POST-WITHDRAWAL SCENARIO IN AFGHANISTAN

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The pull-out plan that President Obama announced in his speech of June 22, 2011 is being seen as faced with a number of challenges, though he claimed that the drawdown was from a “position of strength.” This reference to “strength” itself is being contested since the perception that the insurgency in Afghanistan has been weakened or controlled effectively is not entirely correct. Some recent Taliban incursions into well guarded places and the assassination of key government personalities have shaken this assessment. In fact, the realization in Washington that force alone was insufficient; that a multilateral regional approach was preferable and that the more amenable insurgents should be engaged in negotiations, goes contrary to the said claim of the US President, even though it reveals a healthy shift in policy from the earlier unilateral thinking.

Observers are also pointing not only to the demands of the approaching election year for Mr Obama but the economic constraints being caused by the war that the President himself mentioned in his policy speech as the more tangible reasons for the withdrawal programme.

Though no specific indications have been given as to what happens after the drawdown is complete in 2014, there are all indications America would retain a strong presence in Afghanistan, probably for an indefinite period. If this happens it would be a cause of tension in the region and something that Russia, China and other stakeholders will resent. Whether the Afghans would accept it for long is another question. As it is, the relations between President Karzai and the US government are not without wrinkles. Addressing a youth rally recently Karzai accused the US and Allies of using his country for their own purposes. The civilian deaths in NATO and US operations inside Afghanistan are also a constant source of recriminations. Moreover, there is no certainty that the planned expansion of the Afghan forces (to nearly 400,000 by 2014) to take over from the western forces will materialize, as the question of the loyalty of the new recruits has become a serious impediment since instances of Afghan forces’ turning their guns on their own allies have surfaced.

In Pakistan the focus of the debate on the so-called endgame in Afghanistan is on Mr Obama’s insistence that Pakistan “keeps its commitments” and that the US “will continue to press” this country. The severity of tone and accusatory content in subsequent statements of important members of the American government is naturally causing concern. A considerable section of the opinion here favours the view that the shift in
attention to Pakistan and increased pointing of fingers at Islamabad is to find a scapegoat for the failure of the decade-long US-led campaign in Afghanistan which near its denouement is becoming harder to explain.

This issue of the Factfile contains reports and reviews in the media on the US drawdown strategy announced by President Obama and covers both domestic and foreign opinion.

27 September 2011

Mushir Anwar
FACT SHEET: THE WAY FORWARD IN AFGHANISTAN

Our Mission: The President’s speech reaffirms the March 2009 core goal: to disrupt, dismantle, and eventually defeat al Qaeda and to prevent their return to either Afghanistan or Pakistan. To do so, we and our allies will surge our forces, targeting elements of the insurgency and securing key population centers, training Afghan forces, transferring responsibility to a capable Afghan partner, and increasing our partnership with Pakistanis who are facing the same threats.

This region is the heart of the global violent extremism pursued by al Qaeda, and the region from which we were attacked on 9/11. New attacks are being planned there now, a fact borne out by a recent plot, uncovered and disrupted by American authorities. We will prevent the Taliban from turning Afghanistan back into a safe haven from which international terrorists can strike at us or our allies. This would pose a direct threat to the American homeland, and that is a threat that we cannot tolerate. Al Qaeda remains in Pakistan where they continue to plot attacks against us and where they and their extremist allies pose a threat to the Pakistani state. Our goal in Pakistan will be to ensure that al Qaeda is defeated and Pakistan remains stable.

Review Process: The review was a deliberate and disciplined three-stage process to check alignment of goals, methods for attaining those goals, and finally resources required. Over ten weeks, the President chaired nine meetings with his national security team, and consulted key allies and partners, including the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan. The President focused on asking the hard questions, took the time to carefully consider all of the options, and united a variety of competing views in his cabinet before agreeing to send any additional Americans to war.

As a result of the review, we have focused our mission and developed a common understanding regarding our regional approach and the need for international support. We will deploy forces into Afghanistan rapidly and will take advantage of these additional resources to create the conditions to begin to draw down combat forces in the summer of 2011, while maintaining a partnership with Afghanistan and Pakistan to protect our enduring interests in that region.

The meetings were focused on how best to ensure the al Qaeda threat is eliminated from the region and that regional stability is restored. We looked closely at the alignment of our efforts and the balance between civilian and military resources, both in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and the efforts of the US and the international community.

A number of issues were explored in depth: national interests, core objectives and goals, counter-terrorism priorities, safe havens for terrorist groups in Pakistan, the health of the global US military force, risks and costs
associated with troop deployments, global deployment requirements, international cooperation and commitments for both Afghanistan and Pakistan, and Afghan capacity in all areas to include Afghan security forces, central and sub-national governance and corruption (including the narcotics trade), and development and economic issues.

**What has Changed since March:** Since the President announced our renewed commitment in March, a number of key developments led the Administration to review its approach in Afghanistan and Pakistan: new attention was focused on Afghanistan and Pakistan, new US leadership was established in Afghanistan, Pakistan increased its efforts to combat extremists, and the situation in Afghanistan has become more grave.

The United States assigned new civilan and military leadership in Afghanistan, with the appointments of Ambassador Karl Eikenberry as US Ambassador to Afghanistan, and General Stanley McChrystal as the new Commander of ISAF military forces in Afghanistan. Upon arrival in Afghanistan, both Ambassador Eikenberry and General McChrystal recognized that after eight years of under resourcing, the situation was worse than expected. Together, Ambassador Eikenberry and General McChrystal published a new Civilian-Military Campaign Plan to integrate US efforts across the country.

Afghanistan’s difficult, extended election process and evident signs of the absence of rule of law made clear the limits of the central government in Kabul.

Meanwhile, in Pakistan, the Pakistanis showed new resolve in defeating militants who had taken control of the Swat Valley, just 60 miles from Islamabad. Pakistani political leaders—including opposition party leaders—came together to support the Pakistani military operations. This fall, the Pakistanis expanded their fight against extremists into the Mehsud tribal areas of South Waziristan along the border with Afghanistan.

**The Way Forward:** The President has decided to deploy an additional 30,000 US troops to Afghanistan. These troops will deploy on an accelerated timeline to reinforce the 68,000 Americans and 39,000 non-US ISAF troops already there, so that we can target the insurgency, break its momentum, and better secure population centers. These forces will increase our capacity to train effective Afghan Security Forces, and to partner with them so that more Afghans get into the fight. And by pursuing these partnerships, we can transition to Afghan responsibility, and begin to reduce our combat troops in the summer of 2011. In short, these resources will allow us to make the final push that is necessary to train Afghans so that we can transfer responsibility.

We will maintain this increased force level for the next 18 months. During this time, we will regularly measure our progress. And beginning in
July 2011, we will transfer lead security responsibility to Afghans and start to transition our combat forces out of Afghanistan. As Afghans take on responsibility for their security, we will continue to advise and assist Afghanistan’s Security Forces, and maintain a partnership on behalf of their security so that they can sustain this effort. Afghans are tired of war and long for peace, justice, and economic security. We intend to help them achieve these goals and end this war and the threat of reoccupation by the foreign fighters associated with al Qaeda.

We will not be in this effort alone. We will continue to be joined in the fight by the Afghans, and the aggressive partnering effort envisioned by General McChrystal will get more Afghans into the fight for their country’s future. There will also be additional resources from NATO. These allies have already made significant commitments of their own in Afghanistan, and we will be discussing additional alliance contributions – in troops, trainers, and resources – in the days and weeks ahead. This is not simply a test of the alliance’s credibility – what is at stake is even more fundamental. It is the security of London and Madrid; of Paris and Berlin; of Prague, New York, and our broader collective security.

We will work with our partners, the United Nations, and the Afghan people to strengthen our civilian effort, so that Afghanistan’s government can step in as we establish better security. President Karzai’s inauguration speech sent the right message about moving in a new direction, including his commitment to reintegration and reconciliation, improving relations with Afghanistan’s regional partners, and steadily increasing the security responsibilities of Afghan security forces. But we must see action and progress. We will be clear about our expectations, and we will encourage and reinforce Afghan Ministries, Governors, and local leaders who deliver for the people and combat corruption. We will not reinforce those who are not accountable and not acting in the service of the Afghan people and the state. And we will also focus our assistance in areas – such as agriculture – that can make an immediate impact in the lives of the Afghan people.

**Civilian Assistance:** A continuing significant increase in civilian experts will accompany a sizable infusion of additional civilian assistance. They will partner with Afghans over the long term to enhance the capacity of national and sub-national government institutions and to help rehabilitate Afghanistan’s key economic sectors so that Afghans can defeat the insurgents who promise only more violence.

Growth is critical to undermine extremists’ appeal in the short term and for sustainable economic development in the long term. Our top reconstruction priority is implementing a civilian-military agriculture redevelopment strategy to restore Afghanistan’s once vibrant agriculture
sector. This will help sap the insurgency of fighters and of income from poppy cultivation.

An emphasis of our governance efforts will be on developing more responsive, visible, and accountable institutions at the provincial, district, and local level, where everyday Afghans encounter their government. We will also encourage and support the Afghan Government’s reinvigorated plans to fight corruption, with concrete measures of progress toward greater accountability.

A key element of our political strategy will be supporting Afghan-led efforts to reintegrate Taliban who renounce al Qaeda, lay down their arms, and engage in the political process.

**Our Partner in Pakistan:** Our partnership with Pakistan is inextricably linked to our efforts in Afghanistan. To secure our country, we need a strategy that works on both sides of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. The costs of inaction are far greater.

The United States is committed to strengthening Pakistan’s capacity to target those groups that pose the greatest threat to both of our countries. A safe haven for those high-level terrorists whose location is known, and whose intentions are clear, cannot be tolerated. For Pakistan, we continue to encourage civilian and military leadership to sustain their fight against extremists and to eliminate terrorists’ safe havens in their country.

We are now focused on working with Pakistan’s democratic institutions, deepening the ties among our governments and people for our common interests and concerns. We are committed to a strategic relationship with Pakistan for the long term. We have affirmed this commitment to Pakistan by providing $1.5 billion each year over the next five years to support Pakistan’s development and democracy, and have led a global effort to rally additional pledges of support. This sizable, long-term commitment of assistance addresses the following objectives:

1. Helping Pakistan address immediate energy, water, and related economic crises, thereby deepening our partnership with the Pakistani people and decreasing the appeal of extremists;
2. Supporting broader economic reforms that are necessary to put Pakistan on a path towards sustainable job creation and economic growth, which is necessary for long-term Pakistani stability and progress; and
3. Helping Pakistan build on its success against militants to eliminate extremist sanctuaries that threaten Pakistan, Afghanistan, the wider region, and people around the world. Additional US assistance will help Pakistan build a foundation for long-term development, and will also strengthen ties between the American and Pakistani people by demonstrating that the United States is
committed to addressing problems that most affect the everyday lives of Pakistanis as we work together to defeat the extremists who threaten Pakistan as they also threaten the United States.

White House, December 1, 2009,
http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/way-forward-afghanistan

**KARZAI STRESSES PAKISTAN’S ROLE IN AFGHAN RECONCILIATION**

Visiting Afghan President Hamid Karzai says Islamabad has an "important" role to play in Kabul's proposed reconciliation talks with Afghan insurgent groups.

In a joint press conference today with Pakistani Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani, Karzai tried to shun speculation that Kabul is attempting to sideline Pakistan while reaching out to Afghan Taliban leaders.

Without Pakistani cooperation, he said, "Afghanistan cannot be stable or peaceful."

"There is a recognition now -- I am certain, in both nations -- of the opportunities together and on the dangers that we have faced together," Karzai said. "And that it is upon both of us a responsibility towards our own nations and towards the future generations that we notice the dangers and that we work together to remove them, to take them away from amongst us, and to work together toward stability and peace in both countries."

During his visit, Karzai made visible efforts to convince Islamabad that Kabul would not allow India to use its soil against Pakistan. The effort is an attempt to challenge Pakistani strategic thinking, which experts say emphasizes supporting Afghan extremist groups to counter the influence of its South Asian archenemy in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan, Karzai told journalists, did not want to become a battleground for power struggles between major regional or world powers.

"Afghanistan does not want any proxy wars on its territory. It does not want a proxy war between India and Pakistan on Afghanistan. It does not want a proxy war between Iran and the United States on Afghanistan," he said. "It does not want any big or small country, nearby or far, to engage in any activity against another nation in Afghanistan."

'Double Game'

Karzai's comment also comes after Iran and the United States this week traded accusations of double dealing over the conflict in Afghanistan.
On March 10, Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad used a trip to Kabul to lambast Afghanistan's Western allies, including an accusation that it was Washington -- not Tehran -- who was playing a "double game" in Afghanistan.

Experts suggest that the key aim of Karzai's visit is to press for the transfer of key captured Taliban leaders, including the group's operational chief Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, who was captured in the southern Pakistani seaport city of Karachi last month.

Gilani reiterated his country's support for Afghanistan, saying Pakistan placed "its full weight behind the agenda and vision outlined by the Afghan people and their elected leadership."

But on the extradition issue, Gilani said Islamabad's hands were tied by a court decision last month barring it from handing over recently arrested key Taliban leaders.

"We have our own judiciary and they are quite active," he said. "And we are consulting with the legal experts, too, and we will sit with them and discuss it and we will get back" to Karzai.

In a sign of increasing cooperation, Islamabad and Kabul on March 10 were reported to have agreed on reviving the stalled peace jirgas or tribal councils during a meeting between Karzai and his Pakistani counterpart, Asif Ali Zardari.

**Pushed Toward Reconciliation**

The two sides reportedly agreed on a road map under which they will hold a jirgagai, or small meeting, after a domestic Afghan peace jirga on April 29. That meeting is meant to set out the Afghan government's plan of reconciling with moderate Taliban members and get the backing of the entire Afghan political spectrum.

A follow-up loya jirga, or grand assembly, will then be held in Islamabad later this year. The first peace jirga between the two neighbors was held in Kabul in 2007.

Despite Ahmedinejad's controversial remarks, Western leaders appear to be keen on pushing Kabul toward reconciliation with its domestic foes and developing good relations with its neighbors. In a major policy speech in the United States on March 10, British Foreign Secretary David Miliband outlined Western thinking.

"If Afghanistan is to have a more peaceful and prosperous future, it needs not just a new internal political settlement but also an external one," he said. "There needs to be much greater effort to reach out, not just to disaffected Afghans, but to the country's neighbors and near neighbors."
That greater effort, some argue, needs to be matched with money and political support.

On March 10, Zardari called for a "Marshall Plan" for Pakistan and Afghanistan to rid the countries of Taliban militancy, referring to the US initiative to rebuild Western Europe after World War II.


BEGINNING OF THE ENDFGAME?

Obama is a miracle man. His getting elected as America’s first-ever black president was in itself a miracle. An even bigger miracle was his becoming a Nobel peace laureate, despite the fact that he is the head of state of a superpower that is tirelessly fighting wars ever since the Second World War. His choice for the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize was a huge surprise for Obama himself, but he had no qualm about collecting it.

Now that Obama has got rid of Osama, Americans and people the world over expect him to end the decade-old Afghan war. It is time Obama the miracle man did something to deserve the honour that the Nobel Committee bestowed upon him for doing nothing. In any case, Osama bin Laden was why the United States went to war in Afghanistan, and now that Osama is officially declared dead, Obama is left with no excuse or rationale to continue this war.

There is already growing public and congressional pressure in the United States for Obama to speed up US withdrawal from Afghanistan. Osama bin Laden’s death comes at a time when Obama was already considering the size and speed of his promised troop drawdown in the increasingly unpopular and costly conflict. It remains to be seen whether Bin Laden’s killing will bring any drastic change in Obama’s calculations for an exit strategy.

With his eyes on next year’s presidential election for a second term, Obama has been in a fix over the pullout issue and Bin Laden’s killing now seems to have given him greater strength and more space for political manoeuvring. It may have provided increased momentum for the war in Afghanistan, but Obama should capitalise on the event to reduce the US footprint in Afghanistan and the expense involved in the war.

Political thinking in Washington right now is focused on the need for turning the page over from Afghanistan. Senior officials of the administration are already engaged in discussions and strategy sessions about how to leverage Bin Laden’s death into a spark that ignites peace talks. They consider Bin
Laden’s death as the “beginning of the endgame” in Afghanistan. To them, it changes everything and presents an opportunity for reconciliation that didn’t exist before.

Though the militarist Pentagon-led view is resisting any radical move at this stage and urging a more gradual pullout, many of the president’s civilian national security advisers contend that the benefits of incremental gains do not merit the cost – in lives and dollars – of such a large military presence. They say negotiations are an essential part of a new war strategy that will allow Obama to announce a substantial reduction in US forces starting this summer.

Ever since Bin Laden’s killing, the Obama administration has been engaged in a reassessment of the war in Afghanistan and the broader effort to combat terrorism, with Congress, the military and the Obama administration weighing the goals, strategies, costs and the underlying authority for a conflict that is now almost a decade old. There is little dispute in the White House and among US lawmakers that this year has brought “substantial military gains” against the Taliban.

But assessments of the other elements of the strategy – such as improvement of the Afghan economy and the government in ways that can sustain hard-won security – are less positive. There are serious doubts on the feasibility of plans to recruit and train as many as 400,000 Afghan security forces to take over once foreign troops depart. “Despite our best efforts, there are challenges of corruption, predatory behaviour, incompetence still evident within the Afghan army and police,” Sen John Kerry said at a recent hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that he chairs.

On top of these problems, there is also the question of money and resources. The annual cost of maintaining the Afghan forces is estimated at up to $10 billion, whereas Afghan tax revenue totals less than $2 billion, which leaves a huge gap to be filled by the American taxpayer. “So who will pay the bills to avoid having those armed soldiers and police mobilised as part of the next insurgency?” Kerry asked. He also questioned what he described as a “fundamentally unsustainable” monthly expenditure of more than $10 billion on a massive military operation with no end in sight, and called for urgent clarification from the administration on its mission and exit plan.

Kerry summed up the whole issue in one question: “What is the political solution? We need to make our ultimate goals absolutely clear for the sake of the American people, Afghans, Pakistanis and everyone else who has a stake in the outcome,” he said. This question says it all. No one knows what the political solution is going to be for an end to this unwinnable war which has not gone beyond retribution and retaliation.

No wonder people in the US and allied European countries are sick of this conflict and want their troops to be out of the Afghan war theatre. Even before Bin Laden’s killing, America’s cumulative problems at home, with
growing economic costs of the Afghan war, the continuing national debt crisis, the upcoming 2012 presidential election, and “realities” on the ground had bolstered arguments that the plans to remake Afghanistan’s government and economy went too far beyond the goal of safeguarding US security.

Influential senators like John Kerry and Richard Lugar, both ranking leaders of their parties in the Senate are looking for a political solution in Afghanistan. Kerry looks at Osama bin Laden’s killing as potentially a game-changing opportunity to build momentum for a political solution in Afghanistan that could also bring greater stability to the region, as well as ultimately enable the allies to bring their troops home.

After weeks of debate among civilian and military leaders, the US National Security Council recently endorsed key elements of the State Department’s reconciliation strategy. Starting peace talks has now become the top priority for Marc Grossman, the US government’s special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. He was in Pakistan earlier this month for the first meeting of a “core group” that Afghanistan, Pakistan and the US have constituted to promote and facilitate the process of reconciliation and peace in Afghanistan.

It is important that the transition process does not ignore Afghanistan’s demographic realities and is not weighted in favour or against any particular ethnic group. Durable peace in Afghanistan will come only through reconciliation between Afghan factions, with no selectivity or exclusivity. The US already recognises the Taliban as part of the Afghan “political fabric” and has said that it would be ready to negotiate with them.

In a speech in February that elicited little attention because of events in the Middle East, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton articulated a new stance for negotiations with the Taliban. The benchmarks for the Taliban to renounce violence, break with al Qaeda or embrace the Afghan constitution are no longer preconditions for talks; now those terms only have to be “necessary outcomes of any negotiation.”

On its part, despite the Abbottabad fiasco, Pakistan remains a direct stakeholder in the Afghan peace as it is in its interest to have peace and stability in an independent and united Afghanistan that is friendly towards Pakistan. It would therefore be a source of strength in any Afghan-led reconciliation process, and could also facilitate the whole negotiating process.

Good evening. Nearly ten years ago, America suffered the worst attack on our shores since Pearl Harbor. This mass murder was planned by Osama bin Laden and his al Qaeda network in Afghanistan, and signaled a new threat to our security - one in which the targets were no longer soldiers on a battlefield, but innocent men, women and children going about their daily lives.

In the days that followed, our nation was united as we struck at al Qaeda and routed the Taliban in Afghanistan. Then, our focus shifted. A second war was launched in Iraq, and we spent enormous blood and treasure to support a new government there. By the time I took office, the war in Afghanistan had entered its seventh year. But al Qaeda's leaders had escaped into Pakistan and were plotting new attacks, while the Taliban had regrouped and gone on the offensive. Without a new strategy and decisive action, our military commanders warned that we could face a resurgent al Qaeda, and a Taliban taking over large parts of Afghanistan.

For this reason, in one of the most difficult decisions that I've made as President, I ordered an additional 30,000 American troops into Afghanistan. When I announced this surge at West Point, we set clear objectives: to refocus on al Qaeda; reverse the Taliban's momentum; and train Afghan Security Forces to defend their own country. I also made it clear that our commitment would not be open-ended, and that we would begin to drawdown our forces this July.

Tonight, I can tell you that we are fulfilling that commitment. Thanks to our men and women in uniform, our civilian personnel, and our many coalition partners, we are meeting our goals. As a result, starting next month, we will be able to remove 10,000 of our troops from Afghanistan by the end of this year, and we will bring home a total of 33,000 troops by next summer, fully recovering the surge I announced at West Point. After this initial reduction, our troops will continue coming home at a steady pace as Afghan Security forces move into the lead. Our mission will change from combat to support. By 2014, this process of transition will be complete, and the Afghan people will be responsible for their own security.

We are starting this drawdown from a position of strength. Al Qaeda is under more pressure than at any time since 9/11. Together with the Pakistanis, we have taken out more than half of al Qaeda's leadership. And thanks to our intelligence professionals and Special Forces, we killed Osama bin Laden, the only leader that al Qaeda had ever known. This was a victory for all who have served since 9/11. One soldier summed it up well. "The message," he said, "is we don't forget. You will be held accountable, no matter how long it takes."
The information that we recovered from bin Laden's compound shows al Qaeda under enormous strain. Bin Laden expressed concern that al Qaeda has been unable to effectively replace senior terrorists that have been killed, and that al Qaeda has failed in its effort to portray America as a nation at war with Islam - thereby draining more widespread support. Al Qaeda remains dangerous, and we must be vigilant against attacks. But we have put al Qaeda on a path to defeat, and we will not relent until the job is done.

In Afghanistan, we've inflicted serious losses on the Taliban and taken a number of its strongholds. Along with our surge, our allies also increased their commitments, which helped stabilize more of the country. Afghan Security Forces have grown by over 100,000 troops, and in some provinces and municipalities we have already begun to transition responsibility for security to the Afghan people. In the face of violence and intimidation, Afghans are fighting and dying for their country, establishing local police forces, opening markets and schools, creating new opportunities for women and girls, and trying to turn the page on decades of war.

Of course, huge challenges remain. This is the beginning - but not the end - of our effort to wind down this war. We will have to do the hard work of keeping the gains that we have made, while we drawdown our forces and transition responsibility for security to the Afghan government. And next May, in Chicago, we will host a summit with our NATO allies and partners to shape the next phase of this transition.

We do know that peace cannot come to a land that has known so much war without a political settlement. So as we strengthen the Afghan government and Security Forces, America will join initiatives that reconcile the Afghan people, including the Taliban. Our position on these talks is clear: they must be led by the Afghan government, and those who want to be a part of a peaceful Afghanistan must break from al Qaeda, abandon violence, and abide by the Afghan Constitution. But, in part because of our military effort, we have reason to believe that progress can be made.

The goal that we seek is achievable, and can be expressed simply: no safe-haven from which al Qaeda or its affiliates can launch attacks against our homeland, or our allies. We will not try to make Afghanistan a perfect place. We will not police its streets or patrol its mountains indefinitely. That is the responsibility of the Afghan government, which must step up its ability to protect its people; and move from an economy shaped by war to one that can sustain a lasting peace. What we can do, and will do, is build a partnership with the Afghan people that endures - one that ensures that we will be able to continue targeting terrorists and supporting a sovereign Afghan government.

Of course, our efforts must also address terrorist safe-havens in Pakistan. No country is more endangered by the presence of violent extremists, which is why we will continue to press Pakistan to expand its
participation in securing a more peaceful future for this war-torn region. We will work with the Pakistani government to root out the cancer of violent extremism, and we will insist that it keep its commitments. For there should be no doubt that so long as I am President, the United States will never tolerate a safe-haven for those who aim to kill us: they cannot elude us, nor escape the justice they deserve.

My fellow Americans, this has been a difficult decade for our country. We have learned anew the profound cost of war -- a cost that has been paid by the nearly 4500 Americans who have given their lives in Iraq, and the over 1500 who have done so in Afghanistan - men and women who will not live to enjoy the freedom that they defended. Thousands more have been wounded. Some have lost limbs on the field of battle, and others still battle the demons that have followed them home.

Yet tonight, we take comfort in knowing that the tide of war is receding. Fewer of our sons and daughters are serving in harm's way. We have ended our combat mission in Iraq, with 100,000 American troops already out of that country. And even as there will be dark days ahead in Afghanistan, the light of a secure peace can be seen in the distance. These long wars will come to a responsible end.

As they do, we must learn their lessons. Already this decade of war has caused many to question the nature of America's engagement around the world. Some would have America retreat from our responsibility as an anchor of global security, and embrace an isolation that ignores the very real threats that we face. Others would have America over-extend ourselves, confronting every evil that can be found abroad.

We must chart a more centered course. Like generations before, we must embrace America's singular role in the course of human events. But we must be as pragmatic as we are passionate; as strategic as we are resolute. When threatened, we must respond with force - but when that force can be targeted, we need not deploy large armies overseas. When innocents are being slaughtered and global security endangered, we don't have to choose between standing idly by or acting on our own. Instead, we must rally international action, which we are doing in Libya, where we do not have a single soldier on the ground, but are supporting allies in protecting the Libyan people and giving them the chance to determine their destiny.

In all that we do, we must remember that what sets America apart is not solely our power - it is the principles upon which our union was founded. We are a nation that brings our enemies to justice while adhering to the rule of law, and respecting the rights of all our citizens. We protect our own freedom and prosperity by extending it to others. We stand not for empire, but for self-determination. That is why we have a stake in the democratic aspirations that are now washing across the Arab World. We will support those revolutions
with fidelity to our ideals, with the power of our example, and with an unwavering belief that all human beings deserve to live with freedom and dignity.

Above all, we are a nation whose strength abroad has been anchored in opportunity for our citizens at home. Over the last decade, we have spent a trillion dollars on war, at a time of rising debt and hard economic times. Now, we must invest in America's greatest resource - our people. We must unleash innovation that creates new jobs and industry, while living within our means. We must rebuild our infrastructure and find new and clean sources of energy. And most of all, after a decade of passionate debate, we must recapture the common purpose that we shared at the beginning of this time of war. For our nation draws strength from our differences, and when our union is strong no hill is too steep and no horizon is beyond our reach. America, it is time to focus on nation building here at home.

In this effort, we draw inspiration from our fellow Americans who have sacrificed so much on our behalf. To our troops, our veterans and their families, I speak for all Americans when I say that we will keep our sacred trust with you, and provide you with the care, and benefits, and opportunity that you deserve.

