



AFGHANISTAN PAST, PRESENT AND WAY AHEAD

BACKGROUND

Afghanistan's history, its internal political development, its foreign relations and its very existence as an independent state have been largely determined by its location at the crossroads of Central, West, and South Asia. Although, it was the scene of great empires and flourishing trade for over two millennia, Afghanistan did not become a truly independent nation until the twentieth century. For centuries a zone of conflict among strong neighbouring powers, the area's heterogeneous groups were not bound into a single political entity until the reign of Ahmad Shah Durrani, who in 1747 founded the monarchy that ruled the country until 1973. After his death, the absence of a strong successor possessed of military and political skills resulted in the temporary disintegration of the kingdom he had created. Historical patterns of the past several centuries remained relevant to the nation's situation in the mid-1980s. First, because of Afghanistan's strategic location geopolitically, great rival powers have tended to view the control of Afghanistan by a major opponent as unacceptable. Sometimes the Afghans have been able to use this circumstance to their benefit, but more often they have suffered grievously in the great power struggles.



Great powers have considered Afghanistan's internal politics more as a reflection of international rivalry than as events in themselves. A second pattern has been the inability of central governments to establish effective and permanent control over the Afghanistan. In the more remote areas tribal warriors, the Pashtuns, the largest ethnic group have successfully resisted foreign domination for centuries. Neither the heirs of Alexander the Great nor those of Genghis Khan, Timur, or Ahmad Shah were able to subdue the tribes permanently. A third

enduring pattern in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been the gradual extension of Russian control into Central Asia. Finally, one cannot examine Afghan history without noting the key role of Islam. Even Genghis Khan was unable to uproot Islam, and within two generations his heirs had become Muslims. An important, if often unacknowledged, event in Afghan history

that played a role in the politics of Afghanistan's neighbours and the entire region up to the present was the rise in the tenth century of a strong Sunni dynasty, the Ghaznavids, whose power prevented the Eastward spread of Shiism from Iran, and thereby assured that the majority of Muslims in Afghanistan and South Asia would become Sunnis.

INVASION BY SOVIET TROOPS

The first Soviet troops parachuted into Kabul on Dec. 27, 1979, to assist Babrak Karmal, who had become President in a coup within the Afghan Communist leadership. Moscow insisted that the troops came in response to a plea for help from a legitimately constituted Karmal Government. But most Western analysts say the Soviets engineered the coup as a pretext to replace Hafizullah Amin, the Afghan leader, who had lost their trust. Soviet troops stayed in the country for more than nine years, fighting a conflict that cost them roughly 15,000 lives and undisclosed billions of rubbles, while undermining the cherished image of an invincible Soviet Army. The Kabul Government generally kept a firm grip on the cities, but throughout the war was unable to rout the rebels in the countryside, where the conservative populace was antagonized at the outset by changes in social and land policies that offended Muslim tradition. After 1986, the Soviet Air Force was also rendered largely useless by advanced Stinger Anti-Aircraft missiles supplied by the United States to the rebels. Eventually, after peace talks moderated by the United Nations, the last Soviet troops left Afghanistan in February 1989, in what was in effect a unilateral withdrawal. They left behind a country that was not only devastated by the war but that had become a beacon to Islamic extremists from across the globe who had come to assist in the fighting, including Osama Bin Laden and the group he helped found, Al-Qaeda.

TAKE OVER BY TALIBAN

After Soviet forces departure from Afghanistan by summer of 1994, power was anarchically divided among competing warlords and individual fiefdoms. But one group would eventually gain control. The Taliban grew out of a student movement dedicated to purifying the country, based in the South-East, the home of the dominant ethnic group, the Pashtun. By end of 1994, Mullah Omar, a Pashtun leader, who had lost an eye fighting the Soviets, had nearly 12,000 followers and was rolling up the warlords to the North and East. With his promise of restoring the centrality of Islam to daily life, he created a genuinely popular movement in a country weary of corruption and brutality. As early as 1994, Pakistani intelligence officers began funnelling arms, money and supplies to Mullah Omar's men, as well as Military Advisers to help guide them in battle. Buoyed by Pakistani aid, the Taliban by 1996 had taken control of Afghanistan, imposing strict enforcement of fundamentalist Islamic law, banning movies and music and forcing women out of

schools and into all-enveloping burqa clothing. The Taliban also provided a haven for Osama Bin Laden, who arrived by chartered jet at Jalalabad Airport in May 1996. It is said that Al-Qaeda helped persuade Mullah Omar to order the destruction of the 800-year-old Buddha statues at Bamiyan, an act condemned around the world.

