
India's Afghanistan Policy

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The war in Afghanistan is far from over. The security situation in the country is unlikely to improve. On the contrary, signs of escalation of the conflict in the coming days are clearly discernable. Reconciliation with the Taliban, a critical element for the survival and political stability of Afghanistan, is unlikely to fructify due to lack of will and assertiveness on the part of the major powers, coupled with Pakistan's continued quest for establishing strategic depth in Afghanistan. The Afghan economic situation is far from satisfactory. The political uncertainties and the compelling circumstances, thus, created will narrow down the political space available for any meaningful representational political order within the country. Under these circumstances, what should India's foreign policy approach to Afghanistan be?

India's policy options for Afghanistan will be dictated by the security situation, the ability of Afghanistan's security forces to withstand the Taliban's onslaughts envisaged during the 2016 campaigning season, the deteriorating economic situation, and the irrefutable external dimension to the conflict. Peace and stability in Afghanistan are of vital national interest to India. The presence of radical outfits like the Taliban and the Haqqani network within the power structures of Kabul, threatens the security and stability in the region, posing serious implications for India. Given the constraints and prevailing uncertainty, India's options are restricted and, consequently, it may not be possible to bring about any radical shift in its

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Afghan policy, at least in the near-term. India having already committed US\$2 billion in Afghanistan towards various development assistance programmes, will have to remain engaged with that country.¹ As a responsible country in the region, India cannot afford to either abandon Afghanistan or act in haste to embark on any ill-considered endeavour. In order to arrive at a workable policy, it is necessary to understand the prevailing ailments afflicting Afghanistan.

The Security Scenario

The Taliban launched a major spring offensive in Kunduz, a province in northern Afghanistan on April, 24, 2015. The assaulting terrorists, consisting of foreign fighters of Chechen, Pakistan, Tajik and Uzbek origin were driven out of their base in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan, powered by Pakistan's military operation "Zarb-e-Azb" launched on January, 15, 2015. The Taliban temporarily seized Kunduz city, a provincial capital, as well as 16 district centres, across the north. While the Afghanistan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) were able to regain control of Kunduz city and 13 of the district centres, UN reports indicate that approximately 25 per cent of districts remained contested throughout the country at the end of October 2015.² The fall of Kunduz highlighted critical shortcomings in the capabilities of the Afghan security forces.

Consequent to the Kunduz attack, the Taliban terror base now stands well-established in the provinces of Badakhshan, Takhar, Faryab, Zabul, Baghlan, Jozjan, Baghdiz and Kunduz, all in the northern

parts of Afghanistan. The proximity of the base to Central Asia and Ferghana Valley, shared among three countries—Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan—poses a major threat to countries of the region. Ferghana Valley, a hotbed of Islamic terrorism has the potential of being used as a launch pad for attacks in Central Asia. Kunduz is a transit point for smuggling drugs to Europe through Central Asia. Control of Kunduz would help the militant cause economically.

The Afghanistan-Pakistan border region remains a sanctuary for various

militant groups and is a security challenge to Afghanistan's and regional stability. As of now, Al Qaeda, Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), Haqqani network, Lashkar-e Tayyeba (LeT), Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province (ISIL-K), Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Lashkar-e-Janghvi (LeJ), Harakat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HuJI) and Hizb-e-Islami-Gulbuddin (HIG) are operating in the country. ISIL-K has become active in the eastern provinces of Nangarhar and Kunar in the past six to eight months. It has declared the birth of the "Wilayat Khorasan" – or Khorasan province – in Afghanistan. The terror outfit is in the process of establishing its base in the areas of Jalalabad in eastern Afghanistan, and in Kunar province to its north. It is composed primarily of former members of the TTP and the disgruntled elements of the Afghan Taliban, mostly of Pakistani origin. Days after Mullah Omar's death was announced in January 2015, IMU pledged allegiance to the Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Though the Pakistan Taliban and the Haqqani network have spoken

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of allegiance to ISIL from time to time, reliable evidence of their commitment and loyalty to the terror group is yet to show up. ISIL-K is said to have established three training camps in the eastern parts of Afghanistan.³ On January 14, 2016, the US State Department declared ISIL-K a foreign terrorist organisation under US law.