I met some of those patriotic Americans at Fort Campbell. A while back, I spoke to the 101st Airborne that has fought to turn the tide in Afghanistan, and to the team that took out Osama bin Laden. Standing in front of a model of bin Laden's compound, the Navy SEAL who led that effort paid tribute to those who had been lost - brothers and sisters in arms whose names are now written on bases where our troops stand guard overseas, and on headstones in quiet corners of our country where their memory will never be forgotten. This officer - like so many others I have met with on bases, in Baghdad and Bagram, at Walter Reed and Bethesda Naval Hospital - spoke with humility about how his unit worked together as one - depending on each other, and trusting one another, as a family might do in a time of peril.

That's a lesson worth remembering - that we are all a part of one American family. Though we have known disagreement and division, we are bound together by the creed that is written into our founding documents, and a conviction that the United States of America is a country that can achieve whatever it sets out to accomplish. Now, let us finish the work at hand. Let us responsibly end these wars, and reclaim the American Dream that is at the center of our story. With confidence in our cause; with faith in our fellow citizens; and with hope in our hearts, let us go about the work of extending the promise of America - for this generation, and the next. May God bless our
troops. And may God bless the United States of America.


GAUGING THE EFFECT OF OBAMA'S TROOP CUTS

President Obama's plan to pull 10,000 US forces from Afghanistan this year out of the 100,000 presently there - and another 20,000 toward the end of 2012 - is not ideal from the point of view of the existing strategy. Modifications - some of them significant - will be needed relative to what military commanders assumed and intended. The integrated civil-military campaign plan that has been guiding coalition action and planning will need to be changed somewhat, and progress in stabilizing key parts of the country could be slowed, ironically prolonging the war that Mr. Obama has been seeking to begin to end.

The plan will be very problematic if, as some news outlets are leaking, next year's drawdown must occur by summer's end. That said, the president's decision would not be extreme or irresponsible if next year's drawdown can be extended a few months, until the end of the calendar year or so, since that approach would allow 90,000 American troops to stay through the "fighting season." In the rest of this essay, I will assume that the latter approach is possible in the hope that it will be adopted next year - whatever the plan might be at the moment.

The new plan will retain a basic focus on counterinsurgency operations - securing the population while helping build up Afghan security forces and governance. It does not move toward adoption of a narrow counter-terrorism mission - never realistic anyway - because even counter-terrorism takes good intelligence, which tends to dry up if the population (and friendly sources) cannot be protected. Those who favored cutting US forces precipitously this year or next will be disappointed; most American combat forces will stay in Afghanistan well into 2013. Importantly, Mr. Obama's plan does not require conceding back to insurgents any of the key terrain that has been cleared in recent years at considerable cost in precious life and limb. Given the tenor of the American political debate on both sides of the aisle about debt, deficits and overextension abroad, Mr. Obama's plan is also perhaps the most robust that realistically could be expected.

There has been considerable progress in Afghanistan in recent times, and this should reassure those Americans who fear that the current strategy is a fool's errand. On a visit to Helmand province and Kandahar last month, for example, I saw considerable evidence of positive momentum - Afghan forces
now providing half of all coalition personnel for combined operations; roads in central, populated areas now safe enough to drive for residents and government officials alike; roughly a 50 percent increase in school attendance in Helmand over just the past year and a half; a 50 percent reduction in poppy harvests as more farmers move to legal crops; a doubling of the number of government positions at the provincial and district levels that are filled and functioning. The killing of Osama bin Laden is also a success of the broader strategy. Still, Mr. Obama had to contend with unpleasant realities concerning lack of full cooperation with allies in Kabul and Islamabad and continued levels of violence in Afghanistan that have not yet declined from historic highs. So he could only go so far in selling the mission as a success and only so far in shoring up American political will to sustain the effort. Again, the plan he has announced is reasonably solid under the circumstances, even if I would have preferred a 2011 drawdown only half as large.

How will this troop drawdown likely influence efforts on the ground? The basic plan has been roughly this: Focus first on the country’s south and southwest (primarily Kandahar and Helmand) in 2009 and 2010, which we have largely done, clearing out insurgent sanctuaries and weapons caches and improving protection of key transportation arteries and urban centers. Alas, assassination campaigns continue, but the Taliban no longer control large populated chunks of the strategically key southern reaches of the country. Then, this year, withstand the expected Taliban counteroffensive in those areas while continuing to build up Afghan security forces and government capabilities so that we can gradually hand off more and more responsibility to the Afghans over the coming one to two years. At the local level, as a Marine officer explained to me last month in Helmand, it typically takes 24 to 30 months from when we first clear an area until we can reduce foreign troop totals, so this process cannot be rushed easily.

As we draw down forces in the south and southwest in late 2011 and 2012, we can use some of the resulting capabilities to reinvest our efforts in the east, which remain under resourced because Mr. Obama provided just 30,000 of the 40,000 additional troops that Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal requested back in 2009. Then we can follow a similar process to clear, hold and build in the east in 2012, enabling the beginning of drawdowns there in 2013 along with the acceleration of troop cuts then in the southern parts of the country.

Put it differently: Though it’s tough to break down the US presence in Afghanistan simply into brigade-sized components, it is roughly accurate to say that we have about five American brigades in the southern part of the country, a bit more than three in the east and a couple more spread through the north and west, for a total of something more than 10. If the five US brigades in the southern areas can be reduced to, say, three in the coming year
commands would like to increase brigade strength in the east from three to four, meaning that net drawdowns over the next six to 12 months would be modest countrywide.

All told, we might then have 95,000 US troops (and perhaps 140,000 total foreign forces) in Afghanistan at the end of 2011, 70,000 GIs at the end of 2012, perhaps 45,000 at the end of 2013 and perhaps 20,000 at the end of 2014 as Afghan security forces assume lead responsibilities throughout the country and we make the transition to a modest longer-term presence. This, at least, is my rough understanding of what the campaign plan has been - prior to the president's speech.

Mr. Obama's plan preserves the capacity to do most of this. However, it will require at least one of two risky changes. Either we accelerate the cuts of US and NATO capabilities in the south and southwest, perhaps asking Afghan forces to do more than they are yet capable of attempting and inviting a renewed Taliban attempt at counterattack. Or we forgo the buildup in the east and leave that area a patchwork of relatively safe localities interspersed with dangerous mini-sanctuaries for extremists. The former option implies a substantial risk of losing our recent gains; the latter runs a risk of stalemate in the east, leaving insurgents able to keep attacking us throughout the country by use of these safe zones in the mountains of Khost, Paktia, Paktika, Nangahar and elsewhere.

Yet it is appropriate to end on a note of guarded optimism. With 90 percent of our forces remaining another 15 to 18 months, we will be able to do roughly 90 percent as much as before. Training and mentoring of Afghan security forces should continue at a robust pace, as their current total strength of 300,000 grows to 350,000 or perhaps 375,000 in the coming 12 to 18 months. The most fraught parts of Kandahar and Helmand need not be turned over immediately to Afghan lead control, even if other parts of those crucial provinces may have to be. Our existing forces in the east, north and west will not have to be cut, although some coalition partners may downsize in those areas in coming months. Afghan forces' existing and proven abilities to protect Kabul fairly well will not be compromised. Our intelligence networks and special operations forces - so key to taking out extremist leaders - can be maintained at or near current levels. And perhaps we can, if lucky, strike the right balance between reassuring Afghan and Pakistani partners that we are still committed to the mission while also reminding them that we are not staying forever.

As with most things about Afghanistan these days, the president's speech makes me a bit nervous and again, I will be much more nervous if next year's drawdown has to happen by September. But on balance, there remains a good case for a measured dose of optimism that we gradually will reach our modest goal of an Afghan government able to control most of its territory and
to do so increasingly on its own. Now on to the next challenge: making our political strategy for supporting Afghanistan's young democracy as generally solid as our military plan.


SECRETARY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE
WASHINGTON, DC, THURSDAY JUNE 23, 2011

Thank you, Chairman Kerry and Senator Lugar. It is always a pleasure to see you.

As the President said last night, the United States is meeting the goals he set for our three-track strategy in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The military surge has ramped up pressure on al Qaeda terrorists and Taliban insurgents. The civilian surge has bolstered the Afghan and Pakistani governments, economies, and civil societies and undercut the pull of the insurgency. The diplomatic surge is supporting Afghan-led efforts to reach a political solution that will chart a more secure future for the region. All three surges are part of the vision for transition that NATO endorsed in Lisbon and that President Obama reaffirmed last night. As he said, Afghans have to take responsibility for their own future.

Today I want to echo the President’s statement and update you on our civilian efforts. I also want to answer your questions about the road ahead. Because, despite this progress, we have to stay focused on our mission. As the President said, “We have put al Qaeda on a path to defeat, and we will not relent until the job is done.”

First, let me say a word about the military effort. Last night the President explained his plan to begin drawing down our forces next month and transitioning to Afghan responsibility. I will leave it to my colleagues from the Defense Department to discuss the specifics. But the bottom line, as the President said, is that we have broken the Taliban’s momentum. So we begin this drawdown from a position of strength.

Now, let me turn to the civilian surge. We appreciate the attention you have devoted to this, because improving governance, creating economic opportunity, and supporting civil society is vital to solidifying our military gains and advancing our political goals.

Since January 2009, we have more than tripled the number of diplomats, development experts, and other civilian specialists on the ground in Afghanistan, and we have expanded our presence in the field nearly six-fold. Those new civilians have changed the way we do business, focusing on key
ministries and sectors, and holding ourselves and our partners to higher standards.

There should be no doubt about the results, despite very difficult circumstances: Economic growth is up, and opium production is down. Under the Taliban, only 900,000 boys and no girls were enrolled in schools. By 2010, 7.1 million students were enrolled, 37 percent of them girls. Hundreds of thousands of farmers have been trained and equipped with new seeds. Afghan women have used more than 100,000 micro-finance loans. Infant mortality is down 22 percent.

What do all these numbers tell us?

First, that despite all the many challenges that remain, life is better for most Afghans. The Karzai government has many failings, to be sure. But more and more people can see progress in their streets, schools, and fields. And we remain committed to fighting corruption and strengthening the rule of law.

The aim of our civilian surge was to give Afghans a stake in their country’s future and provide credible alternatives to extremism and insurgency — it was not, nor was it ever designed, to solve all of Afghanistan’s development challenges. Measured against these goals, and considering the obstacles we face, we are and should be encouraged by how much has been accomplished.

Most important, the civilian surge has helped advance our military and political objectives. Let me offer an example.

Last November, USAID began funding the reconstruction of irrigation systems in Wardak province, providing jobs for hundreds of workers and water to thousands of farmers. In March, insurgents demanded that the people abandon the project and support their spring offensive. The people refused. Why should they trade new opportunities for more violence and chaos? Frustrated, the insurgents threatened to attack the project. Local shuras mobilized and sent back a clear message: We want this work to continue; interfere and you will become our enemy. The insurgents backed down.

We have now reached the height of the civilian surge. Any effort of this size and scope will face considerable logistical challenges, and we are working hard to strengthen oversight and improve effectiveness. We have learned many lessons, and we are applying them. And the efforts of our civilians on the ground, working in some of the most difficult conditions imaginable, continue to be nothing short of extraordinary.

Looking ahead, as transition proceeds, we will shift our efforts from short-term stabilization projects to longer-term sustainable development that focuses on spurring growth and integrating Afghanistan into South Central Asia’s economy.

Now, the third surge is our diplomatic effort in support of an Afghan-led political process that aims to shatter the alliance between the Taliban and al
Qaeda, end the insurgency, and help to produce a more peaceful and prosperous region.

To begin, we are working with the Afghans on a new Strategic Partnership Declaration that will provide a long-term framework for our bilateral cooperation and bolster Afghan and regional confidence that we will not abandon Afghanistan. As the President said last night, this will ensure that we will be able to continue targeting terrorists and supporting a sovereign Afghan government.

It will provide a backdrop for reconciliation with insurgents who meet clear red lines. They must renounce violence; abandon al Qaeda; and abide by the constitution of Afghanistan, including its protections for the rights of women. As I said in February, those are necessary outcomes of any negotiation.

In the last four months, this Afghan-led political process has gained momentum.

Twenty-seven Provincial Peace Councils have been established in Afghanistan, and the Afghan High Peace Council has stepped up its efforts to engage civil society and women, even as it also begins reaching out to insurgents. Including women and civil society in this process is not just the right thing to do – it is also the smart and strategic thing to do. Any potential for peace will be subverted if women are marginalized or silenced. And the United States will not abandon our values or support a political process that undoes the social progress that has been made in the past decade.

But we believe that a political solution that meets these conditions is possible. The United States has a broad range of contacts at many levels across Afghanistan and the region that we are leveraging to support this effort, including very preliminary outreach to members of the Taliban. This is not a pleasant business. But history tells us that a combination of military pressure, economic opportunity, and an inclusive political and diplomatic process is the best way to end insurgencies.

With bin Laden dead and al Qaeda’s remaining leadership under enormous pressure, the choice facing the Taliban is clear: Be part of Afghanistan’s future or face unrelenting assault. They cannot wait us out. They cannot defeat us. And they cannot escape this choice.

Special Representative Marc Grossman is leading an active diplomatic effort to build support for a political solution. What we call the “Core Group,” of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the United States, has met twice and will convene again next week. At the same time, we are engaging the region around a common vision of an independent, stable Afghanistan and a region free of al Qaeda. And this effort is paying off. India, Russia, and even Iran are now on board.
Just this past Friday, the United Nations Security Council voted unanimously to support reconciliation by splitting its sanctions on al Qaeda and the Taliban, underscoring that the door is open for the insurgents to abandon the terrorists and seek a better path.

We welcome these steps. And for the United States, the key diplomatic priority – and indeed a lynchpin of this entire effort – is closing the gap between Kabul and Islamabad. Pakistan simply must be part of this process.

Earlier this month the two countries launched a Joint Peace Commission, with substantive talks at the highest levels. Also significant was the full implementation on June 12 of the Transit Trade Agreement, which will create new economic opportunity on both sides and lay the foundation for a broader vision of regional economic integration and cooperation. It took decades to negotiate this agreement, including great effort by the late Richard Holbrooke, but trucks are now rolling across the border.

I recently visited Pakistan and had very candid discussions with its leaders. The United States has clear expectations for this relationship. As President Obama said last night, the United States will never tolerate a safe-haven for those who would kill our citizens.

We are looking to Pakistan to take concrete action on the goals we share: defeating violent extremism, which has taken so many innocent Pakistani lives; ending the conflict in Afghanistan; and ensuring a secure, stable, democratic, prosperous future for Pakistan and the region.

There are obviously tough questions to ask. And many causes for frustration. But we should not overlook the positive steps of recent weeks. Counter-terrorism cooperation continues, and several key extremists have been killed or captured.

As I told the Pakistanis, America cannot and should not solve Pakistan’s problems. They have to do that themselves. But nor can we just walk away from this relationship and ignore the consequences.

Pakistan is a nuclear-armed state sitting at the crossroads of a strategic region. And we have seen the cost of disengaging from this region before. As Secretary Gates has stressed, we cannot repeat the mistakes of 1989.

That is why it is so important that we have the resources to continue implementing our strategy. The State Department is following the Pentagon’s model and creating a special emergency fund – an Overseas Contingency Operations account – that separates normal operating costs from these extraordinary war-time expenses.

Now, we are painfully aware of today’s fiscal reality. And I know it may be tempting to peel off the civilian elements of our strategy that make fewer headlines. But as our commanders on the ground will tell you, that would be a serious mistake. The three surges are designed to work hand-in-hand.
cannot slash one and expect the other two to succeed. And ultimately, we are
saving money – and lives – by investing now in getting this right.

And let’s not forget: An entire year of civilian assistance in Afghanistan
costs Americans the same amount as just 10 days of military operations.

So Mr. Chairman, Senator Lugar, I thank you for this opportunity to
explain our strategy and why we feel it is so vital to America’s national security.
I hope we can work together to implement and improve it.

Senate Foreign Relations Committee, June 23, 2011,
http://foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/062211%20Secretary%20Clinton%20Testimony%20for%20SFRC%20Af-Pak%20Hearing.pdf

DANGERS IN THE ENGAME

US President Barack Obama’s announcement of a gradual troop withdrawal
from Afghanistan and confirmation of overtures being made to the Taliban
represent the formal beginning of the endgame.

This should be a moment of joy to those Pakistanis who believed that
much of the militancy and terrorism in Pakistan could be attributed to US
military presence in Afghanistan. And yet, it may not be as simple as that.

While Obama was not specific about US long-term plans for
Afghanistan, what he said about Pakistan should be deeply worrying to us. In
frighteningly candid terms, he made it clear that America would henceforth
beam laser-like on Pakistan. Though willing to work with Pakistan “to root out
the cancer of violent extremism”, he is no longer asking Pakistan to take out
the militants — he is “insisting” that “it keep its commitments”. Pointing out
that since Pakistan faced an existential threat, he said it was imperative for
her to ensure that there are “no safe havens from which al Qaeda or its
affiliates can launch attacks against our homeland or our allies”.

Obama’s announcement injects a note of urgency to our own policy
assessment. For one, it does not signal an end to American involvement in the
region. In fact, the US has already confirmed its interest in a long-term
arrangement with Kabul for continuing control over some of its huge bases.
This is likely to become a major bone of contention in the peace process with
the Taliban and also arouse grave misgivings in neighbouring countries,
particularly China, Iran and Russia, which are apprehensive that the US
withdrawal could signal the start of another ‘Great Game’.

What exactly do these warnings mean for Pakistan? For one, they
constitute grave challenges on both the political and military fronts. On the
political, the US will demand that Pakistan ensure that the Taliban groups
under its influence ‘play ball’ in the peace process, without taking us fully
onboard. While US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has reiterated that the US
wants us to be “part of the peace process”, she has also indicated that if Pakistan refuses to be cooperative, the option of ratcheting up pressure is always there. On the military front, the US has signalled its frustration with Pakistan’s failure to “address terrorist safe havens” in its territory. If this were to remain America’s perception about our policy, further arm-twisting, including delayed supply of arms, as already hinted at by Secretary Clinton, can be expected. We should also be in no doubt that at any hint of reluctance on our part, the US will not hesitate to increase the frequency and scope of drone attacks, if need be, deep inside Pakistan. In fact, if we were to reduce intelligence and security cooperation with the US, we could see greater US operations close to our frontiers, with all its concomitant consequences.

The risks for Pakistan are enormous. With an overwhelming majority of Pakistanis now viewing the US as an arch-enemy, any precipitate military operations in the country could push it towards civil war. Pakistan is also not sure of what the US intentions are in initiating dialogue with the Taliban. Rumours that the administration may have begun to look with favour at the so-called Blackwill formula, which calls for the partition of Afghanistan into the non-Pashtun north and the Pashtun south, could have disastrous consequences for the region.

The coming months will test both our resolve and our imagination, as we strive to promote our interests while protecting our assets. We cannot do so while in the current state of tension and mistrust with the US, nor can it be achieved by toeing the US line. The room for manoeuvre is narrow and the risks are great. Clarity at home and close consultations with allies abroad are essential if we are to remain relevant to the rapidly evolving developments.

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**US COST OF WAR AT LEAST $3.7 TRILLION AND COUNTING**

When President Barack Obama cited cost as a reason to bring troops home from Afghanistan, he referred to a $1 trillion price tag for America’s wars.

Staggering as it is, that figure grossly underestimates the total cost of wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan to the US Treasury and ignores more imposing costs yet to come, according to a study released on Wednesday.

The final bill will run at least $3.7 trillion and could reach as high as $4.4 trillion, according to the research project “Costs of War” by Brown University’s Watson Institute for International Studies.
In the 10 years since US troops went into Afghanistan to root out the al Qaeda leaders behind the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, spending on the conflicts totaled $2.3 trillion to $2.7 trillion.

Those numbers will continue to soar when considering often overlooked costs such as long-term obligations to wounded veterans and projected war spending from 2012 through 2020. The estimates do not include at least $1 trillion more in interest payments coming due and many billions more in expenses that cannot be counted, according to the study.

In human terms, 224,000 to 258,000 people have died directly from warfare, including 125,000 civilians in Iraq. Many more have died indirectly, from the loss of clean drinking water, healthcare, and nutrition. An additional 365,000 have been wounded and 7.8 million people – equal to the combined population of Connecticut and Kentucky – have been displaced.

“Costs of War” brought together more than 20 academics to uncover the expense of war in lives and dollars, a daunting task given the inconsistent recording of lives lost and what the report called opaque and sloppy accounting by the US Congress and the Pentagon.

The report underlines the extent to which war will continue to stretch the US federal budget, which is already on an unsustainable course due to an aging American population and skyrocketing healthcare costs.

It also raises the question of what the United States gained from its multitrillion-dollar investment.

“I hope that when we look back, whenever this ends, something very good has come out of it,” Senator Bob Corker, a Republican from Tennessee, told Reuters in Washington.

**Sept 11, 2001: The Damage Continues**

In one sense, the report measures the cost of 9/11, the American shorthand for the events of Sept 11, 2001. Nineteen hijackers plus other al Qaeda plotters spent an estimated $400,000 to $500,000 on the plane attacks that killed 2,995 people and caused $50 billion to $100 billion in economic damages.

What followed were three wars in which $50 billion amounts to a rounding error. For every person killed on Sept 11, another 73 have been killed since.

Was it worth it? That is a question many people want answered, said Catherine Lutz, head of the anthropology department at Brown and co-director of the study.

“We decided we needed to do this kind of rigorous assessment of what it cost to make those choices to go to war,” she said. “Politicians, we assumed, were not going to do that kind of assessment.”
The report arrives as Congress debates how to cut a US deficit projected at $1.4 trillion this year, roughly a 10th of which can be attributed to direct war spending.

What did the United States gain for its trillions?

Strategically, the results for the United States are mixed. Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein are dead, but Iraq and Afghanistan are far from stable democracies. Iran has gained influence in the Gulf and the Taliban, though ousted from government, remain a viable military force in Afghanistan.

“The United States has been extremely successful in protecting the homeland,” said George Friedman, founder of STRATFOR, a US-based intelligence company.

“Al Qaeda in Afghanistan was capable of mounting very sophisticated, complex, operations on an intercontinental basis. That organization with that capability has not only been substantially reduced, it seems to have been shattered,” Friedman said.

Economically, the results are also mixed. War spending may be adding half a percentage point a year to growth in the gross domestic product but that has been more than offset by the negative effects of deficit spending, the report concludes.

Comprehensive Study

Some US government reports have attempted to assess the costs of war, notably a March 2011 Congressional Research Service report that estimated post-Sept 11 war funding at $1.4 trillion through 2012. The Congressional Budget Office projected war costs through 2021 at $1.8 trillion.

A ground-breaking private estimate was published in the 2008 book “The Three Trillion Dollar War,” by Linda Bilmes, a member of the Watson Institute team, and Nobel-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz. That work revealed how much cost was added by interest on deficit spending and medical care for veterans.

The report draws on those sources and pieces together many others for a more comprehensive picture.

The report also makes special note of Pakistan, a front not generally mentioned along with Iraq and Afghanistan. War has probably killed more people in Pakistan than in neighboring Afghanistan, the report concludes.

Politicians throughout history have underestimated the costs of war, believing they will be shorter and less deadly than reality, said Neta Crawford, the other co-director of the report and a political science professor at Boston University.
The report said former President George W. Bush’s administration was “shamelessly politically driven” in underestimating Iraq war costs before the 2003 invasion.

Most official sources continue to overlook costs, largely because of a focus on just Pentagon spending, Crawford said.

“Over the last decade, we have spent a trillion dollars on war,” Obama said in last week’s speech on reducing US troop levels in Afghanistan. At the very least, he was rounding down by $200 billion to $300 billion, when counting US congressional appropriations for the post 9/11 wars.

“I don’t know what the president knows, but I wish it were a trillion,” Crawford said. “It would be better if it were a trillion.”

**Elusive Number**

In theory, adding up the dollars spent and lives lost should be a statistical errand. The US Congress appropriates the money, and a life lost on battlefield should have a death certificate and a casket to match.

The team quickly discovered, however, the task was far more complicated.

Specific war spending over the past 10 years, when expressed in 2011 dollars, comes to $1.3 trillion, the “Costs of War” project found. When it comes to accounting for every dollar, that $1.3 trillion is merely a good start.

Since the wars have been financed by deficit spending, interest must be paid – $185 billion of accumulated so far.

The Pentagon has received an additional $326 billion to $652 billion beyond what can be attributed to the war appropriations, the study found.

Homeland security spending has totaled another $401 billion so far that can be traced to Sept 11. War-related foreign aid: another $74 billion.

Then comes caring for US veterans of war. Nearly half of the 1.25 million who have served in uniform in Iraq and Afghanistan have used their status as veterans to make health or disability claims at an expense of $32.6 billion to date.

Those costs will soar over the next 40 years as veterans age. The report estimates the US obligations to the veterans will reach $589 billion to $934 billion through 2050.

So far, those numbers add up to a low estimate of $2.9 trillion and a moderate estimate of $3.6 trillion in costs to the US Treasury. No high estimate was offered.

“We feel a conservative measure of costs is plenty large to attract attention,” said report contributor Ryan Edwards, an economist who studied the war impact on deficit spending.
Those numbers leave out hundreds of billions in social costs not born by the US taxpayer but by veterans and their families: another $295 billion to $400 billion, increasing the range of costs to date to some $3.2 trillion to $4 trillion.

That’s a running total through fiscal 2011. Add another $453 billion in war-related spending projected for 2012 to 2020 and the total grows to $3.668 trillion to $4.444 trillion.

The Human Toll

If the financial costs are elusive, so too is the human toll. The report estimates between 224,475 and 257,655 have been killed in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, though those numbers give a false sense of precision. There are many sources of data on civilian deaths, most with different results.

The civilian death toll in Iraq – 125,000 – and the number of Saddam’s security forces killed in invasion – 10,000 – are loose estimates. The US military does not publish a thorough accounting.

“We don’t do body counts,” Tommy Franks, the US commander in Iraq, famously said after the fall of Saddam in 2003.

In Afghanistan, the civilian death count ranges from 11,700 to 13,900. For Pakistan, where there is little access to the battlefield and the United States fights mostly through aerial drone attacks, the study found it impossible to distinguish between civilian and insurgent deaths.

The numbers only consider direct deaths – people killed by bombs or bullets. Estimates for indirect deaths in war vary so much that researchers considered them too arbitrary to report.

“When the fighting stops, the indirect dying continues. It’s in fact worse than land mines. The healthcare system is still in bad shape. People are still suffering the effects of malnutrition and so on,” Crawford said.

Even where the United States does do body counts – for the members of the military – the numbers may come up short of reality, said Lutz, the study’s co-director. When veterans return home, they are more likely to die in suicides and automobile accidents. “The rate of chaotic behavior,” she said, “is high.”