POST 9/11 INVASION

After the attack on the World Trade Centre in New York on 11 Sep 2001, President George W. Bush gave the Taliban an ultimatum to hand over Osama bin Laden. On refusal, United States joined forces with rebel groups that had never accepted Taliban rule, notably the Northern Alliance, which represented minority tribes. An air and ground campaign began that drove the Taliban out of the major Afghan cities by the end of the year. Remnants of Al-Qaeda and Taliban leadership retreated to Tora Bora in the mountains along the Pakistan border.

KARZAI GOVERNMENT

In December 2001, Hamid Karzai, was named Chairman of an interim Government that replaced the defeated Taliban, making him the leader of the Afghanistan. He took office as interim President in June 2002, with a hope to secure peace for Afghanistan and win much-needed international aid for his country. Hamid Karzai was elected to a five-year term as President in 2004. His popularity gradually declined at home as well as abroad, as Mr. Karzai faced an Afghan population that blamed him for the lack of economic progress and increase of corruptions in the Govt. President Karzai won re-election in 2009, but in a manner that weakened his standing and his Govt. The vote was held in August, and Mr. Karzai quickly declared that he had exceeded the 50 percent mark needed to avoid a runoff. After pressure from USA, Hamid Karzai agreed to a runoff, but his most serious challenger, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, withdrew from the race, scrapping the plan. There were intense pressures from Secretary of State and other US officials on Mr. Karzai for a need to clean up his Government. President Karzai responded in turn by lashing out at the United States; by April, he was talking of negotiating a separate peace with the Taliban. Obama administration officials, alarmed, worked to mend the relationship, including arranging an amiable White House visit in mid May 2010.

TALIBAN RESURGENCE

Despite their defeat in 2001, the Taliban continued to

wage guerrilla warfare from a base in the mountainous and largely lawless tribal area on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. As the American military focus was diverted to the invasion and occupation of Iraq, the Taliban regrouped and began to extend its influence in the southern part of Afghanistan. Their rise was assisted by a resurgent opium trade, which helped to fill the group's coffers. Dealing with vast areas and limited manpower, the American-led coalition has held the cities and highways, but, faced with an increasingly vigorous insurgency, has ceded large parts of the countryside to the Taliban. The Taliban has also spilled over into Pakistan, raising concerns about its stability, and making Afghanistan once more a top foreign policy priority for the Western Allies.

OBAMA'S WAR

President Barak Obama's plan to widen United States involvement in Afghanistan was shaped by a debate in which Vice President Biden warned against getting into a political and military quagmire, while military advisers argued that the Afghanistan war effort could be imperilled without even more troops. In February 2009, President Obama said that he would send an additional 17,000 American troops to Afghanistan in spring and summer. The order added nearly 50 percent to the 36,000 American troops already there. In addition to the troop increases, Mr. Obama appointed Richard C. Holbrooke, a former United Nations ambassador, as special envoy to Pakistan and Afghanistan. Mr. Holbrooke has more than 45 years of foreign policy and diplomatic experience, including brokering an agreement between warring factions in Bosnia that led to the 1995 Dayton peace accords. Gen. David H. Petraeus, the Iraq commander who received much of the credit for the success of the surge there, had taken charge of United States Central Command in October 2008, with responsibility for military operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and across the region.

Mr. Robert M. Gates, Secretary of Defence later brought in General Stanley A. McChrystal, an expert in counter insurgency warfare who for years has viewed the violence in Afghanistan and Pakistan as a particularly thorny problem. In June 2010, President Obama removed Gen. McChrystal after contemptuous quotes from the General and his staff about senior administration officials appeared in an article in Rolling Stone magazine. President Obama appointed Gen. Petraeus to lead the war effort in Afghanistan.

