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Making Sense of Instability in South Asia

Attar Rabbani*

Abstract

Being the key states, India and Pakistan would eventually have to shoulder the responsibility of maintaining stability in the region. Afghanistan is unfortunately being used as the "theater of action" by them, in the name of strategic interest. Stable relations between New Delhi and Islamabad are an unavoidable imperative for bringing stability in the region and this is not realizable so long as they view one another as "arch enemy". And as long as they did not resolve their disputes i.e., dispute of Jammu and Kashmir, their enmity would continue. As a consequence, Afghanistan would remain strategically significant as ever and they are unlikely to desist from intervening in its internal affairs. Breaking such geopolitical re-enforceability is very vital for stability and stable & peaceful Afghanistan would be a critical component of it.

Keywords: South Asia, Regional Rivalry, Geopolitics, Afghanistan, Global Powers, Elusive Stability

Introduction

South Asia perhaps is the most instable and dangerous region in the World today. Its instability is so wide and deep that the whole world is bearing the brunt – visible and non-visible both. This is obviously an outcome of coming together of several factors – some originated in the region and some from wider world politics. Comprehending it therefore would have to be an inclusive endeavor - involving both regionally contributing and globally enforcing variables. These variables have played constructive as well as destructive role in shaping regional scenario and still continues to do so without any serious challenge. In fact, regional actors namely India and Pakistan have been presiding over this instability and inviting world powers to bail them out and thereby indirectly contributing to its continuance. The theater of actual action is ever vulnerable land of Afghanistan where India and Pakistan have left no stone unturned to ensure perceived national interest. Moreover,

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Afghanistan's vulnerability is being used by them to perpetuate strategic calculus which has made South Asia more instable and dangerous, not less.

All this has been done ostensibly in the name of stabilizing Afghanistan or helping the Afghan people. Captivatingly, the world looked the other way when India and Pakistan were busy outmaneuvering one another in Afghanistan. Even now when Afghanistan emerged as the epicenter of terrorism and extracting huge cost, we – the people of the world, this time too, seemingly failing to see through the glass and grasp the reality. This paper attempts to untangle that reality by (a) exposing historical setting of the region (b) identifying regional and global actors and their contributing behavior and (c) showing the way forward for meaningful regional stability and argues that 'unless India and Pakistan stabilize mutual relations, Afghanistan would remain instable and so long as it remains instable the regional stability would elude us.

Setting the Scene

Presently, it is believed that instability in South Asia sprigs from Af-Pak border region, where the Taliban forces have dig in. The role of surrounding states has long been acknowledged in regional instability however was never really explored. Pakistan in particular has repeatedly been singled out as the prime actor, whereas the enforcing role of other regional states like India has largely been ignored or treated at best, partially. Similarly, the role of the world powers has rightly pointed out but aiding and abetting it, by regional states not given attention, it deserve. Besides, the telling reasons behind regional behavior of Pakistan and India have also not been adequately grasped. The largest and influential states of the region - India and Pakistan are actually exceedingly responsible for maintaining regional stability and as such, would have to provide leadership for realizing it. Currently, however neither India nor Pakistan we would argue has the fire in their belly to carry this agenda forward. And without their visible and verifiable commitment, Afghanistan would continue to swing between war and peace. History offers, as it has always been, explanation for this disappointing state of affairs in the region.

The Historical Setting

The 'immediate' as well as 'long' past of India and Pakistan is common and as such, they share geographical and demographical contiguity. In fact, united India had been ruled by Muslim elites for well over two centuries (1526 to 1858) and this contiguity had influenced Hinduism on

the one hand and moderated Islam on the other; now better known as Sufi Islam of the subcontinent. It has also produced several thinkers, poets, musicians, social reformers and political leaders who further cemented this mutual conversion and propounded Hindu-Muslim Unity as an emblem of India's true civilization. Often this takes the form of a notion of "unity in diversity" which eventually was accepted as the foundation stone of Indian nationalism. This did not go unchallenged however.

