

Seminar Report

FUTURE OF AFGHANISTAN SECURITY ENVIRONMENT AND EFFECT ON REGIONAL DYNAMICS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Regional Dynamics are greatly influenced by the situation in Afghanistan. The next decade is an important one for stability in Afghanistan and regional support is a necessity to achieve the goal.

The Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) initiative for achieving peace in Afghanistan has not been fully successful. The First Trilateral Meet (TM) set up by Russia in Moscow involving China and Pakistan has been opposed by Afghanistan as it had no Afghan representation (the Seminar was held on 14 February 2017—a day before the second meet in Moscow). The main aim of the TM was to send a clear message indirectly to the United States that the stakes in Afghanistan are the concern of regional powers also.

China has increased engagement with Afghanistan and it is speaking directly to Afghanistan now instead of through Pakistan as was done earlier.

Pakistan's position towards Afghanistan has remained unchanged and it will not change its policies towards Afghanistan even after the new Chief of Army Staff has taken over the policy decision-making.

Afghanistan needs defence equipment for effective conduct of operations against Taliban, and for this international support remains critical.

Geo-politically, it is important to increase military assistance by India to Afghanistan, including sustenance and maintenance systems for a prolonged period.

Security situation in Afghanistan can only be stabilized after Taliban is controlled. In addition, the turmoil in Afghanistan will continue unless Pakistan is made to change policy by the bigger powers in the region.

The future of Afghanistan's security will depend largely on the success of regional and international cooperation and India has a role in the same.

Increase in military assistance is recommended though deployment of troops, presently, is not recommended.

DETAILED REPORT

General

Even after 15 years of Taliban being driven out of Kabul, there is no peace in Afghanistan. In the same timeframe the democratic process has grown with three elections with the successive governments too are striving to achieve peace. Consequently, Afghanistan remains a focal point for regional dynamics with the situation in Afghanistan affecting the complete region. The next decade is important for Afghanistan and regional support is a necessity to achieve stability.

Afghanistan

Afghan National Security Force

The Afghanistan Army is 3,52,000 strong today. Afghanistan has completed the transition to local troops being responsible for security due to reduction in foreign troops from approximately 1,00,000 to approximately 10,000. Afghanistan faced the toughest summer last year . Afghanistan still needs long-term strategic support and even though it has got some international support, however, there are still gaps in its defence like inadequate air power. ANSF's future strategy is to focus on the people to garner support for operations while also increasing the capability of intelligence gathering.

Peace Process

The QCG initiative has not worked due to lack of support and unwillingness from Pakistan. Afghanistan also opposed the First TM set by Russia in Moscow involving China and Pakistan as it had no Afghan representation and said Afghanistan should be in the driver's seat for any such forum. Afghanistan was of the view that a trilateral mechanism involving the United States, India, and Afghanistan can increase security in the region and India can play an increased role in this.

Taliban Effect

Taliban wants power sharing and the imposition of the Sharia without accepting the Constitution or giving up their weapons. The challenge for Afghanistan is that it has to conduct two parallel dialogues with Taliban and Pakistan Army presently to deal with the Taliban issue.

Pakistan

Pakistan's position towards Afghanistan has remained unchanged and till Pakistan Army thinks that it has a hold on Afghanistan political structure it won't change its policies towards Afghanistan even after the new COAS charge. The effect of Trump administrations actions towards Pakistan will decide future steps to be taken by Pakistan Army also.

The new Pakistan Army Chief, General Bajwa has the following challenges:

1. To retain primacy of Pakistan Army.
2. To retain Pakistan's foothold in the international process involving Afghanistan.
3. To reduce Indian influence in Afghanistan.

The Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) Reforms Report by Pakistan states that the province has the worst socio-economic indicators in the country. Real change in the Region will take place only when Pakistan's Afghanistan policy changes.

Pakistan wants reduced Indian engagement in Afghanistan, access to Central Asia, and a close working relationship between Afghan intelligence and the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI).

Though there is some disarray in Taliban ranks, Pakistan is able of manipulating factions to suit their purpose.

China

China has increased engagement with Afghanistan and is speaking directly to Afghanistan now instead of through Pakistan as was done earlier. Main reason for this is investments in the China-Pakistan

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Economic Corridor (CPEC) while other interests include controlling Uighurs in Xinjiang, Daesh/Islamic State (IS) threat, economic interests, and controlling drug menace.