OBAMA'S PLAN

In a speech delivered 01 Dec. 2009, at West Point, Mr. Obama announced his plan to deploy 30,000 additional troops. He vowed to start bringing American forces home from Afghanistan in the middle of 2011, saying the United States could not afford and should not have to shoulder an open-ended commitment. Promising that he could "bring this war to a successful conclusion," Mr. Obama set out a strategy that would seek to reverse Taliban gains in large parts of Afghanistan, better protect the Afghan people, increase the pressure on Afghanistan to build its own military capacity and a more effective government and step up attacks on Al-Qaeda in Pakistan. He delivered a pointed message to President Karzai, saying, "The days of providing a Blank Cheques are over." But he did not spell out what his administration would do, if the Karzai government failed to deliver on its promise to change its ways.

OPERATION 'MOSHTARAK OR TOGETHER' IN MARJAH

Military operations continued to be the primary tool to further the goal of a stable Afghan state. For much of the past eight years, American and NATO forces had mounted large operations to clear towns and cities of insurgents. And then after they had swept the area, they seldom, if ever, stationed enough soldiers or police officers to hold the place on their own. And so the Taliban returned and, after a time, so did the allied forces, to clear the place all over again. With much fanfare, American and NATO military commanders began their largest offensive since 2001 in the Marjah section of southern Afghanistan in mid-February 2010. The move was the prototype for a new type of operation based on the counterinsurgency thinking propounded by Gen. McChrystal. In Marjah, a Taliban stronghold, US and Afghan commanders planned to do something they have never done before i.e. bring in an Afghan Government and Police force behind and US and UK troops will stay on to support them. But the operation did not go as well as hoped, and the area is still not fully controlled for the Government's activities to resume.

OPERATION 'DRAGON STRIKE' IN KANDAHAR DELAYED

Because of the difficulties faced in Marjah, the prospect of a robust military push in Kandahar Province, which had been widely expected to begin in June 2010, has been unduly delayed and new strategy is being evolved that puts civilian reconstruction efforts first and relegates

military action to a supportive role. Civilian aid workers, protected by an increased military force, will try to provide services first, before any major military action is launched.

TRUST DEFICIT

The success of any stabilization effort may well depend on whether Afghans can overcome their corrosive distrust of President Karzai's Government. Even as US troops clear areas of militants, they find either no Government to fill the vacuum, as in Marjah, or entrenched power brokers, like President Karzai's brother in Kandahar, who monopolize NATO contracts and other development projects and are resented by large portions of the population. Other places, Government officials rarely show up at work and do little to help local people, and in most places the Afghan police are incapable of providing security. Corruption, big and small, remains an overwhelming complaint. In addition, Afghan observers and Western officials interpreted the forced resignations of Afghanistan's two top security officials as another worrying sign of President Karzai's increasingly impulsive decision making and deepening isolation from his backers.

PROSPECTS FOR PEACE REMAIN DIM

Before being replaced, General McChrystal would say that there's no way we can kill our way out of Afghanistan. But prospects for peace remain dim. The government held what it called a three-day Peace Jirga, or council, in early June 2010, and it recommended forming a high peace council as a negotiating body, removing the Taliban leadership from a United Nations blacklist, and releasing insurgents held without trial. Insurgents were not invited, however, and many Afghans complained that President Karzai had stuffed it with his own supporters. The Taliban issued an official denunciation, which was accompanied by a rocket attack. The bigger question remained whether any problems could be overcome before the July 2011 deadline for beginning the withdrawal of US troops. Even if withdrawal happens, that will be a token gesture. At a 11 May 2010, meeting between United States and Afghan military officials, the Pentagon Press Secretary, Geoff Morrell, said they all agreed that "July 2011 will be the beginning of a conditions-based process." The United States has been militarily involved in Afghanistan since 2001, when it led an invasion after the 11 Sept. 2001 attacks by Al-Qaeda. The group had been given safe haven in the country by the Taliban, the extremist Islamic group that had seized control in 1996 after years of civil war. The 2001 invasion succeeded in dislodging Al-Qaeda and

removing the Taliban from power, but not in eradicating either group. Fuelled by profits from the opium trade and dissatisfaction with the weak and often corrupt new Afghan government, the Taliban has made a steady comeback, particularly in the Pashtun regions of the south and east where the group originated.