The most formidable challenge to this version of nation came from a typical section of Hindu and Muslim elites. The first upper-caste elite who conceptualized India (Hindu) as one single whole was Vinayak Damodar Savarkar however better elaborated upon by his close associate, M.S. Golwalkar. The first Muslim upper-caste elite who politically articulated separate homeland for Muslims was Mohammad Ali Jinnah. Savarkar in an ideological pamphlet released in 1923 titled as Hindutva: Who is a Hindu, articulates that Hindus are those who consider India to be their motherland, as well as holy-land where their ancestors lived and their religion originated. Savarkar's associate Golwalkar lists five factors which make a Nation – geography, race, religion, culture, and language and of course Hindus are a Nation. Further he clarifies that all those not belonging to the national, i.e. Hindu race, religion, culture and language naturally fall out of the pale of real 'National' life. In his own words, "We repeat: in Hindustan, the land of the Hindus, lives and should live the Hindu Nation – satisfying all the five essential requirements of the scientific nation concept of the modern world. Consequently, only those movements are truly 'National' as aim at re-building, revitalizing and emancipating from its present stupor, the Hindu Nation. Those only are nationalist patriots, who, with the aspiration to glorify the Hindu race and Nation next to their heart, are prompted into activity and strive to achieve that goal. All others are either traitors or enemies to the National cause, or, to take a charitable view, idiots".[1] Moreover he regarded Hindutva as an ethnic, cultural and political identity and argued that in "Hindu Rashtra" members of religious minorities – Muslims and Christians – as non-Hindus would not be on par with Hindus and accorded them a second class citizenry-status. Similarly while justifying demand of separate state for Muslims of British India Jinnah stipulated that "We are a nation with our own distinctive culture and civilization, language and literature, art and architecture, names and nomenclature, sense of values and proportion, legal laws and moral codes, customs and calendar, history and traditions, aptitudes and ambitions, in short, we have our own distinctive outlook on life and of life. By all canons of international law we are a nation".[2] The

organizational support for both of them was not very difficult to come by and obviously thrown around by the elite sections of respective community. The first organization which championed cause of Hindu India was the Hindu Mahasabha and for separate home land for Muslims was the Muslim League. In the meanwhile, Hindu Mahasabha was relegated to the background by a political organization called the Indian National Congress. This shift is very noteworthy: Hindu Mahasabha championed the cause of Hindu India whereas Indian national Congress championed the cause of politically secular and culturally composite India. One of the leaders of Indian National Congress, Jawaharlal Nehru articulates true multi-dimensional and secular character of India and wrote, "It was presumptuous of me to imagine that I could unveil her and find out what she is today and what she was in the long past. Today she is four hundred million separate individual men and women, each differing from the other, each living in a private universe of thought and feeling. If this is so in the present, how much more so to grasp that multitudinous past of innumerable successions of human beings. Yet something has bound them together and binds them still. India is a geographical and economic entity, a cultural unity amidst diversity, a bundle of contradictions held together by strong but invisible threads. Overwhelmed again and again her spirit was never conquered, and today when she appears to be a plaything of a proud conqueror, she remains unsubdued and unconquered. About her there is the elusive quality of a legend of long ago; some enchantment seems to have held her mind. She is a myth and an idea, a dream and a vision, and yet very real and present and pervasive".[3] This communitarian rivalry between Hindus and Muslims throw two interesting leaders in the main: Mohandas Karmachan Gandhi on the side of the Congress and Mohammad Ali Jinnah on the side of the League. Eventually, Mr. Jinnah did succeed in carving out a separate homeland for Muslims and Pakistan appeared on the world map.

However, neither Pakistan nor India was satisfied with partition plan and protested but had to accept it in the absence of acceptable alternative. Pakistan believed it has not got what initially was promised and India believed that it had to forgo its cultural heart to Pakistan. In fact, neither India sincerely digested its partition nor Pakistan was satisfied with its territorial position. What's more, India went overboard in helping East Pakistan and successfully broken Pakistan and Bangladesh emerged. This further humiliated Pakistan; and its longstanding allegation of India being its prime destroyer found renewed prudence. It is in this backdrop we need to grasp instability in the region.

Afghanistan, another key regional state has unfortunately been very weak in managing internal stability and hence external affairs. Politically it remained instable, economically backward and socially fragmented. It has consistently failed in holding socio-economic and political fabrics appropriately and cohesively. Moreover Afghanistan did not really embrace serious modernization of its socio-politico and economic sectors, which is responsible for pushing Afghanistan into isolation. Consequently it could not attract any meaningful investment from overseas. The dominance of religion and influence of archaic culture therefore did not loosen its grip over people's lives and remained by far inward-looking. This was indeed a classical cocktail and an open invitation for foreign intervention and its giant neighbor - erstwhile USSR actually intervened militarily (December, 1979); and a new era dawned not only for Afghanistan but for wider region as well. This has actually set the ball of regional instability rolling, which no one seems to be able to control now.