The UN has reported that the overall level of security related incidents increased and intensified during the period August 2015 to end October, with 6,601 incidents as compared to 5,516 incidents (19 percent increase) during the same period in 2014. The number of incidents during this period has been the maximum since the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) began reporting on Afghanistan in November 2012.⁴

Control of Territory

The Long War Journal has been tracking the Taliban's attempts to gain control of territory since the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) ended its military mission in Afghanistan and switched to an "advise and assist" role in June 2014. The journal estimates that 29 of Afghanistan's 398 districts are under the Taliban's control, and another 36 districts are contested; 335 districts are either under government control, or their status cannot be determined.⁵ Bill Roggio, the editor of *The Long War Journal*, has confirmed that about one-fifth of the country is controlled or contested by the Taliban, and based on his understanding of how the Taliban operate, he said, "They probably either control or heavily influence about a half of the country."⁶

Civilian Casualties

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Midyear Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, August 2015, between January 01 and June 30, 2015, documented 4,921 civilian casualties (1,592 civilian deaths and 3,329 injured). These figures amount to an overall one per cent increase in civilian casualties compared to the first six months of 2014, and the highest number of total civilian casualties compared to the same period in previous years. Between January 01, 2009 and June 30, 2015, UNAMA recorded 52,653 civilian casualties (19,368 deaths and 33,285 injured).⁷

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Relative Military Strength

ANDSF

The Afghan National Army (ANA) is authorised 195,000 personnel as part of its *tashkil*.⁸ As of October 20, 2015, the strength of the ANA was approximately 170,000 personnel, including more than 6,600 Afghan Air Force (AAF) personnel. According to the US' Office of the Secretary of Defence, Department of Defence Budget,⁹ the Afghan Security Forces Fund's (ASFF's) justification for the Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 issued in February 2016, the fund caters to support the authorised end strength of 352,000 ANDSF which includes 195,000 ANA and 157,000 Afghan National Police (ANP). In addition, it also supports 30,000 Afghan Local Police (ALP) personnel, thus, adding up to an overall force level of 382,000 personnel. Attrition continues to be a major challenge for the ANDSF. The monthly attrition rates of ANA and ANP personnel are at an average of around 2.0 percent. Besides those killed in action and non-fatal hostilities, absence without leave is a major issue afflicting

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the force.¹⁰ A number of personnel are struck off the roles when they absent themselves from their respective units for more than 30 days without authorisation. According to the Supplement to SIGAR, January 2015, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress¹¹, ANA has declined by 15,636 (or 8.5 percent) since February 2014 to 169,203 personnel; the lowest assigned ANA force strength since August 2011. Between September 2013 and September 2014, more than 40,000 personnel were dropped from the ANA payrolls.

ANA continues to suffer serious combat losses. Between October 2013 and September 2014, more than 1,300 ANA personnel were Killed in Action (KIA) and 6,200 were Wounded in Action (WIA). In 2015, the casualty figures in ANDSF have been high almost in all the provinces. In an interview on December 08, 2014, in his office after the lowering of the flag that signalled the official end of the coalition's war-fighting mission, Lt Gen Joseph Anderson, the last American General to lead combat operations in Afghanistan, stated that the record casualties of the Afghan forces are not sustainable, and neither are their astounding desertion rates.¹² He went on to state that more than 5,000 members of the Afghan security forces have been killed during the year (2014), eclipsing previous years, and surpassing the entire coalition death toll since the invasion began in 2001. The deaths mount even as many soldiers and police officers are reluctant to leave their bases, and the deadly attacks have continued into the cold months when fighting typically stops. The Afghan government relies on international funding for the vast majority of its security costs. According to the budget justification¹³, the total amount required to sustain the ANDSF during FY 2017 is \$4.9 billion of which the Afghan government is expected to fund \$544 million, international contributors \$915 million, and the US \$3.448 billion, through the ASFF. As per

estimates about, 50 to 100 militants from Al Qaeda and small numbers of LeT, IMU, and other Al Qaeda affiliates are operating in Afghanistan. The Afghan Taliban strength is said to be around 25,000, including about 3,000 from the Haqqani network and 1,000 of HIG.¹⁴ The ISIL-K strength in Afghanistan is estimated to be around 1,000 to 3,000.¹⁵

International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)

According to the Resolute Support Mission (RSM), as of December 2015, approximately 12,905 personnel from 42 countries are serving in Afghanistan. This includes 6,800 military personnel as the US contribution to the NATO-led RSM.¹⁶

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State of the Economy

According to the Afghanistan Economic Update published by the World Bank in April 2015¹⁷, economic growth is estimated to have dropped from 3.7 percent in 2013 to 2 percent in 2014 and to an average of 9 percent during the period 2003-12. Growth in non-agricultural sectors (manufacture, construction and services) is estimated to have fallen in 2014, indicating a decline in investor confidence. New firm registrations of companies which increased during 2008-11, dropped sharply by 36 percent in 2013, only to further slide by yet another 26 percent in 2014, to 2,470 companies. Poverty nationwide was 35.8 percent in 2011-12 compared to 36.3 percent in 2007-08, with no significant change for the better. Overall, poverty is high and persistent. Domestic revenues fell sharply to 8.4 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2014 from 9.7 percent in 2013 and a peak of 11.6 percent in 2011.