In February 2009, President Obama ordered 17,000 additional troops sent to Afghanistan. In December 2009, after a lengthy policy review, he announced that another 30,000 American troops would deploy in 2010, and laid out a strategy meant to blunt the Taliban's resurgence. Saying that the deployment was not an open-ended commitment, Mr. Obama declared that a troop withdrawal would begin by Jul 2011. The largest obstacle to the success of the plan was widely held to be the weakness of the government led by President Hamid Karzai, who won re-election in August 2009 in a vote marred by widespread fraud on his behalf. Even during parliamentary election held on 18 September 2010, a crucial test of Mr. Karzai's ability to deliver security and a legitimate government has come under fraud and corruption to win voter and buy candidates in favour of Karzai. Midst Massive Kabul Bank fraud reported in end Aug, two of the top Bank officials have been forced to resign and it is also reported that elder brother of Karzai has share in the bank and requested for bailout and investigation are currently in progress to find out fraud and make bailout plan, if necessary.

WIKILEAKS AND ITS FALLOUT

In July 2010, a six-year archive of classified military documents, released on the Internet by a group called Wikileaks, painted a bleak, ground-level view of the conflict. They amounted to a daily diary of an American-led force often starved for resources and attention as it struggled against an insurgency that grew larger, better coordinated and more deadly each year. The leaks came at a time when almost every aspect of the war was going badly. American casualties were on the increase. The major offensive in Kandahar, the most important city in the Taliban heartland, has been slowed because of worries over the lack of local support. The Afghan government and army showed few signs of being able, or even willing, to take over. In the United States, public opinion polls showed that a majority of Americans had turned against the war. The Obama administration continued to stress the importance of succeeding in Afghanistan, reminding Americans that it was the home of Al-Qaeda when it plotted the attacks of 11 Sept. 2001. "If Afghanistan was

to be engulfed by an even wider insurgency, Al-Qaeda and its terrorist affiliates would have even more space to plan their next attack," Mr Obama said. But in making his goal the destruction of Al-Qaeda, which American intelligence believes has only about 100 members in Afghanistan; Mr. Obama underscored the limits of his commitment. At the same time, American military officials are building a case to minimize the planned 2011 withdrawal in an effort to counter growing pressure on Mr. Obama from inside his own party to begin winding the war down quickly. Meanwhile, it has become quite clear that Pakistan ISI and Army is aiding Afghan Taliban to fight US and NATO troops. At the same time Pakistan is making no stone unturned to see that India's nation building efforts are hampered and if at all or as and when US and NATO forces withdraw from the soil of Afghanistan, Pakistan has a decisive role in governance and even peace talks with Taliban.

ROAD AHEAD FOR PRESIDENT KARZAI

It is certain that US and NATO forces are not going to succeed in getting the perpetrator of 9/11 or wipe out al-Qaeda from the soil of Afghanistan. At the same time, we need to wait and watch for the progress of operation 'Dragon Strike' in Kandahar and change in US strategy and plan if any after review of ongoing strategy in December month. As announced by President Obama, withdrawal of forces may happen beginning Jul 2011, as the public pressure is mounting on the US Govt. to show results and it seems that there is no victory in sight. Mounting pressure has already built up in Pakistan against increased drone attacks in North Waziristan, in which suspected insurgents are being targeted and also attack by NATO aircrafts in East Afghanistan border, where three Pak Army personnel were killed. Pak Taliban have reacted by disrupting fuel and logistics supply coming from Karachi Port to Pak-Afghanistan border by burning lorries and killing driver. Almost 60 trucks have been burnt from end Sep to early Oct, by Pak Taliban and more than hundreds of trucks are stranded on Pakistan side. This has forced US and NATO commander to use alternate route through CAR countries, to meet heavy logistics demand in Afghanistan to sustain their operation. In these circumstances Road ahead for peace in Afghanistan is not bright. NATO forces responsible for training of Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police force have to put training efforts on fast track, so that by 2014 as envisaged by President Karzai, the responsibility of full governance and security could be transferred to Afghan Govt. Keeping all this in mind, following way ahead could be suggested for President Karzai and his Govt :-

