

AFGHANISTAN POST-2014 AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

After thirteen years of war in Afghanistan the coalition forces are withdrawing from Afghanistan with a stalemate between the Taliban and Afghan government. The war in Afghanistan has been catastrophic for Pakistan with thousands of lives lost and the economy in shambles. The withdrawal of NATO forces will not result in relief for neighboring countries as each will be vying for more power in Afghanistan. In case of any civil war in Afghanistan, Pakistan will continue to bear the brunt of losses on many levels.

Keywords:- Strategic Depth, zero-sum, Durrand line, reconciliation, drawdown, repercussions.

Introduction

The endgame in Afghanistan has started and it will take another two and half years to bring the war in Afghanistan to a complete end. President Obama has recently announced that only about 9,800 American

troops would remain in Afghanistan by early 2015 and none by 2017 (1). After thirteen years of continuous war, hundreds and thousands of lives lost and billions of dollars spent, we find Afghanistan and Pakistan facing an uncertain future. With no political reconciliation with the insurgents in place, long term stability in Afghanistan remains questionable despite the historical political transition this year (2).

The destinies of Afghanistan and Pakistan are tied together and Pakistan is suffering and continue to suffer the most from instability in Afghanistan. While Pakistan has pursued its policy of strategic depth in Afghanistan since 1980's, it is Afghanistan which has been dependent on Pakistan for a long time. Afghanistan has historically been dependent on Pakistani land for access to maritime trade from Arabian Sea, giving Islamabad a monopoly on most trade with Kabul and influence over much of Afghanistan's economic and political life (3).

Afghanistan and Pakistan's fates are entwined on political, economic and ethnic lines but the relationship between the two countries has been far from desirable. Both the countries are allies in war on extremism but the level of mistrust borders on animosity. Being the only Muslim country that opposed Pakistan's membership of the U.N, Afghanistan refused to recognize the international border (Durrand line), the 2,640 kilometre long, mountainous and porous Pak-Afghan border (4).

The core problem that needs to be discussed is the fallout of the drawdown of NATO forces on Pakistan. Its geo-strategic location, its nuclear weapons, its large population, its terrorist camps, and its enfeebled economy and polity make it more important and more vulnerable-than even Afghanistan (5).

Discussion:-

The stakes are very high for Pakistan in the aftermath of withdrawal of NATO forces in Afghanistan. Pakistan cannot afford to remain as a bystander in what will happen in Afghanistan. The country whose future is most intimately tied to that of Afghanistan is Pakistan (6).

There are real concerns that Afghanistan will plunge into another civil war just as it did after the Soviet Union left the country in 1989. The moral of Taliban forces will be at all time high having survived the onslaught of NATO forces unscathed. The Civil war in Afghanistan will have serious repercussions in Pakistan. Pakistan has no appetite for fresh inflows of Afghan refugees as it did in the 80's. The economic costs were very high then and they'll be higher now (7). Pakistan is facing repeated attacks from insurgents in major cities. The major cities of Pakistan have become sanctuaries of extremists and in case of Civil war in Afghanistan the attacks on major cities will increase manifold. The drawdown is likely to deepen instability not only in Afghanistan and Pakistan's tribal belt, but also- thanks to the dynamics of Pakistan's rapid urbanization in Pakistan's teeming cities (8).

Pakistan's main concern is the growing influence of India in Afghanistan. Since 911, India has invested heavily in Afghanistan and has helped to train the Afghan security forces. Except a brief rule of Taliban in the 1990's, repeated Afghan governments in the past and present had close links with India. As an indication of Pakistan's overriding interest is limiting India's influence in Afghanistan, Pakistan says India is using its Embassy and four consulates in Afghanistan to recruit anti-Pakistan insurgents (9). But India's growing clout in Afghanistan will not just wither away and it will lead to further strained relations with Pakistan. The tensions can only fizzle out if there is progress on India-Pakistan talks, but that is a long complicated process with many bumps on the road.

There are major doubts as to whether the 3,50,000 strong Afghan national security forces (ANSF) has the capacity and will to quell any Taliban assault on the major cities of Afghanistan. Another big concern is that donor countries have to keep the ANSF afloat and provide the necessary funding for year to come. Few accept that the forces will be ready to become the principal custodians of Afghan security 2014. They perceive the bloated size of the Afghan National Army to be unsustainable and a threat to Pakistan interests. (10).

There is a distinct possibility that the withdrawal of U.S forces will have a negative impact on Pak-U.S relations. Although the relations between the two countries have returned to some kind of normalcy but deep apprehensions and mistrust still remains. Since 9/11 Pakistan received billions of dollars in foreign aid and with the drawdown of forces the amount of aid can dwindle significantly. There is a fear that U.S will go back to the 1990's when Pakistan was left to pick up the pieces after the chaos of Soviet withdrawal. Much would depend on how Islamabad and Washington view each other's policies vis-à-vis their dealings with Afghanistan, Iran and India in the post-U.S withdrawal phase (11).

The economic costs of the war have been considerable for Pakistan. In Pakistan, increased levels of violence and risk associated with the insurgency have contributed to capital flight, disruption in commerce and higher costs of capital, retarding economic growth. (12). As there seems no winding up of war in Afghanistan, failure of any settlement with Afghan Taliban and TTP (Teherik-e- Taliban Pakistan), the economic costs will multiply in numbers.

CONCLUSION:-

Pakistan has genuine concerns and security interests in Afghanistan. If we accept geography as destiny then Pakistan is tied to this Afghanistan's quagmire. According to Rahimullah Yusufzai (a senior analyst on FATA), "If Taliban can not capture Kabul, which is highly likely, they will be operating from the border areas so they will still need to come to Pakistan for shelter, funds and medical treatment, and the Pakistani Taliban will find safe havens in Afghanistan.."(13).

Afghanistan has always been a battleground of proxy wars throughout its history and this time around with the level of distrust among the neighboring countries, it will be no different. So long as neighboring countries view it as a zero-sum game, each country will be vying for more influence in the war torn country. Without a regionally backed settlement the greatest danger is a of a proxy war in Afghanistan, with regional powers backing different ethnic or sectarian factions in pursuit of their own interests. (14)

Pakistan cannot disengage itself from what is happening in Afghanistan and wants its security and economic concerns to be acknowledged and dealt with. Pakistan doesn't want to see the return of a Taliban government in Kabul and would prefer to foster a power-sharing agreement in Kabul (15). To secure genuine peace in Afghanistan, a reconciliation between the Taliban and Afghan government is essential. The future scenarios of Afghanistan seem bleak and it would continue to haunt Pakistan in terms of Afghan diaspora. Taliban continue attacks on key installations in Pakistan and border skirmishes.

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