Paradigm Shift in Afghanistan: A Study of the "Af-Pak Strategy" of the United States of America

Mazhar Abbas Khan
M. Phil Scholar
Department of Political Science & International Relations
Government College University
Faisalabad

Abdul Basit Khan
Lecturer
Department of Political Science & International Relations
Government College University
Faisalabad

Ahmad Waqas Makhdoom
M. Phil Scholar
Department of Political Science & International Relations
Government College University
Faisalabad

Abstract

Because of the policy botch and lack of clear planning, the Bush government in United States (US) left the Afghanistan–Pakistan boundary in skirmish. Meanwhile, the Taliban insurgency arose as a menace for regional safety from Kabul to Islamabad. The succeeding Obama government in US twisted the chance to recalibrate policy towards Afghanistan to suppress the ferocity of violence. In 2009, a new approach labeled as "Af-Pak Strategy" was exposed to reconfigure US commitment wherein the strategy makers interpret the region as one geo-political unit. This means the conflation of two distinct but equivalent conflicts – the insurgency in Afghanistan and belligerency in Pakistan – into one existential threat. The present study intends to explore the details and implications of the said strategy.

Introducing the term "Af-Pak"

Af-Pak coinage is used for US foreign policy loops to label Afghanistan and Pakistan as one area of operation. Michael Quinion stated that this stint initiated in newspapers in February, 2009 (Quinion, April 16, 2009), however, the expression was coined and promoted by Richard Holbrooke, the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan appointed by Obama government. (Safire, April 23, 2009) In March 2009, Holbrooke clarified the incentives behind this terminology. He said that they frequently call the problem "Af-Pak" meaning Afghanistan and Pakistan which was an effort to specify that there was a single area of conflict, spanning an imprecise boundary, the Durand Line, where NATO and other militaries were capable to operate. On its eastern side, there is independent and sovereign land of Pakistan. However, the international terrorist crusade is also positioned here. (Quinion, April16, 2009)

In the same year, President of Pakistan, General (r) Pervez Musharraf evaluated the phrase during a talk with Der Spiegel saying that he was entirely against the term Af-Pak and did not like the word due to two reasons: firstly, the strategy set Pakistan on identical level with Afghanistan which was not at all because Afghanistan had no administration and was totally subverted but the same was not the case with Pakistan. Secondly, India was the sole factor involved in the entire game. Pakistan had Kashmir skirmish devoid of which fanatical fundamentalists like Lashkar-e-Taiba would not survive. (Spiegel, 2009) Holbrooke told in a press conference that the word 'Af-Pak ' was not intended to degrade Pakistan but a 'bureaucratic shorthand' envisioned to transport the position in the border zones on two sides as one might not be settled devoid of second one. (The Hindu (Chennai, India), May 6, 2009).

The term attracted great media coverage because of its approved use by the Obama administration.

Af-Pak Strategy

"As President, my greatest responsibility is to protect the American people…We are in Afghanistan to confront a common enemy that threatens the United States, our friends and allies, and the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan who have suffered the most at the hands of violent extremists. So, I want the American people to understand that we have a clear and focused goal: to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their return to either country in the future…To achieve our goals, we need a stronger, smarter and comprehensive strategy". (Obama's speech, March 27, 2009)

There, President Obama also outlined the shift in the US strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan. He mentioned that the primacy of his government was to formulate the warfare in Afghanistan. He assured to upsurge the US forces in Afghanistan to assure victory in the combat. He condemned the role of Bush administration to deal the worsening situation in Af-Pak region. He said that the role of Bush administration in tribal areas of Pakistan turned the region into a safe sanctuary for al-Qaeda and its terrorist partners, powering afghan rebellion and menacing international terrorism. For him, Afghanistan and Pakistan were two centers of same war against international terrorism carried out by al-Qaeda and its terrorist cronies. So, the war in Afghanistan could not meet with success without dealing with terrorism in Pakistan.(Ibid)