- (a) Ensure transparent and responsible governance at all levels, for which Parliamentary election has already been held on Sep 18, 2010.
- (b) Strengthen local governance at province and district level.
- (c) Root out corruption and fraud. Ensure tougher and strict law enforcement mechanism to eradicate corruption from the roots.
- (d) Encourage participation of women in governance at all level, to facilitate development and growth in the society.
- (e) Ensure education for all children including girls, so that young generation is able to find respectable employment to live peacefully.
- (f) Reach out to only those Taliban, who are able to leave their present cadre and join the main stream of governance to help in nation building.
- (g) Afghan Govt. to provide adequate security to UN/International Aid agencies to execute nation building project like Hospitals, Education Institutes, Rail, Road, Power etc.
- (h) Afghanistan should reach out to neighbours like Iran, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Russia, India, China and others to form a consortium to assist in nation building and development of country.
- (j) Bring in tough measure against poppy cultivation, to root out drug trafficking and curb on illegal money.
- (k) A strong HRD will be an assets for new Afghanistan. Efforts should be to train requisite forces whether Army, Police, Civil Servants, Doctors, Health workers, Educationist, Teacher, Engineers etc.

INDIA'S ROLE IN NATION BUILDING AND FUTURE STRATEGY

India has played a crucial role in nation building in Afghanistan by giving aid worth \$ 1.3 billion for building 250 km Highway from Zaranj near Iran-Afghan border to the town of Delaram on the road that connects Kabul, Kandahar and Herat (this will provide alternate access to Sea to Afghanistan through Chah Bahar and Bandar Abbas Ports), Power line from Uzbekistan through Hindu Kush range to Kabul city, Salma Dam power project in Herat province, constructing Parliament building, providing health care and medical facilities, running schools, providing high energy food supplements to school going children, training civil servants, teachers, few Afghan soldiers etc. Despite strong opposition from Pakistan and at the cost of losing brave Indian doctors, engineers, diplomats and workers in attacks planned and executed by al-Qaeda under the direct training by ISI. All these were

done to dissuade India to leave Afghanistan, so that Pakistan is able to use Afghan soil to train terrorist to continue its fight in Kashmir. Therefore, India needs to cautiously tread its path of nation building in Afghanistan to see that we win heart and mind of Afghan people and at the same time remain focussed in our efforts to see that we do not leave strategic importance of our old historical friends.

India's future role in Afghanistan could be summarised as follows:-

- (a) Continue to provide assistance in project of strategic importance and civic development like roads, bridges, rail, power projects, hospitals, schools, colleges and build a robust HRD at all level.
- (b) Ensure security and safety of all personnel engaged in Afghan through local security force and by augmenting from India, to ensure that Indians are protected from any threats.
- (c) Increase number of training seats under ITEC programme in institution and colleges in India, so that maximum Afghans get adequately trained.
- (d) Provide incentives and scholarships to encourage education at all level including girls and women.
- (e) Establish diplomatic efforts with CAR countries neighbouring Afghanistan including China & Russia, to ensure that once US and NATO forces withdraw all these countries including India has say in Afghanistan and Pakistan is not able to hijack the governance and stability by implanting Afghan Taliban.
- (f) Efforts to continue to have TAPI gas pipeline implemented, to meet energy demand of Afghanistan and India.



CONCLUSION

It is well known fact that US has not been able to establish its monopoly by using external forces in any of the countries it invaded except for ruining their peace, stability and development. In Afghanistan, it is the same repeat story and it is for the people of Afghanistan to realise that it is their country and they only need to look after and govern. Days are not far when US and NATO with all its might would have withdrawn, without finding any trace of Osama bin Laden or wiping out al-Qaeda. It is hoped that India with its past historical connection with Afghanistan and role its diplomatic mission played in nation building efforts at the cost of loosing Indian Diplomats, Doctors, Engineers, Staffs and Workers, will find a special place in Afghanistan. India is confident to win the hearts and mind of Afghan population and will continue to play benign role of nation building long after US and NATO forces have withdrawn. These all will depend on how India is diplomatically able to play constructive role with all Afghan neighbours and reach out a solution of better governance by the Afghan People, without having to be dictated by Pak Army or Taliban.

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