

From Cautious Distance to Pro-Active Involvement: A Historical Analysis of Gradual Shift in Pakistan Policy towards Afghanistan (1973 To 2015)

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Pakistan and Afghanistan's relations have always been marked by mistrust and this lack of trust could never be abridged. The mainspring of this lack of trust has been the irredentist claims of Afghanistan over parts of Pakistani territories. Resultantly, Pakistan has been apprehensive of Afghanistan and always considered it to be a potential threat to its territorial integrity. Empirically Pakistan's fears of Afghanistan to its integrity have been misplaced because Afghanistan never had the means to wrench away Pakistani territories. Although Pakistan has always been fearful of Afghanistan but before 1970 it had had adopted an off-hand policy regarding its western neighbour. Sardar Daud, who championed Afghan irredentist claims on Pakistan, capturing of power in Kabul in 1973 effected fundamental change in Pakistan Afghan policy. Islamabad started cultivating Afghan mullahs to serve as its protégés. After December 1979 Soviet Union occupation of Afghanistan, Islamabad organized Afghan resistance on its soil thus started Islamabad's profound entanglement in Afghanistan's quagmire. The experience of Pakistani military and intelligence agencies in Afghanistan during the Soviet-Afghan war (1979-1988) attracted them to take full advantage of the softness of the Afghan state and the political vacuum thereof to locate 'Strategic Depth' in Afghanistan. However, the 'Strategic Depth' policy backfired and Pakistan had to take a U-turn on its Afghan policy in the wake of September 9, 2001 terrorist attacks in the U.S. This paper analyzes the gradual shift in Islamabad's policy towards Afghanistan and its implications bringing out hitherto some unexplored aspects of Pakistan's policy regarding Afghanistan.

Key Words: Pakistan, Afghanistan, policy shift, General. Zia, Taliban, Pakhtunistan

Over the last decade many writers and researchers have explored the nature of strained relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan and their causes and consequences. Interest in the issue of relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan increased after the rise of Muslim militants in Afghanistan particularly the Afghan Taliban and their hosting of global militant-terrorist group, the Al Qaeda and its foreign affiliates, during the Taliban rule (1996-2001). The reason for studying Pakistan policy towards Afghanistan has been driven by the fact that most of the Afghan Taliban studied as refugees at various *madrasahs* in Pakistan and the militia was able to trounce its Afghan opponents with the financial and military support of Pakistan cultivating strong pro-Pakistan feeling among its rank and file. The September 9, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States claimed by the Al Qaeda based in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan and the consequent ouster of the Taliban regime by the U.S.-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces and their occupation of Afghanistan and Islamabad continued support to the Taliban further increased interest in the study of Pakistan policy towards Afghanistan. As Pakistan has been the most important foreign actor in Afghanistan since 1980s, such study is considered significant for the political stability and physical security of Afghanistan and mitigating the impact of Afghan conflict on Pakistan.

Over the last decade many important scholarly research works on Pakistan policy towards Afghanistan have appeared. One such work by Rizwan Hussain explored the topic of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations in its historical context but has focused more on Pakistan's policy regarding Afghanistan and its outcome in the rise of Muslim militant groups in Afghanistan. (Hussain, 2005) Another important book in the last decade on the topic is the *Descent into Chaos* by Pakistani journalist, Ahmed Rashid (Rashid, 2008). The book is not solely on Pakistan policy on Afghanistan but covers a significant part of it. According to Rashid Pakistan's policy regarding Afghanistan has partly been responsible for the chaos and instability in Afghanistan. Another important work on the topic of Pakistan policy towards Afghanistan is the policy paper *Decoding Pakistan Strategic Shift in Afghanistan* by Moeed Yusuf written for the Stockholm International Peace Research

Institute. In this work Yusuf explains the reasons behind what he explains as a 'strategic shift,' started effecting about 2012, in Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan. He argues that this shift in the thinking of Pakistan strategic elite is driven by three fundamental drivers including the rise of domestic instability and terrorism; Pakistan longstanding animosity with, and suspicion of, India; and Islamabad desire to avoid a surge in Pakhtun nationalism among its own large Pakhtun population. All the above and others are important and revealing works on Pakistan policy towards Afghanistan. However, they have not fully explored the reasons behind the formulation of an intrusive policy of Islamabad towards Afghanistan and the gradual shift in this policy to consider Afghanistan almost a client state of Pakistan. This paper tries to fill this gap by exploring the causes of historical genesis of Pakistan's somewhat proactive rather intrusive foreign policy towards Afghanistan and its rationale. The aim is to enlighten the readers particularly the scholars and policymakers to understand Pakistan policy and its dynamics as just blaming Islamabad for unending political instability in Afghanistan has failed to improve situation either in Afghanistan or mitigating the impact of Afghan conflict on Pakistan.

Brief Background of Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations

Relationship between Kabul and Islamabad have been strained and have never got fully normalized since the opposition of Afghanistan to Pakistan's request for the United Nations membership in 1947 arguing that Pakistan was in 'possession' of many parts of the Afghan Kingdom. Afterwards Afghan prime minister, Sardar Daud Khan (1953-1963), raising of the Pakhtunistan issue,¹ which laid claim to the Pakhtun inhabited areas in Pakistan to be 'returned' to Afghanistan, sown the seeds of an interminable mistrust within Pakistan against Afghanistan. Afghanistan irredentist claims on Pakistani territory rest on a weak legal argument that Pakhtun areas within Pakistan were once part of Afghanistan but annexed by Sikh ruler of India, Maharaja Ranjeet Singh (13 November 1780 – 27 June 1839), by force followed by British Colonial rulers of India continued possession of these territories. Afghan King Zahir Shah (r. 1933-1973), removal of Sardar Daud, who also happened to be his cousin, as premiere because Shah did not want to pick an unnecessary quarrel with Pakistan, followed by declaration of complete neutrality by the king in both 1965 and 1971 India-Pakistan military entanglements (Jilani, 2001), temporarily assuaged Pakistani leadership. However, lack of trust within Pakistani establishment, continuously threatened by India militarily, for Afghanistan could not be obliterated.