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Despite restraining civilian Operations and Maintenance (O&M) and discretionary development spending, overall expenditure increased in 2014 due to higher security and essential social benefit expenses. With lower revenues and higher expenditures, the fiscal crisis in 2014 was managed under difficult circumstances by drawing from cash reserves, accumulating arrears, and increased donor assistance. During this period, the foreign exchange reserves remained at US\$7.4 billion, equivalent to around eight months of imports. The US troop withdrawal has caused further economic strains on the already besieged country. President Ashraf Ghani summed up the state of the country's economy in a recent interview (end 2015) to the German publication, *Spiegel*.¹⁸

Hundreds of thousands of people lost their jobs as a result of the troop withdrawals. In the transport sector alone, which constituted roughly 22 percent of GDP, at least 100,000 jobs were lost. Construction of the military facilities was a major driver, with the service sector connected with it comprising an amazing 40 percent of gross domestic product. In addition, the large sum of funds that were provided in annual assistance did little to alleviate poverty, because the government did not focus on the poor. Today, 70 percent of the population still lives on less than \$1.75 a day.

International financial aid remains the most important factor of the Kabul government's strength. Economic strains in donor countries, especially in Europe and Japan have reduced their capacity to provide Afghanistan additional long-term financial aid above levels pledged through 2017 and reaffirmed in 2014 at the London Conference and NATO Wales Summit.

The 'Pakistan Factor'

Pakistan created the Taliban and other terror groups in the region and continues to nurture these forces as its strategic assets to manipulate the situation in Afghanistan. Pakistan hopes to seize power and rule the country through its surrogates and, thus, create the so-called strategic depth. It masquerades as an arbitrator trying to bring about peace between the Afghan government and the Taliban while supporting the very same terror outfits. It funds terror. It is a party to the growing number of terror camps on its soil and in areas under its control. It shelters terror commanders and fighters on its soil. Mullah Omar, the supreme Taliban leader, died in April 2013, if not earlier, in Pakistan.¹⁹ Ample evidence is available to indicate that Mullah Omar had not been in control of the Taliban or its operations in Afghanistan since 2010, if not earlier. Mullah Mansoor, a protégée of Pakistan, living in the Satellite Town in the outskirts of Quetta was the only known link between the Taliban and Mullah Omar and was controlling Taliban operations against the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, supposedly based on the directions of Mullah Omar but most certainly on the instructions of Pakistan. From all indications, this situation has not changed and is likely to continue. If the press reports are correct, Pakistan, is supporting rival Taliban groups²⁰ as well as ISIL²¹ as a counter to the Taliban and as a means to retain control over the fragmented groups.

Afghan Peace Talks

The genuineness of the peace talks brokered by Pakistan has all along been suspect. Consequent to the Kunduz offensive, Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) flew three former so-called Taliban leaders to Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, for meetings held on May 19 and 20, 2015.²² The reality, however, was that these individuals had no connection with the Taliban's Political Commission

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nor did they wield any influence in the Taliban hierarchy.²³ The Taliban were quick to disown the meeting by posting an official statement in their website rejecting as “rumours” that a “delegation of Islamic Emirate met with representatives of Kabul administration’s fake peace council in Urumqi city of China.”²⁴ The first round of the Afghan peace talks brokered by Pakistan began on July 07, 2015, at the resort town of Murree. The Afghan delegation was led by Haji Din Muhammad, a senior member of the High Peace Council. The Taliban delegation was headed by Mullah

Abbas Akhund, besides Abdul Latif Mansur, and Ibrahim Haqqani of the Haqqani network. No member of the Taliban’s political office in Doha attended. A member of the Taliban’s political office in Doha, Qatar, claimed that the talks had been “hijacked by Pakistani officials.” He said they brokered the meeting with unauthorised Taliban representatives.²⁵ The second round of peace talks is yet to take off.

