

EMERGING REGIONAL SECURITY MILIEU IN POST 2014 AFGHANISTAN

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Abstract

Due to their geographical contiguity to Afghanistan, the Central Asian Republics (CARs) became strategically significant for the policy ends of USA and countries comprising the coalition that invaded Afghanistan Post 9/11. A number of Central Asian States provided bases, air passage and ground lines of communications commonly known as the Northern Distribution Network (NDN). Consequent fiscal advantages helped CARs shelve their mutual differences. In 13th year, the Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) seems to be coming to an undesired end: claiming victory without completely achieving the stipulated objectives. Afghanistan is far from being stable and cohesive. Its economy depends upon foreign aid. Albeit the newly formed National Unity government is a ray of hope, it is still grappling with teething problems. Al- Qaida, Taliban, ETIM, IMU and Hiz-bul-Tahrir and now IS, are the major threats to the Regional stability. Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) is not considered sufficiently trained, equipped and motivated. Competing interests of internal and external forces engender intrinsic threats to stability of Central Asia. Therefore, establishment of a consensus based governing mechanism in Afghanistan,¹ capacity building of Afghanistan² and CARs with sustained military and economic support shall be important for the regional stability.

Historical Perspective

Afghanistan, a war torn country, has suffered through centuries of aggressions. In her contemporary history, Soviet Union invaded it in 1979, which provoked an international reaction. Almost whole world with US in lead, less Warsaw Pact countries, joined hands to push the Soviet Union out of

Afghanistan. Islamic concept of Jihad was to be the 'Means' to attain this 'End'. Pakistan became the main 'enclave' to execute this strategy, which succeeded. 1989 saw Soviets and West retreat simultaneously, albeit in diverging directions. Afghanistan and Pakistan were left alone to deal with the residual mess. Afghanistan, deficit on everything specifically central control descended into chaos.

In this vacuum the powerful warlords, who had guns and money gained strength. The drug mafia also exploited situation to their advantage³ and a new phenomenon Taliban evolved, who captured Kabul in 1996. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, accepting the fait accompli, recognised Taliban government. Initially, US also considered them as an option to control the anarchy. Till 1996, Taliban were not anti West but 1997 onwards, Osama Bin Laden was thought influenced them, and they started hosting Al Qaida (AQ)⁴. Their support afforded AQ a sanctuary to train, equip and plan attacks on various parts of the world including 9/11⁵.

Consequential wrath fell upon Afghanistan in shape of OEF; an invasion by a Coalition comprising 42 countries⁶, lead by USA and legitimized by United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution Number 1267⁷. In the backdrop of environment prevailing at that time a discourse⁸ ensued in Pakistan, sequel to which Pakistan decided to support the OEF, predominantly to avoid international isolation and also accrue strategic dividends including ridding itself of the menace of terrorism.

CARs significance for coalition's operations in Afghanistan, their potential of exacerbating terrorism with attendant consequences for ISAF and their historical, politico-economic, social and security linkages with erstwhile USSR, made them vital objectives of US and Western diplomacy; to secure their alliances for supporting OEF and also wean them away from Soviet influence.

Central Asia became popular destination for economic and security assistance by regional and extra regional

stakeholders. The CARs were quick to grasp the historic opportunity. For their support to OEF, these were rewarded with aid and assistance that was direly needed during their initial years of independence. The rents from NDN, a crucial line of communication for ISAF, acted as glue for Central Asian States and helped them put their mutual differences at back burner. Presence of extra regional forces, availability of experts along with huge sums of aid helped their rulers to control internal rivals and perpetuate in power. Ruling and political elites of Central Asia also benefitted from the war economy.

After 13 years of OEF, Afghanistan still remains restive with increasing uncertainty on its future, tenuous security and growing violence. Despite spending trillions and significant loss of lives, the ISAF has not been able to achieve its perceived ends.⁹ Therefore, they look for scapegoats to blame for their failures and Pakistan, despite its sufferings, is the easiest choice. Regardless of ground situation, after projecting a notion of victory, they plan to start withdrawing bulk of forces and equipment by end of 2014.