Express Tribune (Islamabad), June 29, 2011,
The US Drawdown or Withdrawal

The exit strategy from Afghanistan appears to be suffering from many inconsistencies and lack of a synergy in the holistic view on the part of occupation forces. The recently announced drawdown of the surge forces in three phases till next summer by President Obama from Afghanistan can be analyzed from different perspectives. The optimists consider it as a change of course from hostilities towards de-escalation and a step forward on the peace avenue. The pessimists dub the speech as deceit to establish a permanent citadel in Afghanistan to control the region through their strong and long stick in the shape of US air platforms by holding Bagram like air bases. There is yet another view that the US wants to shift the war on terror from Afghanistan to Pakistan. The optimists are drawing strength from a mosaic of arguments in favour of their conclusions. They consider that it is a long drawn war in the history of US and there is a face saving available at this point in time in the shape of beheading al Qaeda and weakening Taliban to shelter al Qaeda like elements in future. The war on terror is no more saleable at home ground and the elections are around next year, so the political stakes are high for President Obama, eyeing on the re-election. The present economic recession has made the tax payers averse to the continuation of this far fetched war. More so, it is an unconventional war and there is no win, win situation in such wars, therefore a zero sum game need not be pursued at the cost of economic degradation and body bags of the middle class American tax payers. The pessimists are of the view that the prestige of American Empire is at stake and the history may equate them with the fate of British and Russian Empires licking dust in the war of subjugation of Afghanistan. Since, they could not suck the mineral wealth of Afghanistan during the decade long war on terror, therefore a semi-permanent presence could accrue them dividends, if peace could be traded at some of their terms. The goals and objectives of the war on terror, (so heavily invested upon) could only be realised by draining the CAR resource basin and maintaining strategic presence in the region to contain Chinese interests/influence. They are for a lion share of the cake being baked during this Asian century. The carrot and stick rule shall prevail, irrespective of the type of Govt in Afghanistan. The third group of analysts takes into account the Viet-Cambodian analogy and juxtaposes it on Af-Pak under the obtaining environments. The clear warning in Obama’s speech should not be confused with rhetoric, that as long as he remains the president, he would go after the sanctuaries of terrorism unilaterally. There is an identification of future threat to US interests from the tribal belt of Pakistan in the 9/11 Commission Report as well. The dimensions of the threat to Pakistan has been further galvanized by Hillary Clinton and Secretary Robert Gates that either
Pakistan takes concrete steps against the indicated targets or face funds choking coupled with unilateral action by the American boots. The American media terrorism is a free lance tool at the hands of CIA to paste detesting picture of Pakistan elite institutions and agitate demoralization and chaos amongst the rank and file. The recent five incursions into Pak territory from across the border cannot be dismissed as ordinary events. The escalation in the drone attacks will get a further boost once General Petraeus takes the control of the joy stick of CIA’s favourite predator’s flock. The list of the most wanted top al Qaeda and Taliban operatives has been pasted on the Pakistan’s wall since the 2nd of May episode. The wish list is long enough to hunt Pakistan in the years to come. The double talk and duel standards have further complicated the situation for Pakistan. There is an urge on the Kabul Govt to talk to the insurgents in order to bring the decade long War on Terror to an end. The US and NATO forces are finding ways to adjust to the thinning out of its forces and bringing about a socio-politico face to the forefront. It is a belated realisation by the incumbents’ governments and their military top brass that the military centric approach has failed. It is also a tacit recognition that Taliban are still a politico-military force to reckon with and be taken on board for ensuring the safe exit of occupation forces. This almost a decade old facade of violence, destruction and consistent instability in the region has been very costly in terms of human sufferings and economic degradation. It has to be loaded on or pasted on some body’s shoulders or face by the historians. It is evident that the chips are down and the occupation forces are losing on the war front, in spite of the surge strategy amply demonstrated with lot of media blitz. But the ground reality is adding to the body bags and the IEDs are sounding like the bell tolls. The US may bring new phraseologies to play down the events and tone down the words but reality is stark and lurking for recognition. The surge means reinforcement, (badly needed for the under capacity) the drawdown is nothing but withdrawal and the collateral damage is but killing of the innocent non-combatants in all forms and manifestations. It is better to reconcile with the present, no win no loss situation, rather than stretching beyond the means and will. Afghanistan is unlike Iraq where oil wealth is still being looted to fill the coffers of Dick Cheney and his Neo-cons, here desolation and roughshod are difficult to surmount in the wake of a shadow war. The use of double standards, a common ploy in the American diplomacy is being amply demonstrated during the US high official visits to Pakistan. They not only discourage any rapprochement and dialogue with the insurgents in FATA, but harp on the, do more, and the, do better, mantra. It is clear beyond any doubt that it is an alliance of strange bed-fellows, who are on different pages in the overall gambit of Af-Pak -Strategy. Pushing Pakistan into NWA and Tirah Valley will lead to further hostilities at the cost of present fragile peace. The non-action under the present circumstances due to lack of
capacity, if termed as non-cooperation or defiance by US on the part of Pakistan armed forces will be dangerous to the stability of the region. It will be difficult for US to replicate the Cambodia-Viet strategy, as long as the nuclear deterrence remains viable. Any such misadventure will not only dwarf the gains, so far made in the war on terror, but initiate a new catastrophic war. The obtaining environment dictates restraint and prudence to facilitate peace and stability in the region rather than opening new fronts. The peace shall accommodate all stakeholders and the long awaited ROZs be launched to augment rehabilitation. The coercive diplomacy and the use of military instrument have lost the ground and its further use will be reinforcing the failure. Afghanistan has enough of it; let peace be given a chance by the international community by letting the Afghans to decide regarding their way of life and type of govt.


MULLAH OMAR KEY FOR US IN AFGHAN TALKS: EXPERTS

The US may be in talks with the Taliban but its key challenge will be reaching out to the militants’ elusive, one-eyed leader Mullah Omar as momentum builds for a peace deal in Afghanistan, experts say.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai said Saturday that the United States and other foreign countries were in contact with the Taliban, the first official confirmation of their involvement in talks after nearly ten years of war.

While diplomats say contacts are at a very early stage, Karzai’s remarks show the increasing focus on a political settlement to the Afghan war after the death of Osama bin Laden and as foreign combat troops prepare to leave by 2014.

The support of the Taliban leader, for whom Washington offers a $10 million reward, is considered vital for any ceasefire or power-sharing deal.

But his location, long thought to be somewhere in Pakistan, remains a mystery.

The search has particular momentum given President Barack Obama’s promise to start pulling out some of the 90,000 US troops from Afghanistan next month ahead of a full withdrawal within three years.

Pakistani analyst and author Imtiaz Gul told AFP that the US special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Marc Grossman, asked for general assistance last month in tracking down Omar.

“Grossman told me the US is looking for people who can prove demonstrable access to Mullah Omar,” he said.
“I think the US considers Mullah Omar is still the key to Afghan peace. A US official told me: ‘We don’t want to remove him. We are very interested in talking to him.’”

Omar has long been thought to live in Pakistan’s southwestern city of Quetta but Pakistan insists it has no idea where he is.

After al Qaeda leader bin Laden was killed by US forces in the Pakistani city of Abbottabad last month, most experts believe that Omar would have moved on quickly.

Afghanistan’s intelligence service said shortly after bin Laden was killed that Omar had “disappeared from his hideout” in Quetta, without saying where he might have gone.

Western and Afghan officials in Kabul see assistance from Pakistan as crucial to efforts to open up a communication channel with Taliban leaders.

Karzai recently visited Islamabad, unusually for two days, and inaugurated a joint peace commission.

Afghan officials now believe that Pakistan, where the Taliban leadership is believed to be based, is more willing to help.

“The dynamics in the relationship have changed quite substantively over the last few months,” an Afghan official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

“They now say very clearly that they have a role to play and we in Afghanistan have specific expectations of Pakistan.” One such expectation is for Pakistan to “actively encourage Taliban leaders including Mullah Omar to join the reconciliation process,” he said.

Publicly, the Taliban insist they will not discuss peace until all 130,000 foreign troops leave the country.

“We have already said this and have repeated it many times. We have no negotiations with the United States,” said Zabihullah Mujahid, a Taliban spokesman.

But Germany’s respected Der Spiegel magazine reported last month that Berlin had helped US officials contact Tayyab Aga, Omar’s trusted personal secretary and brother-in-law, reportedly deputy head of a Taliban political commission.

Afghanistan analyst and former Pakistani intelligence official Brigadier Saad Khan said the contacts in Germany were “initial and exploratory” but that Aga took part “with the full blessing of Mullah Omar”.

“I think both the US and the Taliban realise they have to talk to each other,” Khan told AFP.

Whatever the status of talks, all sides clearly have a vested interest in keeping something so sensitive under wraps.

But in a situation of such shadowy uncertainty, the US and its allies will also be wary of repeating the kind of humiliating mistake which hit efforts to talk peace with the Taliban last year.
In November 2010, a man who claimed to be a senior Taliban commander was apparently brought to Kabul on a NATO aircraft to meet Karzai, before being exposed as a lowly shopkeeper from Quetta.


**The Kabul Meetings**

A series of important meetings in Kabul over the last few days have not received the coverage they deserved. Instead, the focus has been on the Taliban attack on the Kabul Intercontinental Hotel. Some of the attackers wore police uniforms, raising questions regarding the degree to which Afghan security forces have been infiltrated and the ability of the Afghan armed forces to provide security.

Recent stories in the American media have highlighted the fact that more than 8,000 new soldiers/policemen are entering the forces every month in Afghanistan and are being allowed to do so after what seems to be the most cursory of security vetting.

Clearly, such Afghan forces will not be able to combat the insurgency or to provide security after international forces withdraw in 2014. Reconciliation is, therefore, the only way that foreign forces can leave without a fear of Afghanistan descending into chaos.

As regards the meetings, the military commanders of Pakistan, Afghanistan and the US met recently, presumably to discuss coordination of action against the insurgents on both sides of the border but, in all probability, they talked about the modalities for establishing contact with the insurgents, the conditions that would need to be laid down for such talks and the prospects of success. The next meeting was that of the Afghan contact group, which brought together the 40-odd countries that are donors of assistance. On another plane, the Afghans had summoned a meeting of provincial governors to discuss the carrying forward at the provincial level of the reintegration and reconciliation process. Nothing has been said publicly that would indicate any advance towards reconciliation in these deliberations.

The most important meeting was that of the ‘core group’ — consisting of Pakistan, Afghanistan and the US — to discuss the details of reconciliation. The backdrop was provided by US Special Envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan Marc Grossman’s statement that the meeting was “a way to coordinate efforts on reconciliation but also a way for Afghanistan and the US to state clearly to the government of Pakistan…to end the support by Pakistan of safe havens.” Earlier he had said, “Pakistan had important choices to make”. Lastly,
Grossman had also said that the Pakistanis had not been involved in the contacts the Americans had established with the Taliban.

It seems from the cursory coverage the meeting has received so far that a large part of time was taken up by the exchange of allegations regarding cross-border artillery fire from the Pakistan side and the five separate occasions on which insurgents crossed over from Afghanistan to attack Pakistani forces in Dir, Mohmand and Bajaur. At the joint press conference, the one point highlighted in the press was Foreign Secretary Salman Bashir’s call for “an end to the blame game” and for Pakistan and Afghanistan to “take ownership of their own affairs”. Whether this was meant to suggest that reconciliation was something that need not involve the Americans was unclear. What did become clear to careful observers was that there had been little or no meeting of minds.

In the meanwhile, other difficulties between the US and Pakistan are being made more public. Not only did Grossman talk about Pakistan having to make choices but US Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry asserted that Pakistan had a bad record of fighting insurgents.

As if this were not enough, in Senate hearings, the incoming commander of American forces in Afghanistan, General Allen, maintained that Mullah Omar was in Pakistan and that despite requests the Pakistanis had not found him.

Other reports indicate that the reimbursement of the coalition support funds has been held up ostensibly because Congress has not yet accorded approval. Our ministry has said that there are some $3.5 billion due from the US on this account. If these sums do not become available soon, our parlous economic condition will become worse.

What should we do if relations continue to deteriorate and we become subject to further attacks from across the border? Our defence minister says we need to review our terrorism policy, but in what direction?


**WILLIAM CONQUERING PAKISTANI HEARTS BUT WHAT IS US DOING?**

I always admired William Hague the British Foreign secretary not because he has close Welsh connections like me but his fine articulation of argument and clarity in response. I still remember his speech at the Tory Party Conference. Former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher chose him and than groomed too. It is always refreshing and he must be appreciated for raising voices for the voiceless.
At a press briefing on 28th June 2011, in the Foreign and Common
Wealth Office, I did congratulate him for his excellent speech on 4th May
2011, at Lord Mayor’s banquet in which he said;

“The changes taking place in the Middle East and North Africa reflect
global trends that are shaping the world around the United Kingdom. We need
to adapt our foreign policy to the networked world of the 21st century in
which economic might and influence is moving away from the handful of
states that were dominant after the Cold War to a range of nations large and
small; and in which no one nation can solve any global problem alone, from
climate change to nuclear proliferation – with what the Deputy Prime Minister
has called “the globalisation of many of our problems”.

He said, “Alongside our indispensable relationship with the United
States and our role in Europe, we now have to work more closely with
countries like Brazil, which now has more diplomats in more countries in
Africa than we do, and Turkey, which is Europe’s fastest growing economy
and is a crucial partner for us in the Balkans, the Middle East and further
afield”.

After his visit to Pakistan and Afghanistan he said at the briefing:
“Pakistan had a major role to play for peace in Afghanistan and Britain
recognises the sacrifices of Pakistan in the war against terror and
extremism”.

British Foreign Secretary William Hague added that the UK has always
welcomed dialogue between Pakistan and Afghanistan as friendly relations
between the two neighbours would yield positive impact on the regional peace
and environment. In response to a question Mr Hague said, ‘discussion with
the Taliban were in the preliminary stages and acknowledged the role of UAE
in this regard.

Mr Hague mentioned that Pakistan was actively participating in Trilateral
Core Group meetings comprising Afghanistan, Pakistan and the United States.
He pointed out that the UK and Pakistan enjoy very friendly and cordial
relations and have deep ties on issues relating to trade, commerce, education,
cultural and defence.

William Hague stated United Kingdom’s development assistance to
Pakistan and GBP 650 million funds that are to be spent in the next three
years to help as many as four million children in age group of five to nine years
enroll in primary schools and distribution of six million text books.

In response to a question about the drone attacks inside Pakistan, Mr
Hague said this issue needed to be resolved between two states Pakistan and
the United States.

I asked British Foreign Secretary William Hague about the presence of
the 2.5 million Afghan refugees since 1979 after the Soviet Invasion. That is an
ongoing issue for Pakistan for over 30 years and as in the past 10 years as a
result of War in Afghanistan there are approximately 2 million internally displaced people in Pakistan. That is too much of a burden for poor and developing state like Pakistan?

A recent article published in The Economist titled – ‘Refugees’ on 23rd June 2011, states:

“America’s wars continue to account for many of the world’s refugees: 4.7m originate from Iraq and Afghanistan, almost half the world’s total, according to the UNHCR’s annual report. America also accepts more refugees for permanent settlement than any other country (71,400 in 2010). Most refugees, however, end up as temporary residents in neighbouring countries. If a conflict or natural disaster is regional, states of origin may also be host states. Hundreds of thousands have fled civil wars in Congo and Sudan, but many seek refuge in both countries too. Tibetans may flee China, but the People’s Republic hosts more refugees than it produces—mostly accounted for by 300,000 Vietnamese long settled in China”.

When it comes to the reality of US aid to Pakistan and losses caused by US policies it has actually proven to be a ‘rip off and fraud’ or one can say financial terrorism by the US. Most part of that US aid actually never arrived in Pakistan as it was paid to defence and military complexes back in the USA.

Breakdown of US aid as reported:

**Total US Aid**

1950-2010: $22.87 billion in 60 years & losses to Pakistan: $60+ billion

1950-1964 $2.5bn economic and $500 m military aid
1965-1979 $2.55 billion economic and $26 million military
1980-1990 $5 billion military and economic aid
1991-2000 $429 million economic and $5.2 million military
2001-2009 $3.6 billion economic and $9 billion military
2009-2015 $7.5 billion approved under Kerry Lugar Bill aid mostly non-military ($1.5 billion per year)

Pakistan has suffered approximately $60+ billion economic, human losses, structural damages to roads and bridges deployed more than 147,800 troops conducting combat operations in the tribal areas along the Afghan border. The Pakistan armed forces has lost more than 3,200 soldiers, with another 6,400 injured. They sustain an average of 10 casualties each day, and approximately 30,000 Pakistani civilians killed by suicide bombers and terrorism.

There is no doubt that problems in Pakistan are due to the US policies and occupation of Afghanistan and not the other way around. US is in habit of blaming others for the failures of its policies as it was in the case of Vietnam i.e. blaming the neighbours, shifting the blame and not taking responsibility. I have discussed following issues on various occasions in the past years as how
US policies affected Pakistan as well as the region. These policies are not only harming other countries including Britain but causing big losses to US itself.

(1) $7 Billion per month cost to US tax payers in Afghanistan

“US expenditures on Afghanistan are now nearly $7 billion per month. This course would not make sense because US interests in Afghanistan are not high enough to justify such an investment. The United States now deploys about 100,000 troops in Afghanistan, yet according to the CIA; there are now only 50 to 100 al Qaeda fighters there. That is between 1000 and 2000 soldiers and perhaps a billion dollars per terrorist each year -- far beyond any reasonable expenditure of US resources given the stakes involved. The original US military objective in Afghanistan was to destroy al Qaeda, not to fight the Afghan Taliban, and that goal has largely been accomplished”, according to ‘Foreign Affairs’ report January/February 2011, Plan B in Afghanistan - Why a De Facto Partition Is the Least Bad Option’ by Robert D. Blackwill.

(2) UN and US ignore Indian Army’s Genocide in Kashmir

The so called international community was too quick to pass UNSC resolution against Libya, holding referendum in Sudan and East Timor but UN and US have forgotten about the sufferings and miseries of the people in Indian occupied Kashmir. UN and US have ignored 92685 killings, 115877 arrests, 15665 home demolitions, by Indian Security Forces, and 22675 widows and 107218 orphans? Kashmir is not a matter of land dispute or real estate. If Indians solve this long standing issue both countries can live like US and Canada. India should not worry too much about over inflated trickle down affect as historically links among the people are much stronger and will further improve. It will leave lot of money to spend on poverty elevation in both countries.

(3) Find a way out and no Plan ‘B’ in Afghanistan

it is time for the US, UK and others to find and seriously work on an exit plan honourably. Any plan B in Afghanistan would make the exit hard, even difficult for US and allies. Now they have one Qandhar ‘Pushtuns’ with plan B they will have three Qandhars of Uzbeks and Tajiks in Afghanistan. There is only one way to solve the problems in Afghanistan and that is way out of Afghanistan without defeated. Shifting the blame on Pakistan would make things worse for US and allies as it would be like ‘blaming the pope and living in Rome’. Afghan venture is costing too much to the UK and US tax payers?

No doubt the relationship between Pakistan and Britain are special but there is always room for development and improvement. The relationship between the two countries must be independent from the US hallmarks as relations with the US and its perception in Pakistan is different. British relationship with Pakistan and Muslim world were/are always complimentary and should remain so. The reaching out policy of Britain should continue and
William Hague statement: Pakistan’s enemy is Britain’s enemy’, should be welcomed’.

On the other hand the problem with the Americans is that they don’t learn from the past mistakes and good thing about the Brits is that they always keep the records.


**AFGHANISTAN AND THE US TROOPS’ WITHDRAWAL**

The American leadership positioned in Afghanistan was confident that it had turned the Taliban tide in the country. It was reluctant to lose that advantage by too precipitous a withdrawal. One indication of success was the relative quiet in the southern districts bordering the province of Balochistan in Pakistan. According to a recent *New York Times* (NYT) report, “the poppy harvest is over and the fighting season has arrived in southern Afghanistan — except this year the Taliban have not returned in their usual numbers to intensify the war”. This change in what had been the normal pattern was ascribed to the presence of large American troops in the region. The change was palpable not only in the province of Helmand that had been since long a strong base of support for the Taliban. It was also apparent in the neighbouring province of Kandahar, the heartland of the insurgency. “In both places, the insurgency is now mostly limited to small groups of local fighters who lay mines or carry out assassinations or suicide bombings in the cities, attacks that are more important psychologically than strategically,” said the same report.

The weakening of the Taliban presence allowed some signs of the government’s presence to re-emerge. Hundreds of Afghan police officers guarding outposts along the main road allowed traffic to flow again, while crews began clearing the irrigation canals that run along the road. For a number of years, roads were dominated by the Taliban who used roadside bombs to discourage people from using them. Lack of maintenance of the irrigation system affected agriculture and crop productivity. These improvements made it possible for people to return to work.

Development aid provided by the Americans and their allies to the southern provinces also helped. Helmand received the most aid per capita of any province in the country in 2010. Aid projects to pave roads, dredge canals, construct schools and clinics improved economic life in the area by providing thousands of new jobs.

Will this success be maintained now that the American pull-out is underway? The answer to the question depends on a number of factors. The
most important of these is the manner and speed of the pull-out. It is unlikely that having achieved some success in the south, the Americans will abandon the area in order to satisfy a political timetable of their own. The Afghan forces may be much more developed than was the case six years ago but they were still not strong enough to prevent the Taliban from re-entering the area as they had done in 2005, when the Americans withdrew some of their forces in order to fight the war in Iraq.

The United States and Nato aimed to build up the Afghan Army and the police to a force of 395,000 by 2014, the year by which all foreign troops were to leave the country. But at issue was the competence and loyalty of the Afghan force. Loyalty became a real concern once some soldiers trained by the US and Nato turned their weapons on their benefactors. According to another NYT report, “since March 2009, at least 57 people including 32 American troops have been killed in at least 19 attacks in which Afghan service members had turned their weapons on coalition forces. Another 64 were wounded. More than half of the casualties in the first five months of this year, signaling an escalation in the number and intensity of the attacks. But while the Taliban often take credit for these attacks, Nato officials say the majority of the episodes stem from disagreements and arguments that escalate into violence.”

Also troubling for the government was the heavy loss of innocent lives as result of Taliban activity and the military effort by the United States and its allies. According to the United Nations, May 2011 was the deadliest month for Afghan civilians since it began to keep count in 2007. It estimated civilian deaths during the month at 368. “The majority of the casualties, 82 per cent, were caused by Taliban and other militants, while 12 per cent were caused by Nato troops and Afghan force; in six per cent of the cases, it was not clear who was responsible.” The Taliban continued to target security forces as well as those whose beliefs differed from their own. For instance, on June 11, they attacked two buses that were carrying members of two families who were travelling to a shrine in Kandahar province to pray for the health of a sick child.

The uneasy relationship between Afghan President Hamid Karzai and the American government became even more uncomfortable as Washington inched closer to making the decision about the number of troops it planned to pull out of the country starting July 1, 2011. On July 18, reports said Karzai “appeared to have crossed a line” when, in “a rambling speech” to a youth convention in Kabul, he accused the United States and other western allies of using his country for their own purposes. He asserted that they take away more money than give, pollute Afghanistan’s environment and ‘dishonour’ the Afghan people. This was not the first attack by him on the US and its Nato allies. According to reports, in an “emotional speech” in the eastern city of
Asadabad, he called for Nato and the United States to stop military operations in Afghanistan; officials later issued a clarification, saying he was referring only to operations that caused civilian casualties. At a news conference in May, he threatened to denounce Nato as occupiers if they did not stop air attacks that caused civilian casualties. That was in response to an air strike in Helmand province that was aimed at Taliban insurgents but killed several civilians, including women and children. On at least two occasions, most recently in April, Mr Karzai has threatened at closed-door meetings of parliament to join the Taliban, according to published accounts.

Given this background, Afghanistan is not likely to move on a smooth road once the Americans begin to pull back.


**CHANGE IN AFGHANISTAN?**

President Barack Obama’s June 22 speech announcing the first phase of the US troop pullout from Afghanistan had few surprises. But the speech lacked specifics and left key policy questions unanswered as well as a continuing disconnect between political objectives and military strategy.

Of deep concern to Pakistan was the indication in his address that the focus of US counter-terrorism efforts would shift from Afghanistan to Pakistan. Without explicitly saying so, his emphasis on using ‘targeted force’ against threats, without the need to “deploy large armies overseas”, marked a move towards the so-called Biden plan. Associated with Vice President Joseph Biden, this had questioned Obama’s 2009 decision to deploy more troops for counter insurgency in Afghanistan and instead advocated a narrower counter-terrorism mission, using Drone technology and covert forces.

As widely anticipated, President Obama overruled the advice of his military commanders for a slower more modest force drawdown. Instead he announced a full withdrawal of the ‘surge’ force of 33,000 troops by summer 2012, starting with 10,000 troops by the end of this year. This signaled a winding down of the counterinsurgency effort he announced 18 months ago.

Citing progress on the goals he had set – refocus on al Qaeda, reverse the Taliban’s momentum and train Afghan security forces – Obama claimed he was beginning the drawdown from “a position of strength”. Obama prevailed over the Pentagon because his hand had been greatly strengthened by the killing of Osama bin Laden. This development provided a compelling rationale for a speedier and more substantial troop reduction. Obama’s troop withdrawal decision was shaped more by domestic political imperatives and his looming 2012 re-election bid than considerations of strategy. This has left
unexplained gaps in US policy including between political goals and the military course of the war in Afghanistan.

His political considerations were dictated by war fatigue in both political parties and the growing unpopularity of the military mission among the public. With the Afghan war's cost running at over $100 billion a year at a time of budget cuts in America, President Obama also justified his decision by what he called the need for nation building at home.

There is as yet no indication that Washington is prepared to contemplate confidence-building measures with the Taliban that can produce a mutual de-escalation of violence and set the stage for serious talks. The US is still focused on setting 'tests' for the Taliban to meet rather than explore the possibility of an agreed stand down or 'strategic pause' in fighting. This approach could further complicate what US officials privately acknowledge to be a challenge: convincing senior Taliban leaders about American seriousness to negotiate. At a time when Washington's position has shifted to accepting an 'inclusive' Afghan reconciliation process and the UN's terrorist blacklist list has been split between al Qaeda and the Taliban, clarity is needed about whether the US will redefine the military mission in Afghanistan to support the peace objective, rather than be at odds with it.

Any shift to the Biden strategy will likely entail frequent and more extensive Drone attacks in Pakistan's border areas, even clandestine operations like the one that killed Bin Laden. This will risk inflaming tensions further with Islamabad. Expansion of covert operations will pitch Pakistan-US relations into uncharted terrain when ties have already hit rock bottom and are in a state of disrepair. With no agreement on Drone operations and Islamabad trying to limit CIA activities in Pakistan, more unilateral actions can push relations to breaking point. Whether a Biden-type plan will be feasible if relations deteriorate further is open to question.

As Islamabad mulls over the ramifications of Obama’s speech, what is already apparent is that without resetting Pakistan-US ties on the basis of reciprocity the search for a negotiated political solution in Afghanistan can become more problematic.

The irony is that just when US and Pakistani goals are more convergent on Afghanistan than they have been in a decade they remain separated by mistrust and mutual grievances. The Obama administration’s present approach of piling on pressure and conducting diplomacy through leaks designed to embarrass Islamabad is contributing to more turbulence in ties. It is also counter productive to the objectives Washington wants to secure in the region.

Only by finding common ground with Pakistan and accommodating its interests can the US really elicit the cooperation it needs for a ‘dignified’ retreat
from Afghanistan and the achievement of its strategic objective: defeat of al Qaeda.

Dr Maleeha Lodhi, *Daily Mail* (Islamabad), July 5, 2011,
http://dailymailnews.com/0711/05/Editorial_Column/index1.php

**TO WIN AFGHAN WAR, WE MUST FIX THE POLITICS**

In recent weeks, Washington has fixated on President Obama's decision about how fast to reduce US troops in Afghanistan. But equally important is helping repair the sorry state of Afghanistan's destructive politics. The Obama administration glossed over such issues in announcing that 33,000 GIs would come home by next summer. In his June 22 speech to the nation, the president emphasized progress in killing terrorists in Pakistan, and on building up the Afghan army and police, but talked of little else. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, in testimony the next day, discussed progress in education and health care, as well as peace talks with the Taliban. But the former accomplishments have not prevented the resurgence of the Taliban since 2006. And the peace talks remain a long shot at best. Fixing Afghan politics is not about nation building. It is about avoiding defeat. If the Afghan political system is dominated by a few individuals and patronage networks, and if all the money flowing into the country is gobbled up by a few key families and tribes, disenfranchised Afghans will continue to revolt and rebel, and the war will continue. US officials take a light touch in addressing these problems, especially the matter of political competition, because Afghanistan is a sovereign country. Discussing how parliament can become stronger and courts more independent, or how political parties can be more influential, or how candidates can mount presidential campaigns when Hamid Karzai must step down from office in 2014 are seen as matters largely beyond foreigners' proper influence. Hogwash. It is a simple fact that democracies cannot succeed without checks and balances. Afghans, relatively inexperienced in democracy themselves, need to hear such lessons from us and other countries, even if they must decide how to fix the problems. Moreover, we largely created this mess. First of all, the United States led the selection of Karzai as president back in 2001, a decision that gave him a leg up in the two elections he later won. Second, we helped write a constitution in 2003 that gave the Afghan president almost autocratic powers. Only he can hire and fire local governors. Only he can propose a budget for the country. Only he has set most ground rules for elections — powers Karzai then used to discourage the formation of strong political parties nearly a decade ago. Whatever the merits of the decision, then, it leaves Afghanistan with no natural way to help select a successor in 2014. It also makes very difficult the organization of parliament.
into meaningful blocs of power based on anything except personality, ethnicity and patronage networks.