The USSR's Afghan intervention had three intentions – (a) showing its adversary the US that still it has the fire to expand its imperial horizon (b) sending a clear single for regional states to align with it and (c) controlling Afghanistan internally as well as externally for its exclusive advantage. This invasion exceedingly alarmed Pakistan, a close US ally because Pakistan feared losing its only available strategic depth to USSR, a formidable India supporter. The USSR openly sympathized and supported Indian position especially on regional issues with Pakistan and China. The USSR also played the pioneering role in laying the ground of several developmental projects in India. In fact it supplied sophisticated ready-to-be-used military hardware to India which was put to good use by India in wars with Pakistan. Moreover, it also used its veto power in UN Security Council to prevent any harsh censure of India and rejected proposals criticizing India with regard to handling of human rights situation in J&K on few occasions.[4] Besides Pakistan worried that should USSR persist in Afghanistan it would be more vulnerable therefore for diplomatic and strategic blackmail by India. However, Pakistan was uniquely placed geopolitically to counter USSR, provided the US and its allies pledge unflagging diplomatic and military support. The US led capitalist block was entirely aware of this reality. It was this coming together of the US, its allies, and Pakistan that had given boost for geopolitical games in the region and this took the form of force called 'Mujahedeen' – a deadly fighter force raised and sustained on religious fodder.[5] The US, in particular, not only encouraged this cocktail of nationalism and religious fervor directed against USSR but also wholeheartedly supported it with firearms and finance coupled with

military training for the fighters. According to one source, the US had earmarked two billion dollars to the Mujahedeen over ten years of Soviet occupation. To be more specific the US allocated dollar 30 million to the Mujahedeen for 1980 and dollar 30 million for 1981. The financial aid exceeded dollar 100 million for the first time in 1985 and reached dollar 630 million in 1987.[6] The Afghan Mujahedeen force as a consequence became so powerful that it gave countless sleepless nights for USSR force in Afghanistan which were eventually pulled back in defeat. Thereafter, unfortunately Afghanistan was left to fend for itself and Mujahedeen were got abandoned without offering them any alternative livelihood and a hopeful future. Pakistan then filled-in the gap with its own national interest, as sole guiding principle however she could not control charged Mujahedeen fighters and situation became very instable. A new era thereafter dawned in the history of Mujahedeen as a 'non-state' entity and changed the history of not only South Asia but also of the whole world. Some unemployed Mujahedeen definitely rallied around the newly emerging holy warriors called Taliban, largely drawn from hundreds of Madrassas (Islamic theology schools) both in Afghanistan-Pakistan and around the world.

The Taliban

The Taliban emerged in the early 1990s in northern Pakistan following the withdrawal of USSR troops from Afghanistan. A predominantly Pashtun movement, the Taliban came to prominence in Afghanistan in the autumn of 1994. As a fighting force with political ambitions, the Taliban appeared in the Qandahar province of Afghanistan amid violent chaos all around. There was civil war being fought in the capital city Kabul between the forces of Burhanuddin Rabbani under his commander Ahmad Shah Masood with his allies on the one side and the forces of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and his allies on the other. The whole city of Kabul was razed to the ground, as a result of the civil war. The UN estimates that about 50,000 civilian lost their lives in the conflict. The rest of the country was ruled by several warlords and petty chieftains with a free-for-all attitude. The Taliban's first promise therefore was to restore peace and security in the area (a rare achievement in Afghanistan). In fact, the Taliban immediately re-positioned itself as a political alternative and propounded a peculiar socio-economic and political order, premised on archaic interpretation of Islam. After seizing power in Kabul in September of 1996, the Taliban centered its focus on wresting all of Afghanistan from the control of their opponents, namely, the United Front headed by Burhanuddin Rabbani.[7]

More importantly, Taliban leaders very consciously gelled with tribal culture of the country and slowly Islamized it, in way that suited them. Simultaneously they embarked on territorial expansion. Whenever and wherever they captured some area or district they dislodged incumbent political order and implanted their own, based on patriarchal preference. Literally women and girls were forced to disappear from social scene. The Taliban initially banned all girls' schools, prevented women from working, except in health care centers. If they leave their houses they have to be covered from head to foot with a veil. Besides being veiled, women are usually required to be accompanied by a male relative when they go out on the streets. And women caught violating these rules have been beaten.[8] The Taliban all the way have justified these restrictions on the ground of protecting women's dignity.