CARs

In late 19th Century, the Russian Tsars annexed the last of Khanates and nomadic lands of Central Asia. After Bolshevik revolution in 1917 these states went under Soviet rule. By 1936, Central Asia was divided on ethnic lines to carve out five socialist republics namely Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. After fall of Soviet Union, these states became independent in 1991.¹⁰ During Soviet era, these states received special attention for their socio-economic development. The welfare got added attention, which revolved around the concept of "cradle to grave welfare by the state"¹¹. After independence, these states did not experience any serious turmoil as apprehended by many analysts and preserved their Soviet heritage, in political structures and policy legacies¹².

The economy of central Asian states is interwoven. Despite collapse of U.S.S.R their economic linkages remain intact. Southern Kazakhstan is still supplied electricity by Kyrgyzstan, and northern Kazakhstan helps service Siberia's energy grid. Turkmenistan continues to send part of its oil to Russia, to be converted into jet fuel, but it processes Siberian crude in her own refineries. However, vacuum is felt due to absence of coordinating institutions that regulate this activity¹³.

CARs and Pakistan

Despite decades of sacrifices and losses, Pakistan is still considered as part of the problem¹⁴. Pakistan's Economy has been badly impacted by excessive expenditure on counter terrorism efforts, human and material losses, decades long burden of Afghan refugees and now its own Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)¹⁵, whose exodus occurred due to military operations against the militants. It has lost 55473 citizens by now¹⁶. A huge cost of \$102.5 billion has been incurred by it¹⁷ on fight against terrorism already. Due to threat of terrorist attacks, the foreign investments have been deterred. Precious resources are diverted to counter terrorism, pay compensations and rehabilitation etc. Rising unemployment due to these factors makes the unemployed youth susceptible to exploitation by the exploiters; terrorist masterminds. Recent terrorist attack at an education institution, 'Army Public School, Peshawar' massive killing of innocent students and staff is the most serious crime even uttered by terrorists. In spite of this, Pakistan is not a trusted and respected ally. It's being blamed for all the ills in Afghanistan. In a recent report of US Department of Defence of 31 October 29, 2014 Pakistan has been accused of using non-state actors for its sway in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan Invasion and the Region

Though the initial gains were quick, Afghanistan has been a tough take for US, and ISAF. Despite losing thousands of lives, and spending trillions of dollars, ISAF has not been able

to achieve her war aims. US strategy on Afghanistan kept seeing changes and modifications. The current and third American strategy, as alluded to by the US President in his West Point address on 28 May 2014, is “to more effectively partner with the countries where terrorist networks seek foothold”¹⁸. This shift indicated that US would transfer whole operational responsibility on to Afghanistan. However, recently it has been reported that US will undertake combat missions as well, which is considered to be a positive re-modification of US strategy on Afghanistan, as US’ reduced engagement in Afghanistan has direct consequences for the regional peace and stability.

The aims of the OEF as deduced from various sources were; unseating Taliban regime, destruction of Al Qaeda and Taliban, removal of terrorist safe havens, punishing alleged perpetrators of 9/11 attacks on twin Towers and bringing a broad based, democratically elected government in Afghanistan. These objectives have not been achieved completely. Killing of Osama Bin Laden and a number of Taliban leaders, degrading Taliban and installation of an acceptable national government in Afghanistan might help USA to project a Notion of Victory. The fact remains that Taliban leader Mullah Omer is still alive. Many rural areas of Afghanistan are witnessing severe contest between Taliban and ANSF, Al Qaeda has proliferated to other continents and its splinters has mutated into Islamic State (IS); an evolving threat. This point is further supplemented by General Dunford’s views during his 12 March 2014 testimony to the US Senate Armed Services Committee. He acknowledged that even after 13 years of War, there is a possibility that Afghanistan could revert to being a safe haven for terrorists and AQ could return after drawdown¹⁹. He defined winning in Afghanistan as: an operationally ineffective Al Qaeda, capable and sustainable Afghan security forces, a successful election political transition, and a constructive Afghanistan-Pakistan military to military relationship. This reflects reconciliation of US leadership for depreciated war aims.