China needs the Pakistan Army to maintain a peaceful environment. Ability of Pakistan Army to provide security to the CPEC is questionable and Chinese have recently raised a Special Force for the same.

Russia

Russia hosted a meeting (First TM) at Moscow between Pakistan, Russia, and China regarding Afghanistan without any Afghan presence. The main purpose was to send a political message to the United States. Russia sees Daesh as a United States created problem.

India's Assistance to Afghanistan

In December 2015, India's decision to give Afghanistan 04 x MI-25 Hptrs changed India's stance as no lethal equipment was provided earlier.

Geo-politically, it may be worthwhile to increase military assistance by India to Afghanistan based on the following considerations:

Russia

It seems to be concerned about the influence of IS Khorasan. Therefore, any additional effort by India that could reduce that threat should be welcomed. It is also likely that Russia is trying to make an entry back into Afghanistan and increase in military assistance by India will be detrimental to that aspiration.

China

Keeping China's interests in Afghanistan in mind, if the military assistance from India can mitigate the threats from ISIL and Uighurs', it may have no objection to that. However, if it impinges on her economic and political interests it may not support that effort.

United States

The United States will welcome any effort that can support the drawdown of its forces.

Pakistan

Pakistan will be opposing any such effort by India that could reduce its influence.

Central Asian Republics

There is likely to support from Central Asia Republics (CAR) nations for strengthening the hands of the Afghan government.

Possible increase in military assistance could be in the following way:

1. Supply of lethal equipment.
2. Training of a Special Forces Brigade of Afghanistan.
3. Increase in numbers for training of Afghan National Army (ANA) personnel.
4. Training of Afghan National Police.
5. Training of Afghan Women Police.
6. Increased cooperation in intelligence sharing.
7. Increase the number of treatment for casualties.
8. Maintenance of off-road equipment for both Afghan Army and Air Force.

In case of enhanced military support to Afghanistan, the following aspects need consideration:

1. Indian armed forces themselves are short of weapons and equipment.
2. It is not only adequate to increase the assistance but systems need to be put in place to sustain and maintain them.
3. Both India and Afghanistan hold Russian origin equipment, hence, maintenance aspects will be easier.

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4. With the operations against the Taliban a prolonged one, any deployment would be a long one.
5. India will have to get into an understanding with Russia for supply of spares.

It is also questionable whether active military support by India can actually do anything meaningful where 1,00,000 troops of the United States and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) could not do much.

Conclusion

Security situation in Afghanistan can only be stabilized after Taliban is controlled. In addition, the turmoil in Afghanistan will remain unless Pakistan is made to change policy by the bigger powers in the Region.

The present nature of Afghanistan political arrangements is also partly driving the uncertainty in Afghanistan.

The future of Afghanistan's security will depend largely on the success of regional and international cooperation and India has a role in the same.

All actions by India need to be viewed through the aspect of Cost vs Benefits.

Increase in Military assistance is recommended though deployment of troops, presently, is not recommended.

CONCEPT NOTE

Let us reflect with urgency on what more must be done and what we must avoid in Afghanistan so that its citizens can self-sustain peace and economic growth. ... an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled process is key. It is the only guarantor of durability of solutions.

– Prime Minister Narendra Modi
Heart of Asia Conference in Amritsar in December 2016

General

Growing insecurity, likelihood of declining commitment of the United States, and increase in Russia's regional involvement in concert with China is the new changed regional paradigm surrounding Afghanistan. Its security woes remain the same till Pakistan changes tack and supports the process wholeheartedly. Afghanistan also is being ignored in the decision-making process in various forums. India remains a bystander on the sidelines as it provides support in terms of development assistance, trade and military training and assistance.

The declaration in the recently concluded Heart of Asia Ministerial Conference in Amritsar also stated that the issue of concern was the 'gravity of the security situation in Afghanistan in particular and the region and the high level of violence caused by the Taliban and other terrorist groups'. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani also came out strongly against external intervention in the country's internal affairs during the same conference blaming Pakistan for providing a sanctuary for the 30 odd terrorist groups that are attempting to destabilize Afghanistan.

Regional Scan

China has recently increased its engagement with Afghanistan in the areas of investment, economic and humanitarian assistance as well as to a small extent military aid. It remains reluctant to consider a security role in Afghanistan, through making major diplomatic

efforts to promote the Afghan peace process. China has always remained reluctant to engage in security issues that carry too great a risk of going wrong. This seems the case in Afghanistan too, where China would have been seen as meddling in what the United States and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) were doing.