President Obama appointed Richard Holbrooke as his envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan who assumed his office on January 20, 2009.On 10th February 2009, while interacting with Interagency Policy Group presided by Bruce Riedel, he appraised US policy towards Af-Pak region. While the Group produced its analysis of US policies towards Af-Pak region, President Obama chalked out fresh US policy towards Afghanistan and Pakistan in his most important speech of27th March 2009. On the same day, a White Paper was also issued by Interagency Policy Group which contained basic rudiments of this strategy. (Ahmed, 2010, p. 41)

The Af-Pak strategy elaborated the necessary structure of the Obama administration's successive policy enterprises about Afghanistan and Pakistan with re-evaluation of Afghan war plan. It bade for a more dedicated US attitude to fight against worldwide terrorism launched by al-Qaeda tramping "a middle path between a narrow counter terror mission and a much more ambitious nation building agenda".(Markey, 2009, p. 2)

Main Characteristics of the Af-Pak Strategy

(I)-The Af-Pak strategy moved the center of war from Iraq to Af-Pak region. It treated both Afghanistan and Pakistan like two dissimilar states but single theatre of war. The main reason behind the strategy was that Pakistan was linked with Afghanistan through its tribal parts. Obama government supposed these areas to be a safe place for al-Qaeda including its militant cronies. It driven the Afghan war and posed a threat in favor of universal terrorism. In that view, the two countries had to face the common enemies. If these enemies were not crushed pre-dominantly, the terrorism could not be eradicated from the world positively. That insurgency in Afghanistan nourished insecurity in Pakistan. Without more operative plans against these clusters in Pakistan, Afghanistan will face enduring uncertainty. (Interagency Policy Group Report, 2009, p. 1)

Pakistan was the main focus of that Af-Pak strategy. US had also increased the economic and military support to Pakistan in order to enhance its capability against war on terror. Moreover, it aspired to involve Afghanistan and Pakistan in an innovative trilateral outline at the uppermost level. The US planned to improve intelligence and military coordination alongside the border and concentrated on common subjects like trade, energy productions and economic development.

(II)-The Af-Pak strategy was grounded on US strategic objective; to disrupt, dismantle and crush al-Qaeda in Pakistan as well as in Afghanistan and to avert their re-occurrence to any state in future. (Obama's speech, March 27, 2009)

The strategy of the Bush administration towards the region was originally based on "War against Terrorism". It was something like incorporating western-style democratic system in Afghanistan by overpowering the Taliban, hostile Afghans or conducting a war against Muslims. So, it was also clarified that US presence in the region was not to exploit the vast oil and gas reserves of Central Asia but it was declared that after the eradication of terrorist elements in the region, the US would leave the area as soon as possible.

Another gauge of the US and NATO intent of not to stopover longer in the region was that the current policy guidelines were stressing on involving adjoining countries in the Afghan peace process. The Obama Government and UN wanted to establish fresh Contact Group for Afghanistan including Pakistan. They hoped that it would collectively take all stakeholders on-board who must had interests in the safety of region, comprising Central Asian Republics, the Gulf States including Iran, Russia, India and China. (Ahmed, 2010, p. 42)

(III)-The Af-Pak strategy was also in favor of a resolution with local Taliban factions including militants who were prepared to surrender and separate themselves from al-Qaeda. According to Obama "there is an uncompromising core of the Taliban". They must be treated with power and be overpowered. But those who had started fighting just due to pressure or for financial problems had choice to pick a different track." (Obama's speech, March 27, 2009)

While instigating this section of the Af-Pak strategy, President Obama signed the Defense Bill on 28th October 2009 which enclosed a new facility whereby US acceded to compensate Taliban troops who had initiated the insurgence activities for mostly defense of their own towns and villages. (Ahmed, 2010, p. 42)

(IV)-The Af-Pak strategy displayed an enduring US promise to Afghanistan and Pakistan in the shape of significant funds provision for national development schemes in both states. In his speech of 27th March 2009, Obama proclaimed "to advance security, opportunity and justice, not only in Kabul, but from grass root level to upper level in the provinces, all the way through, placing a considerable enhance in our civilians on earth, and also with the aid of civilian support from our partners and allies, from the United Nations and international aid organizations". (Obama's speech, March 27, 2009)