Afghan and neighbours' destinies have become increasingly interdependent. Post 2014 Afghanistan is going to have a direct bearing on their security and economy. Afghanistan will inherit large military bases and sufficient military equipment, but does not have capable ANSF to make good use of these. As a society, it is in shambles. Taliban, who were unseated in 2001, have become major stakeholders in future power sharing of Afghanistan.

Former President Karzaie remained a main impediment in creation of environment essential for the drawdown. His unwise and unfounded criticism and allegations on Pakistan and USA, his retarding attitude towards intra Afghan reconciliation harmed Afghanistan's interests²⁰. Taliban's Qatar office was closed due to their unreasonable attitude. Karzai did not hesitate in publically blaming USA for collusions with Taliban for terrorist attacks in Kabul²¹. The Afghan- US relations went into tailspin when he refused to sign the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) and said, "I don't trust them and they don't trust me. The last 10 years have shown this to me. I have had fights with them and they have had propaganda against me"²².

Brokering of power sharing deal between President Asharaf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah by USA, after an impasse due to complains of election fraud, is seen as a ray of hope. While many foreigners have no hopes for Afghan prosperity, the Afghans are optimistic that these elections would bring good days for them²³. It is also expected to be a catalyst for improving tense relations between USA and Afghanistan and Afghanistan and Pakistan.

After lot of efforts, Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) between USA and Afghanistan and Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) between NATO and Afghanistan were signed on 30 September 2014, which have been termed as long-term security pacts. 9800 US and up to 4000-5000 (presently 2500-2700) NATO troops shall be stationed in Afghanistan after ISAF mission ends in Afghanistan on 31 December 2014²⁴. These troops would reduce to half by end

2015 and by 2016 these will be reduced to “Vestigial Force” to protect US Embassy in Kabul and help Afghanistan with military purchases and other issues²⁵. The BSA promises training, advice and aerial support and Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) assistance to the ANSF.

One of the most important pre-requisites of the drawdown is strong ANSF. Afghan National Security Forces are being projected as so trained, equipped and organized that they will be able to control the inner front. In fact, they still lack in training and equipment²⁶. The ANSF suffered 4634 fatalities in 2014 as compared to year 2013, 4350²⁷. The ANSF could, at best be termed as partially capable. They will continue to need intelligence support, professional guidance, equipment and financial support to sustain them. This opinion is further strengthened by the fact that General Joseph Dunford, ISAF Commander till 26th August 2014, in his confirmatory hearing as 36th Commandant of the US Marine Corps, told the US Senate Armed Services Committee that he was not confident if the Afghan Security Forces would be able to sustain themselves after the drawdown. He added Afghan military does not possess intelligence capabilities and a developed aviation, which would affect ANSF ability to undertake operations effectively²⁸. The multi-front offensive launched by Taliban during Summer 2014, has also raised serious questions and concerns on the ability of ANSF to control the situation post US drawdown.

Therefore the ANSF are not sufficiently cohesive and capable to effectively control internal situation and stop external interference efficaciously²⁹. More so, ANSF and the local militias created by USA on the basis of ethnicity and tribes etc are likely to split on ethnic lines and fuel intra Afghan fighting³⁰. It's therefore that, the perceived post draw down dilemmas, haunt the thinkers and policy makers alike³¹; a destabilized Afghanistan could yet again become a safe haven for terrorist and AQ and also serve as a conduit for exporting terrorism to the Region and beyond.

Deteriorated Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations

The challenges of restive inner front, paradoxical and clashing interests of its own and her friends' China, Saudi Arabia, UAE, USA and neighbours; India and Iran make Pakistan's choices complicated and precarious. Pakistan wishes a stable, friendly and prosperous Afghanistan. Therefore, it tried best to play a constructive role by helping in intra Afghan reconciliation efforts, which did not materialise in desired time frame and spirit because of Karzai intransigence and decelerated approach of USA. Pakistan believes that chaos in her neighbourhood will directly impact its internal stability and socio-economic progression, therefore, it has renewed the efforts to allay Afghan complains and reassured help to bring Afghan Taliban to the negotiating table.