Money and fighting machines were not a problem for them because guns were available in abundance left over by the Mujahedeen and USSR. Besides, they were extracting taxes from the areas under control. Pakistan, was watching very carefully the situation in Afghanistan because she was receiving hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees and scores of them literally melting away into its society and throwing a challenge for Pakistani security forces. Pakistan Government and the UNHCR undertook a census (March 2002) which puts the total number of Afghan refugees in the country at 3 million with 42% in camps and 58% in urban areas. According to the same census over 81% of them are Pashtuns with smaller percentages of Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkmen and other ethnic groups and over 50 percent arrived in Pakistan in 1979 and 1980 alone. Noteworthy is the fact that a substantial number of them were born in Pakistan not Afghanistan.[9] The UNHCR puts that there are at least 84 Afghan refugee camps – 71 in NWFP and 12 in Baluchistan both bordering Afghanistan besides one in the Punjab province.

Social and political instability inside Afghanistan was not in fact exclusive effect of Taliban maneuvers but was also the result of infighting among various warring factions actively encouraged by Iran, India and Pakistan. However, Pakistan was much better placed to influence events inside Afghanistan than any other regional state because of its ethnic and cultural proximity. In fact Pakistan had a substantial proportion of Pashtun, the dominant tribal community in Afghanistan (40%) which could be used to establish back channels with warring factions - especially those which could be strategically important and fairly dependable. Reportedly, Pakistan's military establishment had entrusted its surveillance wing, the ISI, the task of positioning and consolidating "geostrategic-depth" in that country.

The Regional Actors

Without a doubt, Pakistan is the prime mover and shaker in Afghanistan and also the one who has extracted maximum leverage from. The key driver of its Afghan policy is unilaterally articulated 'strategic-depth' in Afghanistan: The Pakistani security establishment believes that if she were to face existential threat from India, she would have no alternative but to retreat in Afghan territory and therefore it is imperative to have dependable political dispensation in Afghanistan. Such friendly dispensation would, at the minimum, allow Pakistan to use its territory and exist there as a government in exile (ISW). To realize this Pakistan would have to influence and if needed be intervene, in Afghan domestic affairs, most preferably, by installing a political dispensation, which would, at the minimum, recognize Pakistan's interest in its territory and ward off Indian influence/intervention. If there were to have any Indian influence it would box-in Pakistan from west as well as east by India. This is a bitter truth and Pakistani security establishment believes must be recognized and acted upon. It is a matter of supreme national interest of Pakistan and therefore, continues to intervene in Afghanistan's domestic affairs. As perceived Indian threat ballooned, especially in last decade Pakistan never relented from stabilizing Afghanistan on her own term. The most effective way of intervening, given her limited economic source, was to use religious sentiment and radicalize suitable section of Afghan people and use them to augment and argue for its Afghan policy. Religiously radicalized, militarily trained, and politically encouraged Taliban forces came to serve as readily available instrument for furthering her interest in Afghanistan and beyond.

From cultural and political perspectives Taliban was and still is a fighting force whose aims and objectives go beyond Afghan borders well into South & Central Asia and West Asia. Culturally, it wishes to bring together Arabic and Islamic countries under single jumbo umbrella and establish the same as a formidable force to be reckoned with; besides projecting it as a cultural alternative contrasting the western world. Politically, a near complete dispensation acting and reacting as its cultural commitment requires being. More importantly, they ferociously believe that Islam has the solution for world's problems and therefore Islamization must be pursued at any cost – violent means and methods not only included but form a part and parcel of this pursuance. An embedded wishful imagination apart, even if not entire but a crucial section of Pakistan's security establishment perhaps shares Taliban's vision and covertly/overtly co-opted them in geopolitical enterprise.[10] Aiding and abetting Taliban forces in establishing themselves as true representatives and rulers of Afghan people therefore became an integral

part of Pakistan's unannounced Afghan policy. This is the reason why Pakistan pursues interventionist Afghan policy so long as she perceives an existential threat from neighboring India. The perceived threat from India constitutes the core of Pakistan's response to regional instability and stability both. Taliban for Pakistan hence is not only an indispensable non-state entity but a complimentary tool to wage a proxy war against more powerful and resurgent India.