In succeeding months, the Obama government sustained to dispatch US civilian specialists to Afghanistan. March 2010 was fixed as the target for filling of almost 1000 civilian vacancies in Afghanistan including lawyers, agriculture and development specialists and ambassadors but later stimulated it at the end of 2009. In the same year, despite the deteriorating security conditions in Afghanistan, the US State Department insisted that it was "on trajectory" in achieving the said target. (Civillian Deployment to Afghanistan 'on Track, November 6, 2009)

During the Bush government, Afghanistan received billions of dollars in terms of civilian aid from the US and the rest of the world but it failed to develop the countryside or discourage farmers from poppy farming. Due to this, the Obama administration was determined to send many US civilian connoisseurs to Afghanistan and to place rigorous liability standards for the proper consumption of US and international civilian support fund to the Afghan administration. The major imperative of Af-Pak strategy related to Pakistan was to support the country's proficiency to contest militants. It stressed on the provision of "increased US military assistance for helicopters to provide air mobility, night vision equipment, and training and equipment specifically for Pakistani special operation force and their frontier corps." (Scahil, February 4, 2010)

The US Defense Department had already assigned approximately $4000 million to boost up the Frontier Corps in Pakistan and had recently anticipated for Pakistan Counterinsurgency Competence Endowment under which $3 billion would be allocated for next five years to train and materialize armed forces of Pakistan and guerrilla commandos for counterinsurgency operations. All the said targets were expectedly to be improved and extended during the following years only if US could dispatch more instructors, assemble training facilities and work intimately with Pakistan and Afghanistan governments. (Markey, 2009, p. 2)

However, the Af-Pak strategy stressed on employing Reconstruction Opportunity Zone in Federally Administrated Tribal Areas (FATA), disbursing foreign aid in key sectors such as energy, supporting Pakistan with developing a real approach for using donor aid and securing additional funding for the country from global organizations that included the UN, World Bank, Asian Development Bank and the forum of International Friends of Democratic Pakistan. The said steps were recognized in Af-Pak plan as other neutrals to assist Pakistan to create an extensive financial retrieval. (Interagency Group Report, 2009, p. 1)

Under the provisions of Kerry – Lugar –Berman Act, US would have to offer $7.5 billion aid to Pakistan for the development in civil sector during next five years at a rate of $1.5 billion per year. The aim was to boost up civilian segment in Pakistan, an idea that was never conceived by the Bush Administration which favored personage control over democratic organizations and military support over civilian development. (Ahmed, 2010, p. 44)

(V)-The Af-Pak strategy helped to dispatch extra US forces in Afghanistan which was the common feature of both the Obama and Bush administrations. Compromising with reasonable insurgents and employment of extra troops were the two options used concurrently in Iraq. Following that approach, President Obama, on February 17, 2009, had, in fact, already issued orders to send 17,000 more US troops to Afghanistan. (Interagency Group Report, 2009, p. 1) Still the Af-Pak strategy followed to work with all rudiments of global influence like political, informational, military and financial in order to get maximum results. (Ibid)

The use of army was thought to be inevitable to comprehend the core objective of dismantling and overpowering al-Qaeda and its associates in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The additional deployment of 17,000 US troops in Afghan war was a significant effort in that dimension as 4,000 US troops, along with 600 personnel of Afghan forces, operated more effectively and caused harm to rebels in Province of Helmand where for many past years the Taliban had been rearranging and recuperating power from British troops. (Borger, July 2, 2009) Similarly, Obama administration had increased drone strikes inside the Pakistan border and tribal areas because those areas were being used by Al-Qaeda and its associates for terrorist activities. (Peteren &Tiedemann, October 19, 2009)

Contrary to the Bush administration, the main concern of which was to install additional US and NATO forces to fight in Afghanistan, Obama administration was also committed to strengthen the afghan security forces and had stressed for "a more speedy build up of the Afghan army and police up to 134,000 and 82,000 respectively over the next two years". (Interagency Group Report, 2009, p.3)