In fact Mr. Karzai and his team developed serious misunderstandings and housed deep-rooted distrust for Pakistan. Karzai's deteriorating relations with USA, allegations and counter allegations of housing Taliban by each other, who were conducting terrorist attacks in both the countries, further compounded the situation. Use of Afghan soil by India for anti Pakistan activities had been a sour point that was not heeded to by Karzai and Coalition. These factors had brought the relations between both countries to an all times low, which affected the attainment of war objectives related to long term solution of the Afghan problem for a sustainable peace and stability in the Region.

Change of guards; civil and military in both the countries, signing of BSA, recent positive developments in Sino-Afghan relations, ongoing military operation in FATA by Pakistan, to destroy sanctuaries of terrorist networks operating in neighbouring countries exude hope for better relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan. There is no alternative to developing bilateral understanding. If Afghanistan's misgivings and apprehensions are allayed, both could complement each other's and international efforts to overcome the expected negative fallouts of post 2014

Afghanistan. Recent visit of Afghan President, his warm reception in Pakistan and aura of mutual understanding generated at all levels of leaderships can be taken as a major step for better understanding evolving between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Though Pak- Afghan border region comprises a very difficult terrain with high mountains having innumerable crossing places. The issue of Durand Line, and centuries old custom and practice of “Easement Rights” for the tribes inhabiting both sides of the Durand Line makes the dividing lines between Afghanistan and Pakistan virtually non existent; hence a soft border without a formal control. Pakistan’s efforts to make this a formal international border have always been discouraged by Afghanistan.

Pak-US Relations; Impacts on Regional Stability

Pak – US relations have seen multiple crusts and turfs. Both have grievances against each other. Striking a balance between Pakistan’s own interests, and US demands has been a tight ropewalk for Pakistan. The US military and economic help to Pakistan have been contingent to US policy ends that are mostly event and short term based. US’ vivid tilt towards India is not taken well by the Pakistanis. It also needs to understand Pakistan’s internal compulsions, which Pakistan has to balance out against cooperation with USA³². The new marriage of convenience that began sequel to coercion by President Bush ‘you are with us or against us’ is going through similar experience. US/ISAF quick triumph in occupation of Kabul could not have been possible without Pakistan’s help and support. However, soon the distrust started setting in, primarily due to US’ short-term focuses³³. Not realizing that US-Pak interests are interlinked and a rupture could compromise US Counter Terrorist (CT) objectives³⁴. There is a dichotomy on part of US officials, thinkers and writers, who blame Pakistan publically, and praise its contributions in private. Biggest blows to the relations were raid on Osama Bin Laden, attack on Salala Post and accusations by Admiral Michael Mullen, terming Haqqani Network as ISI veritable

arm³⁵. Another unpleasant factor for bilateral relations was CIA covert operation in Pakistan. Mark Mozzetti in his book “Way of Knife” wrote that Pakistan was “the most penetrated country in the World”³⁶. Pakistan can not develop better relations with Iran due to US reservations.

On the other hand, Pakistan also needs to admit its follies and undertake such steps that blame of ‘double game’³⁷ and having “American blood on its hands”³⁸ are alleviated. The international relations, in today’s Realists World are to be based on this hard reality that every state strives for advancement of its own national interests³⁹. USA is a World Power; both military and economic, whose interests in this Region are linked to Pakistan⁴⁰. Pakistan requires military, technological and fiscal help, so essential to overcome the damages and retardation in development caused by the events of past decades, hence it has to develop a mutually beneficial relationship with USA, not compromising the core national interests. Pakistan and US’ better relations are also important for countering international terrorism and regional stability⁴¹

Pakistan apprehends that USA will walk away from Afghanistan without helping reconciliation amongst Afghans and between Afghanistan and her neighbors, which may lead to re-eruption of the war⁴². Understandably Pakistan does not want USA to leave midway, with a destabilised neighbourhood with colossal negative fallout for it⁴³. The USA should understand that it is incumbent upon her to leave Afghanistan in a better shape with sustained military and economic support to safeguard Afghanistan’s inner front from an implosion that would have sever negative fall outs for Pakistan, China and Central Asia.