One of America's most accomplished modern diplomats, Ryan Crocker, is expected to take over the US mission in Kabul. That will be a good opportunity for several steps to be considered:

- Use quiet diplomacy and public rhetoric to remind everyone including Karzai that he must step down in three years — not out of deference to Washington but out of respect for Afghanistan's constitution.
- Dramatically increase funding and technical help for political parties.
- Encourage parliament to create research bodies modeled after the Congress' Congressional Research Service and Congressional Budget Office to help develop and evaluate new policy ideas, and ask the president to allow parliament to propose legislation.
- Create a multiethnic presidential advisory board to evaluate provincial and district governors, making it harder for Karzai or future presidents to fire them capriciously.

Such measures are needed — not to build some perfect nation, but because reshaping Afghanistan's political competition is the only way to end tribalism, mitigate corruption and ultimately defeat the insurgency.


THE SUPERPOWER UNDER SIEGE

On October 7, 2001, President George Bush launched the ‘shock and awe’ crusade against the Taliban hoping to defeat them and consolidate the US hold over Afghanistan, but he failed to do so. Consequently, the Taliban emerged victorious and are not prepared to give concessions, unless the occupation forces leave the war-torn country. The shame of defeat at the hands of the Taliban is the greatest embarrassment for the sole superpower of the world. But instead of accepting it, the US has opted for a ‘strategy of siege’ that was worked out at the NATO headquarters in Brussels, by the Strategic Plans and Policy Division (SPP). This strategy is a vicious plan of deceit and despair with defeat writ large on itself.

The plan envisages the pulling out of 33,000 troops by the end year 2012 comprising mainly Special Forces and the marines to hold the fortresses of Kabul, Kandahar, Herat and the nearby airbases. Jalalabad will be held as a
fortress by the Afghan army. Mazar-i-Sharif and the airbase at Dehdadi will be developed as fortresses by the Northern Alliance. The areas in the south, that is, from Helmand to Laghman, will be left in control of the Taliban, as the beginning of the vicious plan to divide Afghanistan in three zones. Thus, it (Mazar-i-Sharif) will be an important fortress to guard the alternating supply and exit route through the Central Asian territories because the passage through Pakistan is dangerous. The American claims that ‘40 percent of their supplies are coming through this route’ may not be true because it is very long and hazardous. Also, the Russians may not like that their ‘near abroad’ gets radicalised by the militant organisations such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), who would try to interdict the movements along this route.

USA’s Strategy of Fortress Defence envisages a kind of “secretive war involving armed drones and special operation forces to carry out surgical operations, employing ‘unique assets’ against terrorist threat.” Washington has already extended covert drone attacks to Yemen and Somalia. Such operations will be “particularly focused on Pakistan, on eliminating al Qaeda safe heavens.” How Pakistan and the Taliban in Afghanistan are going to react to this strategy is important.

Focusing operations against Pakistan has already pushed the Pak-US relations to the brink. Under public pressure, the Pakistani forces now have no option, but to retaliate against such blatant violation of the country’s sovereignty. How and in what manner retaliatory actions will be taken is a matter of command decision. The strategic cost of such clandestine actions by the Americans, therefore, would far outweigh the tactical gains and the fallout on relations with Pakistan.

The Taliban have already accelerated the pace of their summer offensive against the occupation forces inflicting heavy casualties on the retreating enemy. And as the US forces get holed up into the fortresses - possibly by mid next year – the Taliban would enjoy the advantage of freedom to conduct operations more effectively against the fortresses. The combination of ‘men and missiles’, which helped Hezbollah to shatter the myth of invincibility of the Israeli army in 2006, would help them to break the will of the forces holding the fortresses. So, they would be enjoying greater freedom of movement and the resultant operational advantages.

The operational environment also is not at all favourable for the Strategy of Fortress Defence. There is hostility within the country and without, of the neighbouring countries, particularly Pakistan and Iran. Russia and China will not like the Americans to hang on in Afghanistan any longer. The sooner they leave, the better it would be for peace to prevail in the region. External pressures and support to the Taliban will add to the problems of the forces under siege.
After USA’s exit, it is the Taliban who ultimately will gain control over Afghanistan. They have already had a bitter experience of betrayal by the Americans since 1990 and trust only in themselves to form a broad-based government, which is the only viable course to secure peace in Afghanistan. So, the Americans must exit from Afghanistan immediately, rather than to extend the pain and shame of defeat through the ‘strategy of siege’, which has already failed, even before it is implemented.


**HOW PAKISTAN CAN FACILITATE AFGHAN PEACE**

“The foreign office has no respect for the heroes who had defeated the Soviet occupation forces and thinks I want to hijack the Afghan policy. They should know that I can hijack much more than that,” yelled Gen Mirza Aslam Beg, then chief of the army staff. His outburst during a high-level meeting chaired by President Ghulam Ishaq Khan was prompted by a sentence in a working paper I had prepared which said that the Pakistan-sponsored Afghan Interim Government in exile was inflexible and “as rigid as a corpse.”

Benazir Bhutto, who had started her first prime ministerial term, retorted that she disagreed with the army chief because the foreign office assessment was spot-on. In his inimitable style, the president defused the tension by saying that the only inaccuracy in the paper was that a corpse was always flaccid and “rigidity only occurred during rigor mortis.” Suddenly there were smiles all around and a potential standoff between the prime minister and the army chief was averted. Nothing has changed since then and policy formulation in pivotal areas of external affairs is still largely determined by the army.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union there have been fundamental transformations in global geopolitics. Communist regimes fell like ninepins, new countries emerged in Central Asia and Eastern Europe, others, such as the German Democratic Republic (East Germany), disappeared. For the first time after the 45 years that the Cold War lasted, the US, which became the sole superpower, found itself having to conduct foreign policy without an ideological adversary. It went briefly into a period of “splendid isolation,” much like imperial Britain in the 19th century. External affairs were relegated to the backseat in Washington’s priorities till the fateful events of 9/11.

Terrorism thus emerged as the overarching threat to global peace and security. The immediate consequence of 9/11 was the US-led invasion and occupation of Afghanistan. The dreaded Taliban regime that had ruled
Afghanistan from 1996-2001 may have been destroyed, but it also ignited a 10-year-long insurgency whose intensity has still not abated.

Despite this, President Barack Obama went ahead with the anticipated announcement on June 22 that 33,000 US troops will be withdrawn from Afghanistan by next summer. Two reasons for this are immediately obvious. The first is the 2012 presidential election and the drawdown is accordingly scheduled in two phases, with an initial 10,000 soldiers returning home in December ahead of the Iowa Democratic Caucus in February 2012 and the remaining 23,000 around the time of the Democratic National Convention on Sept 3. Obama also said that by 2014 “the Afghan people will be responsible for their own security.”

The second is the ongoing peace efforts, and this was confirmed as early as Feb 18 by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton when she said “we are launching a diplomatic surge to move this conflict towards a political outcome...” President Hamid Karzai was far more specific four months later when, on June 18, he disclosed that “peace talks are going on with the Taliban. The foreign military, and especially the United States itself, is going ahead with these negotiations...The talks are going well.”

The following day, Defence Secretary Robert Gates conceded that there had been an outreach on the part of a number of countries, including the US, but “these contacts are very preliminary at this point.” His own assessment was that the talks were unlikely to make much headway till the coming winter because “the Taliban have to feel themselves under military pressure, and begin to believe that they can’t win...” This presages an intensification of the conflict in the coming months. Other countries may have four seasons, but Afghanistan has only two—one in which there is fighting and the other in which the bitter cold of winter imposes an armistice.

The silver lining is that credible reports have emerged indicating that till now three rounds of talks have been held between the Taliban and US officials and these could tone down the level of fighting. The first was in Munich on Nov 28, 2011, the second in Doha on Feb 15, and this was probably what Hillary Clinton meant when she said three days later that the US was “launching a diplomatic surge,” the third round was again in Munich on May 7-8. This was followed by the UN Security Council decision on June 17 not to bracket the Taliban with al Qaeda in the comprehensive list of terrorists maintained by the UN since 1998. This delinking should serve as an inducement to the Taliban to sever all ties with al Qaeda and provides an opportunity to Pakistan to facilitate such an outcome.

But the Afghanistan problem is far more complex than is imagined. The restoration of durable peace and stability is easier said than done because the country, which was established as the Kingdom of Afghanistan in 1747 by Ahmed Shah Abdali, has been incessantly ravaged by ethnic violence caused
by the Pukhtun subjugation of the Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkmens and the Hazaras. The most comprehensive accounts of this are to be found in the writings of Soviet historians. These show that the process of Pukhtun domination, which involved conquest followed by persecution and ethnic-cleansing, reached its peak under Amir Abdur Rahman, who is often described as the Bismarck of Afghanistan.

The enormity of the ethnic problem cannot be overstated. Even if al Qaeda and its affiliates are routed, sustainable peace and stability in the country is unlikely to emerge unless the composition of the future dispensation reflects the ethnic mosaic which defines Afghan society. This can only be achieved through an intra-Afghan dialogue without outside interference. Pakistan, as Afghanistan’s immediate and most important neighbour, can facilitate this. Any other policy will be self-defeating.

Pakistan has enough problems of its own and its focus should be within its own borders. While announcing the troop drawdown plan, Obama bluntly added: “Our efforts must also address terrorist safe havens in Pakistan... The United States will never tolerate a safe haven for those who aim to kill us.” A week later, on June 29, the White House announced its revised National Strategy for Counter-terrorism which envisages surgical strikes against individuals and groups involved in terrorism. Increased drone attacks and even operations by US Special Forces are likely.

Furthermore, The Washington Post of July 2 carried a report sourced to Pentagon officials that the US is drastically reducing its reliance on Pakistan as a supply route for its forces in Afghanistan. In 2009, approximately 90 percent of the shipments were through Pakistan but currently 40 percent of the military surface cargo is being transported via Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, and this is slated to increase to 75 percent in the next six months. The implication is that Pakistan’s leverage with Washington as a supply corridor will no longer be available.

Despite these grim realities, Gen Mirza Aslam Beg is still as much a prisoner of his Afghan illusions as he was in 1988. In a recent television talk show he predicted that after the withdrawal of foreign forces Afghanistan will again be controlled by the Taliban and Pakistan’s objectives will have been achieved. Intrusions of any kind in Afghanistan have always met with fierce resistance. Even Alexander the Great realised this when he wrote to his mother in 330 BC: “I am involved in a land of a lion-like and brave people, where every foot of the ground is like a wall of steel confronting my soldiers. You have brought only one son into this world, but everyone in this land can be called an Alexander.”

MARSHALLING PEACE

President Obama has announced his decision to withdraw 10,000 troops from Afghanistan this year and 23,000 in 2012.

For the US president, the elimination of Osama bin Laden and two-thirds of al Qaeda's leaders, the untenable cost of the conflict ($118 billion this year alone), and the relative success of recent operations mark a turning point in the war that began in the aftermath of September 11, 2001.

Motivated mainly by considerations of domestic politics, the decision seems to have little connection to the logic of the counterinsurgency strategy prevailing since 2009. This strategy, coupled with a marked increase in Special Forces operations and drone strikes in Pakistan as well as Afghanistan, has undoubtedly contributed to a weakening of the insurgents.

The Taliban have been forced to reduce their hold on the south. The reconstruction effort - notably of the Afghan security forces, along with the justice system and local governance - has improved, albeit insufficiently.

Moreover, the Americans have recognised the need for making preliminary contacts with the Taliban that may lead to peace negotiations. The insurgents have not thrown in the towel, but they've adapted their tactics - counterattacking in the eastern border region of Pakistan and intensifying urban suicide operations, which generate major media coverage. The United States and its allies cannot relax their efforts. Progress remains fragile and must be consolidated while the Americans accelerate the political process needed to bring about a resolution.

What can France do to help? First, we must ensure a strict adherence to our commitments. We intervened early on in Afghanistan, in support of the United States. We acted to defend our security interests, which were threatened by a state that had become a haven for international terrorism, and also to promote the humanistic values at the heart of our foreign policy. Now, as France begins a phased pullback of the 4,000 soldiers it has contributed to the allied effort, the nature of our intervention should evolve. Military action, under US command, should give way to the training of Afghan security forces. The reconstruction effort should continue in areas where we have a presence - education, health, agriculture, justice and rule of law. This will certainly necessitate the maintenance of a reduced civil and military contingent. Too rapid a departure would be out of the question, given that our presence in the eyes of our allies, especially the Americans and the British, demonstrates our renewed commitment to the Atlantic alliance and our status as a pillar of a European defense system still under development. Had it not been for this, military cooperation agreements would never have been signed with Britain in November 2010.
What contribution can France and the Europeans make to a political settlement in Afghanistan?

Even at this early stage, peace negotiations cannot stay solely in the hands of the United States and Pakistan, in cooperation with Saudi Arabia and Turkey. The Europeans should be as closely associated to the peace as they have been to the war. France should take the initiative in conjunction with the British and the Germans, tying in the European Union. This arrangement, honed in negotiations with Iran, would give us the flexibility to pursue our interests and views.

Similarly, we cannot be entirely detached from the regional dimension. Any lasting stabilisation of Afghanistan requires a solution to the crisis in Pakistan. The long relationship between Pakistan and the US is of central importance, but it has been polluted by a history of reciprocal mistrust and misunderstanding.

Only a broadening of the dialogue, bringing together neighbouring countries, regional actors and the major powers to deal with all the issues - including regional security, cross-border cooperation, trade, technological cooperation, economic development, and energy issues, including civil nuclear power - can lead to a successful conclusion.

Pakistan's military officials should be involved in these negotiations. This is a prerequisite for its success. Talks should also include countries that play an active role in Afghan politics (Iran, India and Pakistan) and in Pakistan (China, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Turkey). France and Europe must take the lead, but without harbouring any illusions concerning the difficulties involved and the time required in undertaking such a project. After all, the effort is not dissimilar to the Helsinki process of the early 1970s, which eventually led to the thawing of East-West relations.


**ASSASSINATION MAY CREATE LEADERSHIP VOID IN CRUCIAL KANDAHAR**

Ahmed Wali Karzai, a Kandahar strongman and the half-brother of Afghan President Hamid Karzai, was shot and killed during a meeting July 12 by a security commander from Ahmed Wali's hometown. Sadar Mohammad, the shooter, who was then killed by Karzai's bodyguards, had long worked for the Karzai family. Both men were members of the Popolzai tribe, which belongs to the Pashtun, Afghanistan's main ethnic group. Much speculation will center on the reasons for the shooting — whether it resulted, for instance, from a personal dispute, perhaps related to Ahmed Wali’s illicit activities, or from an
infiltration by the Taliban (which the latter claims, as they do in many cases whether they are responsible or not). Ahmed Wali’s death is an important development, but it must be looked at in the appropriate context to be understood. Ahmed Wali was often accused of corruption, drug dealing and other illicit behavior, yet his brother gave him consistently unflinching support. This loyalty was not simply due to family connections but reflected the important role Ahmed Wali played in maintaining the presence and influence of his brother’s government in Kandahar province, the Taliban’s homeland. While he was not the actual governor, as chairman of the provincial council Ahmed Wali developed relationships with various power networks in the Pashtun region. He even interacted with the Taliban, both out of pragmatism and for personal gain. Ahmed Wali spent years systematically developing networks to enhance his wealth and influence — and to some extent that of the Karzai regime. He had his hands in all business in the province — from the drug trade to facilitating the movement of resources from the United States. Many US officials would like to think that weeding out corruption would help a viable government take root in Kandahar. However, that same convoluted system of personal networks is characteristic of Afghan politics and is essential to maintaining stability. Ahmed Wali’s success within this system ensured Hamid Karzai’s influence and presence on the Taliban’s core territory. A reassessment of all local alliances is necessary in gauging the state of affairs in Kandahar province after Ahmed Wali’s killing. President Karzai will seek to appoint a successor able to maintain the existing networks and power structure, but Ahmed Wali’s charisma, clout and relationships make him tough to replace. Conversely, his death gives the Taliban an opportunity to compete for some of these networks — not to mention lucrative narcotics routes — and to fracture or divide others. Local warlords and businessmen will be deciding where to place their allegiance in order to maximize their positions, security and personal gain. This process can be particularly fluid in a country like Afghanistan, and the timing is especially delicate as the United States and its allies are beginning to draw down their forces in the region. As the United States prepares to begin its withdrawal, the important question is how much authority the Karzai regime can maintain against Taliban forces in the Taliban’s ethnic, tribal and historical geographic core. Kandahar is a key indicator. With or without Ahmed Wali, Kandahar is where we can first expect the Taliban to gain influence when foreign troops leave. Without Ahmed Wali as a bulwark against their influence — and if a capable successor is not found — the Karzai regime’s ability to maintain control after a US exit just got harder. Meanwhile, if the Taliban or other groups try and take Ahmed Wali’s networks, renewed instability and fighting in the south could make the US drawdown more difficult. If the Taliban can capitalize on this moment and
fracture the Karzai power structure substantially, it would bring about an important shift at a time when the United States is attempting to reshape perceptions and redefine the war. As Washington attempts to initiate and then accelerate the drawdown, US leadership is trying to negotiate with the Taliban through intermediaries. The loss of Ahmed Wali eliminates one such conduit and potentially increases US dependence on Pakistani networks. A STRATFOR source illustrated the tenuous situation created by the loss of Ahmed Wali. The source said that some locals working with the International Security Assistance Force, upon hearing of Ahmed Wali’s death, rushed to withdraw their money from Kabul Bank, a business over which he wielded substantial influence. The question now becomes whether the United States and the Karzai regime can maintain stability if the structure they have so painstakingly built begins to come apart. Ahmed Wali was no doubt important, but it is unclear how much the development and perpetuation of his networks depended on his personality. It remains to be seen whether the command, management and maintenance of the networks he built can be transitioned without significant maneuvering and fracturing. For the Karzai regime, the challenge is to fill the leadership void in the midst of the US withdrawal. For the United States, it must handle negotiations with Pakistan to manage its withdrawal from Afghanistan.


**HAS US FOREIGN POLICY EVER BEEN SUCH A MESS?**

I can’t remember a time when the US military has been stuck in so many quagmires at once. Libya seems destined to fail unless the US gets a lucky shot and kills Gadhafi. US militarists are openly maneuvering to stay in Iraq — the war Obama told us was over. Relations with nuclear-armed Pakistan are at their lowest levels ever. And Afghanistan is getting worse with Obama’s minimal, slow withdrawal looking more like staying than leaving.

The new defense secretary, Leon Panetta, unanimously confirmed by the US Senate, is making his first trip to the war fronts and letting it be known that the US is staying, not leaving. *The Wall Street Journal* headline said it clearly, “Panetta Slips Up on Troop Withdrawal From Afghanistan,” and the article highlights Panetta saying at a press conference, “We’re going to have 70,000 there through 2014.” This is inconsistent with President Obama’s stated plan of being down to 70,000 troops next summer and continuing to draw down from there.

In Iraq, *The New York Times* reported Panetta saying that he expected the US to have “an enduring presence” in the region while pushing the Iraqi
government to “invite” US forces to stay after 2011. Panetta echoed the Bush administration when he told US troops in Iraq that we were there because of 9/11 (when US intelligence reports Iraq had nothing to do with 9/11). Panetta later clarified the remark by making it worse, saying, “We really had to deal with al Qaeda here.” Of course, there was no al Qaeda in Iraq until the US invaded. In the war in which President Obama told us combat was over, 15 American troops died last month, making June the bloodiest month for American combat-related fatalities since June 2008.

Pakistan has become a major foreign policy problem for the US. The relationship has been on a downward spiral ever since the CIA-led drone war got going under commander-in-chief Obama. Then, the arrest of CIA-hired Blackwater agent Raymond Davis for killing two Pakistanis — who Obama falsely told Pakistanis and the American people was a diplomat — added to the crisis in the Pakistan-US relationship. That mess resulted in hundreds of CIA agents being required to leave the country. Panetta was head of the CIA at the time of those blunders and left unable to fix the situation. Finally, the killing of Osama bin Laden has made the relationship even worse, with Pakistan expelling US military trainers from the country and limiting the ability of US diplomats and other officials to get visas. The crisis culminated this week in the US withholding $800 million in military funds to Pakistan.

Without the Pakistan supply lines, the Afghanistan war becomes more difficult and expensive to fight. And it has become evident that when the politicians and corporate media in Washington were recently singing about the success of the Obama surge and the need to protect US gains, they were either deluded or lying. Since then, the Taliban showed it could successfully attack one of the most guarded hotels in the country, the highly protected Inter-Continental Hotel in Kabul. And this week it showed it can kill one of the most guarded people in Afghanistan, President Hamid Karzai’s brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai, an official in southern Afghanistan.

The bad news continues. Libya, the war that was supposed to last “days, not weeks,” is now in its fourth month. Gadhafi has survived assassination attacks against him. Mass demonstrations of support for Gadhafi have taken place. And now NATO seems divided on how to continue. There are reports of people dancing in the streets of Tripoli as they see victory, with peace talks beginning and bombing slowing. What seems to be occurring is NATO countries are trying to find a way out of a war that cannot succeed in changing the regime in Libya.

The US is also supporting Syrian rebels, and on July 11 supporters of the Syrian government attacked the US Embassy in Damascus as well as the residence of the US ambassador. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton used the attack as an opportunity to condemn the Assad regime, saying, “President Assad is not indispensable, and we have absolutely nothing invested in him.
remaining in power.” The French Embassy was also attacked. The attacks occurred just days after the US and French ambassadors visited the opposition stronghold of Hama in central Syria.

And other challenges in Yemen, Somalia, and Iran have the US military already acting or on edge. “Spread thin” would be a mild way of describing how President Obama has positioned the military.

Obama’s lucky the Republicans don’t have a well-spoken general who can run against him and tear apart his role as commander in chief. Obama was politically smart to put Gen. David Petraeus in as CIA head to take him out of the running for the Republican nomination. Even with the cover of killing Osama bin Laden, Obama’s handling of foreign policy and the military could be successfully attacked, as it is hard to imagine much more of a mess than exists under his leadership.

Of course, Obama’s wars are an outgrowth of George W. Bush’s wars, just as the invasion of Iraq by George W. Bush was the next step from the economic blockade of Iraq by Bill Clinton. Each of these presidents was the commander in chief of a more than 100-year-old empire that since World War II has been dominated by a deeply embedded weapons and war industry that needs war for profits.

The best hope for the United States is that once again Afghanistan will be a graveyard for empire. Sadly, it will probably take hundreds of billions more in war spending and more defeats on the battlefield before US leaders learn what Great Britain learned from US colonists — it is hard for a distant empire to defeat people defending their homeland. Is the US leadership capable of recognizing that empire is not consistent with a democratic republic and undermines both national and economic security as well as the rule of law? More Americans are waking up to this fact. Hundreds have signed a letter to President Obama and Congress urging an end to US militarism and empire, and the signers include representatives of the Nixon, Reagan, Clinton, and Bush administrations, as well as people from across the political spectrum, from libertarian to liberal, progressive to conservative. Others are promising to make Freedom Plaza in Washington, D.C., an American Tahrir Square by occupying the plaza to protest US militarism and corporatism.

Americans want an end to US militarism. Some political leaders must recognize that an empire enforced by war is counterproductive to economic and national security. Where is the leadership to lead the United States out of its self-created empire quagmire?

REDUCE CORRUPTION, DEFEAT THE TALIBAN – ANALYSIS

The possibility of a negotiated settlement for the 10-year war in Afghanistan finally gained some traction when Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced a political surge in February. Since then President Obama and other prominent officials have refuted the notion that the conflict can be resolved by military means alone. The goal is to create political solutions led and agreed upon by the Afghan government and the insurgency, and acknowledged by major regional players including Pakistan.

This is not mere idle talk. Afghan President Hamid Karzai publicly acknowledged that his government, as well as that of the United States, has been in discussions with Taliban officials. Though those who comment on the status of negotiations are sure to qualify them as preliminary and fragile, any progress is surely a good thing.

The principle of negotiating from strength certainly applies here. The United States and its allies hope that maintaining military pressure on the insurgents will encourage them to abandon violence and address their grievances through peaceful means. But the US withdrawal of only 33,000 troops in the next two years and continued use of counterinsurgency and counter-terror strategies are not likely to bring about this desired effect. Indeed, the position of strength needed to undercut the insurgency and bring it to the negotiating table has less to do with force and more to do with governance capacity and trust. Combating civil corruption and careless military mistakes will go a lot further in inducing the insurgency to talk than continuing the current overreliance on military force.

The Fallacy of Military Power

Overreliance on the military to force the insurgency into negotiations and the claims that troop withdrawals will undermine progress on that front are based on false assumptions. In fact combat operations are increasing the legitimacy of the insurgency more than garnering support for the government. Insurgents largely move freely in the critical Eastern Triangle region, a major route for fighters coming into the country from Pakistan. Coalition bases meant to offer a stabilizing presence remain distant from local populations. The unnecessary casualties resulting from Special Operations night raids support insurgency narratives that condemn the foreign coalition as dangerous and coldblooded.

Furthermore, Afghans recruited for the national military and police force must undergo more rigid screening processes. There have been several cases in which men recruited by the Afghan security forces used their positions to help the insurgency. Infiltration can have serious consequences.
The Carnegie Endowment for Peace argues that suicide attacks should not be considered signs of desperation on behalf of the insurgency, but as troubling proof that insurgents have mastered the art of penetrating the Afghan security apparatus. The psychological impact of these types of attacks, in the capital no less, cannot be overstated. Any discussion of restoring local confidence in the capability of the Afghan security forces, let alone Afghanistan’s ability to assume security responsibility in the near future, must address this issue. If the stability and loyalty of the Afghan armed forces cannot be guaranteed, the insurgents will not fear confronting them and will not likely become willing participants in negotiations.

Rather than focusing on military force, the coalition ought to implement a strategy that focuses on good governance. After all, the insurgency is fueled primarily by the weakness and corruption of the national government. Much like poor military practices, a government with weak authority does more than just destabilize the country — it strengthens its enemies.

**Rule of Lawlessness**

In a society based on local leadership, authority is becoming increasingly and dangerously disconnected from provincial government. Important services like education and medical care are often “outside of government control” and require the consent of the Taliban to run at all. In some places — the northeast province of Kapisa comes to mind — government officials simply don’t exist. This lack of civilian authority isolates the population and plants serious, and clearly warranted, doubts in the minds of local Afghans about the ability of the national government to provide for the most basic needs of its people.

Without much competition, the Taliban have stepped into authority roles in large areas of eastern Afghanistan. Preying on the need for order, the Taliban establish shadow governments that “operate as parallel governments, administering taxes, settling disputes and distributing power through the appointment of local military commanders.” Rule under Sharia law might be harsh, but it is apparently better than the lawlessness that pervades when government neglect leads to mass insecurity.