On March 27, 2009, President Obama pronounced the strategy to dispatch 4,000 additional US troops to train the Afghan security forces. However, in an evaluation of the Afghan war presented to Barrack Obama in August 2009, General Stanely McChrystal, Commander of US and NATO /ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) forces in Afghanistan, declared that 40000 more US troops would necessarily be deployed to achieve success in Afghanistan, defend the Afghan citizens, boost up government and actively respond to Taliban activists. The review also suggested that the proper security of the Afghanistan necessarily required an enhancement in the numerical strength of Afghan security forces up to 240,000 and 160,000 both for the Afghan army and the Afghan police respectively. (Woodward, September 21, 2009)

The analysis of Af-Pak strategy by Obama administration revealed that as an element of its way-out strategy, the US desired to transfer the liability of security of Afghanistan to Afghan security forces. In September 2009,US Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, remarked that the Afghan national security forces would assume a greater role in controlling and protecting their own territory as the US would initially recede into an advisory capacity and ultimately to withdraw. (Ahmed, 2010, pp. 45-46) The Obama administration delayed the implementation of exit plan until the Afghan presidential elections were held. Re-election of Hamid Karzai as President restricted the choices for solving the problems of governance and progress in Afghanistan. (Barnes, October 24, 2009)

The Key Objectives of Af-Pak Strategy

According to Katzman, following were the key objectives of Af-Pak strategy:

i. Devastate the Terrorist networks in Af-Pak region and lessen their capacity to launch worldwide terrorist activities.
ii. Establish a strong government in Afghanistan.
iii. Provide training facilities to Afghan security forces for improvement in their counterinsurgency capabilities in order to make them less dependent upon US assistance.
iv. Get the support from international community to accomplish these objectives.
v. Additional troops will be dispatched to Afghanistan to cover safety arrangements in the Af-Pak region.
vi. Encourage reconciliation with the moderate Taliban figureheads that acknowledge the Constitution of Afghanistan and ready to stop the terrorist activities.
vii. Provide military aid to Pakistan of 1.5 billion dollar per year for the period of next five years in order to destroy terrorist networks in their country particularly in border areas.
viii. "Reconstruction Opportunity Zones" will be created in Afghanistan and Pakistan with the help of US for economic development of the region.
ix. Create "Contact Group" comprising all stake holders whose safety is associated with Afghanistan just like NATO allies, Central Asian Republics, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, India and China. (Katzman, 2009)

McChrystal's Evaluation of the War against Terrorism (August 2009)

President Obama supplemented 21,000 troops in Afghanistan after his induction into the White House but he had a fear that underpinning more US troops could result in the increase of their death rate. It could also increase the US public resentment about Afghan war. For instance, the Helmand operation caused huge casualties to US and British troops. The year 2009 was spattered with the blood of US, British and other NATO forces. A total of 153 US soldiers were killed in Afghanistan during July and August 2009 only. (Ahmed, 2010, p. 46)

Gen. McChrystal, ISAF Commander in Afghanistan, suggested for a move in the US policy stressing that a few remote areas would be surrendered to the Taliban which had limited strategic worth. He also suggested that Western forces should pay deeper consideration around the more developed and populated areas which ultimately would result in better security conditions in the country. In that way, a positive image of Western forces would be created in cities and towns that they could bring safety and financial assistance to people. (Coglan, November 9, 2009)

In August 2009, when Gen. McChrystal put forward his analysis of Afghan combat, President Barrack Obama initiated a wide ranged appraisal of the Af-Pak strategy. However, when this appraisal was under process, certain essentials of the counterinsurgency measures suggested by Gen. McChrystal had already been applied to warfare scenario. For example, when he took the charge of US and NATO/ISAF armed forces in Afghanistan, he prohibited the excessive use of airstrikes because if US did not lessen the civilian causalities, it might lose the war. (Filkins, June 21, 2009)

Under the Obama Government, tactical viewpoint of US about the Afghan war and Pakistan's counterterrorism job both have undergone a qualitative change which was evident from the prominent features of Af-Pak strategy debated above. Initially proclaimed in March 2009, the Af-Pak approach was intended to work about advancement and envisioned to offer an agenda for US strategy**.** Deliberations about the precise ordering of goals of US, the height of and the way in which political, soldierly, brainpower and monetary assets of US should be positioned and the suitable sequence and period of US struggles were remained open for appraisal. (Markey, 2009, p.1) After the evaluation of Afghan war by Gen. McChrystal, the Obama administration took 92 days to contemplate over the said aspects.(Ahmed, 2010, pp. 48)