India has its own compelling reasons – some connected with Pakistan and some not so connected which propel her regional behavior in general and policy towards Afghanistan in particular. Nevertheless, Pakistan's regional maneuvers constitute the single most prominent influential variable. The prominent embodiment of this influence is a proxy war waged against it from across the border she shares with Pakistan. To be more precise, Pakistan according to India sponsors and export militancy and terror to J&K and beyond, which has taken hundreds of thousands of innocent lives. The annual report 2010 -2011 of the Ministry of Home Affairs reads – "The State of Jammu & Kashmir has been subjected to severe terrorist and secessionist violence, sponsored and supported from across the border, for the past two decades. More than 13,800 civilians and 4,730 Security Force (SF) personnel have lost their lives. In the year 2010 according to the report 488 incidents of violence took place in which 69 security personnel and 47 civilians were killed. Furthermore, Pakistan has been relentless in globalizing issue of J&K - especially exposing excessive use of force by Indian security forces in J&K and human rights violates of people there. The Special Committee of the Parliament on Kashmir of Pakistan's National Assembly, in Forward to a broacher titled "Draconian Laws in Indian Occupied Kashmir" writes that "The Kashmiri people have been subjected to the worst kind of human rights abuses ever since the British sold Kashmir to the Dogra Maharaja Gulab Singh. Since the partition of the Sub-Continent in 1947, this gruesome task has been taken over by the Indian forces, which number over 700,000. The Indian troops deployed in Indian Occupied Kashmir operate under a host of draconian laws, specific to Kashmir, which have made these forces take on the role of an occupying army. They have been given a free hand to play havoc with the life, honor and property of the hapless Kashmiris" (NAP). This is indeed very worrisome for India given its often claimed commitment on democracy and democratic values. Moreover, India has also lost regional dominance because of domestic instability largely believed to be caused by Pakistani support and diverting attention from development – which is crucial for regional dominance. And therefore, India's foreign policy has been Pakistan centric, even if not Pakistan dominant. Strategically India

therefore tries to isolate Pakistan internationally. Constraining Pakistan militarily by increasing its military prowess thereby bankrupting Pakistan economically is a logical extension of India's foreign policy. Moreover, India has defeated Pakistan on the battle field more than thrice and knows well the vulnerabilities of hers. Afghanistan figures here prominently in India's geopolitical calculus.

India's Afghan policy seems to have three ingredients in the main. (a) aiding and abetting anti-Pakistan elements within Afghanistan, (b) helping Afghanistan rebuild its economic and political infrastructure, and (c) closing in on Pakistan from Afghan soil not literally in physical sense but a kind of psychological pressure of potentially inducing or encouraging disgruntled tribal elements in bordering areas with Afghanistan. India's top priority in Afghanistan is to aid and abet any political formation which has considerable anti-Pakistan orientation even if not outright hostility towards. The reasons are not very difficult to comprehend – first, if political dispensation in Afghanistan is influenced and controlled by Pakistan, it would most likely boost the anti-India Taliban and militant groups and consequently causes more trouble in Indian controlled Kashmir and elsewhere. Because, militancy in India controlled Kashmir is fuelled and sphere-headed by none other than Taliban (Pakistan chapter) and its clones in Pakistan. Second, this would keep Kashmir pot boiling and hence the concerned world would discuss and debate it – internationalization of Kashmir, which India has been fighting against. In fact, on the contrary believes that the best way to solve the Kashmir issue is through bilateral pursuance. Third, internationalization of Kashmir, India believes, benefit Pakistan more – by raising the boggy of Kashmir on international forums including UN General Assembly and Security Council. Moreover, India considers Kashmir an integral part and hence an internal matter – pure and simple. At the most, India is willing to discuss it with Pakistan within constitutional framework. Additionally, Kashmir is the sole Muslim majority state of the Indian Union and considered to be its secular crown; therefore, she cannot afford any undue advantage to Pakistan on this front. Not, surprisingly this, in the main, drives India's Af-Pak policy.

Accordingly, India has been very forthcoming in helping Afghanistan reconstruct essential economic and political infrastructure. This provides India a rare opportunity to remain visible in Afghanistan and thereby seek sympathy of Afghan government and people. A report titled "Reaching out to Afghanistan" on India's Ministry of External Affairs website reads - "India and Afghanistan are not just neighbors, joined together by history and civilization contacts stretching over the millennia, but also strategic partners. Our close relations are based on