Economic corruption strengthens the insurgency in a variety of ways as well. Fraud and laundering schemes involving major government officials engender skepticism of the government and make it more likely that civilians will put passive trust in the insurgency and Taliban shadow governments.

Exacerbating the situation is the existence of a “shadow economy.” The insurgency exploits the unregulated Afghan economy and corrupt government officials in running the lucrative opium trade, engaging in massive mineral smuggling rings, and imposing local taxes. All of these moneymaking
techniques would be impossible without political and police support. Certain elements of the insurgency, notably the Haqqani network, infiltrate the development sectors in construction and logistics using front companies. Complicit in these practices, along with the many Afghan officials, is US and international aid doled out to develop infrastructure and foster long-term stability in the country. Unfortunately the process of aid corruption works to support the very groups the coalition is struggling against. It is not hard to imagine why Afghans are suspicious of their government officials and their empty promises of support.

**Diplomatic Solution?**

The United States claims that it is committed to pursuing an Afghan-led diplomatic path to ending the conflict. Secretary Clinton and those senators in attendance repeated this sentiment at Senate Foreign Affairs Committee Hearing on June 23, 2011. In spite of this, the United States still places short-term emphasis on continuing the same counter-productive military practices. The administration has promised to scrutinize the recent Senate report, which details how international aid has created a criminalized war-economy in Afghanistan, and implement new strategies to avoid these loopholes. It must do these things and then some.

The greater puzzle of negotiations in Afghanistan encompasses more than just the Afghan government and the insurgency: it involves regional players including China, Iran, India, Russia, and, most critically, Pakistan. The ability to diminish the insurgency’s capacity to achieve its goals hinges not only on denying it access to Afghan resources and support, but also on preventing it from using Pakistan as a safe haven from which it can stage attacks across the Durand Line.

Selig Harrison in *Foreign Policy* lays out a strategy for Afghan-led negotiations acknowledging the necessity of allowing the Taliban to maintain authority in certain provinces as part of a “shift to a loose federation.” This strategy also involves further US force reductions and international pressure on Pakistan to encourage it to better police its borders. If the international community is to engage in negotiations with the insurgency that will put the national government on a higher footing, it must consider how its actions affect the situation. Not only must the United States reassess how it uses its military and financial strength to combat the insurgency, it must work with Kabul to strengthen political and financial oversight and promote good governance, especially around judicial practices.

For these efforts to be effective and legitimate, the Afghan government must be allowed to take the primary role so that it may rebuild civilian confidence in its ability to govern and actually gain the skills necessary to do so.
without foreign leadership. Quashing corruption will go a long way in shoring up support for the government, suppressing the insurgency, and providing Afghans with much-needed tools for their future. The United States must adopt this definition of “a position of strength” to bring about a political solution for Afghanistan.


**CAPITAL SUGGESTION**

Kabul is 11,152 kilometres away from Washington. Uncle Sam is about to abandon the nine-year-long, $500 billion circus of ‘nation-building’. The GIs came and now they are heading back to their land of ‘milk and honey’. But, Afghanistan is Pakistan’s strategic backyard. Afghanistan will remain where it is and so will Pakistan. India, bent upon planting threats on Pakistan’s western flank, isn’t going anywhere either.

The Pak-US relationship is based on co-dependency. Pakistan’s strategic dependency on the US is about two things: first, enabling the Pak Army to fend off an enemy 8.5 times bigger than itself. Second, bridging a trillion rupee budgetary deficit through direct grants plus soft loans via the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, and the IMF.

America’s strategic dependency on Pakistan revolves around conserving American influence in this critical region (read: keeping China out), keeping India in check, and also keeping the militant threat, nuclear weapons, and the intersection of militants and nuclear weapons, in check.

To be certain, the original parameters of the original strategic co-dependency haven’t budged much over the past several years. What we see under the broad strategic co-dependency is tactical manoeuvres by both sides to protect and promote their respective national interests. In that sense, every action that the US – or for that matter, Pakistan – takes has to be understood in terms of the action being ‘strategic’ or ‘tactical’ in nature.

Is the recent suspension of military aid strategic or tactical? Well, America’s foreign policy has, more often than not, revolved around America’s electoral calendar. Here’s what the calendar looks like: Iowa Caucus in February, the Democratic National Convention in September, and the Presidential Election in November.

Obama’s Af-Pak project is now standing on four pillars: One; exit – and an honourable one – from Afghanistan. Two; converting the Afghan War into a high-tech, robot-driven, intelligence intensive, counter-insurgency undertaking. Three; using Afghanistan to hunt down the remaining al Qaeda
leadership. Four; badgering, intimidating, bleeding and squeezing the Pak Army, forcing it to do America’s bidding so that America can negotiate an honourable exit.

Uncle Sam has a long history of being arrogant and self-serving. Right now Lt General Pasha and the Intelligence Directorate that he commands are under an asymmetric attack - the ‘war of the mind’. The weapon is one of the oldest in the CIA’s bag of tricks. Psychological operations are non-lethal but a definite combat multiplier. The CIA’s psywar toolkit is targeting to deplete the esprit de corps of Pak Army’s top brass in-tandem with a media onslaught. Carriers of these tools include The New York Times, The Washington Post, International Herald Tribune, Voice of America, Senator John Kerry, Marc Grossman, and Admiral Mike Mullen.

Sticks and carrots have long been the White House’s mainstay. Neither sticks nor carrots, however, are going to make Pakistani generals part ways with what the generals consider Pakistan’s national interests. The CIA is aiming to manoeuvre an ISI cave-in without having to fight for it. Uncle Sam has long been a student of Sun Tzu who believed that “to subdue the enemy without fighting is the supreme excellence.”

The $800 million US manoeuvre is tactical. In the not too distant future, after the current battle of wits is over, both the US and Pakistan will be sucked back into the old strategic paradigm of co-dependency.


THE LIMITS OF COUNTER-INSURGENCY IN AFGHANISTAN OR THE FAILURE OF THE EU

The international community has been involved in Afghanistan since 2001 as a consequence of the 9/11 attacks on US soil. By 2003, NATO took control of the ISAF and expanded its operations across all Afghanistan. Likewise, the Europeans have been involved in Afghanistan through several types of missions. On one side, Europeans have contributed to ISAF efforts by sending troops under the NATO umbrella as part of the counter-insurgency effort. On the other side of this military contribution, Europeans have sent policemen as part of the EUPOL Afghanistan mission launched in 2007, in addition to the European Gendarmerie Force also deployed in 2007. The European police mission is a continuity of the German police-training mission launched in 2002. Thus, the EUPOL-A was dispatched as an answer to US pressure for increased EU contribution on the Afghan stage. Under US
pressure, the EU had two options: to be marginalized for inaction or to join the US by deploying an EU mission.

Since the beginning, the EUPOL-A has been plagued by lack of leadership, limited financial and material supports, and personnel shortage. Furthermore, because of its civilian mandate, the EUPOL-A does not qualify for NATO protection, limiting EUPOL personnel interventions on the ground. Last but not least, it is the first CSDP mission launched during war, making it the most perilous of all.

The intervention of Europeans in Afghanistan underlines the schizophrenic nature of Europe. On one side, EU Member States are involved in combat operations as contributors to NATO forces. On the other side, EU Member States are contributing to a civilian mission under the EUPOL umbrella. These political choices made by European capitals are sending mixed signals concerning the nature of the EU as a global actor.

The counter-insurgency strategy developed by the Americans during the second war in Iraq and then applied in Afghanistan has had limited success for one obvious reason: while NATO forces continue to kill civilians, the results will be limited. With a total takeover by the military in Afghanistan, the priority of the military must be the protection of civilians. Because this has not been the case, the leadership should shift from a military to a civilian one as argued by Luis Peral.

The latest numbers of civilian casualties are a clear proof of such an argument. According to Liberation, a leading French newspaper, in 2011 more than 1,400 civilians have been killed, which represent a 15% increase compared to the same semester last year. The UNAMA report published on June 19, 2011 contributes to this empirical literature on the question of civilian casualties. The first 6 months of 2011 saw an increase of death of civilians by airstrikes, which is at 79 as opposed to 69 in 2010. However, this represents only 5% of the total casualties for 2011. The majority of civilian casualties come from IEDs (30%), ground combats (21%) and suicide attacks (19%). The increase of civilian casualties often leads to an increase in recruiting by the Taliban.

On the other hand, the coalition fatalities have been at 2,588 since 2001. This number underscores the trend of causalities in modern warfare, where civilians increasingly suffer more than soldiers. Interestingly enough, European media tends to emphasize the death of one or two soldiers rather than civilians. The war in Afghanistan has been questioned because of the death of five French soldiers these last couple days. However, the war has not been questioned for its gap between counter-insurgency theory and failure to apply it on the ground by protecting civilians. Civilian casualties, from a military standpoint, fall under the category of collateral damage. It is becoming quite surprising to see a surge of criticism in Europe after the death of one soldier,
and faint reaction after the deaths of dozens of civilians. One thing is certain; there is an illusion counter-insurgency can be done without casualties. The narratives have changed from regime change to counter-insurgency, and we are simply paying the cost of the continuation of the policies of the Bush era. Once the West – the coalition of the willing – was trying to design new regimes in Iraq and Afghanistan. Today, the global West is not trying to change the regimes but instead training local security forces in order to let them assume the overall security realm of their countries.

As argued by Luis Peral of the EU-ISS, a transfer of power needs to be effectuated from military leadership to a civilian one. He argues that a transfer of leadership to the UN is the appropriate solution. He claimed that, “It is also time to re-engage in effective multilateralism beyond empty commitments, and it is only the UN that has accumulated relevant expertise—from prior operations elsewhere to experience on the ground in Afghanistan—to take the initial lead in the more crucial aspects of international operations, including anti-corruption efforts, improved local governance, and security sector reform.” Others such as Seth Jones of the RAND Corporation argue that counter-insurgency in Afghanistan should remain a military project. He focuses on two aspects: “assist Afghan national and local forces [to] degrade the insurgency, and target terrorist leaders.” NATO and the US understand the importance of counter-insurgency and civilian approach to security. However, one can doubt the success of a civilian strategy implemented by a military leadership. The EU, through its EUPOL-A, has tried to lead in these sectors, but was unable to do so due to limited commitments from its member states and lack of leadership in Brussels, in the capitals, and in Afghanistan. The EU had its chances to lead the civilian approach to security, but because of its growing schizophrenic nature, it has fallen behind once more.

From the Guardian of July 15

DROP BY DROP, A RIVER IS FORMED: TRANSITION BEGINS IN AFGHANISTAN

Over the next week, lead security responsibility in Afghanistan will shift from NATO to the Afghan Army and Police in seven areas: the provinces of Bamiyan, Panjshir, Kabul (minus Sarobi District) and the municipalities of Mazar e-Sharif, Herat, Lashkar Gah, and Mehtar Lam. President Karzai trumpeted this important decision earlier this year and offered a vision for his country during a graduation ceremony at the National Military Academy of Afghanistan:

It is right that we have brought democracy to Afghanistan. It is right that we have improved the situation in some spheres. It is right that we have laid some foundations. But the Afghan people are still not safe….We wish that one day the Afghan people think that the Afghan government, its agencies, Afghan security personnel, Afghan courts and attorneys are serving them not posing threats to them. If we achieve that day, undoubtedly, Afghanistan will stand on its own feet and be built by its own people. And it will take steps towards a bright future with hope.

To be sure, transition marks an important milestone in the history of post-2001 Afghanistan. Dozens of countries are supporting Afghanistan today to improve security conditions and create a foundation where Afghans can provide security for Afghanistan. While the Taliban and other insurgent groups remain fixed on conducting attacks, there are positive signs too. Lieutenant-Colonel Fraser Rea, commanding officer of the second battalion of the Royal Gurkha Rifles, recently observed, "for the first time in recent years, the locals are living through a summer ... without any real fighting season starting and that is a real sea change for them. They are now looking at what the (Afghan) government can offer," This is promising for both the citizens of Lashkar Gah, but also other villages across central Helmand.

At the same time that ISAF is supporting geographic transition over the next three years, NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan (NTM-A) is supporting institutional transition. NTM–A has been charged with building Afghan capacity in four primary areas: training and equipping the Afghan National Army, Air Force, and Police; developing the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Defense; improving the country’s human capital; and investing in Afghanistan’s physical capital. Only after Afghanistan’s security institutions are self-sufficient and self-sustaining will it be possible for the Afghan government to make geographic transition gains durable.

Carrying out these missions are men and women from 33 countries. On any given day, we have 500 advisors assisting Afghan officials in the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior initiate strategies, develop plans,
execute budgets. At 70 training sites across Afghanistan, we have trainers teaching military and police skills from marksmanship, intelligence analysis, logistics to warfighting capabilities. Both Afghans and our multinational team are working hard to recruit, train, equip, field, and partner with Afghan soldiers, airmen, and police. In partnership, “shoulder to shoulder,” we all recognize that a well-trained and professional Afghan Army, Air Force, and Police are essential to geographic transition and vital to realize the gains of the international investment in Afghanistan. To be sure, Afghanistan faces both internal and external challenges, but we are inspired by an Afghan proverb, *Qatara qatara, darya mesha* (drop by drop, a river is formed).

Although we have come a long way, we recognize that transition is only the first of many difficult steps in the future. Days and months that will be challenged by difficulties, marred by setbacks, and faced with dangers. However, reinforced by the bonds of partnership, professionalism, and pride, I am convinced that the path we are on together developing the Afghan Army, Air Force, and Police will provide the Afghan people with the security they deserve, the prosperity they desire and a future they determine for themselves.


**AFGHANISTAN CRISIS: GILANI, CLEGG SEEK AFGHAN-LED SOLUTION**

Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani and British Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg on Tuesday called for a solution for peace in Afghanistan, generated from within, with the combined support of the United States, the United Kingdom and Pakistan.

Clegg termed Pakistan’s role as ‘most important’ in ensuring peace in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of the US-led Nato forces.

Addressing a joint news conference at the Lancaster House after the two leaders held a luncheon meeting, Gilani and Clegg agreed that Afghanistan had the capacity to deal with the situation on its own, but insisted that support from the US, UK and Pakistan was important for its future.

Gilani said Pakistan and Afghanistan had realised that both countries had suffered a lot in the fight against terrorism. “If it has to be a solution [for Afghanistan], then any process that leads to peace in this country would be supported by Pakistan,” he said, asserting that a stable Afghanistan, with non-interference in its internal affairs, was important for regional and global peace.
He added that Pakistan favoured engaging with the Afghan leadership and was committed to the process that was Afghan-led and Afghan-owned. Gilani also urged for increased trade and market access for Pakistani products into the European markets to stabilise the country’s economy and address issues of poverty and unemployment. Later, Gilani also met with chief executives of Oxfam, Islamic Relief and Save the Children UK.

*Express Tribune (Islamabad), July 20, 2011,*

**COMMUNIQUÉ, KABUL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON AFGHANISTAN**

- A Renewed Commitment by the Afghan Government to the Afghan People
- A Renewed Commitment by the International Community to Afghanistan

**Preamble**

The Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the international community (“Participants”) held a historic meeting today in Kabul to renew their commitment to the Afghan people. The Conference marked a new phase in their partnership, the Kabul Process, and a heightened commitment to a secure, prosperous and democratic Afghanistan. Participants affirmed support for the Afghan Government’s leadership in exercising its sovereign authority.

The Afghan Government’s programme is defined by measurable benchmarks contained in this document, as well as the detailed National Priority Programmes supported by the Conference that together represent the prioritized requirements of the Afghan National Development Strategy.

2. The hallmark of the Kabul Process, which began with President Hamid Karzai’s second inaugural speech in November 2009, is Afghan leadership and ownership. The consensus of the nation is being translated into a vision through a concrete programme of action for the renewal of the state. The Consultative Peace Jirga of June 2010 was an expression of national consensus and gave a mandate to adopt a “whole of the state” approach and “whole of government” path to national renewal. The essence of the “whole of the state” is constitutionalism: to strengthen each of the three branches of the government and to reinforce the constitutional checks and balances that guarantees and enforces citizen rights and obligations. The essence of the “whole of government” approach is structural reform to create an effective,
accountable and transparent government that can deliver services to the population and safeguard national interests.

Together, these complementary approaches, by putting people at the core, are key to stability and prosperity.

3. The Kabul Process is built upon deep and broad international partnerships. The United Nations mandate, expressed through the consensus of the General Assembly in 2001, and renewed through a series of Security Council resolutions, provides the international legitimacy and manifests the will of the international community to secure Afghanistan’s future. Our meeting in Kabul has been made possible by intense work that took place at the London Conference, and consultations with international partners since the London Conference. These events reaffirmed the commitment of the Afghan Government to improve security, governance and economic opportunity for its citizens. In addition, these events reaffirmed the international community’s commitment to support the transition to Afghan leadership and its intention to provide security and economic assistance to realise our shared objectives.

Participants affirmed their support for relevant United Nations Security Council Resolutions upholding the security, prosperity and human rights of all Afghans and in particular the central role of the UN to support the Afghan Government’s efforts in achieving these goals.

4. Given Afghanistan’s location at the heart of Asia, its newly affirmed natural wealth, and the expanding Asian economy, Afghanistan is poised to become a centre of regional cooperation.

Peace yields a much higher dividend than conflict. Participants invited Afghanistan’s neighbors to join with urgency in a common quest for stability and prosperity to overcome the recent legacy of conflict and poverty.

5. In support of Afghanistan’s vision of renewal and programmes to deliver concrete benefits to its citizens, the international community intends to realign its assistance to advance Afghanistan’s priorities, reaffirming the commitments made at the London Conference to channel increasing international resources through the Afghan Government budget, and in greater alignment with Afghan priorities. The international community welcomes the Afghan Government’s committed reforms outlined in its new National Priority Programmes, particularly those related to accountability and anti-corruption. Appreciating the role that international financial institutions have played in the management of the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) and their support for national programmes, Participants invited them to provide their support and expertise for the Afghan Government’s programme of renewal.

6. The Kabul Process recognises that the Afghan Government can guarantee security only when its people are confident in its ability to deliver public services, good governance, human rights protection including gender equality, and economic opportunities. All parties recognise that the chance to deliver on
these commitments has been earned through tragic losses, including civilian casualties, and the tremendous sacrifices of the Afghan and international armed forces currently engaged in the struggle for peace and stability in Afghanistan.

**Principles of Effective Partnership**

7. To achieve success in Afghanistan, the partnership between the Afghan Government and the international community should be based on the leadership and ownership of the Afghan Government, underpinned by its unique and irreplaceable knowledge of its own culture and people. This partnership should include coherent support by the international community, lending its resources and technical knowledge to the implementation of Afghan-defined programmes. Participants acknowledged that aid delivered through the budget is among the most effective means of reducing dependence, delivering the shared governance, development and security outcomes that Afghans desire, and increasing the coherence of aid and Afghan Government capacity. As donor funds are increasingly transferred to the Afghan Government in line with increased confidence in Afghan public financial management, off-budget development assistance should also increasingly align with the prioritized Afghan National Development Strategy.

The Government of Afghanistan recognizes the importance of established and successful bilateral development programmes and projects, which are in line with the Afghan development priorities and that fulfill the criteria for effective off-budget development finance and form crucial elements to meet Afghanistan’s reconstruction and development needs.

8. To implement these principles of effective partnership, international Participants:

- In line with the London Conference Communiqué, restated their strong support for channeling at least 50% of development aid through the Afghan Government’s core budget within two years while, as committed at the London Conference, the Afghan Government achieves the necessary reforms to strengthen its public financial management systems, reduce corruption, improve budget execution, and increase revenue collection to finance key National Priority Programmes;
- Expressed their readiness to align progressively their development assistance behind the National Priority Programmes with the goal of achieving 80% of alignment within the next two years. Implementation and costing plans for these programmes are to be brought forward by the
Afghan Government by October 2010. Participants committed to work with the Afghan Government to take the concrete steps necessary to address the current limited capacity for the transparent absorption of funds;

- Intend to begin work with the Afghan Government to practically implement the principles outlined in the 2010 “Operational Guide: Criteria for Effective Off-Budget Development Finance”;
- Intend to work with the Afghan Government to improve procurement procedures and due diligence in international contracting procedures within a year, and, unless a clear case for added value is made, endeavor to reduce sub-contracting and to take responsibility for the visibility and transparency of all necessary sub-contracting networks.

**Governance, Rule of Law, and Human Rights**

9. Good governance, the rule of law, and human rights form the foundation of the strategy to achieve a stable and prosperous Afghanistan. Improvements in these areas should not only increase the confidence of the Afghan people in their own future, but also underpin security improvements and economic and social development. It is also crucial that the Government, in pursuing its reforms, continue to consult with the people through their representative bodies, civil society, and other mechanisms. Building on the London Conference commitments, the Government of Afghanistan, with the support of its international partners, pledged to:

- Initiate within six months a strategy for long term electoral reform that addresses in particular the sustainability of the electoral process;
- Improve access to the delivery of justice throughout Afghanistan by:
  - advancing a legislative reform agenda that includes enacting the draft Criminal;
  - Procedure Code in the next six months, preparing commentaries on the Civil and Penal Codes, and strengthening state policies and judicial capabilities to facilitate the return of illegally seized lands;
  - improving provision of legal aid services within the next 12 months;
• aligning the national priority Law and Justice for All Programme with the National;
• Justice Programme and the National Justice Sector Policy in the next twelve months;
• and committing to sequenced implementation of the reforms they require;
• completing the informal justice strategy in alignment with the National Justice Sector Strategy to link it with the formal justice sector, and beginning implementation in the next twelve months.

- Undertake all necessary measures to increase transparency and accountability and tackle corruption. The Afghan Government pledged to:
  - finalise by October 2010 the Framework of the Afghan Government’s National Priority Programmes, including guidelines for clear goals, benchmarks and timelines;
  - establish, within twelve months, the statutory basis for the Major Crimes Task Force (MCTF) and the Anti-Corruption Tribunal (Special Courts);
  - submit an Audit Law within six months, meeting international standards, for external audits to ensure the strengthening and the independence of the Control and Audit government;
  - establish a legal review committee within six months to review Afghan laws for compliance with the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) which the Government of Afghanistan has already signed into law and ratified. Laws found to be inconsistent are to be prioritized for revision;
  - adopt policies governing bulk cash transfer, including regulations or laws that are needed, and begin their implementation over the next twelve months;
  - establish the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Committee with a permanent secretariat, to be fully operational in three months.

- Verify and publish the asset declarations of all senior officials required by the law, and update and publish these declarations on an annual basis, starting in 2010;

- Increase its efficiency and effectiveness by continuing to implement broad-based policy, legal, and structural reform in public administration. Over the next six months, the appointment procedures for senior civil servants are to be simplified and made
transparent, merit-based procedures are to be introduced and salary reform accelerated;

- Strengthen civil service reform by enhancing complementarity between the Afghan Civilian Technical Assistance Programme (CTAP) and the Management Capacity Programme (MCP) in twelve months;
- Seek an understanding with donors, over the next six months, on a harmonized salary scale for donor-funded salaries of persons working within the Afghan Government;
- Introduce and implement a standardized methodology to assess public financial management of line ministries, and, within six months, design with donor support, capacity development programmes to fulfill assessment recommendations;
- Implement over the next twelve months, in a phased and fiscally sustainable manner, the Sub-National Governance Policy, and strengthen local institutional capacity, including training of civil servants and development of training curricula, and develop sub-national regulatory, financing, and budgetary frameworks;
- Improve capacity in the judicial system through the design and implementation of a comprehensive human resources strategy that strengthens accountability mechanisms and provides adequate benefits for judicial employees within 12 months;
- In cooperation with civil society and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), finalize and begin the implementation of the National Priority Programme for Human Rights and Civic Responsibilities, and undertake human rights, legal awareness and civic education programmes targeting communities across Afghanistan to foster a more informed public and civil society, and to increase Government accountability;
- Strive to ensure the necessary political and financial support for the AIHRC while guaranteeing its constitutional status, and initiate discussions with the AIHRC within six months to explore its budgetary status.

Gender and Children’s Rights

10. Participants reiterated the centrality of women's rights, including political, economic and social equality, to the future of Afghanistan, as enshrined in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. Participants commended the mainstreaming of gender into all priority programmes and reiterated their commitment to assist all national ministries and sub-national government bodies in implementing their respective responsibilities under the National
Post-Withdrawal Scenario in Afghanistan

Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA), and to ensure that all training and civic education programmes contribute to concrete advancements in its implementation. In addition, the Government of Afghanistan, over the next six months, is to identify and prioritize NAPWA benchmarks for implementation within each cluster; and develop a strategy to implement the Elimination of Violence Against Women Law (EVAW), including services for victims.

Participants committed to respect and prioritise the fulfillment of the rights of Afghan children, and to invest in girls’ and boys’ education, protection and healthcare.

Economic and Social Development

11. Participants welcomed the Government of Afghanistan’s development agenda, which is focused on job creation and broad-based economic growth driven by National Priority Programmes on agriculture and rural development, human resources development, and economic and infrastructure development, as agreed at the London Conference. The international community supported the Afghan Government’s strategy that seeks to achieve fiscal independence by unlocking Afghanistan’s potential prosperity through an effective mix of investment in critical infrastructure and the development of a skilled labour force and of a strong, value-adding agricultural sector. The international community and the Afghan Government understood that the success of this strategy depends on the creation of a strong enabling environment for private sector investment, including public-private partnerships in social and economic development, through adequate regulatory and institutional reform.

12. Consistent with the realignment of donor funds behind these programmes, the Government of Afghanistan is committed to:

- Further the design, costing and sequencing of the national priority programmes by October 2010, and undertaking their implementation to achieve planned outcomes;
- Implementing the Public Financial Management Roadmap within the established timeframes to further strengthen the transparency and accountability of Afghan Government systems and to increase budget execution;
- Setting out detailed plans to rehabilitate and expand regional transport and energy networks to realise the benefits of, amongst other things, its growing extractive industries sectors.
This should be supported by relevant policy, fiscal and institutional reforms across these sectors, including implementation of mining
regulations and establishing the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative Secretariat;

- Establishing a special Infrastructure Trust Fund within six months, leveraging the support and the capabilities of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank (WB);
- Maintain economic stability, improve the effectiveness of public spending, and increase domestic revenues in a sustainable manner by about 0.7 percent of GDP by March 2011, with a view to attaining fiscal sustainability over time. The underlying policies and reforms to support these objectives are set out in the understandings reached last week between the Government and the staff of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on a new three-year economic program to be supported by the IMF’s Extended Credit Facility.

**Peace, Reconciliation and Reintegration**

13. Participants welcomed the outcomes of the Consultative Peace Jirga, held from 2-4 June 2010.

The Consultative Peace Jirga demonstrated the strong will within Afghan society to reconcile their differences politically in order to end the conflict. The Government of Afghanistan noted the demand of the Consultative Peace Jirga that all parties engaged in the conflict respect the need to bring lasting peace through mutual understanding and negotiations, in full respect of the values and rights, including those of Afghanistan’s women, enshrined in Afghanistan’s Constitution, and through inclusive elections. Participants welcomed the establishment of an inclusive High Peace Council composed of women and men to set policy, strengthen political confidence and build consensus.

14. Accordingly, Participants welcomed and endorsed in principle the Afghan Government’s Peace and Reintegration Programme, which is open to all Afghan members of the armed opposition and their communities who renounce violence, have no links to international terrorist organizations, respect the Constitution and are willing to join in building a peaceful Afghanistan. The international community reiterated its commitment to continue to support this endeavor through the Peace and Reintegration Trust Fund, and looks forward to local Peace Jirga meetings that include men and women at district and provincial levels to discuss elements of an enduring peace.