In a recent development at the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) events,²⁶ Sartaj Aziz, adviser to the Pakistani Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs, has owned up to Pakistan harbouring Taliban commanders. Coming at a time when the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG)-brokered second round of peace talks between the Afghan government and Taliban seems imminent, the confession and the statement is an indicator of the Pakistan manipulated failure of the talks should the outcome tend to be heading towards a finish that does not suit Pakistan’s interests. Hence, can these talks be expected to deliver? Now with the

Taliban on the offensive and gaining ground and control over large swaths of Afghanistan territory, would it give up arms and settle for partnering the elected government in Afghanistan? Would the Taliban relinquish its larger aim of establishing a pan-Islamic caliphate in Afghanistan and beyond, governed by the *Sharia* law? As of now, do any of the militant commanders in Afghanistan have the capability to implement a peace deal even if they wish to, especially with Daesh entering the fray in Afghanistan and elsewhere on the world stage? Is

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Pakistan capable of reining in the multifarious terror groups which it was instrumental in creating, funding, training and launching in Afghanistan? Would Pakistan, at this stage, give up on its objective of creating strategic depth in Afghanistan when it seems to be getting closer to achieving it?

Assessment of the Situation

The terror attacks in Afghanistan are likely to increase manifold in 2016 compared to 2015. The Taliban are expected to expand their control over the interior areas, thus, limiting the space for manoeuvre by the government forces. This process is likely to continue during the winter months and then the main battle is expected to target strategically important besieged cities. Apart from the war-fighting between the Taliban and the government forces, inter-group as well as fighting between the Taliban and ISIL, directed by Pakistan, is likely to intensify, providing an escape clause to the peace-brokers for not being able to implement the assurances given during the peace talks held, if any. Genuine Taliban representatives are unlikely to be brought to the table for talks. The Taliban will disown the talks if they

are compelled to go through them. The peace talks, from all indications, are unlikely to succeed. Despite the numerical advantage, the morale and the fighting capabilities of the ANSF are unlikely to improve adequately in the short-term to turn the tide.

Faced with a deteriorating security situation, the Afghan government may be hard pressed to address the economic crisis facing the country effectively. This will have an adverse effect on political cohesion and stability within the country. The country will have no option but to depend on foreign aid to sustain itself. Pakistan giving up its larger aim of establishing a proxy government in Afghanistan seems improbable. The Taliban and other terror forces too may not give up their focus on establishing a pan-Islamic caliphate in Afghanistan and beyond, governed by *Sharia* law. An article titled “Pakistan’s Hand in the Rise of International Jihad” sums up the current Afghan situation.²⁷ The author quotes President Ashraf Ghani of Afghanistan, warning, in several recent interviews, that unless the peace talks with Pakistan and the Taliban produce results in the next few months, his country may not survive 2016. Afghanistan is barely standing, he says, after the Taliban’s onslaught last year, which led to the highest casualties among civilians and security forces since 2001. To the question, “How much worse will it get?,” Ghani, in a recent television interview, replied, “It depends on how much regional cooperation we can secure, and how much international mediation and pressure can be exerted to create rules of the game between states.” The finger is pointing at Pakistan’s interference in Afghanistan. According to the article, Pakistan’s ISI has long acted as the manager of the international Mujahideen forces, many of them Sunni extremists, and there is even speculation that it may have been involved in the rise of the Islamic State.

Likely Near-Term Afghan Scenarios

Barring some dramatic transformations, the likely scenarios in Afghanistan in the near term are as follows.

Scenario 1: The present war will result in the collapse of the existing government by the end of the 2016 campaigning season. A Taliban regime controlled by Pakistan, either independently or as a part of a power sharing arrangement, will be established in Kabul. However, the war-fighting between the Taliban and Daesh will continue. War between the Taliban and non-Pashtun elements is likely to intensify.

Scenario 2: The present war will continue for the next three or four years, resulting in the collapse of the present government. In the meanwhile, Daesh would be funded and strengthened by *jihadi* forces from across the world. Between Daesh and the Taliban, the superior force is likely to establish its rule in the country. War-fighting between the Taliban and Daesh will, however, continue.

Regardless of the scenario, war-fighting in Afghanistan is unlikely to end. The country is likely to become a base for *jihadi* terrorism and, in all probability, expand beyond its borders into Central Asia and Pakistan as a part of the Global Islamic Movement, threatening Russia, China, India and Iran.