Review of Af-Pak Strategy (December 1, 2009)

The US war committee under President Obama met for nine times in White House situation room. The President urged his consultants there to provide a thorough detail about the policy decisions. Many other matters like corroding public backing in US and NATO republics for Afghan conflict, the monetary and human price of the combat and NATO's unwillingness in preceding years to drive extra forces to Afghanistan were discussed in detail. (Coughlin, November 27, 2009)

The Obama administration negotiated with its coalition-partners in Afghan war including commanders of NATO forces and leaders from Afghanistan and Pakistan. On December1, 2009, President Obama proclaimed that the Af-Pak strategy would be assessed in a foremost dialogue at US Military Academy situated at West Point in the city of New York. The said dialogue was labeled as "A New Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan". (Obama's speech, December 1, 2009)

The support by general public in US for Afghan conflict reduced due to increasing military fatalities and fiscal charges resulting into financial collapse inside the country. President Obama presented the deteriorating danger from al-Qaeda and its allies in Afghanistan to justify the fighting in Af-Pak region. He highlighted the progress that was attained in the wake of Af-Pak strategy initiated in March 2009, asserting that "High-ranking al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders have been killed, and we've stepped up the pressure on al-Qaeda worldwide. In Afghanistan, we defeated the Taliban from preventing a Presidential electoral process. It was stained by deception that election created a rule that is dependable according to Afghan's laws and constitution." (Ahmed, 2010, p. 48)

He further said that the serious threat to the US and global security from al-Qaeda and its committed allies in the region had not vanished until then. He also announced to dispatch 30,000 more US troops to Afghanistan. He added that after 18 months, US forces would start to leave Afghanistan. (Ibid)

While repeating the earlier avowed "narrowed down" objectives of the Af-Pak strategy which were to upset, dismantle and crush al-Qaeda in Afghanistan in the future, President Obama proclaimed its three essential features; a military exertion that would built a situation for transition in civilian surge that in turn would strengthen constructive achievements and lastly an efficient joint venture with Pakistan. The aims behind these basic essentials were to be accomplished in three ways:

I. For ousting the Taliban, an increased use of military tactic in Afghanistan would be compulsory in the upcoming 18 months. For that reason, in the start of year 2010, 30,000 troops were to be positioned in Afghan areas to crush the uprising and protect prominent populace centers**.** These supplementary US and international forces will let to hasten transferring responsibility to Afghan security forces; and withdrawal of their forces from Afghanistan will be started from July of 2011 as President Obama had announced.
II. While stating the element of development in civil sector through Af-Pak strategy, President Obama professed that "the US would work with its partners, the United Nations and the Afghan individuals for a more operative civilian policy so that the government can take benefit of enhanced safety". But he added that this policy should apparently be based on enactment which meant that the US neutral aid to Afghanistan would be linked with its role to fight against corruption and ill-administration. He made one thing very clear that US was fascinated to end the war and misery and it had no interest to occupy Afghanistan. He further added that the US was in favor of Afghan government's decision to welcome those Taliban who had surrendered their arms and showed the admiration for human rights of their people.
III. President Obama proclaimed that US would combine Afghanistan and Pakistan equally as a part of single theatre of war. According to US President, their aim in Afghanistan was to stop an evil from spreading all the way through that country; nevertheless such identical situation had taken foundations in the border areas of Pakistan. Therefore, they wanted to make a policy to deal across both sides of border. (Ahmed, 2010, pp. 48-49)

Review of Af-Pak Strategy (December 16, 2010)