Pakistan Dismemberment, Daud Ascendancy to Power and Shift in Islamabad Afghan Policy

After the dismemberment of Pakistan in December 1971 and cessation of East Bengal to become Bangladesh the incoming political leadership of Pakistan headed by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto wanted rather felt the need to address the Afghan threat to the Pakistani state and in this regard wanted to have some 'coherent' policy. Bhutto and his cohorts aimed at scotching further secessionist forces in the country. Among these secessionist forces perpetrators of Pakhtunistan Movement and their Afghan supporters were considered as the most potent threat to the state. The temporal context of Pakistan, feeling the need to eliminate the threat from Afghanistan to Pakistan's territorial integrity was extremely important. Not only Pakistan got dismembered in 1971 but dethroning of King Zahir Shah by Sardar Daud through a *coup d'état* also took around the same time in 1973. So after returning to power this time as a result of a bloodless coup, Daud was expected to wage a more articulate, real and vociferous struggle for the attainment of Pakhtunistan. Daud in his first broadcast speech on July 17, 1973 declared Pakhtunistan was an "incontrovertible reality" (Mahdi, 1999: 129) and said "his country had no dispute with any other country except Pakistan." (Dar, 1986: 139) Thus fears of Pakistan soon proved true as Daud revived Afghanistan's campaign for Pakhtunistan (Ayob, 1973) and gave sanctuary to Baluch separatists. (Rashid, 2008) Daud must have been convinced of the practicality of wrenching parts of Pakistan by training and arming Pakistani Pakhtun separatists on Afghan soil after Bengali separatist militant group, Mukti Bahini, trained and armed by India on her soil, was successful in separating East Bengal from Pakistan. In response Pakistan under Premier Zulfikar Ali Bhutto also began to support alternative contenders for power in Afghanistan. To deal with the threat from Daud-ruled Afghanistan, Bhutto ordered formation of an 'Afghan Cell' in Pakistan's Foreign Office in July 1973, which was primarily aimed at countering propaganda from Afghanistan. Major General Naseerullah Khan Baber was tasked with looking after Afghan affairs through the Afghan Cell which worked on regular basis for the next four years.

However, the subsequent incidents suggest somewhat otherwise. Bhutto asked Major General Babar, who was then serving as Inspector General Frontier Corps (IGFC)² and was later made the governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (then North West Frontier Province which was renamed in 2011) also by Bhutto, to develop a policy on Afghanistan keeping in view his expertise on the country. He prepared a policy paper and in this he mentioned that as the Russians had a long-cherished desire since the days of Peter the Great (r. 1682-1696) to reach the hot waters of Arabian Sea and India Ocean, therefore, the Soviets after cultivating communists in Afghanistan would attempt to expand southwards posing extreme threat to Pakistan.

¹ Ranjit Singh founded the Sikh Empire, in India in the 19th century, which existed from 1799 to 1849. The empire was mainly based in the Punjab.

² The main duty of the corps, first formed by the British Colonial rulers of India has been to man the Durand Line.

In 1973 when Sardar Daud staged a coup against King Zahir Shah in Afghanistan and we thought we had an interest there. So I wrote a paper analyzing what would happen, for instance, to Shah of Iran etc. Then Bhutto decided that we had to protect our interests. At the same time, the Hizb (Hizb-Islami-Afghanistan) man, Habibur Rahman, came to us. The Hizb was against the socialist and communist parties in Afghanistan. In 1950s when Daud became premier he had opened Afghanistan to Russians. If you can recollect all the routes from Torghundi to Kandahar and the other from Bandar Sher Khan to Kabul were opened up while the main airbases of Bagram and Sheen Dandh were built by the Russians. We thought this was a plan by the Russians to move on to the hot waters. Peter the Great (Russian emperor) had left a will to his nation to keep pressing until it got to the hot waters. Last of the communist ideologues, like Brizhnev etc liked to complete the agenda of Peter the Great. (Personal interview of Raza with Major General Babar, January 2007)

So in order to pre-empt the situation in Afghanistan that emerged after Daud's Coup and to forestall the threat thereof, Pakistan had decided to cultivate certain Afghan groups mainly Muslim clerical outfits to counter the Soviet supported Afghan nationalists. "The Islamist opposed the creation of Pashtunistan, but neither Hizb nor Jamiat mentioned this in its program." (Rubin, 2003) So in line with this policy first of all Gulbaddin Hekmatyar and Ahmed Shah Masud, who were then studying at the Kabul University and had religious tendencies, were brought to Pakistan and made state guests. Hekmatyar in particular became the cynosure of Pakistan. (Gutman, 2008) "Hekmatyar's radical Islamism (and hence anticommunism) and the superior organization of his party made Hizb the favourite of not only the Pakistani and Arab Islamists---including the ISI officers---but also moderate Pakistan generals and the operations wing of the CIA" (Rubin, 2003).