cultural affinities, the shared values of multi-ethnicity and pluralism and the common quest of our peoples for peace and development... A prime example of India's partnership with the people of Afghanistan is the construction of a 218-km road between Delaram in Afghanistan to Zaranj on Afghanistan's border with Iran… The road was an ambitious project and would link up to the "garland" highway stretching all the way to Kabul. The road would be Afghanistan's "lifeline" to Iran, giving the land-locked country an extra avenue to reach out." According to the same website India is the sixth largest donor of Afghanistan, with a bilateral assistance programme of $1.3 billion. Factually, India does not have (due to wide presence of Taliban influence and Islamic way of life), alternate way of intervening in Afghan affairs, even indirectly. Nonetheless India has a long list of programs – the assistance programme has four categories in the main – (a) Humanitarian, (b) Security, (c), Infrastructure and (d) People to people contacts. Humanitarian programme consists of medical and food assistance. Under this programme India has sent to Afghanistan protein-fortified biscuits and by 2008-09, 32,000 tons of biscuits were supplied to children in 33 out of 34 provinces of the country. Further, India runs 5 medical missions in Kabul, Heart, Jalalabad, Kandahar and Marzar-e-Sharif and gives out medicines to over 30,000 patients every month. India also runs the Indira Gandhi Institute for Child Health (IGICH) in Kabul - the largest pediatric hospital in Afghanistan with a three-storied surgical block, a polyclinic and a diagnostic block with CT scan and MRI facilities. As far as security component is concerned Indian foreign secretary says "The security of Afghanistan and what happens there impacts us, as a country in the region, as a close neighbor whose ties with the Afghan people stretch into antiquity. A stable and settled Afghanistan, where the rank and file of the Taliban has given up violence against the government, and the people, cut all links with terrorism, subscribe to the values of the Afghan Constitution and its laws, and where development is the hard rationale, is what we seek and quest for. It is important also that for such a structure to be durable and enduring, Afghanistan's neighbors, and regional partners, will need to be in the picture – both by consultation and by adherence to the principle of non-interference in the country's affairs, ensuring that it thrives as a trade and transit hub for the region, and by eradicating transnational terrorism."[11] Moreover, recently in October, 2011 Afghan President visited New Delhi and has penned down a historic agreement on strategic partnership between Afghanistan and India. They also signed two important MOUs pertaining cooperation in developing hydrocarbons and mineral resources development. The text of the strategic partnership reads: "The Sides agree to establish a

Strategic Dialogue to provide a framework for cooperation in the area of national security. Security cooperation between the Sides is intended to help enhance their respective and mutual efforts in the fight against international terrorism. India agrees to assist, as mutually determined, in the training, equipping and capacity building programme for Afghan National Security Forces".[12]

India also assisting Afghanistan put in place critical developmental infrastructure. For instance, in 2005, India began construction and by 2009 completed a project – a 220 KV double circuit transmission line (202 km) from Pul-e-Khumri to Kabul and a sub-station in Chimtala near Kabul. The strategic agreement between India and Afghanistan also has strong trade and economic component and reads "In the interest of Afghanistan's sustainable development, and furthering economic interdependence between the two countries, the Sides commit to deepening and diversifying cooperation in sectors such as agriculture, rural development, mining, industry, energy, information technology, communications, transport, including civil aviation, and any other areas that the Sides may agree on". Besides the agreement talks of capacity building support and reads "As part of its capacity building support for the Afghan government, India will continue and expand technical, training and other capacity building support to the various departments in the three branches of government, including the Executive, Judiciary and the Parliament. In response to Afghanistan's need to strengthen its administration and governance at national and sub-national levels, India offers its experience of governance at the national, state, district and local body levels, and technical assistance in setting up a permanent, career-based civil service suitable for Afghan realities". For cementing people-to-people contacts the strategic agreement vows to "further expanding the existing people-to-people bonds that exist between the two countries, the Sides envisage greater exchanges between parliament, media, women, youth, sports, academic, cultural, intellectual and religious figures and bodies".[13]

Through this "development diplomacy" India wish to retain and perpetuate her presence there and send a strong signal to Pakistan that it is on its geopolitical radar and would not allow it have free field in Afghanistan. Moreover, a socio-politically stable Afghanistan would be less likely to toe the Pakistan line, especially with regard to its foreign policy. Besides, a stable Afghanistan would also like to pay more considerate attention to India's concerns. In brief, a socio-politically stable and economically less vulnerable Afghanistan, India deems, is not only in her interest but also significant for stability in South Asia. And therefore, India continues to fund developmental projects in Afghanistan

and also encourages its public as well as private sectors to invest in strategically significant sectors of Afghan economy. According to Indian foreign secretary, Nirupama Rao the rationale behind India's assistance to Afghanistan is: "India is engaged in developmental and humanitarian work to assist the Afghan people as they build a peaceful, stable, inclusive, democratic and pluralistic Afghanistan. The landscape of destruction must change. India neither sees Afghanistan as a battleground for competing national interests nor assistance to Afghan reconstruction and development as a zero sum game." However without missing the real point she continues, "The bottom-line for India's involvement remains the fact that India considers extremist ideologies to be very dangerous and a national security threat. To that extent, India wants to utilize its development programme in Afghanistan to (deny such ideologies space to grow) help Afghanistan stabilize and emerge as an economic hub linking South and Central Asia through a network of trade and transit linkages that would benefit the people of the entire region".[14]