Intrinsic Dangers to the Stability of Central Asia

Central Asian Region's intrinsic threats are poor governance and weak state institutions, which, if exacerbated, could bring them to the brink of failed states category. CARs in general and Tajikistan in particular have comparatively softer borders and weaker state institutions. Tajikistan has

become a popular transit route for terrorists and drug traffickers. Potential for Islamic militancy, rampant corruption, autocratic rules and human right violations are considered to be major threats for their internal stability⁴⁴. These states also have multiple irritants between them. Uzbekistan tries to act as a big brother, which the others do not like it. While Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan are closer to Russia, the Uzbekistan struggles to unshackle from the legacy of Russian dominance. Kazakhstan tries to assert itself as regional military power. Disputes on water sharing of Amu Darya are another contentious issue. Claims on sharing of Caspian Sea riches are yet to be decided within CARs and also with Iran. Caspian Sea is considered to be a potential flashpoint for confrontation amongst its littoral states⁴⁵. All these issues, unless resolved appropriately, have the potential to precipitate into interstate conflicts⁴⁶.

Threat of Extremism and Terrorism

US has a great role and history in creation of religious extremism in this region. The foundations of Jihad economy were laid decades ago when Gulbadin Hikmatyar and Burhanuddine Rabbani were invited to Washington by the then US President.⁴⁷ President Putin also blames US for sponsoring Islamic extremism for which he sighted the example of creating and using Mujahedeen to fight Soviet Union in 1980s. He said that USA and West were destabilizing Ukraine and were turning a blind eye toward the encroachment of international terrorism in Russia and Central Asia.⁴⁸ Though the CARs also have potential of religiosity based extremism, however, few analysts contend that threat of Islamic extremism in CARs is overstated by Russia for seeking a larger role and establish greater hold on Central Asia through Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Few also opine that Heads of CARs take shield of the boggy of religious extremism to suppress their rivals.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, the potential of exploitation and germs of extremism cannot be ignored in Central Asia.

AQ claims that her leadership had safely moved out of Afghanistan to Middle East, Africa, Chechnya and Central Asia before the Coalition operations in Afghanistan⁵⁰. AQ 2020 Strategy, to establish Caliphate in Central Asia, by launching Pincers of Jihadist Movements from "Jihad Triangle of Horror"⁵¹ Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kashmir, Iran, northern Turkey, Lebanon, Chechnya and from within CARs converging in heart of Asia to capture Khorasan⁵² and then move northwards to Russia has to be taken seriously⁵³. Frank Shanty in his book, *The Nexus; International Terrorism and Drug Trafficking in Afghanistan*⁵⁴, has also written about AQ such long-range regional and global ambitions⁵⁵. Their ambitions are too high and perceived ends too catastrophic for the regional stability.

AQ Shura has claimed sufficient progress in the groundwork. AQ Shura also endorsed Iran's Oil Strategy in 2005 (to attack and burn all the oil field in the region if Iran is attacked), which indicates AQ-Iran collusion, regardless of sectarian differences between Shia Iran and Salafi AQ and Wahabi Taliban for Global Jihad against non-Muslims.⁵⁶ The Islamic State in Iraq and Islamic state in Levant can already be seen as the strands of AQ strategy.

USA and CARs

Post 9/11 USA and CARs developed mutually beneficial relationship, which continued improving. US maintained Manas Base in Kyrgyzstan till June 2014⁵⁷, Karshi Khan Abad (K II) Base in Uzbekistan till May 2005. ISAF made use of Termez Base in Uzbekistan, which is rented by Germany. USA is now looking for new bases in Central Asia to deploy its drones⁵⁸. After closure of passage through by Pakistan in post salala incident, the NDN became a lifeline for ISAF and USA. For its use bilateral agreements between USA and concerned states were concluded in January 2009. In 2010, these were supplemented by agreements between NATO/ISAF and the CARs. However, cost of shipment per container, rose from \$ 7200 to \$ 17500 over NDN⁵⁹. In 2012, the Governments of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan signed bilateral

agreements with NATO for Reverse Transit as well.⁶⁰ The US has been providing security and economic assistance over and above the rents and taxes being paid to them as well.

Central Asia is destined to become less central to US foreign policy and security ends after its drawdown. It is however, considered that it will remain relevant to the US and as well as her concern for multiple reasons like Internal fragility of these states and potential for state break down. Crimes and rampant corruption, drug trafficking and weapons smuggling. Fears of radicalization and consequent export of extremism. Rivalry of regional powers, especially Russia and China that could evolve into yet a new Great Game. More importantly for integrating CARs into Regional and global economic systems for developing a long-term self-sustaining security and stability environment in Central Asia⁶¹.