Analysis of relevant research shows that basically the Pakistani establishment led by Babar was very much convinced that there was no potential threat of Soviet southwards expansion; however, it made an old Russian theory a pretext to justify Pakistani interference in Afghanistan. This was primarily done to nip the Pakhtunistan Movement in the bud as well to initiate an effort to establish a virtual Pakistani suzerainty over the weak state of Afghanistan. This was a major shift in Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan. The American interest of trapping the Soviets in Afghanistan may also not be ruled out in Pakistan policy shift regarding Afghanistan. In short it was the community of interest of the U.S. and Pakistani establishments which also contributed to the gradual policy shift of Pakistan towards Afghanistan, which to all intents and purposes was proactive rather than indifferent as was the case in General Ayub's era (1958-69) or even before it. The shift in Pakistan policy is described by a pertinent instance in which Pakistan tried to form its loyalist clerical government rather state in Afghanistan.

Even earlier, in 1970s we were in negotiations with Sardar Daud (creator of Pakhtoonistan movement) and also with Zahir Shah. We sent two men from Hizb-e-Islami with Pakistani colonel Ibrahim to Rome with the offer that the Hizb would be supportive of Zahir Shah if he returned as a constitutional monarch. The constitution had been prepared by one Mr. Shafiq, who had been to the Al-Azhar University in Cairo. This constitution was acceptable to the Hizb-e-Islami Afghanistan. (Personal interview of Raza with Major General. Babar, January 2007, Peshawar)

However, Pakistani efforts fall through and Daud resisted the move and deposed King Zahir Shah could not return as a constitutional monarch. In the meanwhile Sardar Daud went on with anti-Pakistan tirade and Islamabad kept on taking measures through its cultivated right wing Afghan student leaders-turned militant commanders to create problems for Sardar Daud. The *coup d'état* by the members of People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan against Daud rule and his assassination on April 28, 1978 ended one of the worst period of Pakistan-Afghanistan animosity. Although the relations did not improve during the rule of Noor Muhammad Tarakai (1 May 1978-27 March 1979), and Hafiz-ul-Amin (14 September-27 December 1979)³ the communist successors of Sardar Daud. But these Afghan rulers were so much embroiled in internal strife that they could not turn their attention towards Pakistan.

Soviet Occupation of Afghanistan & Adjustment in Pakistan Policy

The U.S.S.R occupation of Afghanistan in December 1979 changed the power equation in the region. With Pakistan as the next door neighbour of Afghanistan and the fears of Soviet expansionism towards the 'hot' waters of Indian Ocean, reachable through the seacoasts of Pakistan, very much on the minds of Pakistani strategists, Islamabad got extremely intimidated due to the Soviet forces presence in Afghanistan. The instrumental role which Pakistan under President General Zia-ul-Haq led military regime played during the anti-Soviet Afghan resistance is now history. However, Pakistan was cautious enough not to allow the Afghan nationalist and royalist groups to form anti-Soviet resistance and instead provided a rallying ground for creating Muslim militants euphemistically called 'Mujahedeen' by bringing together the Afghan clerical groups. This act of Pakistan was aimed at preventing the surge of a national liberation movement in

³ The two along with Babrak Karmal (1979-1986) staged coup against Sardar Daud and named the uprising as *Saur Revolution* which established the Communist Democratic Republic of Afghanistan.

Afghanistan by resisting Soviets as Islamabad, keeping in view traditional Afghan antagonism towards Pakistan, feared that at some later stage gushing nationalistic fervour in Afghanistan may get directed towards Pakistan. Therefore, General Zia, in line with Bhutto's, otherwise his *bête noire*, policy of supporting Afghan clerics, was interested that the same Afghan clerics should lead the anti-Soviet resistance movement.

The king (Zahir Shah exiled in Rome) himself has been an ineffectual ruler who relied on more strong-willed members of his family and court. His closest adviser, his nephew and son-in-law, Abdul Wali, requested a visa to consult with resistance organizations in Pakistan in 1979, but Pakistan refused. Islamabad would hardly permit a member of the royal family that had demanded self-determination for the Pashtuns in Pakistan to establish a tribal army or an alternative Afghan capital in Peshawar. (Rubin, 2003)

Organizing anti-Soviet Afghan resistance was more a policy compulsion of Pakistan than due to anti-Afghan sentiments within the country's establishment. A hostile Afghanistan, which did not have the means to pose a threat to the security of Pakistan, was now supplanted by mighty Soviet Union in Afghanistan. With Soviet forces on the western borders and arch-rival India ever-threatening Pakistan security on the eastern borders and both U.S.S.R and India also closely allied, Islamabad was in a great peril.

Potentially, it was a highly dangerous strategic situation. India and the Soviet Union were allies; should they combine, Pakistan faced the prospect of being squeezed out of existence. I was fully aware of these threats. Like all officers, I knew that our military contingency plans were drawn up on the basis of fighting the Indians or, since 1979, the Soviets. Our nervousness was heightened by the fact that the USSR was a nuclear giant, and India had developed a nuclear capability, which we were seeking to emulate for obvious reasons of self-defence. (Yousaf, Adkin: 1992)

In 1980 Pakistan recognized seven main religious groups as the representative of the Afghan people. These included the Hezb-e-Islami of Gulbadin Hekmatyar; Hezbe-e-Islami of Maulvi Yunus Khalis; Jamiat-e-Islami of Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani; Ittehad-e-Islami Bar-e-Azadi-e-Afghanistan (Islamic Union for the Freedom of Afghanistan) of Abdul Rab Rasool Sayyaf; Harakat-e-Inqilab-e-Islami (Islamic Revolution Movement) of Maulvi Muhammad Nabi Muhammadi; Mahaz-e-Milli Islami (National Islamic Front) of Sayed Ahamd Gailani and Jabha-e-Nijat-e-Milli (National Liberation Front) of Sebghatullah Mujaddidi. (Atai, 2003: 381) These Sunni militant-religious groups had the backing of Pakistan while the Shiite parties were enjoying the support of Iran. (Atai, 2003: 382) These religious groups were being generously aided with the flow of dollars coming from the U.S.A. to circumvent the expanding communist designs of the Soviet Union. At the peak of the war in the mid 1980s, quoting a Pakistani diplomat associated with the Afghan affairs for several years, an Islamabad based journalist Mr Imtiaz Gul wrote:

Gulbadin Hekmatyar and Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani were receiving close to \$200 million each. Maulvi Muhammad Nabi Muhammadi, whose Harakat-e-Inqilab-e-Islami (HII) later provided the mainstay for the Taliban movement, receiving about \$100 million from American and European sources. Another \$200 million-also in cash and kind was distributed among the other four components of the seven-parties. (Gul, 2002: 15)

The conditions were relatively conducive for Pakistani policy of putting an end to the threat from Afghanistan to Pakistan in the leaderless Afghanistan of 1980s. Even Pakistani forces and Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) sent their thousands of fighters and operatives in the garb of Afghan Mujahedeen to help the CIA-funded resistance and to make it a success.

The ISI regarded itself as the general staff of the war, planning and commanding the actions of the Mujahideen. The ISI would plan operations, pick targets, and promise commanders and parties extra weapons for carrying the operations out. It also sent advisers into Afghanistan to oversee key operations. (Gul, 2002: 15)

Perhaps for the first time Pakistani military and agencies got exhaustive and profound experience of Afghanistan and its socio-cultural and politico-economic dynamics and dimensions. This experience of Pakistani security establishment went a long way to convince Pakistan of the political softness of the Afghan state⁴ and attracted them to fill the power

⁴Historically many experts have termed the Afghan state established by Ahmed Shah Abdali (later Durrani) in 1747 as more a confederation of various Afghan tribes than a modern state. Either the most influential or the largest tribes have had dominated the regimes in Afghanistan. This seemingly is still the case; previous president Karzai belonged to the most influential Popalzai clan of Durrani tribe whereas the incoming President Ghani hails from the largest Pashtun tribe of Afghanistan, the Ahmedzai.

vacuum by making Afghanistan a virtual dependency of Pakistan. From this arose the Pakistani establishment coined theories of 'Afghanistan the fifth province' (Rashid, 2008) and 'Strategic Depth'. (Rashid, 2008) Pakistani military strategists of the time thought that by making Kabul dependent on Afghanistan Pakistan could make use of the Afghan soil at times of war with its arch-rival India once Pakistani forces were pushed behind by the mighty Indian forces. This was important to save Pakistani military from being pushed to the wall by the Indian military.⁵ According to Ahmed Rashid:

The Pakistani military also determined that a friendly government in Afghanistan would provide Pakistan with "strategic depth" in any future conflict with India—a theory that had been convincingly dismissed by Pakistani civilian strategic thinkers but which the military continued to espouse—refusing to acknowledge the destabilizing fallout from the Taliban inside Pakistan: the growth of extremism and sectarianism. (Rashid, 2008)

Moreover, Pakistani strategists thought that a virtual Pakistani control over Afghanistan would scotch the Pakhtunistan movement sponsorship in Afghanistan. From a realist state policy standpoint this policy was quite justified as in an anarchical international scenario every state can do every bit, fair or foul, to protect itself and further its interest. This is aptly explained by one of the greatest realist scholars, Hans J. Morgenthau, in his seminal work. *Politics Among Nations* by explaining principles of political realism, which determine actions of states: "Universal moral principles cannot be applied to the actions of states in the abstract; the circumstances of time and place must be considered. The state must place its survival above all other moral goods." (Morgenthau, 1948) By the way when Afghanistan raised the Pakhtunistan issue it did not take into consideration any moral principles but pure interests of the state.

Zia's strategy in Afghanistan mainly rests on the intermingling of Islamic and ethnic question. Under this strategy Pakistan gave significant support to Pakhtun-dominated 'Islamist' parties especially Hizb-e-Islami of Gulbaddin Hekmatyar and subsequently Taliban so that to manipulate the largest ethnic group to its utter advantage. Consequently, as Pakhtunistan issue, bothered Islamabad for long, was supplanted by Islamic nationalism in Afghanistan. (Shafqat, 2002: 151) The 'Strategic Depth' in Afghanistan by Pakistan may also meant to install some of Pakistani nuclear launchers on Afghan soil to attain a Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) vis-à-vis India and to keep its 'Second Strike' capability intact. An allied reason for Pakistan to have a client state in Afghanistan was to generate drug money, which the CIA and ISI successfully done during the anti-Soviet resistance in Afghanistan, by taking fullest potential of Afghanistan's opium production.

After the Soviet withdrawal, as military pressure on the countryside eased, agriculture and trade revived. Much of this renewed production took the form of opium growing, heroin refining, and smuggling; these enterprises were organized by combines of Mujahideen parties, Pakistani military officers, and Pakistani drug syndicates. (Rubin, 2003: 183)

Raising such money was necessary for funding huge and unbearable expenses of Pakistani military and intelligence agencies as well as to foot the huge bill of luxuries of military-civilians elites. In order to achieve the above-mentioned objectives, the international border status of the Durand Line, for which Pakistani establishment has always been blaming and vituperating successive Afghan regimes for not recognizing it, was started to be violated at will by Pakistan itself after the Soviet forces withdrawal completed in 1989. After Soviet forces withdrawal the U.S. also assumed a totally off-hand posture towards Afghanistan providing Pakistan an opportunity to have limited rather than extensive 'Strategic Depth' in Afghanistan.