Apart from helping Afghanistan rebuild its politics and economy, India also strives to encircle Pakistan diplomatically and geopolitically. In last decade India has doubled its diplomatic presence in Afghanistan. Despite several terror attacks on its interest, India increased staff presence and vow to do so again, if necessary. It seems India has a mild intention of encircling Pakistan and perhaps also fuelling already troubled Pakistan provinces that border Afghanistan: NWFP and Baluchistan specifically. This can also be interpreted as a tit-for-tat, for what Pakistan has been doing in Indian held Kashmir. Given profound discontent prevailing among tribes of NWFP & Baluchistan and disconnect between the province and the federal government of Pakistan, this appears a very logical extension of India's geopolitical maneuver. In fact, recently, Pakistan has been accusing India of interference in its border regions more often than in the past, giving some (unverifiable) credence to the allegation. However, India would gain the most from such maneuver cannot be in doubt. In other words, India becomes very concerned whenever Afghanistan becomes instable from within; because it provides an inducement for Pakistan to influence the events there and may be used for anti-India activities.

This is the defining and mutually enforcing geopolitical framework that both constructs and de-constructs the regional stability in South Asia. And therefore any sincere effort to stabiles the region, would have to positively accept this geopolitical fact and design its response accordingly. Importantly such response has to stabiles relations between India and Pakistan, as an unavoidable companion because without it, instability in Afghanistan would continue to elude us for foreseeable

future. Stable relations between India and Pakistan could not be materialized so long; core issues between them not addressed squarely, namely the dispute of Jammu and Kashmir.

The Global Actors

The global powers particularly the erstwhile USSR, the US, and Europe has been in and around Afghanistan due to several reasons. Some of the reasons were and still are geopolitics, and economics. As it happens in realism driven world politics, the global powers co-opt regional powers to enhance their acceptance in the region. In this instance the US and USSR co-opted Pakistan and India respectively and are responsible for prevailing mess in Afghanistan in no small way. Both of them had encouraged regional partners and shaped their behavior and therefore it is an imperative to identify and explore the reasons for their involvement in South Asia in general and Afghanistan in particular.

The US-Pakistan relations are essentially based on supporting mutual positions on regional issues. Afghanistan finds prominence in their geopolitical calculus because it is the weakest nation-state in South Asia. Obviously Pakistan is the best placed to do the job. Moreover, it was Pakistan with the active help from the US dislodged the USSR from Afghan soil which actually later turned out to be a watershed in its disintegration. However, the core concern of Pakistan has been a resurgent India and her dispute over the state of Jammu and Kashmir besides other auxiliary disagreement on issues pertaining to water sharing and borders in snowbound regions of Siachin. Pakistani security establishment therefore has often attempted to have strategic balance maintained in the region by aliening with a global power like the US. Afghanistan is an integral part of Pakistan's so called 'strategic-depth' calculus. The global powers are well aware of this fact and often tried to use it for forging relations with Pakistan. So long as they recognize Pakistan's strategic interest in Afghanistan she did not really mind playing along with outsiders like the US or China. The prevailing influence of Pakistan in Afghanistan is an undisputed reality today and the US has played and continues to play a huge contributing role in perpetuating it. In fact, the US has been the major supplier of weapons to Pakistan to help her maintain perceived parity with India besides providing huge economic and diplomatic support whenever she was threatened with instability – both from within and without. Pakistan in exchange provided unfettered access to military bases to launch its 'War on Terror' against now unfriendly Afghan Taliban and sustain its presence. In fact now it is widely accepted that whatever successes the US has managed to achieve in Afghanistan was because of critical

support Pakistan provided and still continues to provide. It is this mutually contributing behavior of these two, which unfortunately propels instability in the region.