16. As requested by the people of Afghanistan at the Consultative Peace Jirga, the Government of Afghanistan committed to reduce the number of people arbitrarily detained or imprisoned. In parallel, the Government of Afghanistan has committed to improve the capacity of the justice institutions in order to ensure due process in making these decisions and to address the most serious crimes. To facilitate this process, a Special Detainee Release Committee has been formed and systems and procedures are to be developed with the aim of releasing detainees whose detention is based on inaccurate information or unsubstantiated allegations.

Security

17. Participants recognized that civilian casualties and protection of civilians are of great concern and noted that most civilian casualties are caused by insurgent attacks. Participants regretted the death of every Afghan and international civilian, and Afghan and international military forces remain committed to the objective of a steady reduction in the rate of civilian casualties.

18. Participants welcomed the Government of Afghanistan’s commitment to a phased exercise of full authority over its own security. The international community expressed its support for the President of Afghanistan’s objective that the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) should lead and conduct military operations in all provinces by the end of 2014. The international community committed to provide the support necessary to increase security, and to the continued support in training, equipping and providing financing to the ANSF to take on the task of securing their country. Participants agreed to continue efforts to ensure stable areas benefit from development.

19. Within the framework of Afghan sovereignty participants endorsed the Afghan Government’s plan, developed in coordination with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), based on mutually-agreed criteria and phased transition to full Afghan responsibility for security, as set out in the technical Inteqal (transition) paper, and endorsed a decision-making process of the Government of Afghanistan and the North Atlantic Council (NAC). The international community committed to support the Government of Afghanistan in creating the conditions necessary to allow for transition and to continue to support the transition process to advance to the point where the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Afghan National Police (ANP) are fully capable of maintaining internal and external security, public order, law enforcement, the security of Afghanistan’s borders and the preservation of the constitutional rights of Afghan citizens. The Government of Afghanistan and
NATO/ISAF are to assess jointly the provinces with the aim of announcing by the end of 2010 that the process of transition is underway.

20. In order to ensure stability and provide conditions for the effective rule of law, the Afghan Government pledged to:

- Continue the implementation of the Afghan National Police Strategy and its underpinning Police Plan to build a strong, professional police force, with a focus on institutional and administrative reforms of the Ministry of Interior including the implementation of the Ministry's Anti-Corruption Action Plan, and leadership development;
- Progressively enhance the quality and quantity of the ANSF such that the ANA reaches a strength of 171,600 personnel and the ANP of 134,000 by October 2011, with the necessary financial and technical support by the international community;
- Support the ANSF, in line with the Government's financial means, with continued and sustained financial and technical support from the international community.

Regional Cooperation

21. Participants noted the importance of regional cooperation to prosperity, peace and stability, and applauded the recent joint efforts of Afghanistan and its regional partners to combat terrorism by ending support, sustenance and sanctuaries for terrorists from wherever they are, and the drugs trade, increase stability, enhance regional economic cooperation and employment opportunities, and address Afghan refugee issues. Participants re-affirmed their support for the objectives and principles laid out in the Kabul Declaration of 2002 on Good Neighborly Relations, in particular the shared determination to defeat terrorism, extremism and drugs trafficking, on the basis of mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty. Participants further recognized the need for greater regional coordination and extended their support to the inclusive vision set out in the Istanbul Statement on Friendship and Cooperation in the “Heart of Asia” of January 2010, which offers regionally-owned measures for enhanced regional cooperation.

22. Participants welcomed the meeting of regional organisations, notably the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO), South-Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC)/ADB, UN Economic and Social Commission Asia Pacific (UNESCAP), and the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) on 19 July 2010, hosted by the
Government of Afghanistan, and commended the agreement by these organisations for a plan for enhanced coordination of Afghanistan’s regional engagement.

23. Participants welcomed the conclusion of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Trade and Transit Agreement (APTTA), and look forward to its successful implementation.

24. Participants underlined the importance of:

- The voluntary, safe, and gradual return of Afghan refugees in dignity, and the support of the international community to this process;
- The economic potential of Afghanistan’s natural resources for the stability of the state and the region, and the prosperity of its peoples;
- Integrated regional infrastructure projects, including transport; and encouraged both multilateral organisations and bilateral partners to promote such projects, including those presented in the Regional Cooperation Concept Paper submitted to the Kabul Conference;
- Investment in and expansion of railway and road linkages from Afghanistan’s neighbours, such as Abadan and Chahar Bahar to Herat, Zaranj to Delaram, Gwadar-to-Kandahar, and Hairatan to Mazar-i-Sharif, and Torkham to Jalalabad, which are welcome and highly appreciated. Afghanistan invites the international community to support for its integrated railway corridor across the country;
- The centrality of Afghanistan in the production, transmission and distribution of energy resources.

25. Participants look forward to the next Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA) and the concurrent business-to-business meeting, and which is to focus on regional economic connectivity and enhanced cooperation. Participants recalled the existence of various processes aimed at contributing to enhanced cooperative ties among regional countries, including, among others, trilateral summit processes among neighbours and regional partners. The Afghan Government and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) welcomed the forthcoming high level meetings of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Turkey, including the “Istanbul Forum” meeting in Kabul. They also welcomed the trilateral meetings of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan and supported this trilateral initiative to include neighbouring countries of Afghanistan.
Counter-narcotics

26. Participants welcomed the efforts of the Government of Afghanistan to update and improve the National Drug Control Strategy in 2010, with a particular emphasis on a partnership approach to ensure joint, effective implementation and coordination; capacity-building of law enforcement bodies across the government; and support the Government of Afghanistan’s plan to establish a functioning system to monitor measurable, time-bound targets. In addition, Participants

- Stated their intention to strengthen international and regional cooperation to counter illegal production, trafficking and consumption of drugs from Afghanistan. They resolved to fight the illicit drugs trade by supporting the Afghan Government’s initiatives and policies and to increase, with the cooperation of regional and other international partner countries, the number of poppy-free provinces;
- Welcomed the intent to strengthen the cooperation with relevant UN agencies, NATO, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), and the SCO in the field of border control;
- Acknowledged that narcotics are a global challenge and combating them requires international will and cooperation; and therefore stressed the need for Afghan Government led counternarcotics efforts, including agriculture development, interdiction, demand reduction and eradication, as well as corresponding public information;
- Called for the effective implementation of UNSCR 1817(2008) on combating deliveries of precursors for drug production in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and a decrease in the export of the pre-cursor chemicals to Afghanistan within twelve months;
- Welcomed the cooperation of the Government of Afghanistan with the Security Council Committee established pursuant to UNSCR 1267(1999) in the sphere of implementation of UNSCR 1822 (2008), including the identification of individuals and entities involved in financing or supporting activities of al Qaeda and the Taliban, relating to the use of the proceeds of illicit cultivation production and trafficking of narcotics and their precursors, and recommended to continue such coordination.
Next Steps: Supporting Afghan Ownership and Leadership, Strengthening International Partnership

27. Participants appreciated and benefited from the Government's strengthened inter-ministerial coordination mechanism under the cluster approach to prioritise and implement the Afghan Government’s development strategy. Participants looked forward to continued inter-ministerial coordination and cooperation to achieve the National Priority Programmes presented at the Kabul Conference. They also affirmed that a review of progress is imperative to the continued delivery of action items from the conference.

28. The Afghan Government is to focus on reform of service delivery institutions, policy decisions and the implementation of the National Priority Programmes, within the framework of a prioritised Afghanistan National Development Strategy, in its rolling 100-days action plans.

29. Participants further welcomed steps to strengthen the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB) in its support role for the Kabul Process. Participants agreed that the JCMB would meet every four months (supported by Standing Committees and their sub-committees) to monitor and assess progress of the Government and the international community in achieving the commitments stated above, and at the January 2010 London Conference. The Kabul Process is to include annual meetings between the Afghan Government, the international community, and civil society, including those providing services, to promote norms and standards for mutual accountability. Using existing resources, the government and the international community agreed to focus their expenditures on well-designed projects and programs. The Government of Afghanistan and the international community stated their intent to meet at Ministerial level, on an annual basis, to review mutual progress on commitments and to consider new Afghan priorities as part of the Kabul Process.

30. The Afghan Government committed to further prioritize and strengthen the National Priority.

Programs, including their implementation matrices for intended results and budgets. These plans will articulate 6 and 12 month, as well as 3 and 5 year targets, to ensure effective management and accountability, and the Afghan Government will refine them with the international community, including through the JCMB process, with the aim of building support for implementation. Key time-bound commitments are presented in this Communiqué.

Participants supported implementing the Afghan Government’s Public Financial Management.
Roadmap

31. The participants recognized the paramount importance of holding transparent, inclusive and credible elections in the fall, encouraging the full participation of female as well as male candidates and voters, and the Afghan Government in particular is fully committed to ensuring this objective and welcomes the international community’s support.

32. The broad and high level participation of governments and international organizations in Kabul is a sign of confidence in the future of Afghanistan and a message of hope and commitment to the people of the country. Appreciating this concrete manifestation of ongoing support, the Afghan Government vows to fulfil its commitments.

July, 20, 2011,


AFGHANISTAN’S ETHNIC FAULT-LINES

By 2014 the withdrawal of US and Nato forces will have been completed and, in the words of President Obama, “the Afghan people will be responsible for their own security”. This, however, will only be possible through genuine reconciliation among the various Afghan groups which, in turn, necessitates the creation of a mechanism to ensure that the composition of future governments will be in accordance with the ethnic map of the country. It is the quest for national cohesion in a heterogeneous population that defines the Afghanistan problem.

Afghanistan emerged as a loose confederation of Pushtun tribes under Ahmad Shah Abdali in 1747, and its identity became synonymous with Pushtun nationalism. Despite the presence of other ethnic groups, the country has unfortunately been run by and for the Pashtuns through most of its troubled history. The ethnic minorities notably the Tajiks, Uzbeks Turkmen and Hazaras have, with considerable justification, been described as “the victims of internal colonisation”. This needs to be revisited in order to understand the formidable obstacles that impede the establishment of sustainable peace and stability in Afghanistan.

The Tajiks lost their state with the fall of the Samanids, but continued to fight stubbornly to preserve their independence. It was only in the first half of the nineteenth century that the Pushtun feudal lords defeated the Tajik peasants of the Kabul, Kandahar and Ghazni regions. In the 1830s a bitter struggle between the Tajiks and the Pashtuns began, which culminated in the
1880s when Amir Abdur Rahman succeeded in finally breaking the Tajik resistance.

The establishment of Pushtun authority in the Tajik areas was accompanied by the confiscation of land from the local aristocracy, the forcible seizure of small holdings from the peasantry, and the transfer of unworked land to the state. The vast state holdings thus acquired were distributed among the Pushtun migrants who formed military colonies in these areas. The indigenous population was strangulated economically through the imposition of exorbitant taxes from which the Pashtuns were exempted.

The process was repeated with the Uzbeks and the Turkmen but it was the Hazaras who suffered the most because, as Shiias, they were detested by all Afghan groups. Jealousy and envy also played a role because, unlike the other ethnic minorities, the Hazaras had guarded their independence and did not submit for a prolonged period to any outside power.

The people of the Hazarajat accepted only their own leadership till the 1890s, when they were finally subjugated, after a long and fierce conflict lasting several decades, by Abdur Rahman. Not only did they lose a considerable portion of their land to the Pushtun feudal lords but also suffered persecution, the severity of which has few parallels even by Afghan standards. The heads of slaughtered Hazaras were placed on pillars along the highways as a warning to those contemplating rebellion.

The bazaars of Kandahar and other major towns were filled with Hazara prisoners who were sold at cheap prices as slaves. A foreigner who happened to be Kabul in the 1890s wrote: “A short while ago a Hazara baby was bought for half-a-crown, and the purchaser got the mother for fifteen shillings.” The possession of Hazara slaves became a status symbol for prosperous Pashtuns. Even after slavery was abolished by King Amanullah, the Hazaras continued to live as outcasts possessing neither wealth nor any rights.

In the 1960s, a second infiltration of the Hazara areas took place when about 60,000 Pashtuns from the plains were settled in the Harzarajat. The local population meekly accepted this as they were too weak to offer any resistance. In this period they also became the victims of wealthy Pashtuns who lent them money at interest rates that verged on extortion.

As was inevitable under the circumstances, the power base in Afghanistan has constantly remained extremely narrow. Its exercise has been the privilege of the Pashtuns, within the Pashtuns of the Durrans, and within the Durrans of the Barakzais. For almost half a century during which power rested with the Mohammadzai branch of the Barakzai clan, Afghanistan was controlled by an inner cabinet consisting of important members of the royal family and a few of their trusted associates. Command positions in the army were invariably held by members of the royal family and, in some instances, by staunch supporters of the monarchy.
The successful coup by Sardar Mohammad Daud Khan in July 1973 against his cousin, King Zahir Shah, merely ended the monarchy but did not result in any diffusion of power. In effect, power was transferred from the former oligarchy to a single individual. Without exception, Afghan cabinets have been dominated by Pashtuns completely out of proportion to the population ratio. For instance, in a cabinet of sixteen, the number of non-Pashtuns hardly exceeded one and very rarely two. Even this meagre representation was not always ensured.

Against this backdrop it is intriguing that during their repressive rule over most of Afghanistan from 1996-2001, the Pashtun-dominated Taliban appointed eleven non-Pashtuns as governors, some of them in Pashtun provinces, and included four or five members of the minority groups in the cabinet. Despite this the fierce internal conflict that started after the capture of Kabul by the Taliban on Sept 27, 1996, was entirely ethnic in nature. Resistance to the Taliban onslaught was provided by the Northern Alliance, the dominant components of which were the Tajik Jamiat-e-Islami led by Burhanuddin Rabbani, Dostum’s Uzbek Jumbish-e-Milli, and the Shia Hizb-e-Wahdat headed by Karim Khalili.

The ethnic factor has always been at the heart of the Afghan problem. For instance several years before the emergence of the Taliban, Rabbani was one of the four founding members of an organisation which styled itself as a movement against national oppression. This group consisted only of Tajiks and dedicated itself to redress the persecution which the ethnic minorities had suffered from centuries of Pashtun rule. Rabbani, however, left the movement because of differences between him and its leader, Tahir Badakshani, on tactics and strategy.

Similarly, the underlying impulse behind the creation of the Jamiat-e-Islami by Rabbani in 1970 was to replace more than two-and-a-half centuries of Pashtun rule by that of the Tajiks who constitute the largest ethnic minority. When Rabbani succeeded Mujaddadi as the president of Afghanistan in accordance with the provisions of the Peshawar Accord in June 1992, he removed Pashtuns from key positions in the administration and the army and replaced them with Tajiks.

As a safeguard against Pashtun domination, all other ethnic groups have persistently demanded maximum autonomy. Thus the Hizb-e-Wahdat, which was established when Iran merged the eight Shia factions, sought: (i) semi-independent status for which the country would have to become a federation; (ii) the Jafferia school of thought as a principal religious doctrine alongside the Hanafi School; and (iii) one-third of all government posts.

The turmoil in Afghanistan today has its roots in the past. However it is much more complicated than in the earlier phases of Afghan history because of the nexus between the Taliban insurgency and al Qaeda. The Taliban have
constructed the narrative that they alone represent the Pashtuns and towards this end have target-killed important Pashtuns in the government. Since January, five of the six top leaders who have been assassinated, including the president’s half-brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai, were Pashtuns.

President Karzai’s reintegration programme announced on July 20, 2010, and the subsequent establishment of the High Peace Council headed by the controversial Burhanuddin Rabbani has achieved little. If the Taliban are prevailed upon to renounce terrorism, only an intra-Afghan dialogue, without external interference, will yield a permanent settlement based on proportionate representation of all ethnic groups in the government and the military.


AFGHANISTAN’S ECONOMIC TEST

American and NATO troops will soon be moving out of Afghanistan, and people are asking whether the Afghan army will be able to provide security. An equally important question is: Will the Afghan economy be able to provide for the country?

Without a viable economy, there is little prospect of Afghanistan ever paying for its own security; little hope of its government gaining legitimacy; and not much chance of creating opportunity to counter the insurgency.

Afghanistan’s economy is at risk of a “negative multiplier”: A withdrawal of funds that precipitates an abrupt slowdown. Afghanistan has been growing strongly, at an annual rate of more than 10 percent, over the past five years. But this performance has been fuelled by massive inflows of international military spending and aid. From 2010 to 2011, military spending was estimated at more than $100b, while spending on aid could be as high as $15.4b. Total gross domestic product is about $16.3b. As the troops withdraw, support will shrink. Private consumption is closely linked to military spending and aid.

Afghanistan is a poor country that can ill afford an economic reversal, especially when it faces rising security challenges. It languishes near the bottom of development rankings, placing 155th on the UN Human Development Index in 2010 for its performance in health, education, income and other indicators. The withdrawal of military spending and external aid will hit hardest in construction and services, particularly transportation, distribution and security.

Afghanistan’s partners need to anticipate the effects of this spending drawdown to better soften the blow. Given tight budgets, Afghanistan will
need more efficient aid combined with proven delivery mechanisms to ensure that every dollar helps the Afghan people. First, militaries and donors could do more to increase spending within Afghanistan. Total aid to Afghanistan last year was equivalent to 91 percent of its economy, but most military and other aid was spent outside the country. Even if these amounts decline, they will still be big numbers for the Afghan economy. Redirecting more funding to local contractors and suppliers so that it is spent in Afghanistan and employs more Afghans could have a significant softening effect.

Second, more aid should go through the Afghan government. Only 15 percent of aid is expended through the government’s budget. Connecting aid to the budget can raise the share of contracts won by local businesses. Donors will, of course, need to build capacity within the Afghan government, including rigorous anti-corruption safeguards. Yet the able Finance Ministry has used financing through the budget to increase transparency, fiduciary oversight and supervision of other ministries. The World Bank and the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund deliver assistance through the budget in partnership with Afghan ministries. Afghans cannot take control of their destiny if donors bypass the government. Development does not work without local ownership.

Third, Afghans can help themselves if they can pay for more themselves. Current trends show that domestic revenue could increase 16 percent a year, climbing to around 13 percent of GDP by 2019, largely driven by progress in customs reforms, a new value-added tax in 2014 and collection of mining revenue. But if external support declines rapidly, the gap between money coming in and going out will grow. That gap will have to be filled for a period by foreign donors.

Donors can support all these objectives by recommitting to the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund. The fund is financing many of the programs that represent success stories, including the National Solidarity Program, a community-driven development initiative; other successful programs include education for boys and girls; rural access roads; a basic health program; and a credible public financial management system. Fourth, more needs to be done to increase private-sector investment. Afghanistan ranks 167th in the World Bank’s Doing Business report. Beyond security and corruption, obstacles that businesses face include expensive and unreliable power, no proper land registration system and weak legal structures. Yet Afghanistan has a wealth of resources in the largely neglected, under-funded mining sector. With private investment to help fund exploration, improve capacity and build appropriate infrastructure, mining, oil and gas could boost the country’s economic development. Agriculture can improve on its traditional place as Afghanistan’s economic mainstay; more investment will be
needed in irrigation and across the production chain to get produce to domestic and foreign markets.

Afghans have made real, measurable economic progress in recent years. We need to build on that progress — not abandon it. The security transition strategy needs a complementary strategy for economic transition. An army without an economy is doomed. A precipitous and unplanned economic withdrawal will throw away gains paid for with blood. Afghanistan needs to stand on its own. But Afghanistan’s partners need to plan now — together, coherently and with the government — for how the country will reach that point. The writer is president of the World Bank.


TOWARDS A REGIONAL SOLUTION IN AFGHANISTAN

Many observers have suggested that perhaps the best way to seek salvation for Afghanistan’s difficulties is to strive to restore that country to its traditional stance of neutrality.

The eminent scholar, Hamid Ansari, and this writer proposed nearly seven years ago (The Hindu, December 24, 2003) a 'neutral' status as the best possible solution for Afghanistan's persistent problems. Since then, much water has flowed down the Amu Darya. The country has gone through, and is still experiencing, unending violence, assassinations and instability. The international community, with the United States in the lead, has invested a huge effort in human and material terms to assist Afghanistan over the past 10 years to achieve a degree of calm and security. But the results have been less than hoped for. Now that the bulk of international security forces will pull out of Afghanistan in a little over three years, those best positioned to make a difference to Afghanistan's future seem to have realised that it is futile to seek a purely military solution to the country's miseries and that a political-cum-diplomatic approach is at least as important.

The political aspect is being pursued in the effort to engage the insurgents, i.e. the Taliban, in negotiations with a view to inducing them to give up their militancy, sever links with al Qaeda and respect the Constitution the so-called three 'red lines'. Those involved in the political track do not appear to be particularly optimistic about the chances of bringing a significant number of the Taliban to adopt the approach; they are also diffident about the capacity of the Afghan national forces to assume full responsibility for restoring and maintaining peace and security in the country by 2014. If the drift continues, the threat of Afghanistan descending into a civil war type of situation cannot be ruled out.
Diplomatic surge has not attracted sufficient attention thus far. Perhaps one reason is that the principal external actors have not thought through what exactly the diplomatic approach involves. While there was a general awareness of the fact that Afghanistan's stability was linked in various ways to the behaviour of its neighbours as well as its own, there was no focus, no common ground on which to work. Several observers including Henry Kissinger as well as this writer and Ambassador Karl Inderfurth, former Assistant Secretary of State in the Clinton administration, have suggested that perhaps the best way to seek salvation for Afghanistan's difficulties is to strive to restore that country to its traditional stance of neutrality.

In a welcome development, the US has now embraced the idea of seeking a regional solution to Afghanistan. In her significant testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on June 23, 2011, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was asked by the influential Senator, Richard Lugar, whether the nearly 200-year-old precedent of the Congress of Vienna of 1814-15 could offer a model for Afghanistan today. Ms Clinton's response was positive. She said: "[The] Congress of Vienna is an interesting historical example because there was a pact among regional powers that in effect left the Benelux countries as a free zone, so to speak Afghanistan is a part of a much larger diplomatic pattern and set of relationships, comparable to the Congress of Vienna." She went on: "this [Afghanistan] is a regional problem that is going to have that kind of a rather broad diplomatic solution. Certainly, if we could get to that point with the regional powers in South Asia that would be a very worthy outcome". She added Iran to the names suggested by Senator Lugar, India, Russia, Saudi Arabia. In her words: "you cannot ignore Iran. Iran is a big player in the region and has a long border with Afghanistan and Pakistan." She concluded: "The only way we are going to get a political solution is through this kind of diplomatic outreach and that is what we are engaged in."

The Afghan government's views are obviously of paramount importance in this matter. It would wish to pursue a line which, in its judgment, would best protect and further the national interests of its people. The Afghan factions represented at the Bonn Conference in December 2001 were conscious of this responsibility when they unanimously issued an unequivocal call to the international community as represented by the United Nations, to help achieve exactly the kind of solution Ms Clinton seems to seek. Appendix 3 of the Bonn Agreement is clear. It states: "[the participants] request the United Nations and the international community to take the necessary measures to guarantee the national sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of Afghanistan as well as the non-interference by foreign countries in Afghanistan's internal affairs." It was, therefore, not much of a surprise when a spokesman of the Afghan Defence Ministry said on June 27, as reported in the Financial Times of June 28: "The government of Afghanistan welcomes the idea of Mrs.
Clinton to turn Afghanistan into a neutral zone country and the Ministry of Defence believes that idea will help the peace process a lot. Bringing peace to Afghanistan without the cooperation of regional countries is impossible as they play a major role in conflicts in Afghanistan." What is important is not the terminology but substance. The word 'neutral' does not have to be employed but the regional approach is imperative.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has everything that he might need to take the initiative to begin implementing the unanimous appeal by the Afghan parties at Bonn the mandate, the support of the most important player and the green signal of the Afghan people. He should proceed, without further loss of precious time, to begin consultations on at least the person to whom the difficult task of consulting the regional countries should be entrusted. This also means that at a minimum, some regional powers ought also to help the process, instead of leaving the entire burden on the Americans. India should be more than willing, not so much because Ms Clinton has asked India "to take the lead" but because it is in our interest to do so.

For too long, India has allowed itself to be influenced by Pakistan's possible reaction to whatever it might propose. It is almost axiomatic that Pakistan will oppose anything India proposes. We have also been too solicitous of the American anxiety not to upset Pakistan because of Washington's own vital interests, in the process denying ourselves the opportunity to play any meaningful part in the diplomatic arena. Now, however, an opportunity has opened up for us to join the effort to work towards a regional approach. The US can only welcome such help from us as it prepares to withdraw by 2014.

Pakistan will always be an extremely relevant factor in anything to do with Afghanistan. It has interests and concerns in that country. We in India may not regard Pakistan's concerns as legitimate or well-founded, but much of the international community seems to have bought the Pakistani line vis-à-vis India. There is, therefore, an urgent need for an Afghanistan-specific India-Pakistan dialogue. At track-II level where this writer has been present, the Pakistani delegates were dismissive of the idea of such a dialogue. "Let us first try and reduce our bilateral deficit before we can consider bringing Afghanistan into the dialogue" was their categorical response. We should nonetheless pursue this possibility. It is conceivable that the reaction at the official level might be more encouraging. There is no alternative to our two countries exchanging views on the Afghan situation. It is entirely possible that we might find enough common ground relating to Afghanistan which, in its turn, might help in reducing the bilateral trust deficit.

During her recent visit to Delhi, Ms Clinton seems to have proposed a quadripartite dialogue among the US, India, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Given Pakistan's allergy to India having anything to do with Afghanistan, this idea
will not go far. It would be more practical and productive to initiate a trilateral dialogue among the US, India and Afghanistan, specifically on Afghanistan. We should give all the encouragement to what Ms Clinton put forward during her testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. We should similarly persuade the United Nations Secretary-General to seriously act on the mandate given to him by the Bonn conference 10 years ago. We should certainly engage with Iran on the Afghan situation since we have worked together on it in the past and have common concerns. We should also talk to Russia, China, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the Central Asian states not merely to compare notes but even more on how to initiate and take the regional process forward.


**GREATER SINO-AMERICAN COOPERATION NEEDED IN AFGHANISTAN**

In July 2011, the United States military began its scheduled withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, when 650 soldiers from the 113th and 114th Cavalry Units returned home. Considering China’s unease with a large foreign military presence on its borders, one would expect the US drawdown to be welcomed in Beijing and result in greater US-China cooperation on Afghanistan. However, the US and China have different goals and timetables regarding this conflict, which pose challenges to their bilateral relationship.

In a June 22nd speech US President Barack Obama announced that 10,000 American troops would be withdrawn by the end of the year, with up to 23,000 more by the end of 2012, his original withdrawal date for US forces. The recently announced drawdown would return home the additional 30,000 troops President Obama sent to Afghanistan as a part of his 2009 surge strategy. This would leave about 68,000 US troops in the country. According to the President’s timetable, the withdrawal process would accelerate in 2013 as Afghan forces assumed greater responsibility for their security and be completed by the end of 2014. The US forces are the largest contingent of a total of 150,000 troops under NATO command. All are scheduled to leave by the end of 2014.

In a July 25th speech, Ryan Crocker, the newly appointed US Ambassador to Afghanistan, cautioned that there would be no ‘rush to the exits.’ Although he denied that the United States sought permanent basing in Afghanistan, the two countries are planning on developing a strategic partnership that could involve an American military presence even after the formal withdrawal deadline. China remains concerned about this prospect, but
the alternative—a premature withdrawal of foreign forces—also poses risks of increased terrorism and political instability in the region.

The Chinese government responded cautiously to the US drawdown announcement. While welcoming the stated goal of the United States to make Afghanistan responsible for its own security and respect its sovereignty, Chinese officials have expressed concern in recent weeks over the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan and political instability there. The United States is pursuing three overlapping tasks in Afghanistan: using military force to defeat al Qaeda networks and Taliban insurgents; supporting political, social and economic development in Afghanistan and Pakistan; and engaging in diplomacy to end the conflict and provide lasting security in the region. With the death of Osama Bin Laden on May 1, 2011, American officials see the weakening of al Qaeda networks within sight. However, political instability, pervasive corruption and the dominating role of the drug economy have stymied progress on the second set of goals.