Mujahideen Internal Strife and Pakistan's Problems in Afghanistan

As soon as the Soviet forces withdrew and the U.S. also turned back on Afghanistan, various anti-Soviet Mujahideen factions started fighting each other for territory, money, and influence. Pakistan apparently tried to make a patch up among the warring factions but it is debatable how sincere were these efforts because instability or to put it more precisely lack of stability in Afghanistan has suited Pakistani interests. Nevertheless, Pakistan negotiated key 'peace' accords among various Mujahideen groups. The most important of these agreements were Peshawar, Islamabad and Mecca accords. These accords gave a roadmap for future Afghan government by sharing political power through distributing governmental positions among key commanders. But they failed to bring long-term stability to Afghanistan covertly desired by Islamabad but at the same time they also could not bring Pakistan's Afghan protégés into power in Afghanistan.

Thus the internecine Afghan Civil War between the so-called Mujahideen groups in the aftermath of Soviet withdrawal kept Pakistan active to call the shots in Afghanistan. However, finding it impossible to have its way in Afghanistan, Pakistani security establishment opted to aggravate the instability in Afghanistan (Grare, 2014) in order to keep it weak as the communist regime of Najeebullah Ahmadzai, yet another staunch Pakhtun nationalist, was in the saddle and a constant threat to Pakistan. Pakistan strategists calculated that the deeper political instability would force

⁵ For details see *Afghanistan: The Bear Trap* by Brigadier Yousuf.

Najeebullah to leave power and in this regard Islamabad's was to an extent successful.

With Najeeb I arranged talks in 1992 and Asad Durrani (former DG ISI) set the tone for the work of intelligence agencies. Dr Najeeb said he was ready to quit at any time provided a governing mechanism was set up in Afghanistan. Due to the unpreparedness of ISI or its insincerity the talk fell through. I must add that I went as a guarantor of Pakistan in talks with Najeeb. (Personal interview of Raza with Major General Babar, January, 2007, Peshawar)

The above assertions of Naseerullah Babar, who was to become interior minister of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in 1996, point towards the incoherence of Pakistan's Afghan policy as Pakistani strategists were not in full agreement on the dynamics of country's Afghan policy. However, Pakistan was able to put an end to the Pakhtunistan Movement at least for a considerable time as the communist regime of Najeebullah did not have the strength to pursue proactively an anti-Pakistan policy. Nevertheless, seeing things not going the way as desired by the Pakistani establishment during the Afghan Civil War and even after the dethroning of the Afghan nationalist regime of President Najeebullah in 1992, Pakistan stuck to the policy of finding a 'Strategic Depth' in Afghanistan.

On its part Pakistan took steps to ensure that Mujahedeen groups closer to Pakistan get lion's share in the scramble for power. However, Islamabad closest Afghan militant ally, Gulbadin Hikmatyar, could never get full control of affairs in Afghanistan despite remaining prime minister from 1993 to 1994 during the Mujahedeen rule. Islamabad's insistence to make Hikmatyar in-charge of affairs in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of Soviet troops, because of his Pakhtun background, estranged its preferred Tajik militant commanders, Burhanuddin Rabbani and Ahmed Shah Masud. Rabbani although served as President of Afghanistan from 1992 to 1996. This was the beginning of the rivalry of non-Pakhtun Afghan militant commanders with Pakistan, who latter formed the Afghan Northern Alliance to fight the Taliban (See below). Ahmed Shah Masud who remained defiant vis-à-vis Pakistan became an Afghan nationalist in essence and after his killing by the Taliban-supported Al Qaeda, just two days before the 9/11 incidents in the U.S., become a symbol of Afghan nationalism. In fact, he is the first non-Pakhtun who became a real symbol of Afghan nationalism. Here it is important to note that Pakistan adopted a policy of gathering militants from all ethnic groups of Afghanistan to resist the Soviet occupation and when the latter forces pulled out of Afghanistan Islamabad policy was to place a Pakhtun as head of Afghanistan irrespective of the fact that it would estrange non-Pakhtuns. The aim of the first policy was to give strength to anti-Soviet resistance and the second to win the goodwill of Pakhtun majority of Afghanistan by making them believe Pakistan was on their side in their struggle for power against other ethnicities in Afghanistan. Such goodwill was expected to neutralize the support of Pakhtuns of Afghanistan to the Pakhtunistan Movement and to provide Pakistan 'Strategic Depth' as historically only Pakhtuns, save a couple of brief interludes, have been ruling Afghanistan since its birth and only a Pakhtun leader could give Pakistan what it wanted. Pakistan support to the Taliban, a predominantly Pakhtun movement, afterwards was the continuation of this policy.

Rise of Taliban and Pakistan Policy in Afghanistan

The biggest opportunity for Pakistan to locate and firm up 'Strategic Depth' in Afghanistan arose with the emergence of Taliban in 1994 in Afghanistan. Most of the Afghan Taliban commanders got education at Pakistani madrassas run by religious-political group, Jamiat-e-Ulema-Islam. Among these madrassas, where the Afghan Taliban got education, Jamiat-ul-Uloom-al-Islamiyyah located in New Town, Karachi; Jamia Haqqani located in Akora Khattak (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) and several madrassas located in Quetta and its suburbs were most important. The first mentioned madrassa, operated by Maulana Mohammad Yousuf Binori, had enrolment of nearly 8000 Taliban from different nationalities. Top three of the six members of the Rahbari Shura (Supreme Council) of the Taliban leadership came from madrassa Binoria. (Rahid, 2008: 120) It is a strange coincidence that Naseerullah Babar, the man who was instrumental in formulating Pakistan's coherent new policy or effecting paradigm policy shift towards Afghanistan in 1970s, was again the man who was involved in creating the Afghan Taliban, a fact admitted by former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto (Qureishi, n.d) By arming and supporting Taliban to take over other Mujahedeen leaders and involvement of the ISI to divert the loyalties of important Mujahedeen commanders and fighters to Taliban head Mullah Omar, Naseerullah Babar wanted to remove various Mujahedeen warlords to pave way for Pakistan to achieve its objectives in Afghanistan through Taliban. Therefore, it was no coincidence that provinces and areas, where Hekmatyar's militants had firm control, fall to the Taliban without fighting and in no time. It is widely believed that Hekmatyar on the directions of Pakistani intelligence operatives did not resist Taliban. After Taliban captured Kabul in September 1996 with the support of Pakistani military and intelligence network in Afghanistan, Pakistani establishment anticipated that under the Taliban control Afghanistan Pakistan would be able to locate 'Strategic Depth' in Afghanistan.