The contributing role of the erstwhile USSR had been the founding stone of instability in Afghanistan and the impact of this founding stone was so profound that its reverberations are being felt to this day. Apart from near complete destruction of that country, its military intervention disproportionately propelled divisions within Afghan tribes to such an extent that various factions are now thirsty of each other's throat. Obviously, the majority tribal community, the Pushtoon's come to occupy the central position and other smaller tribes have been facing repression ever since. Pakistan had taken fullest advantage of this fact and ensured its relevance there since. What is more, contemporary Russia has not completely forgotten Afghanistan and still continues to watch it carefully and reportedly continues to support suitable tribal groups there. In all of this chaos, created and sustained by the outsiders, the US came around Pakistan and ensured its indirect involvement there. In fact, the US so encouraged Pakistan in internal Afghan affairs that it tuned complete blind eye towards overt use of religion to militarize hearts and minds of the young Afghans against the USSR, which later came back to lay roost in New York on 9/11, 2001. Though the USSR is now no longer in existence, given its direct intervention which set the ball of instability rolling in the region can not absolve itself of contributory responsibility.

Lately, the Europe, as a block also entered Afghanistan indirectly aimed at protecting their security driven interests. Actually, there is a noticeable proximity with the US' policy in South Asia and that of the Europe. European states the UK, France and Germany, in the main, drive European policy towards Afghanistan in particular and South Asia in general. Though not supportive of Pakistan to the extent the US did, the Europe not really took a clear stand on the situation and uncritically supported the US policy. Specifically, after 9/11 attacks in America, European states openly aligned with the US military formation that invaded Afghanistan in later part of 2001 (NATO: military formation cutting across the Atlantic) and also actively encouraged Pakistan security agencies besides defending Pakistan as a central ally in the 'War on Terror'. In all of these mutually reinforcing positions of the states involved, real and durable stability in Afghanistan became the natural casualty. Ironically, restoring stability in Afghanistan was their stated objective.

Unsurprisingly, Russia, and China in particular are increasingly coming together in view of emerging geopolitical climate and attempting

to stitch together a new security format. Vladimir Putin after announcing his candidacy in the forthcoming presidential elections in Russia made a significant foreign-policy pronouncement pertaining to the creation of "Eurasian Union" (which virtually challenges the New Silk Road project initiated by the US) and his fist visit has been to China to develop "comprehensive strategic partnership" between the two countries. What is more, realizing the rocky nature of relations of Islamabad with Washington, Russia has taken initiatives to improve its relations with Islamabad and it is almost a foregone conclusion that Moscow will attach greater significance to its dialogue with Islamabad on the issues of regional security in the coming period. It would not therefore be an exaggeration to say that under Putin presidency Russia would pay far greater attention to central Asian region and will go extra mile to strengthen its influence. Moreover, once the trillion-dollar gas deal between Russia and China, (which is said to be on the verge of finalization), is successfully concluded, Russian-Sino cooperation and coordination in central Asia will surely assume a qualitatively new heights. In other words, these competitive geopolitical maneuvers surrounding Afghanistan are the new emerging realities, which would impress upon larger regional security.

Given these prevalent realities, as to what could and should be the way forward to realize stability in the region. We must grasp the magnitude of the question and explore possible answers thereto; simply because the truth involves us all and the paramount truth is that we the people of the world cannot afford to ignore dangerous instability in South Asia.

The Way Forward

Dealing with instability in South Asia which houses two nuclear weapons (self-proclaimed) states coupled with profound poverty and persistent ethno-religious conflicts, would not be going to be a cake-walk. Moreover, the nuclear states – India and Pakistan - have several unresolved issues, including the dispute of Jammu and Kashmir – one of the most complex international disputes. Any meaningful way-forward should therefore have stable relations between New Delhi and Islamabad as a "critical component". Because, so long as New Delhi perceives Islamabad and her maneuvers antithetical to its interest, most likely, not desist from intervening in Afghanistan in order to counterbalance Pakistan.

Most importantly, given India's aggressive economic strides, Islamabad is likely to continue its balancing act aimed at seeking perceived defense parity with India by inviting some global power in the

region. The People's Republic of China and the US seems, at present, her favorite partners in the game. And the preferred battle ground is Afghanistan. Since global powers like China and the US have their own geo-strategic interest, they would co-opt regional state to enhance effectiveness and India and Pakistan figures prominently in the calculus. In other words, New Delhi and Islamabad reinforce each others' maneuvers and global powers complement them knowingly. This cycle of reinforcement must be broken and can be broken if we focus on resolving pending disputes between them. And therefore, international community must concentrate on stabilizing relations between New Delhi and Islamabad by actively encouraging them to resolve all major disputes between them. Stable and durable relations between New Delhi and Islamabad surely make Afghanistan less attractive and once this becomes reality, Afghanistan slowly but surely would move on the path of progress which also eventually stabilizes the region. This may be the most viable and productive way-forward to realize stability in South Asia.

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