The US and China have different priorities in Afghanistan, complicating the process of regional engagement on the country’s future. For the United States the military mission has taken up the lion’s share of American spending on Afghanistan—444 billion USD since 9/11. Half of the 51.5 billion USD in assistance funds budgeted from 2001 to 2010 have gone to training and equipping Afghan security forces. Remaining funds have placed a priority on counternarcotics programs, governance projects and infrastructure development.

Despite its concerns over the spillover effects of terrorism and drug trafficking for China, especially in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, the Chinese government has contributed relatively little to regional aid efforts, just 200 million USD over the past decade. While Washington has focused primarily on immediate security priorities, Beijing has been pursuing a long-term economic strategy to integrate Afghanistan into the web of Chinese infrastructure and resource projects in Central and South Asia. Thanks to the 3.5 billion USD Aynak copper mine project and related infrastructure development, China is now the largest investor in Afghanistan.

Although each strategy has its merits, neither is likely to be successful on its own. There has been some grumbling in the US that China will benefit economically from the US military effort. But without viable development, how will Afghanistan wean itself from its now overwhelming dependence on foreign donors for its legal revenue? Development, however, has been plagued by corruption as the recent revelation of the diversion to the Taliban of 3.3 million USD of a 2.16 billion USD US transportation contract in exchange for safe passage of convoys. Moreover, China’s long-term plans for resource exploitation in Afghanistan will be impossible to fulfill in the absence of a stable government and adequate security.
China has not been willing to provide security, preferring to support its ally Pakistan’s efforts instead. Ironically, both China and the United States are hamstrung by their reliance on ties with Pakistan. To emerge from this plight the US has sought to diversify its regional outreach by creating alternative supply routes for Afghanistan through Russia and Central Asia. Most recently US counternarcotics officials have been developing a new Central Asian initiative to share information more readily among Central Asian states, Russia and Afghanistan. China, however, seeks to promote cooperation with Central Asian states and Russia within the context of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, a ten-year old regional initiative that excludes the United States. At times the United States and China have collaborated in Afghanistan—a Chinese contractor joined in the construction of the ring road so essential to NATO military effort. However, according to US diplomatic cables obtained by Wikileaks, in 2009 the Chinese government rejected a request by the Obama Administration to help supply non-lethal aid for the Afghanistan war effort via the Wakhan corridor, the thin strip of mountainous territory bordering on China.

Despite their different approaches, the United States and China share common interests in the security and stability of Afghanistan. A lasting and stable peace will require greater Sino-American cooperation as well as their support for inclusive regional dialogue.


**Bin Laden’s Last Laugh**

Simone de Beauvoir, the French existentialist writer, was on the dot when she remarked, “If you live long enough, you’ll see that every victory turns into a defeat.”

With that in mind, one must inquire now what happened to the euphoria of the US ‘victory’ when the Taliban surrendered Kandahar on Dec 7, 2001. In 2004 and then again in 2007, Osama bin Laden said that he would bleed the US into bankruptcy, as he had done earlier with the Soviet Union. Today, it is quite clear that the military situation in Afghanistan is chaotic and appears to be failing.

Even when the neo-cons were at their peak under the Cheney-Rumsfeld team, there were warnings that “attacking Pashtuns, renowned for xenophobia, warlike spirits, and the love of independence, is a fool’s mission”, in the words of columnist Eric Margolis in 2006. “Pashtuns are Afghanistan’s
ethnic majority. Taliban is an offshoot of the Pashtun people. Long-term national stability is impossible without their representation and cooperation.”

In hindsight, we can see that the war in Afghanistan was poorly conducted and led against one of the most backward and ill-equipped of adversaries. It would appear that modern warfare cannot succeed over an ideologically driven opponent in an under-developed nation. Furthermore, once the US military began running the national agenda of the war in Afghanistan and Iraq, all dissent evaporated and even the media in the US became slavish, thus allowing mistakes to go unchallenged.

The curtailment of liberty and the criticism of government policies by harsh new homeland security legislation took away the US’s edge in honest intellectual analysis. Today, it is possible to clearly see that this method of managing war almost brought a superpower to the verge of financial disaster. It is astonishing to note that after remaining engaged in Afghanistan for a decade, the US has not succeeded in subduing a medieval force — the Taliban.

In the process, the US created a huge financial black hole for itself. With its debt at an astronomical level of $14.6tr, it will make $600bn a year in interest payments. This is equal to its defence budget for one year. Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, told businessmen in Detroit that “the national debt is the single biggest threat to national security.”

Yet one could ask that as a military man, did he not have a hand in creating it?

The US failed in its strategy in Afghanistan because its military was so sure of success that it lost touch with the harsh Afghan reality. On a number of occasions, potentially more sound policy advice for stabilising the situation was suggested, such as by the British and Dutch in 2007, but it went unheard.

President Hamid Karzai’s woes have multiplied with the killings of his closest confidants. The assassination of his half-brother Ahmad Wali, followed by that of the former governor of Uruzgan, Jan Mohammed, and later the mayor of Kandahar, have deprived him both of influence and advice regarding peace talks with the Taliban.

It is clear that without a successful peace deal with the Taliban, President Karzai’s relevance in an ordered withdrawal of troops will be diminished. If there is no peace deal by December 2014, when the majority of the US troops will be withdrawn, then the US will still be in Afghanistan implementing a containment plan based on a counter-terrorism ring of fire in bases bordering the Pakhtun belt in Southern and Eastern Afghanistan. Will this be a de-facto partition of Afghanistan? Whether so or not, this will usher in another period of blood-letting that will continue to destabilise the region — particularly Pakistan.

Why can’t Afghanistan be stabilised after the expenditure of so much money and the concerted efforts of countless minds?
There are a number of reasons behind this failure and I highlight just a few.

The first failing was the absence of an exit strategy at the start of the US intervention in November, 2001. A review of the US objectives shows that from the initial, limited aim of removing the Taliban government, the US took over the job of redesigning the Afghan state. This, obviously, was a formidable task. Recreating a tribal nation is impossible. That mission was bound to fail.

Afghanistan has always been a loosely-run nation where a king retained control by balancing the tribes and strongmen as well as shaping the ethnic dynamics. He often used the military to bring about change when other methods of persuasion failed. As long as the king could provide patronage and kept the resources flowing to the strongmen in the countryside, peace was ensured. Afghanistan remains the same today and patronage trumps policy. To expect otherwise was unrealistic.

When the Taliban were ousted in December 2001, President Karzai began rebuilding the state by relying on strongmen who can be considered the nouveau riche created by the drug trade rather than being traditional leaders of their tribes as in former times. For example, Gul Agha Sherzai, a drug entrepreneur, emerged to lead Kandahar, Jan Mohammed became the governor of Uruzgan and Sher Mohammed Akhundzada the governor of Helmand. The same sort of leaders emerged in other parts of the country. Such an administration compromised the very justification for the invasion. Meanwhile, Pakistan’s role in fanning the flames to neutralise growing Indian influence was yet another cause of Afghan instability.

Secondly, in a country composed of various ethnicities of whom the Pakhtuns constitute 45 per cent of the population, the Tajiks 22 per cent, the Uzbeks 6.4 per cent and the Hazaras and Aimaks 5.6 per cent and 5.4 per cent respectively, the new structure denied the Pakhtuns their share. Furthermore, no space was kept in the Bonn design for reconciled Taliban, thus declaring hostility to a political compromise with them.

These ethnic imbalances are now reflected in the rebuilt Afghan army and police. These groups will lose coherence as soon as their mentors, who belong to foreign countries, are withdrawn. When this happens insecurity will return to Afghanistan after the 2014 withdrawal deadline.

The unpromising situation leads one to conclude that Afghanistan may after all constitute Bin Laden’s last laugh.

THE TERROR ENDGAME

Ever since US President Barack Obama decided to begin withdrawing American troops from Afghanistan, global interest in what role (if any) China will play in determining that war-ravaged country's future has grown dramatically.

After all, China is not merely a neighbour of Afghanistan, but the world's most important rising power - indeed, a "world power," as Mike Mullen, Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff proclaimed in Beijing this past June.

If China proves itself willing to help shore up Afghan President Hamid Karzai's administration, it will not seek to gain any immediate advantage from the withdrawal of US forces. But, despite the billions of dollars China has invested in developing Afghanistan's natural resources, it is hard to see it undertaking a policy of broader and proactive engagement there. One reason why China is wary of assuming a bigger role in Afghanistan, despite the country's undoubted importance for regional stability, is that America's war there has been controversial in China from the outset. Chinese nationalists believe that the war was undertaken by the US partly in order to place its military near one of China's most sensitive borders. Moreover, to supply its Afghan forces, the US deepened its military footprint in Central Asia by renting the Manas Air Base in Kyrgyzstan, which also shares a border with China.

In the eyes of Chinese nationalists, these efforts were all the part of an American conspiracy to encircle China. Thus, Chinese nationalists can't wait to see the back of America's Afghan military presence.

For Chinese strategic realists, any support for America's efforts to help end the Afghan insurgency should be part of a broader China-US bargain. China might agree not to undermine America as it withdraws only if the US agrees to rethink its arms sales to Taiwan, or to pull back from its commitment to support Japan's claims to the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands, the ownership of which China disputes. Obviously, such deals will be unwelcome in the US. Given that neither Chinese foreign-policy camp believes that it will get what it wants out of cooperating with the US, both simply want America's withdrawal to happen as soon as possible, without concern for what Afghanistan will look like afterwards. For both camps, only great-power politics matters for China's national security, and if diplomacy cannot influence the balance of power, there is little reason to engage with an issue.

Of course, a stable, orderly, and secular Afghanistan serves China's interests as much as it benefits the rest of the world. Yet few Chinese are willing to confess that the US-led Afghanistan war, which removed the Taliban
and al Qaeda from their dominant roles in the country, improved China's domestic security. That refusal is clearly the result of the "structural" ambivalence that now exists between the US and China.

The extent to which China will engage Afghanistan positively will depend in large part on whether China rids itself of the prevailing zero-sum mindset and facilitates America's military withdrawal by doing what it can to stabilise the country.

China can help by stiffening the resolve of Pakistan's military to move more aggressively to contain Taliban extremists on its territory; open border regions to help resupply NATO forces in Afghanistan; and invest in the country's infrastructure. Indeed, China's relations with Pakistan have assumed greater importance recently, owing to the tensions that now exist between Pakistan and the US. By working with the US on Pakistan, China can help secure its own interest in a strong Pakistani campaign against the militants on its territory.

China's cooperation may not be essential to defeating al Qaeda and other militants in Afghanistan, but it will be if lasting peace and stability is to be realised. Chinese and US interests in Afghanistan are unlikely ever to be perfectly aligned, but the two sides can and must learn to cooperate for their own benefit, and that of the region. The challenge for China is to exert its power and influence in a way that harmonises with the US, despite widespread displeasure among Chinese at America's position on a variety of issues, from Taiwan to the East and South China seas.


**FLAWED US STRATEGY**

The downing of a US helicopter with 30 Americans and eight Afghans on board in the eastern province of Wardak is a significant blow to the US-led war effort. It wasn't just that the incident, which the Taliban have claimed responsibility for, made Saturday the single deadliest day for US troops in Afghanistan, but also the profile of the troops who were killed. With the American media reporting that 22 of the dead Americans belonged to the Navy SEALs, the US has lost some of its most elite and high-profile warriors imaginable — and the Taliban will almost certainly gain a psychological boost. Down in the south, in Kandahar, the Taliban have notched up three significant assassinations this year — the brother of President Karzai, Wali Karzai, a deputy governor and the Kandahar police chief — putting serious question marks over American claims that the foreign forces have checked the
momentum of the Taliban and produced a fragile recovery in parts of Afghanistan.

Saturday’s incident will also likely produce fresh scrutiny of the night raids so beloved of Gen Petraeus and resented by the Afghan government and the public at large. Night raids are part of a US military-led attempt to decapitate the Taliban leadership by targeting senior-level and mid-ranking Taliban leaders in Afghanistan. The raids are particularly relied on in areas where the US does not have a heavy concentration of troops, such as in eastern Afghanistan, which includes the site of Saturday’s incident in the Wardak province. But the raids go to the heart of an apparent conflict in US strategy in Afghanistan: night raids are part of Gen Petraeus’s push for 'total victory', whereas the US is now inching towards some kind of settlement with the Taliban as American troops are set to head for the exit door.

Does it make sense to whack over the head the very interlocutor the US will have to engage going forward? More importantly, the night raids have proved to be very unpopular with the Afghan public. In eastern Afghanistan there are numerous reports of protests against the night raids. President Karzai has publicly called for an end to the raids and labelled them as one of the main irritants in relations with the US. In some ways, the raids are analogous to drone strikes in Pakistan’s tribal areas. But there is one crucial difference: in Afghanistan, no senior al Qaeda or Taliban leader has been killed in the raids yet. So, if a policy has limited military dividends and high political costs, does it make sense to continue it? And now, in the wake of Saturday’s incident, can the military cost be said to be worth it, especially if the Taliban try their luck to see if they can chalk up more victims?


**US CASUALTIES IN AFGHANISTAN: THE NEED FOR PERSPECTIVE**

There are good reasons to question whether we should stay in Afghanistan. They include the quality of governance and the problems with President Hamid Karzai; the value of winning in Afghanistan without success in dealing with Pakistan; the ability to create a stable Afghan regime after we phase out troops and aid; and the sheer cost of any degree of success in money and lives, at time that the Congressional Research Service estimates that the war has already cost at least $557 billion, and the Department of Defense estimates that US casualties alone total 1,557 killed and 13,011 wounded. We should never commit ourselves to combat without constantly reexamining the strategic value and cost of the war.
No one can ignore the loss of 30 American troops, including 22 Navy SEALs, when a helicopter went down in Wardak this past Saturday. It is the single bloodiest incident of the war for the United States, it cost the lives of our allies as well, and it’s a very real tragedy.

That said, it is necessary to keep such tragedies in careful perspective:

- Nothing done to a helicopter can prevent it from being vulnerable if it hovers, lands, or takes off in any area where the enemy is present. No silencing can prevent it from giving some warning. Night cannot keep it from being profiled as a target at short range.
- Squad-sized automatic weapons and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) can “kill” a helicopter if it comes with range of the enemy. There are no countermeasures to direct fire, the enemy is often not visible to the best night vision systems, and sheer chance can make up for the lack of tactical experience and advanced guided weapons. What some in the military call a “magic bullet”—one that finds a critical vulnerability out of sheer chance—is a constant risk of war.
- No intelligence system can ever warn or predict the density of scattered infantry that is masked by natural cover and is in motion. Even the best unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) sensors have limits, and the Taliban and other insurgents know that if they have a high profile, attacks may come and can locate their fighters accordingly.
- Many of the missions in the east are high risk, going into insurgent held territory without major support. This raises the risk of exposure, but it is also essential if we are to focus on critical targets—which generally stay in the more secure areas—rather than ordinary fighters.
- It has been clear from the start that the surge and new strategy meant we had to intensify our combat operations in the south and the east in 2010–2012 to have any hope of a successful transition in 2014. We have stepped up every aspect of US operations, including higher-risk Special Forces operations, and this is likely to continue through the end of 2012. This has increased the risk of casualties as we have taken the fight to the enemy. So far, the actual increase has been limited, the Taliban has not been able to intensity its operations as much as predicted, and we have scored major gains in the south. This is, however, war. It is a killing ground, and losses are inevitable.
None of this means that we should not mourn every US, allied, and Afghan casualty. It does mean, however, that we should not overreact to worst-case incidents or exaggerate their tactical and strategic importance.

This is particularly critical because the Taliban, Haqqani network, and other insurgents are reacting to their losses by shifting away from the area they once controlled to tactics focusing on assassinations, high-profile bombings, and terrorist attacks, and seeking to win the war at the political level by outlasting the US, ISAF, and Afghan willingness to fight.

If we overreact to a single major loss, rather than judge the war on its tactical and strategic merit, we give the enemy an advantage that has nothing to do with the overall fighting and merits of the conflict.

More broadly, the same caution in overreacting is true of incidents that involve civilian casualties, major bombings, and assassinations of key Afghan commanders and officials. These are part of the same Taliban and Haqqani strategy in seeking to win a war of political attrition that they are not winning at the military level.

Similarly, we can expect the Taliban and their allies to continue to use every military act that produces collateral damage and civilian casualties as a political weapon. We can expect them to try to stop night raids, target Special Forces operations, and counter UAV attacks by publicizing and exaggerating civilian casualties just as threat forces do in the Iraq War and did in the Kosovo conflict. They know our sensitivities, they know that few Afghans understand the fact that overall US, friendly, and civilian casualties are far lower in such operations than in any comparable operations using other means—or in previous conflicts in history.

Above all, we need to remember that this is war. We often do ourselves great harm in overemphasizing success and minimizing sacrifice, in exaggerating what our technology and weapons can do, and in creating expectations based on “surgical” and “perfect” war.

War remains a horrible, bloody mess that can only be justified when it is better than every alternative. It inevitably kills people and not things, and it is always filled with unavoidable confusion and error. We would be far better off if we accepted this reality, never minimized it, and never asked our troops and allies to make sacrifices that did not involve a full recognition of the costs. Unfortunately, this is an area where public affairs officers are often as dangerous as the enemy, if not more so.

This means that we need far better leadership from the president, the secretary of defense, and the secretary of state in describing the details of the conflict, both the negative and positive trends, the costs, and exactly what our plans are for transition. We need far more detail on our strategic goals and grand strategic goals and the probability that they can be met with lasting effect after 2014. This is any area where there has been so little real leadership
that there is nothing to follow, and the efforts to control the message have really amounted to having no message at all. This is the area where the American people, the media, analysts, and think tanks, and the Congress should constantly challenge the reasons for being in Afghanistan—not necessarily because the war is a failure, but because this is an area where no president or commander deserves trust without earning it in depth and every day.


**DISRUPTED DIALOGUE: PURPORTED TALIBAN NEGOTIATOR ‘GOES MISSING’**

**It may have been just talk after all.**

A purported Taliban official mediating with the Americans can no longer be traced, frustrating the US attempts to hold another round of talks as they seek a negotiated settlement to the decade-old conflict in Afghanistan, officials said on Sunday.

Former US defence secretary Robert Gates had confirmed late June that the US was holding ‘outreach’ talks with members of the Taliban in Afghanistan. It was the first time the US had acknowledged such contact. A day prior to that statement, Afghan President Hamid Karzai had also disclosed that the US had been in contact with the Taliban.

While Gates and Karzai confirmed talks with the Taliban, they did not disclose the name of the Taliban leader involved in the reported talks.

The media, however, reported that US officials met Tayyab Agha, a close confidant of Taliban supreme leader Mullah Muhammad Omar. Agha, an ethnic Pashtun from Kandahar, also served as Mullah Omar’s spokesperson and the first secretary in the Taliban-led Afghan embassy in Pakistan during the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

An Afghan leader familiar with the negotiation process said that the US has made frantic efforts to contact Agha for further talks but there has been no success so far. “Agha has not yet been traced and is believed to have gone either to Qatar or the United Arab Emirates,” he said.

**Agha’s Mandate**

They’ve held talks with him earlier but the Americans and Afghans are still unsure if Agha had a mandate from the top Taliban leadership to enter into negotiations, an Islamabad-based Afghan diplomat, requesting not to be named, told *The Express Tribune.*
The issue of Agha’s mandate came under discussion at the Afghan Presidency when US officials shared information with President Hamid Karzai, the diplomat said.

An Afghan leader familiar with the negotiations said that Agha was annoyed at the disclosure of the secret talks to the media by Karzai and Gates.

Agha, and those behind the negotiations, did not want the matter to appear in the media unless there was some progress.

The Taliban have always denied any talks but Western and Afghan leaders insist that channels of communication with the Taliban have always stayed open.

A leader of another Afghan opposition party confirmed to The Express Tribune that indirect contacts between the Taliban and the US had always been intact.

Meanwhile, Mullah Abdul Salam Zaeef, former Taliban ambassador in Pakistan and once a close aide of Mullah Omar, doubts any talks were held between the US and Agha.

“I do not have any exact information if the talks have been held but I can say that statements by Afghan and US leaders in the media make the process appear doubtful,” Zaeef told The Express Tribune last week from Kabul via phone.


**POLITICAL INSECURITY AND REPORTS OF WORRYING DEVELOPMENTS**

Afghan politics are fast-paced and slow at the same time; often more smoke than fire, but unpredictable enough to keep everyone on their toes and to keep the political class engaged in endless cycles of meetings. The chatter is a steady hum on the background of whatever is going on in the country. In insecure times it goes into overdrive, feeding existing speculations and suspicions, and suggesting imminent crisis. Because nerves have already been strained for quite a while, the narratives are becoming increasingly imaginative and complicated.

It is a highly dynamic process. People meet, talk, speculate and plot. They are gauging the mood, swapping conspiracy theories, forging alliances, provoking divisions, calling in favours, spreading stories, persuading, enlisting, floating ideas, reporting back (often embellishing) on what others said or what they are planning, and exaggerating one’s own ability to deliver this person or
that outcome. Most conversations are preliminary, explorative and lead to nothing. But how to be sure.

So rumours of meetings lead to more nervous meetings (so-and-so are gathering, they must be planning something; I feel weakened, my enemies must be after me; if they are ganging up, who can I mobilise; if I tell this-and-them that so-and-so is plotting, maybe they will finally act against him; if I talk up my support, they can neither hurt nor ignore me, etc.). Insecure times are rife with half-true, half-baseless reports of highly worrying developments. This is definitely what we are seeing now.

Much of the current political discomfort has its origins in the deterioration of relations between the US and President Karzai, and the political repositioning and jockeying that came with that. It led the President to believe that the proceedings of the presidential election – and to a certain extent the 2010 parliamentary election – were a blatant attempt by the international community to remove him, undermine him or intimidate him into submission. It is a feeling that has never left him and that allows him to believe the foreigners may be behind a whole host of misfortunes that is hitting his country and his family. It also persuaded him that he needed back-up plans and alternatives in terms of allies and benefactors. This combination of dependence and paranoia is an important driver for the mixed messages that come from the palace.

There is, as a result, a general sense of being in flux, which has been exacerbated by a wave of more recent incidents and developments: the string of assassinations that targeted high-profile officials in their own compounds; the wide-ranging speculations over which hidden hands are behind the killings (leading to new narratives over who is to be feared); all the talk about secret talks, coupled with long-standing suspicions that the war may really just be a cruel game; the complicated American message that while they have no interest in staying, they will not abandon the Afghans again (both of which are being simultaneously disbelieved); regular media reports that seem to suggest extensive presence and interference by foreign intelligence agencies (see for instance recent articles here, here and here), which fuel the growing distrust of the ‘real objectives’ of the foreigners that are here; the looming deadline of 2014 and the increasing expectations of what the second Bonn conference might mean for the Afghan political set-up. There is obviously a lot to talk about.

This has led to roughly three strands of concerns. First, there is a strong sense of foreboding among large parts of the population that the ‘transition’, whatever form it may take, will ultimately result in a combination of the rule of the rough (the violent, the uneducated, the exploitative, the over-conservative) and a general unraveling. Over the years the wish to leave the country, or to
send children abroad, has risen and waned. At the moment it is at a peak again
and many are trying to prepare their exit, in case they may need it.

Second, there is the heightened sense of alarm among those prominent
enough to be singled out in acts of targeting or revenge. It has led many of the
former commanders to limit their movements, increase their personal security,
be suspicious of formal meetings and meetings with foreign military, and carry
a weapon at all times (which in turn is accelerating the ongoing (para-)
militarization of Afghan society). The string of killings looks to them like an
intentional reshuffling of the cards and many of them fear they may be next.
Initially the high-profile killings mainly concerned former Jamiat-linked
commanders (Kandahar police chief Khan Mohammad, Kunduz police chief
Mowlana Seidkheili, Northern Zone police commander Daoud Daoud), but
the recent assassinations of Ahmed Wali Karzai and Jan Mohammad have
widened the scope of the targeting.

There are various ways to look at this. One is that the Taliban, in
response to the fierce Special Forces ‘kill/capture (mainly kill) campaign’, have
launched their own targeting campaign, in an effort to hit their opponents
where it hurts. But it is unlikely that the Taliban are doing this on their own,
given the high-level of inside facilitation that is needed to be able to come that
close, that often. At least two commanders (Khan Mohammad and Ahmad
Wali Karzai) were killed by people whom they had known and relied on for
years. Although the Taliban have put much effort into infiltration and
recruitment, there is a growing conviction that something else is going on.
Several interlocutors have commented that they believe the Taliban may
increasingly be offering or facilitating attackers to be used by anyone with a
grudge or an enemy they want to take care of.

Former factions now believe they are increasingly being targeted by old
enemies in a process of political repositioning. But behind that many suspect
the looming presence of foreign interference. This is illustrated in the
comments by presidential spokesman Waheed Omar’s immediately after
General Daoud’s killing: “No one from Afghanistan carries out attacks.
Everything shows that they are shaped outside Afghanistan. The President of
Afghanistan says these are foreign forces. We will continue the war against
terrorists who are foreigners. He is asking for your patience.” And yesterday,
Ustad Rabbani, currently the head of the High Peace Council, was quoted by
Tolo saying that “the assassination of high-profile Afghan figures is part of a
plot sketched by foreign intelligence organisations to misuse the name of the
Taliban and to defame Islam.”

The conspiracy theories are not new, but they seem to be gaining
traction in unprecedented ways, with the ‘West’ often being mentioned before
even Pakistan. The killings are in this view alternately seen as an effort to
weaken the President so that he is obliged to agree to US demands (in
particular long-term bases); an indication that Westerners have run out of patience and are taking out those whom they had blacklisted long ago; or – an old suspicion – part of an effort to intentionally prolong the war for their own reasons.

A former commander, now politician, recently took this view to its extreme: “If you want I can easily arrange a few suicide bombers to hit someone. It is very easy. The Taliban have become like a shop with different clients. And they have clients from three sides: Pakistan, the West – and when I say the West I don’t mean Europe, except of course England – and India, to hit Pakistan… Basically people think you [foreigners/Westerners] have instructed and paid the Taliban to do these latest attacks.” (Internationals would be wise not to brush such views aside too lightly. The fact that they do not seem that outlandish to many of the Afghans we speak to, illustrates the ever widening gap in how this conflict is viewed).

The third concern is the concern of the government – or rather: the concentric rings formed first by the President, second his various entourages, and third the wider political elite of those who have allowed themselves to be coopted. It centres on the fear of being outshone and replaced by other persons or groups, who may manage to capture the favour of the increasingly impatient international community. It builds on the assumption that the internationals may one day pick a new leader or ally, if only they can be persuaded that this is in their interest. As a result, opposition discussions are being closely monitored and trusted advisers closely watched.

Critics of President Karzai – whether situated in the formal opposition or within government – are engaged in what you could call an ongoing low-level brainstorm, in which they evaluate whether and when it might be feasible to propose a new political set-up and how to secure international support for the effort. The open opposition – roughly centred around a few key figures, including former NDS chief Amrullah Saleh, former Foreign Minister Dr Abdullah and the more recent coalition made up of Mohaqeq, Dostum and Ahmad Zia Massoud – continues to be preoccupied by their efforts to forge a more united front. Although the uprisings in the Middle East and the symbolic appeal of the upcoming Bonn conference are providing a sense of both opportunity and urgency, so far discussions seem to get stuck in disagreements over who will be (or which group will provide) the main personality that all others are expected to rally around.

The stand-off between the President and Parliament, which is consistently being played down by the Palace, is closely linked to this precarious balance between the government and the opposition. It is a balance in which both sides try to check each other’s influence – without exaggerating and thus possibly provoking a rash reaction from the other side that they may not be able to contain. Every now and then the media singles out some of the
rumour and posturing – state of emergency, impeachment, revolt – and reports on it, but for the moment the unraveling does not seem imminent.