Before 9/11 several retired ISI officers had boasted that one of the key reasons for Pakistan's support to the Taliban regime was to gain access to vast former Soviet underground storage bunkers built at major airfields such as Bagram. Here Pakistan could stash away conventional and nuclear-tipped missiles in order to enhance its second-strike capability against India in case of War (Rashid, 2008: 121)

Pakistan did not bring the Taliban to power in Afghanistan on its own. Certain other factors also played significant role in the Taliban capturing power and in this regard general welcoming of the Taliban by the Afghans, who had got fed-up of warlords, was significant. There was also an American interest in Taliban regime as it expected that it would create acceptable law and order conditions in Afghanistan so that oil and gas pipelines could be laid across Afghanistan to pump central Asian oil and gas resources to the seashores of Pakistan and beyond.

During the Taliban era (1996-2001) Pakistan did find a relative 'Strategic Depth' in Afghanistan vis-à-vis India. But remaining true to the traditional independent Afghan national character, Taliban started making decisions on their own which were divergent of Pakistan's establishment desires. The Taliban also started hosting Arab fighters and global jihadists led by Osama Bin Laden. The latter taking full advantage of political vacuum and Afghans need and greed for money established a virtual Wahabi-Arab Islamic Emirate (state) within Afghan state. Arguably, the Taliban coming under domineering influence of the Al Qaeda made the militia and its regime less dependent on Pakistan. But under the Taliban many Pakistani militant groups like Jaish-e-Muhammad and Harkat-ul-Ansar, who were mainly focusing on militancy in Indian occupied Kashmir, established training camps in Afghanistan. The rise of the Taliban leadership and its unprecedented style of governance, termed wrongly as *Khilafah* of contemporary era by its supporters, turned out to be a watershed in Afghan and modern Muslim history due to which the regime received criticism from far and wide. In this situation Pakistani establishment was able to realize from the Taliban whatever it liked. Nevertheless, Taliban were very much in line with Pakistani strategic thinkers expressed their indignation for India. At least under Taliban Pakistan had nothing to worry about Indian involvement in Afghanistan and launching of anti-Pakistan activities which was the case during President Hamid Karzai (2002-2014) and now President Ashraf Ghani (2014---). However, Taliban, to the chagrin of Islamabad, refused to accept the Durand Line as permanent border between Pakistan and Afghanistan reflecting longstanding official Afghan stand.

Terrorist Attacks in U.S. And Impact on Pakistan Afghanistan Policy

The incidents of 9/11 and its direct fallout for Afghanistan is a common knowledge. The occupying NATO-ISAF forces made short work of the Taliban regime which it dislodged by the end of 2001. The U.S. which also started Global War on Terror (GWOt) asked all the countries to join this war and specifically asked Pakistan to unequivocally announce whether it is on her or on the terrorist side in the war. Pakistan under General Musharraf came under so irresistible pressure that it had to join the American camp and announced its ditching of the Taliban at least officially. Islamabad even handed over the Taliban ambassador to Pakistan, Abdul Salam Zaheef to the U.S. The foreign forces occupation of Afghanistan where on the one hand put a damper on the long-cherished desire of Pakistani establishment to have 'Strategic Depth' in Afghanistan, the volte-face on the Taliban made the latter suspect of the sincerity of Islamabad to the goals of the group. Pakistan's fears of Pakistani and Afghan Taliban joining hands is rooted in the rough treatment, which Pakistan meted out to the Afghan Taliban after the 9/11 incidents. However, to keep the Taliban on its side and also to put up stiff resistance to the anti-Pakistan forces in Afghanistan, Pakistan secretly kept on supporting the Taliban. (See below) The coming into power of chairman Karzai after the first-ever popularly participated elections in Afghanistan in 2004 was a significant impediment as far as Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan were concerned. Pakistan lost its relative strategic depth, which it found under Taliban, in Afghanistan. Secondly, due to deep ingrained mistrust and disliking for Pakistan among Afghans, large-scale anti-Pakistani feelings ignited in Afghanistan under President Hamid Karzai. Consequently, long-drawn efforts by Islamabad to cultivate goodwill for Pakistan within Afghanistan failed.