On 16 December 2010, the US policy makers announced the annual review of Af-Pak strategy claiming that this strategy had achieved few of its objectives. It was asserted in the report that: "The surge strategy with military and civilian assets, along with a prolonged special operations force doing local security arrangements at grass root level of the country, has lessened the Taliban pressure and detained the impetus they had attained in current years in remote areas of country". On 16 December 2010, President Obama stated: "Today, al Qaeda's senior leadership in the border region of Afghanistan and Pakistan is under more pressure than at any point since they fled Afghanistan nine years ago. Senior leaders have been killed. It's harder for them to recruit; it's harder for them to travel; it's harder for them to train; it's harder for them to plot and launch attacks. In short, al Qaeda is hunkered down". (Jaspal, 2011, pp. 36-38)

The review report certified the NATO's decision that withdrawal of troops would start from July 2011 which was declared in NATO's Lisbon Summit held in November 2010. (Mackenzie, November21, 2010) But it was also clearly announced that a large number of US troops would remain in Afghanistan till 2014. The remaining troops would carry on supporting the Karzai government for restoring the writ of the government, providing training facilities to Afghan military and paramilitary forces and structuring the state institutions. The report also announced that the number of Afghan military and police personnel would be increased to more than 300,000 over the next two years. President Obama expressed great pleasure over the success in Afghanistan. On 16 December 2010, he affirmed that: "I want to be clear. This continues to be a very difficult endeavor. But I can report that, thanks to the extraordinary services of our troops and civilians on the ground, we are on track to achieve our goals". (Jaspal, 2011, pp. 36-38)

However, security analysts criticized the said annual review of Af-Pak strategy because it did not follow the requirements of policy analysis. That review did not have anything new and discussed the old slogans of "to dismantle, defeat and disrupt al Qaeda". It did not address the basic reasons behind the increase of aggressive behavior and radicalization that boost up the Al-Qaeda movement. (Ibid) So, the deficiency to address the root causes of increase in terrorist elements and dealing the Afghanistan problem improperly resulted in the war like situation in the country. Furthermore, it emphasized the fact that the Obama government wanted the military solution of the Afghan problem.

But since December 2010, the US had been searching for political solution of the problem as well and consulted all stakeholders; it had changed its earlier policy of negotiating with the selected regional groups of Taliban. But, on the other hand, US government had been forcing Pakistan to initiate military strikes in North Waziristan. Regardless of the antagonism from Islamabad, US had also increased the drone attacks in North Waziristan. (Ibid)

Exit Strategy

US President Barrack Obama had earlier argued that "there needs to be an "Exit strategy" for Afghanistan so that US policy does not appear to be perpetual drift". (Katzman, 2009, p. 30) He later proclaimed that US forces would start leaving Afghanistan in 2011 and would depart totally till 2014. (S. James & D. James, 2011)

Afghan war had affected the US economy quite seriously and aggravated unconstructive public views among US community. The NATO allies were also divided upon Afghan war, as some opined that, for the rebuilding and stability in Afghanistan, NATO troops must stay in the country even after 2014. But others have different observations and desired to quit from Afghanistan as rapidly as feasible. (Katzman, 2009, p. 30)

ISAF had some objectives in Afghanistan before leaving it.

i. Instruct the Afghan institutions like military, police department and judiciary.
ii. Preserve powerful government in Afghanistan which could control the flow of narcotics.
iii. Build up market system.
iv. Curb the Taliban network as a whole. (Morells, 2009)

These ambiguous policies caused nervousness to spread among the policy makers of all the countries having vital interests in the region particularly of Pakistan and China. US tilt towards India in the region had created much anxiety for the intended benefits of Pakistan and China. All countries excluding India were in favor of complete withdrawal of US and coalition forces from the region. (Katzman, 2009, p. 30)

Drawdown and Transition Process of US Troops from Af-Pak Region

The surge of operational forces in Afghanistan was acknowledged as successful and the process of shifting of power to Afghan security personnel begun in July 2011 as decided earlier. The said transition was to be carried out in five steps called "tranches". The Afghan President Hamid Karzai announced first tranche in March 2011 while the second and third were conducted in November 2011 and May 2012 respectively. At the end of 2013, the jurisdiction of Afghan security forces would have to extend up to 75% of population. (Ibid, p. 22)