Circumstances suggest that the killing of Ahmad Wali Karzai was not an orchestrated affair, but rather an escalated personal argument over money or a family matter. This, however, becomes largely irrelevant in the context of conspiracy theories.

The use of the word ‘foreigners’ is conveniently ambiguous, as it can cover both the regional neighbours, most prominently Pakistan, as well as the US-led international coalition, and suggests that secretive ‘hidden hands’ are at work. Although politicians and spokespersons may point the finger at foreigners while knowing better, either to deflect scrutiny or to arouse emotions, it does seem to increasingly resonate with what their audiences wonder.


**US-PAK-AFGHAN TALKS: IS THERE A POINT?**

The tripartite meeting between Afghanistan, Pakistan and the US representatives on August 2 took place against the backdrop of souring relationships, killing of Osama bin Laden and President Barak Obama's 2014 withdrawal plan. Despite such a grim scenario, the fact that the three countries decided to talk on issues of mutual concern was in itself positive. It shows that at least the US was not ready to give up its central role in bringing the suspicious neighbours together for a peace process.

But can this single burst of positive feeling undo a growing crescendo of suspicion and bickering among the key stakeholders in the Afghan peace process?

The meeting was attended by Afghan Foreign Minister Jaweed Ludin, his Pakistani counterpart Salman Bashir and US envoy to AfPak Marc Grossman. They discussed issues such as regional economic development, echoing Hillary Clinton's vision of a new Silk Road encompassing the whole region. But obviously what figured high on the agenda of the talks was the Afghan peace process. Afghanistan was keen that Pakistan must bring the Haqqani group to the negotiation table. Grossman was less enthusiastic about such a development and said "Pakistan fully supports the reconciliation process in Afghanistan".

The rehearsed bon homie could barely hide the profound mistrust and lassitude between the two 'allies'. The US, stung by Pakistan's duplicity and brazenness in preventing its diplomats and officers from working freely inside Pakistan, was not keen on Pakistan playing a bigger role in the reconciliation
process. The ISI’s role in supporting and sustaining terrorist groups on both sides of Durand Line raises serious questions about the army leadership’s intentions in the peace process. The US policy makers, echoing the words of the late Richard Holbrooke, believe that Pakistan has "to stop this war in Afghanistan".

Nonetheless both the US and Pakistan know that they simply cannot ignore each other if they want stability in Afghanistan. And here lies the first bone of contention. While the US is pushing forward with an exit strategy that includes talks with Taliban and a process of gradual transition where select areas would be handed over to the Afghan security forces, Pakistan nurses other ideas which undermine the Afghanistan’s sovereignty. The Pakistan Army is widely acknowledged as a key stumbling block in the process of peace building and reconciliation in Afghanistan. By waging covert actions in Afghanistan through the Haqqani network, the Army wields considerable influence to ensure that Pakistan’s core interest in Afghanistan, that is to deny India any major foothold, is protected.

By adopting this posture, the military leadership in Pakistan is infuriating at least some of the key policy makers in the US. The recent revelations made by Amrullah Saleh, a former Afghan Intelligence Chief, about the ISI sheltering Taliban chief Mullah Omar, will only sharpen the trust deficit between Islamabad and Washington.

Pakistan's refusal to give up its 'terror strategy' will grossly undermine the peace process in Afghanistan. Pakistan would do its utmost to ensure that its agents, Jalaluddin Haqqani and his network retain a key role to play in Afghanistan. Pakistan will also do all it can to impede any engagement in the reconciliation that comes from India. Pakistan’s policy is to keep India and the US at an arm's length in future Afghanistan story. With the deadline of 2014 well in mind, Pakistan is ready to take over as the main actor in Afghanistan, notwithstanding the fact that few in Afghanistan – and even fewer among the international community – are ready to see the Taliban entering Kabul for a second time.


**PROSPECTS FOR THE ENDGAME**

With the United States having committed itself to the ‘endgame’ in Afghanistan, one would have thought that Washington would be engaged intensely in this strategic objective.
Current developments appear to indicate otherwise. For a start, the deepening economic crisis and the resultant budgetary squabbles in Congress have left President Obama a much diminished leader. Even if the US has hardly ever permitted its economic constraints to influence its global ambitions, its domestic preoccupations raise inevitable questions as to how this could effect US policy in this region, particularly its ability to ensure a satisfactory outcome to the endgame in Afghanistan.

As a candidate, Obama had been an enthusiastic supporter of the Afghan war, calling it a “war of necessity”, but disillusionment set in early and he was soon asking his generals to agree on “benchmarks” for success in the war. Finally, in his strategy speech on June 22, 2011, he claimed that the US had largely achieved its goals in Afghanistan, setting in motion a timetable for withdrawal of combat troops, though acknowledging that peace was not possible without a political settlement inclusive of the Taliban, while warning that focus of US counter-terrorism efforts would shift from Afghanistan to Pakistan.

While this decision was shaped primarily by domestic political imperatives rather than by war strategy, recent developments in and around Afghanistan call into question US capacity to execute this strategy. For a start, while the US and its allies appear increasingly eager to wrap up their military engagement in Afghanistan, the Taliban are becoming bolder and more adventurous. Nothing signals this more starkly than the manner in which they bought down an American Chinook helicopter in Wardak province, killing 30 American Special Forces troops. Even if it was a ‘lucky shot’, it will have boosted the Taliban morale.

Within Afghanistan too, Karzai’s home base in Kandahar is gripped by fears over a power vacuum created by assassination of the president’s key allies, including his powerful brother, Ahmad Wali Karzai. These deaths have left the president exposed at a time when the US would have looked to him for a meaningful role in negotiations with Taliban.

The recent unexpected deterioration in Pakistan-US relations, especially between their military and intelligence organisations, which may even portend an unravelling of their ties, could become another complicating factor as regards US cooperation with Pakistan, particularly in reaching out to the Taliban. Moreover, the exacerbation of Saudi-Iranian ties and continuing hostility in US relations with Iran will not help either.

And finally, the new cast of ‘principals’ in Washington in critical national security-related assignments lack both the stature and the nuanced world view of their predecessors. Defence Secretary Robert Gates, a proven hand, had retained close rapport with his party compatriots, something that his gaffe-prone successor Leon Panetta lacks. The highly respected Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen, who was also viewed as
sympathetic to Pakistan, has been replaced by the comparatively less known General Dempsey. It is, however, the new CIA chief who could prove a huge gamble. Though competent and intelligent, General Petreaus is unabashedly ambitious and visibly contemptuous of those that dare to differ with him. Having failed to make any headway in Afghanistan, Petreaus is a frustrated general, determined to burnish his Afghan legacy. He is not viewed as a friend of Pakistan either and his presence in Langley may inject fresh tensions in relations with the White House, as well as in ties with the ISI.

It is nevertheless essential that the US formulate a comprehensive game plan and undertake a sustained effort to ensure that its exit from Afghanistan does not throw that country back into the throes of another civil war. That would be disastrous for the entire region, but, at the same time, a satisfactory conclusion could strengthen peace, stability and cooperative relations in this long-tormented region.


**Ramazan’s Lost Chance for an Afghan Truce**

A slew of questions were raised when a Chinook helicopter was shot down on 6 August in Afghanistan’s Wardak province killing 30 US servicemen – most of them elite Navy seals – and eight Afghans.

Will the heaviest loss of American lives in a single incident since 2001 heighten doubts about the Afghan mission among an already war-weary American public and Congress? Does the downing of the helicopter show the limits of America’s changed war effort that increasingly involves special operations missions? Will the blow signal a psychological shift in the war or was it a one-off? Does the incident dramatise the fragility of the transition underway, in which security responsibilities being transferred to Afghan forces have to be completed in 2014?

Most importantly what this development laid bare is the continuing tension in US policy between the declared goal of pursuing a negotiated political settlement and a military strategy still centred on kinetic actions. By the time the planned international conference convenes in Bonn this December, Washington wants to be able to announce that serious negotiations with the Taliban are in progress to end the decade long war. But are its military actions in Afghanistan serving this goal? Or are they undercutting the start of serious talks?

The answer is clouded in confusion. The helicopter incident came in the midst of escalating violence in Afghanistan. Recent months have seen a series of assassinations of high-profile Afghan officials and aggressive military
actions by US/Nato forces targeting the Taliban in Kandahar, Helmand and extending to eastern Afghanistan. This cycle of violence has intensified even as trilateral meetings of the so-called core group – Afghanistan, Pakistan and the US – have been underway to discuss how to reach out to Taliban leaders and engage them in negotiations.

The Taliban’s hit and run tactics have increasingly taken the form of assassinating top Afghan government figures. Since March, several officials have been killed including President Hamid Karzai’s brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai in a campaign that has especially unsettled Kandahar.

Meanwhile US Special Forces have been conducting an intense campaign of kill-or-capture raids to eliminate mid-level commanders and degrade the Taliban. These have entailed controversial night raids, which have provoked sharp criticism from President Karzai and calls from Afghans for an end to the deadly operations. Nato officials say that between April and July there were around 2,832 special operations raids. The mission in which the US helicopter was shot down was one such operation.

Meanwhile the renewal of Drone-fired missile attacks into North Waziristan is part of the same US strategy of killing as many Taliban commanders as possible even as American officials accept that all Taliban groups could potentially be part of the peace process. Confusion abounds over what the US hopes to achieve by simultaneously wanting to target and talk to Taliban leaders. In this ‘kill-capture-or-reconcile’ strategy, the US expects Pakistan to assist by facilitating contacts and at the same time take action against Taliban leaders unwilling to ‘reconcile’. And this while the US itself continues to ramp up military actions against the Taliban.

This approach will produce more not less violence, and is hardly a promising setting for serious talks. The cycle of revenge killings by both sides will hinder not help the start of meaningful negotiations. That is why a change of course is essential especially as there are indications of Taliban interest in a negotiated settlement – reflected in recent statements posted on its website. Instead of pursuing the current fight-and-talk approach, Washington in fact had the opportunity to offer a Ramazan ceasefire to help prepare the ground for negotiations that it acknowledges is the only way to end its violent entanglement.

Such an offer, whether confined to selected areas or signalling an end to night raids, would have tested the Taliban’s interest in peace and given a sharp focus to the trilateral process. A halt in fighting during the holy month would have helped to ascertain who among the Taliban could be brought into the reconciliation process and which elements opposed talks. Instead violence this Ramazan has far surpassed that in the same month in previous years.

The US unwillingness so far to consider any interim confidence-building measures – suspending nighttime raids in return for the Taliban’s cessation of
assassinations – may reflect the continuing lack of clarity in the Obama Administration about how to proceed in Afghanistan. Different parts of the administration seem to want different things. While the White House and the State Department appear to want the reconciliation process to accelerate and military strategy recalibrated to support that goal, it is not clear if the Pentagon and the CIA are fully on board. The US military still seems to balk at talks with the Taliban, regarding them as an admission of failure to win the war. Where the CIA stands on this is signalled by its continued use of Drones to hammer the Haqqani network in North Waziristan.

Whatever the internal dynamics in Washington, operational US strategy is still at odds with its declared objective of seeking a negotiated end to the war. A ‘pause’ in fighting – effected through a Ramazan truce or by one later – can open the diplomatic space and generate the momentum to speed up peace talks. Escalating special operation missions provide the Taliban an incentive to continue fighting and not abandon it in preference for talks.

The notion that more fighting will force the Taliban into negotiations means pursuing elusive battlefield gains without the assurance that the Taliban will respond to these methods. Bringing military pressure to bear in an effort to soften the adversary’s negotiating stance is a well-rehearsed tactic. But there comes a point when this runs it course and a pause in fighting is essential to pave the way for negotiations. That moment arrived when the Obama Administration declared months ago that it sought a political settlement and supported Afghan reconciliation.

The historical record of peace processes suggests that they start with some form of agreed stand down leading to a negotiated cease-fire. Pakistan has long advocated the need to advance the reconciliation process by peace building measures. It has stressed the importance of properly sequencing the steps necessary to secure a negotiated settlement. In recent exchanges with the US, top Pakistani military officials have said that the concept of ‘Afghan reconciliation’ needs to be turned into an operational plan. This means ensuring that the political strategy determines the military mission and steps taken in that regard advance a political settlement.

Pakistan has argued that a mutual reduction of violence will help to create the political conditions for dialogue. It has proposed a roadmap for an Afghan-led peace process that involves three phases and starts with a reciprocal de-escalation of violence to create the conditions for peace efforts. This is seen as setting the stage to persuade the Taliban to renounce al Qaeda – the most important strategic goal shared by the core group. Once this is achieved talks can make real progress. The third and final phase aimed at securing acceptance of the Afghanistan Constitution can follow later in a process in which the Afghan parties can discuss modifications to arrive at a new constitutional consensus.
It remains to be seen how the three parties in the core group are able to evolve agreement on translating the reconciliation objective into an implementable plan. What can give the early stage of this process a decisive impetus is if the US accepts mutual cessation of violence as a necessary starting point. A plausible and credible plan can then be crafted for a peace process that can over time deliver a negotiated settlement.


**PAKISTANI AND INDIAN, HAND-IN-HAND**

In the darkness of night, we lit candles to let the world see the beginning of a new chapter in the annals of India and Pakistan. Ours was the 17th pilgrimage — we have been doing it every year since 1994 — to the Attari-Wagah border this week. Today I am convinced that even though the journey is long, there is no reason to doubt that we will not be able to make the destination.

New Delhi and Islamabad are in the midst of negotiating a peace deal. Foreign secretaries and foreign ministers have met to pave the way for a summit between the prime ministers of the two countries. They are the ones to push the pace of talks which, at present, oscillate between the steps needed to eliminate terrorism and the formula that would find a common ground between India and Pakistan.

However, I do not pin much hope on governments on the two sides. They have different priorities and have locked themselves into snarls of fear and mistrust. No settlement is possible without involving the three — India, Pakistan and Kashmir. And I do not think that there is such a formula possible, although Pakistan's former foreign minister Khurshid Kasuri claims that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh would have visited Islamabad to sign the agreement at Islamabad if the lawyers' agitation in Pakistan had not come in the way.

I still hope for an agreement and my optimism is due to the response by the ever-increasing number of people who attended Attari-Wagah border event and raised the slogan: “Long Live India-Pakistan Dosti”. This time, it was a sea of humanity. Nearly 200,000 people had come to the border to participate in the function where we talked of peace and friendship and where we heard the leading singers of India and Pakistan displaying their skill.

The most heartening and somewhat surprising aspect was the presence of the Pakistanis right at the border to exchange candles and to raise the slogan of friendship jointly between the two countries. Never before had the Pakistanis come to the zero point at the border, sometimes because of
government pressure, sometimes because of threats by Islamic parties and
sometimes because of mere diffidence.

Happily, I find that a group of Pakistanis has come up to dare the anti-
Indian opinion makers in their country. They have braved more difficulties
than us because theirs is still a military-blessed civil government. We too got
threats from the saffron crowd but the democratic structure in India
strengthened us in our resolve to span the distance between the two countries.

Former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, a sane voice in Pakistan, has said
that person-to-person contact should continue as it was linked with peace and
prosperity. He said both Pakistan and India competed with each other in
defence, due to which Pakistan was lagging behind in infrastructure, health and
development. India’s poverty is also linked with too much expenditure on
defence.

The media on the Indian side was once again caught napping. For it,
thousands of people shouting for peace and thousands from the other side
lending their voice to the demand for friendship does not make news. Most
newspapers and TV networks suffer from prejudice against Pakistan, which
they have had for years. Have they ever considered consequences of Pakistan
disintegrating or going under the Taliban?

It was Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, leading a government of the
Bharatiya Janata Party which still thrives in disseminating hatred, who wrote in
the visitors’ book at Minar-e-Pakistan — the place where the resolution for the
formation of Pakistan was adopted in 1940 — that India’s integration and
prosperity was dependent on the integration and prosperity of Pakistan. The
process of peace can be accelerated if this is understood both at New Delhi
and Islamabad. There is no alternative to friendship between the two nations.

Kuldip Nayar, *Express Tribune* (Islamabad), August 22, 2011,

**HOW TO PREPARE AFGHANISTAN FOR US WITHDRAWAL**

As the United States begins a security transition in Afghanistan, it has focused
the vast majority of its strategy, efforts and resources on building Afghan
security forces and weakening insurgents through military pressure. Yet the
broader Afghan state is in crisis. Afghans we met with during a recent trip to
Kabul warned that their country’s fragile democratic institutions were
crumbling. If the current political trajectory continues, Afghan security forces
may have no state left to defend.

A range of Afghans — government officials, opposition figures and
members of civil society — argued that the United States must perform a
tricky balancing act to strengthen the state. We should heal our rift with
Afghan President Hamid Karzai but without providing unconditional financial and political support, which weakens Afghan state institutions and contributes to a culture of impunity. Relying exclusively on Karzai or pushing to marginalize him would be calamitous for Afghanistan’s stability.

Navigating this minefield demands deft diplomacy — one that uses transparency, conditions and incentives to help Afghanistan create a political system that is lasting, includes the current opposition and leaves the door open for a settlement with elements of the Taliban. Key shifts in US policy are required.

First, it requires the United States to be crystal clear about its objectives in Afghanistan, supported by a political track that is synchronized with the military strategy between now and 2014 — and beyond. Conspiracy theories abound even at the most senior levels of the Afghan government that the United States wants to use Afghanistan indefinitely as a base to project power in Asia and the Middle East as part of a new “Great Game.” Many Afghans view our stated Counter-terrorism objectives as secondary to this larger interest. This perception is partially due to Afghanistan’s fertile ground for conspiracy theories; it is also a result of mixed messages emanating from US policymakers, particularly in Congress but also in the Obama administration.

The new team, led by Ambassador Ryan Crocker and Gen. John Allen, must reduce the misperceptions and create a civil-military road map that better integrates our political, economy and military strategies. This plan needs to work backward from 2014, when a transition occurs under the Afghan constitution from Karzai to an elected successor, as well as from allied forces to the Afghan government.

Second, despite its public aversion to nation-building, the US government must support Afghanistan’s institutions and democratic forces, including the media, parliament, Supreme Court, Independent Election Commission and even the political opposition. Although these bodies remain weak, they channel more Afghan voices into the political system, creating increased accountability. Karzai has said that he will step down in 2014, and the United States must work with him and Afghanistan’s parliament to reform the electoral system to enable political party formation and to support the emergence of Afghan leaders who can assume national leadership positions after him.

Third, the United States must more effectively use its leverage to encourage political and economic reforms. The strategic partnership agreement under negotiation offers an opportunity to clarify US and Afghan objectives and to provide minimum conditions for ongoing US support. The United States should establish within that agreement specific reforms required by the Afghans in return for continued assistance to the Afghan government and its National Security Forces.
Fourth, the United States needs to commit to facilitating an Afghan political settlement. The ambivalence in the US approach on this issue is creating confusion in the region and within the Afghan leadership and is increasing tensions between the Afghan and US governments. The United States should support the appointment of an international mediator, accept an office in a third country for discussions to take place with Taliban insurgents, and calibrate its military approach to support an eventual settlement. It must push for an open and transparent process, which includes the domestic opposition and civil society, so that their fears are addressed. And the one view that seems to unite the entire Afghan political spectrum is that the United States needs a comprehensive regional diplomatic strategy that stops Pakistan from playing a spoiler role.

President Obama took the right step in announcing the start of the transition in Afghanistan. After nearly 10 years, our troops need to begin coming home, and Afghan security forces need to take the lead. But as this security transition occurs we need to accelerate our efforts to help Afghanistan strengthen its political institutions, power-sharing arrangements and economic foundations to make sure the country will be able stand on its own.


THE AFGHAN ‘WAY FORWARD’

Throughout the ongoing Afghan war, now in its tenth year, the fundamental issue has been not so much how this war was being conducted but how it will end. A basic lesson of military history ignored in this case is that you don’t start a war unless you know how to end it. At least till now, Washington doesn’t seem to have any fresh thinking, much less a dialogue strategy to end the Afghan war that in the first instance was a wrong war to start.

It has been the costliest conflicts in America’s history and also one of the longest ones which has been prolonged not for national interests but by its own inertia. No wonder people in the US and its allied European countries are sick and tired of this unwinnable war and want their troops back from Afghanistan as early as possible. President Obama who wasted two years in an ill-advised surge operation has been facing public as well as congressional pressure for a speedy pull out.

With his eyes on next year’s presidential election for a second term, Obama has been seeking to redress the situation to avert the repeat of popular backlash his party suffered in last year’s mid-term elections. He recently announced a troop drawdown involving phased removal of 33,000 US troops
from Afghanistan by summer next year to be followed by a “steady pace” of reduction until 2014, when under a transitional process, the Afghans are expected to take “full control of their own security”.

War wary sentiments has been reinforced all over the world by the argument that if Osama bin Laden was officially declared dead there was no excuse or rational left for the US to continue this war in Afghanistan. Even in Washington, political thinking across the party lines looked at Bin Laden’s death as a “game-changing” opportunity to build momentum for the beginning of the endgame in Afghanistan.

Logically therefore, once he over-ruled the predominantly militarist approach and announced the troop drawdown, President Obama should have moved ahead more vigorously with a sustainable peace process in Afghanistan. By now, he should have drawn a clearer blueprint for negotiations with the Taliban as an essential part of his Afghan strategy that would have helped him not only reduce the US military footprint in Afghanistan but also prepare the ground for an honourable US exit from this costly war.

In the absence of a coherent strategy, Washington’s haphazard approach has not gone beyond tactically-motivated perfunctory contacts with so-called Taliban ‘representatives’ under German sponsorship. Even these contacts seem to have run into an early cul de sac after they were leaked to the media prompting an abrupt Taliban denial of any talks with US officials. No meaningful dialogue can take place in an environment of mutual mistrust and suspicion.

The foremost requisite for any dialogue in a conflict situation is to hold fire and not to let military means disrupt the political process. Before sitting together for a genuine peace settlement, both sides need to do lot of confidence-building and also develop a mutually agreed framework of modalities for the conduct of their dialogue. They will have to come out of their straight-jacketed mode to be able to have enough flexibility for a political settlement.

Given the intensity of deeply seared trust deficit on both sides, the UN alone can provide a neutral ground and credible mechanism for the main players to negotiate the Afghan peace. Once the rules of the game are established in good faith, instead of aimlessly pursuing further tactical objectives, it would be advisable for both sides to move into serious talks through a credible intermediary, preferably a special representative of the UN Secretary-General, who will lead the mediation phase in evolving broad parameters of an eventual political settlement.

Neither side should have any problem with this UN-led approach which has already been tested in the 1980s Geneva Accord leading to the Soviet exit from Afghanistan. There are no longer preconditions for the talks to begin. The US already recognises the Taliban as part of the Afghan “political fabric”
and is ready to negotiate with them a political settlement leading to a complete withdrawal of foreign troops in return for Taliban’s acceptance of a constitutional set up in Afghanistan and severance of links with al Qaeda and any other terrorist networks.

According to Henry Kissinger, for any negotiations to turn into a viable US exit strategy, four conditions must be met: a cease-fire; withdrawal of all or most American and allied forces; the creation of a coalition government or division of territories among the contending parties (or both); and an enforcement mechanism. The first step in any roadmap to peace in Afghanistan has to be mutual cessation of hostilities, especially prior to the upcoming two Afghan-related conferences, first in Istanbul in November and the other in Bonn in December.

Since both these conferences are aimed at charting out Afghanistan’s post-transition future, it would be all the more propitious to have Taliban included rather than excluded from these events so as to provide them an opportunity to be on board with a direct stake in the future socio-political dispensation of their country. On their part, the Taliban must also demonstrate their goodwill by associating themselves in good faith with these conferences as part of the larger Afghan contingent. If properly choreographed and skillfully steered, these events could serve as a timely springboard for an eventual political settlement in Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, the Afghan government must also reset its functional mode and improve governance, limit corruption, and augment the rule of law to sustain Afghan public support for the political process. On its part, the US must overcome the ‘trust deficit’ it now faces in both Afghanistan and Pakistan over the very premise on which the proposed transition is based. It is important that the transition process does not ignore the Afghan demographic realities and is not weighted in favour or against any particular ethnic group. Durable peace in Afghanistan will come only through genuine reconciliation of all Afghan factions with no selectivity or exclusivity.

In its essence, the Afghan peace process will involve two tracks: one addressing the Afghan domestic governance issues, and the other dealing with guarantees on its non-aligned status and regional security situation addressing the security concerns of the states in the region and the broader international community. On core domestic issues, Afghans alone are the final arbiters and should be resolving them in keeping with their own culture and tradition through a multi-tiered national dialogue under UN auspices.

No reconciliation imposed from outside will work in Afghanistan, not even in the name of a regional approach. As the Afghans approach an agreement on their governance arrangements, the UN should directly engage the neighbours in the region and broader international community in a parallel
track on guarantees for regional security, economic cooperation, and post-conflict peace-keeping operations.

The Kabul Declaration of December 22, 2002 on Good Neighbourly Relations signed under UN auspices by Afghanistan’s six neighbouring states, namely Iran, China, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, provides the most appropriate multilateral basis for these guarantees on Afghanistan’s independence and non-interference in its internal affairs.

And lastly, Pakistan has direct stakes in the Afghan peace as it is in its interest to have an independent, friendly and united Afghanistan. For Pakistan, to play its indispensable role effectively in the peace process, its legitimate concerns will have to be addressed by ensuring that the Afghan soil is not used for undermining its security and territorial integrity.


**TAJIKISTAN SUMMIT**

An important four-power summit concluded in Tajikistan on September 2 where Pakistan, Tajikistan, Russia and Afghanistan agreed to work closely to combat terrorism, drug trafficking and organised crime, and stressed the importance of linking their countries through modern highways and railroads. Significantly, Russia lamented the lack of progress in Pakistan-Afghanistan energy projects that could help bring stability to the volatile region. “There’s a whole range of projects that have been on the table for a long time which have seen no movement forward and which should be implemented,” the Russian president said, referring to the transnational gas pipeline and the CASA-1000 through which power will be sent from Tajikistan to Afghanistan and Pakistan. Indeed, like previous years, this year too there was talk of Central Asian electricity, and like previous years, the transport infrastructure needed to be able to achieve this continues to be missing. Given that Pakistan has been consistently looking to Tajikistan to strengthen its national power grid and Tajikistan has been eyeing Gwadar for an outlet to the sea through Pakistan, it is important to correct this infrastructure deficit and aim for the early establishment of air, road and rail links from Central Asia to Pakistan. In this regard, the road link from Dushanbe to Chitral in Pakistan and through Iskatul Gulkhana in Afghanistan is a welcome idea. It will also link the ports in Gwadar and Karachi to Dushanbe and onwards to Russia.

In Tajikistan, the leaders also stressed cooperation to fight and eradicate terrorism and extremism. Most important in this regard was the Russian and Pakistani suggestion that the Nato-led coalition in Afghanistan step up training
of local security forces as it completes its phased withdrawal so that the new Afghan force is able to independently provide for the defence capabilities of the state, and combat extremist groups and drug traffickers. Russia is most keen to demonstrate it is playing a constructive role in improving security in a region where it has had a major influence historically and where it now wants to expand its footprint, especially as relations between Islamabad and Washington plummet. The thrust of the Tajikistan summit, as of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, is to replace terrorism with trade as the mode of communication between states. Indeed, if Pakistan wants to become a player in the Central Asian region, it is essential to establish trade and trade routes and stand firmly against the export of extremism from non-state actors. For decades, Pakistan has been quietly supplying the food markets of Central Asia through smuggling. The Pakistani potential for growing food crops can only be realised if it becomes a permanent source of supply to the region through secure and formal trade routes.