India's Foreign Policy Options

At this stage, India's strategic aim in Afghanistan should be restricted to providing assistance to, and support for the survival of, the present government and a free, independent, inclusive and a stable government in the future. Capture of power by *jihadi* groups or those sponsored by Pakistan will be a grave security threat to the region and will put an end to India's economic and trade interests and hopes in and through Afghanistan in the foreseeable future. Our economic assistance to Afghanistan should, therefore, not be measured in terms of equivalent strategic gains. India's engagement and support to Afghanistan will have to be built around the Strategic Partnership Agreement signed between the two countries on October 04, 2011.

Overview of India's Development Assistance to Afghanistan

India has committed US\$ 2 billion for the civil reconstruction and development of Afghanistan. This makes India the largest donor to Afghanistan in the region, and the fifth largest in the world.²⁸ Some of the major development projects funded by India in Afghanistan are:

- Delaram–Zaranj (218 km) highway connecting Zaranj, the border town on the Afghanistan–Iran border, with Delaram on the Garland Highway, linking the major cities of Kabul, Kandahar, Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif and Kunduz, completed in 2008. With the road from Chabahar port to Zaranj upgraded by Iran, the major cities in Afghanistan have been linked to the Chabahar port.
- Electricity transmission lines from Uzbekistan to Kabul.
- Rebuilding the Salma Dam in Herat province (expected to be completed by 2016).
- Afghan Parliament building constructed at a cost of US \$90 million and inaugurated on December 25, 2015.²⁹
- India has also finalised a plan to build a 900-km railroad from the Afghan province of Bamiyan to Chabahar port.
- Charikar and Doshi sub-stations (both completed).
- Restoration of Store Palace.
- Upgrading the telephone exchanges in 11 provinces.
- Expansion of the national TV network by providing an uplink from Kabul and downlinks in all provincial capitals for greater integration of the country.
- Small Development Projects (SDP) scheme³⁰, in the fields of agriculture, rural development, education, health, vocational training, etc. implemented in three phases. Under Phases I and II, 131 projects at a cost of US \$ 20 million were sanctioned. Under Phase 3, 125 projects will be undertaken with an additional provision of US\$ 100 million.
- Out of a total committed quantity of 1.1 million metric tonnes (mt) of wheat under the Wheat Assistance Programme, 711,882 mt of

wheat (or wheat equivalent in cash) has already been supplied to Afghanistan at an expenditure of Rs 989.45 crore.³¹

India's Aims and Objectives in Afghanistan

India wants Afghanistan to develop into a peaceful country with a broad based government free of foreign influence, capable of formulating its own foreign, domestic and security policies. India believes such a government in Afghanistan will enhance India's larger security, and economic interests. Its larger aims in Afghanistan are:

- Prevent the country becoming a safe haven and base for *jihadi* forces that would expand their influence beyond the Afghan borders in pursuance of the global *jihad*.
- Countering Pakistan in its efforts to establish a weak and a pliable government in Afghanistan with a view to create a so-called strategic depth and a launch pad for terror attacks at will, beyond the Afghan borders, which will have a consequential deniability factor built into it.
- Create secure transit land access to Afghanistan and through it to Central Asia and beyond, creating greater trade opportunities in the Afghan as well as Central Asian and European markets, resulting in greater economic integration with the region.
- Secure India's energy security requirements as well as an assured supply of natural and mineral resources.

Diplomatic and Political Engagement

China, Russia, Iran and the Central Asian countries are concerned with the developments in Afghanistan as the fallouts of the situation can expand into their country, adversely affecting their internal as well as regional security. India needs to recognise this reality and involve these countries in all the issues relating to the security and economic development in Afghanistan. Though China has been very close to Pakistan, besides its

economic interests, it is very deeply concerned with its security in Xinjiang and the activities of the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) a terror group that had long been sheltered and trained in the tribal areas of Pakistan. India needs to work on this to increase India-China cooperation on Afghanistan to convince China to pressurise Pakistan to put an end to its meddling in Afghan affairs.

India needs to initiate the necessary diplomatic process for involving the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in the security of Afghanistan, as a deteriorating security situation would mostly affect the region and the SCO countries, in particular. The “Heart of Asia” initiative supported by India to attract finance and investments for Afghanistan from across the world is a step in the right direction which needs to be pursued so as to assist Afghanistan’s economic development. India also needs to support Afghanistan’s entry into the SCO and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). India needs to put in place an institutional mechanism to coordinate, and deal with, all issues relating to Afghanistan’s security and development and to keep a watch on India’s interests in Afghanistan. India needs to engage with all ethnic and political groups in Afghanistan, including the so far neglected Pashtun groups. Contact with all groups of the erstwhile Northern Alliance needs strengthening. As for the Taliban, while there is a need to maintain contact, as long as the outfit remains a proxy of Pakistan, the question of India recognising its government or formally engaging with it does not arise.