The Drawdown Plan

As the transition in 2011 was under process, General Petraeus, the ISAF Commander in Afghanistan, suggested a steady drawdown of surge forces from Afghanistan. In view of these suggestions and subsequent to death of Osama Bin Laden, President Obama decided that US should further reduce number of its army personnel in Afghanistan to decrease financial liabilities and insufficiency of resources. On June 22, 2011, President Obama declared:

i. 10,000 US armed personnel would be withdrawn at the end of 2011. The number of US forces would be reduced up to 90,000.
ii. 23,000 personnel from the remaining 90,000 armed troops would be withdrawn until September 20, 2012 leaving the operational US military strength to 66,000. (Ibid)

Afghan President Hamid Karzai visited US on February 12, 2013. President Obama then declared that from February 2014, 34,000 US troops would be withdrawn from Afghanistan. The remaining US forces in Afghanistan would leave the country after the Afghan presidential election that will be held in 2014. Hence the US military involvement in the country is being minimized with the passage of time. This withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan resulted in the low level of striking missions against insurgents in the country. (Chivers, July 7, 2012)

Conclusion

The Barrack Obama government's Af-Pak strategy has given the opportunity to US to check the Taliban impetus and to "disrupt and dismantle" the terrorist elements operating across the border areas of the Af-Pak region. The strategy stresses upon an increase in US and NATO forces, settlement with "moderate" Taliban and adopting a regional approach to check the Taliban flow into border areas of Pakistan.

But the current study analyzes that it provides a low level of mechanism requiring a sound implementation and also is deficient in analyzing the true social fabric of the border areas to handle the insurgency and crush the aggression. It is also explored that there are some inconsistencies, variances and structural imperfections in the Af-Pak strategy that may cause more deterioration of the Af-Pak border situation.

President Obama had earlier announced a 'military upsurge' of about 50,000 US troops in the border areas to enforce a move from counter-terrorism to counter-insurgency. But employing this approach into the Pakhtoon tribal areas is very difficult because, historically, they resist all forms of suppression. Furthermore, there is a deficiency of government and infrastructure at provincial, district and local levels to absorb more troops. An enhancement in troops may also be an amplification of the inconsistency and may promote the militarization of the Af–Pak border region. These considerations led the Obama administration to review the approach.

The strategy also talked about negotiations with Taliban, but in reality, it is a difficult task to achieve. The deficiency in local information, reliable mediators and liability to adopt proportionate enforcement measures halt the compromise and conciliatory procedures with 'moderate' Taliban. Conciliation with the influential Taliban may generate more problems in controlling the inconsistency and to lessen the insurgency, or it can make the Taliban more energetic to occupy more areas of the country. The battle can be succeeded only when the sympathy of natives would be adjoined to the strategy and the military acts. So, initially, the strategy must deal with the Taliban separately from al-Qaeda and after that negotiate with the moderate Taliban and utilize their support in finding, ousting, and eradicating the hard line militants.

The drawdown of US troops from Afghanistan was to be started by 2011 and along with that the country's security would have to be handed over gradually to Afghan security forces. By that time, the NATO plan was to raise the number of local security forces up to 240,000 and to build up and develop the structure of Afghan National Army and Police Force. Keeping in view the past experience of high rates of attrition and ethnic imbalances resulting into violence that have hampered the socio-political development of the country, it is necessary to equip the domestic security structure with proper training so that it may be ready to meet the timetable of withdrawal of US troops. Creating dual institutions such as local militias that are susceptible to criminality and perpetuate insecurity could undermine institution-building and the counterinsurgency efforts; hence the withdrawal must be conditioned with acceptance of Afghan security forces that they are ready to control the security of the country.