Demands for Making Pakistan-Afghanistan Confederation & Islamabad Afghan Policy

Although it was not an official policy of Pakistan but to adjust to the changing situation in Afghanistan and keep Pakistani interest in perspective, the KP province chief of Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), Siraj-ul-Haq,⁶ came up with a strange suggestion of forming a Pakistan-Afghan Confederation. The JI has historically been closed to Pakistani security establishment. Members of its student cadre, Islami Jamiat Talaba, took part along Pakistani military against Bengali insurgents in 1971 in East Pakistan (Bangladesh). Then it joined the regime of General Zia, who espoused creation of an Islamist Empire in the region by combining Pakistan, Afghanistan and Muslim regions of defunct U.S.S.R in Central Asia. Many IJT members fought against the Soviet forces in Afghanistan. The party also had intimate relations with Hekmatyar; whereas Pakistani security establishment was under a compelling influence of clerics of the JI with regard to Pakistan's policy on Afghanistan and India due to the presence of many individuals subscribing to the JI ideology on key positions in the country's security establishment under the patronage of General Zia. Sirajul Haq demanded: "It is high time that Pakistan and Afghanistan must form a confederation." The suggestion aired by Siraj ul Haq was a farfetched idea. It was the manifestation of a specific mindset in Pakistan which by all means wanted to make Afghanistan Islamabad's backyard. This suggestion came in the wake of a failed Afghan policy of Pakistan and was floated to make amends for the failure of

⁶ , Siraj remained senior minister of the KP during the rule of MMA (2002-2007) and the present coalition provincial government of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Jamaat-e-Islami (2013---) till his elevation to the position of party head in March 2015 and his election as a member of Senate of Pakistan.

Islamabad to make Afghanistan the 'Strategic Depth' of Pakistan. But when it became apparent that this policy could not achieve its aims by patronizing Afghan mullah-militants then it was decided to get the same through the illogical idea of forming a confederation of two independent and sovereign states. The idea of Pakistan-Afghanistan confederation, which the JI suggested in 2007, was not something new as the idea was believably floated by the country's military-intelligence establishment many years back. In the edited version of late PPP chairperson, Benazir Bhutto's book *Daughter of the East*, she wrote that some officials from the ISI had suggested a plan to her, when she was the prime minister, that after the fall of Dr. Najeebullah's government, Pakistan should announce a plan for making a confederation with Afghanistan.

Obviously, by giving a practical shape to the quixotic idea, Siraj-ul-Haq rather the entire JI, wanted to make US-NATO troops leave Afghanistan as he also pointed in his statement that with the coming into being of a Pakistan-Afghan confederation, the 'evil' designs of the U.S. and India could be thwarted. Giving practical shape to such a proposal would have been tantamount not only to fundamentally jeopardizing the existence of the Afghan state but also the state of Pakistan; would have endangered regional security and would have serious repercussions for Iran and India in addition to Central Asian republics and even China. Given the huge difference in population size of Pakistan and Afghanistan with the latter no match for the former, the idea of formation of Pakistan-Afghanistan confederation was perhaps euphemistically saying something akin to making Afghanistan a dependency of Pakistan. This idea of Pakistan-Afghanistan confederation is also equally impractical if analyzed against the backdrop of international political realities in which the institution of state still very much relevant despite under severe pressure from the forces of globalization and non state actors.

Success and Failure of Pak Afghan Policy Since 1970s

In view of the three main objectives of the gradual shift in Afghan policy of Pakistan in the decades of 1970s, 1980s and 1990s from that of cautious distance to proactive involvement in Afghanistan, the policy has had its failure and successes. Insofar as a key objective of the policy of Pakistan vis-a-vis Afghanistan since 1970s is concerned, it was to torpedo the Pakhtunistan Movement. Islamabad has largely been successful in neutralizing that threat to its very integrity. On the other hand Pakistan has failed to get 'Strategic Depth' in Afghanistan vis-à-vis India. Whereas, Pakistan's policy of proactive engagement in the political vacuum in Afghanistan, inflicted large-scale negative impact on the state and society in Pakistan in the shape of influx of millions of refugees, evolution of a 'Kalashnikov and Madrassa culture' and the rise of Pakistani Taliban,⁷ which for years posed existential threat to the very survival of the Pakistani state and society. But as the Pakhtunistan movement and the underlying irredentist claims of Kabul over Pakistani territory was the mainspring of all issues between the two countries, its neutralization overshadows the negative fallout in Afghanistan for Islamabad. Whereas, the negative impact of Pakistani policy regarding Afghanistan on the latter was monumental.

However, often Pakistan is blamed for the negative repercussions of its policy on Afghanistan but taking all factual data into consideration a closer look would reveal that Kabul has to blame itself equally as it could not overcome the political vacuum whenever Pakistan competed to fill the gap. Moreover, for a landlocked and an underdeveloped country like Afghanistan, dependent largely on Pakistan for its trade, staple commodities and education and health needs, raising a dispute with the latter was but disastrous. The strategists of the soft Afghan state could not calculate the risks for their country by picking quarrels with Pakistan, a country having a big economy relative to Afghanistan; huge, well-trained and well-armed military in absolute terms while Afghanistan has had no match for Pakistan in quantity and quality of armed forces; and huge natural resources, all key ingredients of national power.

Pakistan's Dilemma To Reinvigorate Taliban Movement

With Pakistan seeing most of its objectives in Afghanistan falling through or unachievable in the presence of U.S.-NATO forces and even after their withdrawal towards the end of 2014 and due to increasing return of former communist and anti-Pakistan Afghan nationalist officials from exile and hibernation to join the country's establishment, Islamabad only hope is an reinvigorated Taliban movement so that the latter could get some share in the constitutional dispensation and political system of the country. But Islamabad is also aware of the dangers of the Taliban gaining strength as that might pose a threat to it. (Yusuf, 2013) There is a strong apprehension within Pakistani establishment that once international forces would have completely withdrawn from Afghanistan, Afghan and Pakistani Taliban would join hands. Pakistan is apprehensive of affinity between the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban and wants to avoid the situation in which the two groups join hands against the Pakistani state. Therefore, it wants to continue friendly ties with the Afghan Taliban and is reluctant to deny them sanctuaries on its soil. (Grare, 2014)