There would, however, be concerns about the deterioration of security in Afghanistan since numerous international security forces withdrew from the country in 2014 and of becoming a target of terrorist groups such as the Taliban, who might have links with Islamic independence groups in Xinjiang (the recent announcement on tightening of border controls in its north-western Xinjiang region) and China definitely benefits from a reconstructed Afghanistan. China is consequently setting-up an anti-terrorism alliance with Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Tajikistan, to tackle the threat of terrorism and extremism. The four countries agreed on establishing a 'four-country mechanism' to share intelligence and training.

A TM was also held recently in December 2016 between representatives of Russia, China, and Pakistan in Moscow on the political and security situation in Afghanistan. The Meet focused on growing influence of Daesh in the country. The three countries agreed to a flexible approach to remove certain figures from sanctions lists as part of efforts to foster a peaceful dialogue between Kabul and the Taliban movement. Afghanistan had, however, objected to the meeting which had excluded Kabul. The recently conducted series of QCG meets also did not yield results and it has petered down in its efforts. This indicates a breakdown of regional and maybe global consensus over Afghanistan.

Pakistan's new COAS, General Qamar Javed Bajwa has been invited to visit Afghanistan after he spoke to Afghan's current President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah. What approach General Bajwa takes towards Afghanistan will be an important factor for peace and stability in the country in the months ahead.

Iran continues its 'Wait and Watch' attitude while denying any contact with the Taliban rebels though there are reports of some

outreach by Iran on the same. (Iran is reported to have hosted the leaders of the Taliban at the Islamic Unity Conference.)

Afghan Military

The Afghan Armed Forces are presently overstretched and are being tested continuously by the Taliban. They are on an upward trend as far as capability building is concerned. As regards funding, the former United States President Barack Obama had authorized US\$ 4.26 billion for the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) for the Fiscal Year 2017 through the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017. The NATO coalition also approved US\$ 390 million for projects advancing the capabilities of the Afghan forces. The 2017 ANA Trust Fund Implementation Plan will fund more than 37 projects for critical sustainment of the Afghan Army, including their salaries and incentive pay, infrastructure and logistic sustainment, and more. These will allow for unhindered improvement of the forces.

India

Though India is arguably at the sidelines of the security imbroglio surrounding Afghanistan, it is making the right noises. It is involved with Afghanistan in trade, development and military support and there is much more it can do. The recent Chabahar Deal with Iran allows India easier access to Afghanistan goods and vice versa, but keeping the Zaranj-Delaram axis operational will be a challenge.

Whether India moves on to a military intervention also needs to be introspected upon. Even the US Commander in Afghanistan, General John Nicholson has said they would welcome an increased Indian assistance in Afghanistan while endorsing his understanding of India's actions being calibrated due to Pakistan concerns. Isn't it time to de-hyphenate the Indian policy in Afghanistan from Pakistan? Is there also a case for India to be the bridge between Afghanistan and the United States slowly edging itself in to a desired status?

SEMINAR PROGRAMME

<i>Time</i>	<i>Event</i>	<i>Speakers</i>
10:00 –10:30 h	Tea and Registration	
10:30–10:35 h	Welcome Address	Lieutenant General BS Nagal, PVSM, AVSM, SM (Retired), Director, CLAWS
10:35–12:10 h	Session 1: Regional Scan and Afghan Military	
10:35–10:45 h	Introductory Remarks by Chair	Vivek Katju
10:45–11:00 h	Current and Futuristic State of Afghan Military Forces	HE Dr Shaida Abdali
11:00–11:15 h	The Efforts of China, Russia, and Pakistan Towards a Stable Afghanistan	Rakesh Sood
11:15–11:30 h	The Future of Pakistan's Afghanistan Strategy Under New COAS	Nitin Gokhale
11:30–12:10 h	Interactive Session Including Closing Remarks by Chair	
12:10–12:30 h	Tea Break	
12:30–13:45 h	Session 2: India and Afghanistan	
12:30–12:40 h	Introductory Remarks by Chair	Vivek Katju
12:40–12:55 h	India's Current Development, Trade and Military Assistance to Afghanistan	Harsh Pant
12:55–13:10 h	India's Increased Military Assistance in the Future: Pros and Cons	Lieutenant General SL Narsimhan, PVSM, AVSM,** VSM (Retired)
13:10–13:45 h	Interactive Session Including Closing Remarks by Chair	
13:45–14:45 h	Lunch	







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National Seminar on
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