Economic

India continues to support both the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA) and the “Heart of Asia” processes. As a first step, India needs to take the initiative to seek the support of the world’s countries to provide financial aid to Afghanistan to help tide over its financial requirements to run the country till it

can stand on its own feet. Failure to provide financial support to the country will result in the end of democracy in Afghanistan and usher in the Taliban's rule. Except where the Afghan government is controlled by Pakistan or is inimical to India, India should continue to provide economic assistance to the Afghan government towards social welfare and specific developmental projects. The prevailing security situation permitting, India needs to encourage and facilitate private investments providing maximum employment opportunities to local Afghans. All efforts are needed to increase bilateral as well as regional trade which will facilitate Afghanistan's integration with the regional political and economic structures. This will aid economic growth which is crucial for the country's stability.

India needs to raise the issue of extension of the Afghanistan–Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) to India and Central Asia, the major powers, and at every international forum. Under the APTTA signed between Afghanistan and Pakistan, while Afghanistan has permitted Pakistani trucks to go to Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Iran, Pakistan has allowed Afghan trucks to go only up to the Wagah border and transfer Afghan exports into Indian trucks.³² Afghan trucks are not allowed to enter India or carry Indian goods back to Afghanistan, causing a huge loss to the Afghan truck owners besides escalating the costs of exports and imports both ways. If this issue is resolved to include Central Asia and India in the APTTA, the entire region and especially Afghanistan would gain by way of enhanced bilateral trade and trade within the region, as well as entry into the European markets. India will need to seek international intervention to clear the hurdles in the way of the Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India (TAPI) pipeline. This project will provide additional revenue to Afghanistan besides integrating the country with the regional economy. India needs to facilitate funding and construction of the infrastructure necessary for trade as well as transportation of energy products in coordination with international

India's policies will have to be in line with the needs and priorities of the Afghan people. It will have to take a long-term view of the essentials and be prepared to adapt, modify and manoeuvre around, within the constraints of potential instability and violence in the country.

financial institutions. As of now, India's proposed project for the development of Chabahar port in Iran which was expected to provide access to Afghan markets seems to have come to a dead end.

Military Support

India's troop commitment on its own borders, counter-insurgency operations and related combat turnover requirements preclude the possibility of pulling out troops for deployment in Afghanistan. Lack of geographical contiguity as also of secure lines of communication between India and Afghanistan, with a hostile Pakistan controlling the northern parts of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), would mean putting boots on the ground an economic, security and logistic nightmare. India's military involvement in Afghanistan has the potential of tarnishing the goodwill that India has earned in the country all along. India, therefore, should not embark on deploying troops in Afghanistan. Even under the UN flag, the prevailing Pakistani influence and control over the terror groups operating in Afghanistan and guaranteed logistic arrangements should dictate India's decision to deploy troops. On the other hand, India needs to support Afghanistan in its capacity building programmes relating to the ANDSF. This will include providing training assistance and essential military equipment. India may finance military equipment for Afghanistan as it did in May 2014 for military equipment sourced from Russia.³³ Providing military hardware will, however, have to be based on an assessment of the possibility of this equipment being pilfered by militant sympathisers within the ANDSF or landing in their

hands. Depending on the government in power, India may enter into a workable intelligence sharing arrangement with Afghanistan for mutual benefit.

Conclusion

Afghan President Ghani is already experiencing, and is conscious of, the serious security, economic and political tribulations that he is likely to face in the coming days as a result of the US' / NATO forces' withdrawal from the country. He understands the precipitously grave challenge Pakistan poses to the present government's survival and Afghanistan's security. It is in this context that Ghani is compelled to engage with China and Pakistan and virtually reject cooperation and assistance from India. His efforts to make political space for the Taliban within Afghanistan's political and constitutional framework also need to be seen in this backdrop. It is against this milieu that India will have to craft its policies towards Afghanistan. India's policies will have to be in line with the needs and priorities of the Afghan people. It will have to take a long-term view of the essentials and be prepared to adapt, modify and manoeuvre around, within the constraints of potential instability and violence in the country. India today is seen as a well-wisher and a positive contributor to Afghanistan's development. It is here that the strength of India's foreign policy and the finesse of our relationship with Afghanistan lie. It would be in India's long-term interest to develop positive and friendly relations with all major ethnic groups and factions in Afghanistan. Our approach towards each of these groups will have to be unique as each one of them has its own dynamics.

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