There are indications that the US funding will not remain assured at present level and for a longer term. This cut reflects US lawmakers' anger at Karzai's on his refusal to sign the BSA – and also US taxpayer's apprehension for large portions of US aid lost to corruption and incompetence⁶². Similarly the CARs, which gained multi faceted advantages from their support for OEF, shall also experience depreciated fiscal gains and a security vacuum in the region with obvious consequences. They and Afghanistan will therefore, need continued security and economic support.

Foreign presence in CARs has been acting as a balancing factor for contending states and as well as for factions within these states.⁶³US' depreciated military presence and reduced fiscal assistance will impact negatively the collective regional security arrangements.

Biggest Dilemma for USA; is to maintain a balance between pursuit of her strategic objectives in the region and receding domestic support and constricting fiscal space due to recessionary economy.⁶⁴More so, the USA cannot stay relevant without ensuring requisite military presence and providing security and economic assistance for a sustainable

peace in Afghanistan, and Central Asia. The vacuum created after US withdrawal from the region shall be filled by China and Russia, which if not well regulated, may draw a regional competition and prove detrimental to long term US interests.⁶⁵ These countries also foresee increased Russian and Chinese influence impinging upon their sovereignty and internal dynamics. Most of them, therefore, want Extra Regional Forces (ERF) to stay in the region for a longer term.⁶⁶ The non-state actors, who would be competing for their personal and group stakes, shall further fuel the instability.

Therefore, it is considered obligatory that USA, Coalition Partners and regional countries must draw a suitable plan and continue supporting Afghanistan till it becomes capable of sustaining itself economically, socially and militarily⁶⁷. Cooperation and commitment of China, Russia, India, Pakistan and Iran shall be essential for enduring stability not only in Afghanistan, but in Central Asia as well. In the whole matrix, Pakistan can, and must play a constructive role⁶⁸.

Converging and Diverging Interests of Stakeholders

There are multiple stakeholders including the states and also the non-state actors who have convergence of views and also competing interests related to post 2014 Afghanistan, Central Asia and their neighbours.

Current Chinese interests in Afghanistan and Central Asia are primarily economic oriented. It is investing in minerals, oil and gas, rail, road and social sectors; consolidating influence in Central Asia through no-strings attached lending policies, financial investments and infrastructural projects⁶⁹. It allocated \$5 billion credit to Kazakhstan's state owned development bank and \$5 billion to Kazmunaigaz a state run gas company. China lent Turkmenistan \$ 4.1 billion loan for developing South Yolotan gas field. China is also funding several major energy and transport projects in Tajikistan⁷⁰. Chinese President Xi-Jiping has envisioned 6437 Kilometre long Silk Road comprising economic belt connecting Far East

with Europe via Central Asia⁷¹. These investments have and are likely to give Afghanistan sufficient influence in these countries. While it does not exhibit military ambitions and vision to export political reforms into Central Asia, yet it will. In no case, like increased US presence and enhanced Russian influence in the region⁷². Similarly, it will not like the drugs and extremism plaguing her territory from the bordering regions. The US policy makers are earnestly working to prop India as counter weight to China in hope that India will be able to contain Chinese expansion in the region, especially in Asia pacific. Obviously, it concerns China. In China, America, Japan Australia and India are routinely referred to as "Eastern NATO"⁷³. USA has to be careful in this quest, as India is not a country that would act only for the US interests in the region.

NATO has participated in all the ISAF operations and EU spends ample money in the region. It is already facing criticism for not taking appropriate measures against Russian reassertion in Europe, annexation of Crimea being a case in point. In view of reducing domestic support for out of area engagement, it is likely that post 2014 drawdown, major interests of Europe would be to benefit from trade and riches of Afghanistan and Central Asia. However, they will continue to worry about and participate in international counter terrorism efforts for saving their countries from terrorism. At grand strategy level, they will stay under US umbrella and will also support the post 2014 processes.