The Af-Pak strategy combines the insurgency in Afghan areas and militancy in Pakistan as "one geo-political entity". In other words, the strategy is modifying the theatre of warfare. Although it is acceptable to recognize the interconnected parts of the menace but it complicates the character of the insurgency on each side of the Durand Line and unable to understand the differentiation in security lines and capacities of the two countries. Treating both countries as a single theatre is to offer a greater logic to activists on each side of boundary to shape a coalition in order to counter the exterior danger postured by the increase of US forces. This approach may probably generate hostility between the two neighbors. The dissimilarities across the border are substantial: Pakistan is a well-known republic, holds a greatly proficient army equipped with modern nuclear deterrence, has a mounting middle class and relatively unwavering frugality, unshakable and well-known information and infrastructure systems and is a nation of one hundred seventy million populace with a royal past of working out local, provincial, and also state supremacy. On the other hand, Afghanistan is a war-torn country with a growing democracy, insurgency lying and with backgrounds of blotchy, immoral, and futile governance. Owing to these dissimilarities, an Af-Pak strategy contemplating to treat both countries uniformly will make such strategy awfully problematic if not absolutely unrealistic.

The threat of India plays a very crucial role in Pakistani security apprehensions. Both countries have deployed large number of militaries over their mutual boundary because both are involved in a constant acrimonious clash over the issue of Kashmir; water problems, a nuclear armaments race between the two; and augmented hostility over the extremist assault in Mumbai in 2008. President Obama himself has accepted the graveness of this situation during his election campaign in 2008and also mentioned this in his speech of March 27, 2009.

Indian involvement inside Afghanistan region further thwarts the improvement in violent situation in border areas across Pakistan and Afghanistan. Military establishment in Pakistan has mentioned it time and again that Indian secret agencies have been operating from its consulates, situated in Afghan cities of Jalalabad and Qandahar on the boundary of Pakistan to promote militancy in Balochistan.

New indications of Indian involvement in providing arms to revolutionaries operating in Swat and FATA in Pakistan, foretell terrible penalties for the Af-Pak strategy. US should exert pressure on India to stop its anti-Pakistan activities initiated from Afghanistan if it wants to handle the India-Pakistan relationship.

A revised strategy requires more provisions dealing a great range of civilian aid actions equally for Afghanistan and Pakistan. This comprises following the Kerry-Lugar-Berman legislation authorizing one and half billion dollars per year for the period of five years to accomplish public support events in Pakistan; an appeal for Congress to follow a bipartisan bill making Reconstruction Opportunity Zones in Afghan areas and the border areas of Pakistan; and petitioning global backing to create a new Contact Group for both countries which will combine all stake-holders interested in strengthening security and affluence in the region.

These efforts would be futile due to the capacity shortage faced by Pakistan. The US aid of 1.5 billion dollars per year is clearly insufficient to meet the urgent economy-related solvable predicaments faced by Pakistan which requires at least twenty billion dollars of global assistance within the upcoming few years to become fiscally stable. It is an established reality that, since 9/11, Pakistan has spent approximately thirty five billion dollars in the war against terror. The US has amplified its help to Pakistan conditionally on the basis of Pakistan's performance in combating the terrorism in FATA. Such hassle of "conditions" for the delivery of support, which pervades US strategy, irritates Pakistani community and causing all these steps to be fruitless, decreasing the confidence between US and Pakistan and mounting anti-US sentiments among Pakistani public.

US drone strikes against known or alleged terrorist sites in Pakistan are also part of the actions that should be stopped at any cost. The Drone strikes are causing the loss of lives to innocent Pakistani citizens and are counterproductive to Pakistan's efforts to eradicate terrorism. To restore Pakistan's confidence, the US should collaborate in intelligence sharing with Pakistan and provide it the requisite scientific competence (drones and subsidiary control system) to conduct the accurate military strikes within itsown geographical jurisdiction. The United States should practically display tactical persistence as well as admiration for red lines of a sovereign country.

It is a common perception that the US is not a part of the region and its physical presence here will lead to intervention in the affairs of other regional countries. In order to boost up authentic collaboration and to fabricate stable relationship with other stakeholders in the Af-Pak region like China, Iran and Russia, the US is required to reduce the prevailing suspicion about any of its prolonged stay in the region. In order to operate more effectively and to fully eradicate the violence, the Af-Pak strategy should not confine only to address Afghanistan and Pakistan and should incorporate and involve these major regional countries. Lastly, the Af-Pak strategy by Obama administration, which is an effort to deal the increasingly worsening situation across Pak-Afghan border, should be evaluated annually to incorporate necessary measures required according to changing circumstances.

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