elite of Kabul that a grand Jirga consisting of all stakeholders of Afghanistan may be convened for the future settlement. This act will lead a permanent stability in Afghanistan.
- Afghanistan should quit its attitude of mudslinging and blaming Pakistan. Pakistan has been hosting three to four million Afghan refugees since last four decades. Afghanistan should come on the table of negotiation and address the divergences. Furthermore, Afghanistan should destroy the sanctuaries of terrorists present inside Afghanistan which are threat to the stability of both countries.
- To fulfill Pakistan's demands, Afghanistan should also handover the TTP members held by it or against whom operation can be launched that are in the reach of the Afghan government. Additionally, Pakistan has shared evidence of the presence of the masterminds of the attacks of the Army Public School (APS) Peshawar and the Bacha Khan University Charsaddah with Afghanistan. President Ashraf Ghani admitted that Mullah Fazlullah was living in Afghanistan, therefore, if Afghanistan played its card positively and eliminate or handover Fazlullah to Pakistan, it will likewise put pressure on Pakistan to act against the remainders of Haqqani network and TTA in Pakistan.
- Moreover, reciprocal trust building should be the foundation of Pakistan's Afghanistan policy. It should focus on the marginalization of Indian role and manipulation in Afghanistan through a combination of diplomatic and hard-line preferences. Financial stakes of Afghanistan should be raised by structuring mutually favourable institutions in trade, transit, connectedness, and development of infrastructure for general wellbeing, education, industries and constructing energy

corridors like China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India (TAPI) pipeline project.

- Besides, Pakistan should support Afghanistan led solutions for convincing TTA for dialogue. It should also look forward to working directly with Afghanistan in addition to other stake holders to eradicate extremism and terrorism predominantly the emerging terrorist threat of ISIS.
- To reduce border disputes between the two countries, both should advance contemporary border structure mechanisms, only allowing legal cross border movement. Installation of biometrics system at crossing points, increasing numbers of border posts and launching suitable crossing points at alienated villages are significant to stop cross border infiltration of militants and allow individuals, who have all legal travel documents to travel across the border.
- Coordination by means of existing bilateral and multilateral forums of the countries involved in this process such as the US, Russia, Iran, China, India and Central Asian Republics (CARs) is a must for the success of the peace process. Those stakeholders, who are not the members of Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) such as Iran, Russia and other Central Asian states, should be given observer status in the QCG so that their reservations are addressed as well.
- Last but not the least, China should proactively come forward to contribute towards the peace of Afghanistan, because it is the second country after Pakistan, which suffers the most at the hand of lawlessness in Afghanistan. The economic interests of China and its vision of ‘One Belt One Road’ are going to be accomplished in its entirety only if Afghanistan becomes a peaceful country.

Conclusion

For the past fifteen years, relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have been spiraling on a downward trend. The trust deficit appears to have been come to an unprecedented level. Impartiality cannot be an alternative with two closely connected neighbours. They both need to make a win-win situation for each other. The corner stone of relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan will be the creation of a conducive, trust building environment. The only outcome of stalled relations between the two neighbours is lawlessness and insecurity in the

region. While, good relations between them can ensure peace and security. It will also help both the countries to improve their economies through trade.

The US should refrain from irrational acts such as killing of the Taliban leaders, if it is truly interested in the success of the peace process. Being a superpower, it should give adequate time and incentives to all parties involved in the peace process. The option of limited peace is not viable; the US should show a policy of openness in Afghanistan by welcoming all internal and external stakeholders, who want to contribute towards the peace of the country. Moreover, it should not violate sovereignty of Pakistan through drone strikes. Such violations of Pakistani air space make it difficult for the country to take the US peace efforts in Afghanistan and Af-Pak region without a grain of salt.

NOTES

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