Moscow has greater stakes in CARs and Afghanistan, hence it worries about post 2014 Afghanistan and Central Asia. On August 1, 2012 Russian President Vladimir Putin said, "It was regrettable that countries who are participating in operations in Afghanistan are thinking about how to pull out of there"? He added "since NATO took up the burden, should carry it to the end"⁷⁴. Although Russia worries about visualised post 2014 instability around her that could threaten its inner front and even Federation, yet it will not endorse excessive military presence and influence of USA in the region. Expanding Chinese influence in Central Asia and Afghanistan also rings alarm bells in Moscow. Russia has been

trying to re-assert militarily in the region, manifested by holding "Rostock Military Drills 2010"; the biggest military exercise post USSR.⁷⁵ Recent annexation of Ukrainian Crimea and sponsoring of separatist in Ukraine, Russian Presidents' recently expressed views implicating USA for starting sponsoring of Islamic terrorism during 1980s also indicate Russia's change of posture.

Russia's main concerns revolve around saving her inner front from negative fallouts of instability, extremism and drugs from her neighbourhood. It will like to re-establish and safeguard her erstwhile traditional influence in security and economic spheres of Central Asia. Furthermore, Russia would not like increased military presence of USA and enhanced dependence of CARs on China⁷⁶. Benefitting from Central Asian riches, especially energy resources and 'New Silk Road Project' is a natural desire of Russian leaders and masses. If Russia desires to counter extra regional influence in Central Asia and establish hers, then it will need requisite military capability and economic capacity to do so. Presently, Russia lacks the economic capacity to return to erstwhile Sovietisation⁷⁷. The next important aspect is, that if Russia do this without US help and consent or will USA allow it desired space? It is opined that US will have to develop some understanding on Russian role in Central Asia and Afghanistan.

Iran has ethno- Religious linkages with Central Asia, especially with Tajikistan. It will not like a major United States military presence in the neighbourhood. At the same time, it likes to expand her sphere of influence through trade and economic ties. To attract trade with Central Asia through her territory, it has developed road and rail links with Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Iran has strong links with few Taliban commanders in Afghanistan. It also enjoys closer contacts with Afghan Hazara community, which is predominantly Shia⁷⁸. Few analysts and writers also hint at Iranian support to extremists in Tajikistan and other CARs.⁷⁹

Turkey nurtures ethnic and historic bondages with Afghanistan and CARs. She has cultural and linguistic affinity with Turkmenistan. She has been playing a constructive role in the reconciliation process and would like to be recognized as one of the major stakeholders. Her apprehensions also stem from envisioned unrest in the region after US withdrawal. She also wishes to expand her sphere of influence. In the same effort, it tried to export Turkish model of governance in Kazakhstan in 2007,⁸⁰ which created differences between both countries. However, Turkey was quick to re-adjust her policy and resolve the contentious aspects. Turkey is presently more focused on the issue of Syria that impacts its security and economy.

The Afghan Taliban consider themselves a legitimate stakeholders in Afghanistan's power matrix and any future dispensation. They were given due recognition by establishment of their office in Qatar. China, Turkey and Pakistan also tried to help bridge differences between them, Afghans and Americans. Due to factors like Karzai intransigence and US wavering attitude the process did not succeed. However, the new Afghan President is expected to restart negotiation with them. Their integration into the corridors of power and governance is considered essential for a durable peace in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries. Pakistan is, and must continue to help intra-Afghan reconciliation.

Conclusion

Understandably, the future of a post-2014 Afghanistan is very difficult to predict. It's a complex situation with multiple catalysts; evolving continuously with quite an unpredictable future. Most of the solutions are hypothetical. It is also not easy to evaluate this intricate military operation; distinguishing victory from defeat is very difficult. Many writers opine that it can at best be termed as a "partial" success. Competing interests of Regional and Extra Regional players and the non-state actors will continue to make it a battleground for Proxy War(s) with obvious negative impacts

on its neighbours. In opinion of Abdul Kuddus, “Afghanistan will still be a failed state with a potential of increased chaos, sporadic incidence of violence and bloodshed when the Afghan Security Forces take charge”.⁸¹

The situation offers international community an opportunity to integrate nascent CARs and war torn Afghanistan and turn a liability into an asset. Major challenge for regional and extra regional powers is the capacity building of Afghanistan and CARs in political, economic, social and military fields for self-sustenance in post drawdown environment. Stability in Afghanistan is considered important for the interest of the whole world and the region, as turmoil in Afghanistan could evolve into trans-border threats embodying extremism, terrorism, drug trafficking, and separatism for CARs, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, China and even beyond.