Despite the Taliban' militant orientation and their recalcitrance to join the political system unless all the foreign forces would have withdrawn, Pakistan is under duress to support the Taliban militancy. Nevertheless, this strategy has paid

⁷ Pakistani Taliban cherished the model of the Afghan Taliban and wanted to replicate the same in Pakistan and to capture state power to dictate their agenda to the society. In the process since 2007 Pakistani Taliban have waged the bloodiest insurgency in the country's history resulting in the deaths of more than 50,000 civilians and security forces personnel and economic losses to the tune of around \$100 billion.

some dividend as the Taliban could not be decisively defeated (Schroden et al., 2014) by U.S.-NATO forces while the performance of more than 300,000 Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) after assuming security duties in the wake of pull out of foreign forces is well below expectation. (Daniel & Shalizi, 2014) The Taliban have been able to capture a number of areas from the ANSF including the group's biggest success on the battlefield in 13 years by capturing the northern city of Kunduz in September 2015 for a brief period. In order to deflect international pressure and continuous allegations by Afghanistan, partly aimed at making amends for the incapacity and lack of commitment within the ANSF and other state institutions, that the Taliban could only negotiate for peace when they would be pushed for the same by Islamabad the latter released a number of Taliban leaders held by it in her custody. The aim was to facilitate Taliban-Kabul peace talks in the hope that the former would get a sizable share in political power in Afghanistan. (Grare, 2014) Islamabad even used its influence over the Taliban and made them hold rare talks with the Afghan government in July 2015 in Murree.

However, as the peace process had to move forward meaningfully and the second round of negotiations were about to be held, Afghan National Directorate of Security (NDS), which is believed to be a repository of many anti-Pakistan officials, revealed the death of Taliban movement founder Mullah Omar. (Stancati, Amiri, Shah; 2015) The NDS wanted to torpedo the peace talks between the Taliban and Kabul knowing that its architect was Pakistan and its biggest advantage would accrue to Islamabad in the shape of Taliban return to the power corridors which would largely be at the altar of these anti-Taliban and anti-Pakistan Afghan officials. However, as peace talks between Kabul and Taliban have failed, the latter increased their pressure in the battlefield to enter into negotiations not only from a position of strength but also to make it a compulsion of the weak government of President Ashraf Ghani. The future of Pakistan's Afghan policy would depend how the Taliban and ANSF fight it out on the battlefield and how Kabul-Taliban peace talks move forward.

Conclusion

The mistrust between Pakistan and Afghanistan could never be bridged. As long as Afghan King Zahir Shah was in power he tried to pursue normal relations with Pakistan. Islamabad also reciprocated in the similar manner. However, a strong lobby within Shah's government led by Sardar Daud Khan laid claim over parts of Pakistani territory and after the latter dethroned the king he spearheaded the Pakhtunistan Movement, which called for making Pakhtun areas of Pakistan part of Afghanistan. In response Pakistan made a paradigm shift in her previous Afghan policy of cautious distance from affairs in Afghanistan to actively engage itself there. This pro-active policy of Pakistan regarding Afghanistan rested on the aim of weakening anti-Pakistan, largely-communist oriented Afghan nationalists, by cultivating their Afghan rivals, mostly Muslim clerics. Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in December 1979 provided a great opportunity to Islamabad to organize the Afghan resistance against the Soviet forces and their Afghan cohorts on its soil. Pakistan wanted to give this resistance an Islamist colour and Muslim militants joined from across the Muslim world were given training at the madrassas especially established for the purpose in the bordering area along Afghanistan. The first-hand knowledge of Afghanistan by Pakistani intelligence and military officials, while organizing and supervising the resistance against the Soviet troops occupying Afghanistan, attracted General Zia, who espoused grand designs of forming an Islamist Empire in the region by combining Pakistan, Afghanistan and Muslim areas of U.S.S.R. in the Central Asia. Therefore, his regime fully engaged itself in Afghanistan internal affairs to cultivate its protégés, Afghan clerics, who would help him create an Islamist empire and would also push back anti-Pakistan Afghan nationalists. For this General Zia paid a huge price by hosting millions of Afghan refugees on Pakistani soil, the largest refugee population anywhere in the World and gave them a free hand within Pakistan so that to make them dependent on Islamabad.

However, the sudden death of General Zia along with his top brass including the architect of resistance against the U.S.S.R., General Akhtar Abdul Rahman, in a plane crash on August 17, 1988, and the factional fighting between various Mujahedeen groups after the withdrawal of Soviet forces in 1989, prevented Pakistan from attaining a key policy objective of making Afghanistan its 'Strategic Depth' vis-à-vis India. Failing to install a client regime in Afghanistan after Soviet forces withdrawal, Islamabad helped the Taliban to emerge and overrun most of Afghanistan, in a bid to get 'Strategic Depth' in Afghanistan. Islamabad was able to have relative Strategic Depth' in Afghanistan under the Taliban. However, the latter hosting of the global terrorist outfit, the Al Qaeda and the involvement of the latter in terrorist attacks in the U.S. cost the Taliban their regime and Pakistan its 'Strategic Depth' in Afghanistan. Since the occupation of Afghanistan by foreign forces in 2001 and return of former anti-Pakistan officials and politicians to decision-making roles in Afghanistan, Islamabad's policy in Afghanistan fall flat. In response Pakistan has been trying to strengthen the Taliban to get the latter a sizable share in the political system and dispensation in Afghanistan and thus safeguard its key interests of preventing the resurrection of the Pakhtunistan Movement and going of Afghanistan under a domineering influence of Delhi. The future of Pakistan policy in Afghanistan depends on the successes of the Taliban insurgency and Kabul-Taliban talks.

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