Unless a finely carved out transition, duly backed up by long term, well considered support system takes place, Afghanistan may collapse into chaos.⁸² Therefore Pakistan, Afghanistan, USA, Russia, China, Turkey, Iran, India and CARs must develop a consensus-based solution for handling post 2014 Afghanistan and Central Asia⁸³. Inclusion of warring factions in the process of reconciliation shall strengthen it further. Frank Shanty, in his book *The Nexus; of International Terrorism and Drug Trafficking from Afghanistan*, stresses that every solution for Afghanistan shall require a regional approach, in which Pakistan’s role and support shall be important.⁸⁴ For CARs, the CSTO may be a suitable body for implementing future plan of stability, however, CSTO dominance by Russia may draw criticism by Uzbekistan and others. The other suitable forum for execution of a long-term solution for CARs could be SCO, which has a broader membership and acceptance. For Afghanistan possibility of using SAARC or some UN mandated body comprising the major stakeholders, to oversee the Post 2014 arrangements could be considered.

Promotion of regional trade by institution of softer regulations, operationalization of New Silk Road concept and early development of road and rail network through Iran and Pakistan shall also be important⁸⁵ for integration and long term stability of the region.

Notes

¹ Asmatullah Wazir Khan, "Withdrawal of the US Troops from Afghanistan and its Implications for Pakistan - Challenges and a way Forward," *Tigah, a Journal of Peace Development Volume II*, 2012: 97

² Jeffrey Mankoff, 25

³ Frank Shanty, 2012 *The Nexus; International terrorism and Drug Trafficking in Afghanistan*, Pentagon Press, New Delhi, 25-29, 43.

⁴ *Ibid* ; 54, 71.

⁵ National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon United States. *The 9/11 Commission Report; Final Report of the National commission.*

⁶ Asmatullah Wazir Khan, "Withdrawal of the US Troops from Afghanistan and its Implications for Pakistan - Challenges and a way Forward," *Tigah, a Journal of Peace Development Volume II*, 2012: 92

⁷ Dr. Maria Sultan: *Afghanistan Post 2014; Decision Point: 2*, 7 and Asmatullah Wazir Khan, "Withdrawal of the US Troops from Afghanistan and its Implications for Pakistan - Challenges and a way Forward," *Tigah, a Journal of Peace Development Volume II*, 2012: 92

⁸ A Constructivists' account of Pakistan's Political practice in the aftermath of 9/11. The normalisation of Pakistan's participation in The 'War On Terror', Nazya Fiaz submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Department Of Peace Studies, University of Bradford, 2010.

⁹ Syed Hussain Shaheed Soherwordi, "Withdrawal of American Forces from Afghanistan (Endgame): Issues and Challenges for Pakistan," *Journal of Political Studies*, Vol 19, issue -1. 2012: 134,135 and Saeed Shafqat, Raheenul Haque "Pakistan, Afghanistan & US Relations: Implications and Future Directions," 2011: 22

¹⁰ Government of United State, Congress, *Central Asia: Regional Developments and Implications for U.S Interests*, 2013, Washington. DC: Congressional Research Service: 1 and Jones, Pauline, ed. *The Transformation of Central Asia States and Societies from Soviet Rule to independence*, New York: Cornell University Press, 2004.

¹¹ Jones, Pauline, ed. *The Transformation of Central Asia States and Societies from Soviet Rule to independence*, New York: Cornell University Press, 2004.

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Role of USA in cobbling the whole effort together for a regional solution post its withdrawal emerges out to be very important. USA will have to remain engaged not only in Afghanistan but also in Central Asia for sustained peace by helping ensure agreements for intra-regional cooperation and capacity building of the weaker states. If chaos prevails in Afghanistan, the regional and extra regional countries are likely to bear the brunt with severest fall out for immediate neighbours.