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**The US' AF-PAK Strategy and its
Implications for India**

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Abstract

This thesis looks at the US'AF-PAK strategy in detail and analyses the implications of the strategy for India and for US strategy in the greater South Asian region. It approaches the topic by looking at the operational impact of the strategy in Afghanistan and the challenges posed to the strategy by the situation in Pakistan and the Pakistani military establishment. It then considers the impact of Pakistan's strategic imperatives in Afghanistan before looking at the basis of India's Afghan engagement and then reviews these findings in the light of current India-Pakistan relations. The thesis concludes with a look at the implications of the AF-PAK strategy for India and on the US-India-Pakistan trilateral relationship.

Keywords

US'AF-PAK Strategy, Indian Strategic Objectives, US South Asia Strategy, India-Pakistan Relations, Afghanistan, US – India Relations

Scope of Work

This thesis contains 95 double-spaced pages composed of 180816 keystrokes including references but not including title pages.

Declaration

I, Hrishabh Sandilya confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. This not been submitted before, for any degree in any other university. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis. I agree with the publication of my thesis for scientific purposes.

Prague, September 12th, 2011

Hrishabh Sandilya

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Chapter 1

1.0 Introduction

In one of his first acts after taking office on February 10, 2009, President Barack Obama of the United States of America (US) ordered a strategic interagency review of the US' presence in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and shortly after he named veteran South Asia hand Richard Holbrooke as Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. Holbrooke would co-chair the review panel along with former CIA Afghan expert, Bruce Riedel¹. In recognizing the failures of American strategy in the region during the later years of the Bush administration, President Obama said:

We are going to need more effective, coordination of our military efforts with diplomatic efforts, with development efforts, with more effective coordination with our allies in order for us to be successful².

Later that year on March 27, 2009, President Obama, presented the findings of the review, setting out his clear cut goal in region as defeating Al-Qaeda and amalgamating the theatre of conflict to include both Pakistan and Afghanistan, hence setting out the new Afghanistan-Pakistan (AF-PAK) strategy³. The AF-PAK strategy recognised the situation as one problem that was being played across two fronts and hence needed a common approach.

¹ Reuters, *Obama orders Afghan-Pakistan policy review*, February 10, 2009, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2009/02/10/us-obama-afghanistan-sb-idUSTRE5195HF20090210> (accessed April 4, 2011).

² Ibid.

³ Barack Obama, *President Obama's Remarks on New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan (full text)*, March 27, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/27/us/politics/27obama-text.html> (accessed February 12, 2011).

The AF-PAK policy initially laid out five clear goals. These goals sought to disrupt terrorist networks in Afghanistan and Pakistan; promote better, more effective and accountable governance in Afghanistan; develop more self-reliant Afghan forces that could take on counter-terrorism activities without US assistance; assist efforts to establish and enhance civilian control, constitutional governance and economic vibrancy in Pakistan; and involve the international community to a greater extent in Afghanistan and Pakistan⁴. These goals were further built upon using subsequent reviews, speeches, and strategy papers throughout 2009. Further, the London Conference on Afghanistan had a significant impact, adding key motives to the strategy in January 2010.

The strategy created the first tangible opportunity to recalibrate the US' involvement in Afghanistan and was welcomed as an opportunity for the US to regain the foreign policy credibility it had squandered. The Obama regime recognised the chimerical duality in the purposes of attempted state building and a military response, and proposed to address this with more tangible soft power measures for reconstruction and counterinsurgency. It also called for an increase in International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) troops, reconciliation with moderate Taliban (in its later iterations) and a greater scrutiny and involvement of Pakistan and its response to the insurgency in its tribal areas. The AF-PAK strategy was also unique in its novel nomenclature, hyphenating Afghanistan and Pakistan into one situation. It viewed Afghanistan and Pakistan as separate conflicts, which presented one existential threat and therefore demanded a cohesive solution.

⁴ The White House, *White Paper of the Interagency Policy Group's Report on U.S. Policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan*, White Paper (Washington D.C.: The White House, 2009).

The response to the AF-PAK strategy in India was largely muted. Many in India saw it as a blow to India's interests⁵. While the strategy sought to address many concerns India had expressed about Pakistan in the past, it was viewed as one that strengthened Pakistan's hand because it implicitly called for a future US withdrawal from Afghanistan and remained reciprocal to the idea of talking to the Taliban. India had built up substantial economic interests in Afghanistan, along with significant support in the reconstruction effort, and a wrong move by the US at this stage could risk jeopardising these interest and that effort. India also remained fundamentally opposed to the Taliban, which in the past had supported terror groups that attacked India, and with a radical revisionist Islamic ideology, was the epitome of what a modern secular India did not want to see.

The last two years have been tumultuous in South Asia as the AF-PAK strategy has been shaped and re-shaped on the back of numerous reviews and in response to domestic concerns. Yet as President Obama announced that US troops in Afghanistan would be phased out by 2014, the next three years look to be fractious as India ponders the implications of US withdrawal and remains locked in a situation with Pakistan that continues to test its patience, given Pakistan's consistent intransigence.

This thesis seeks to approach the situation in Afghanistan from a regional perspective. It uses Afghanistan as the canvas on which the US, Pakistan and India are drawing up their plans to ensure their strategic interests are best served. The US sees its strategic interests being achieved by Pakistan supporting US objectives in Afghanistan. Yet it realises that to serve US strategic interests, Pakistan's strategic concerns vis-à-vis

⁵ Harsh V. Pant, *AfPak Strategy Solves Nothing*, ISN Security Watch (Zurich: International Relations and Security Network, 2009).

India must be allayed. The US therefore has tried to do this without alienating India, for in India the US has a future strategic partnership, built upon the same bedrock of democracy and shared values. Yet it is here the biggest conundrums for the US are posed, namely the short term-gain with Pakistan in Afghanistan versus its long-term relationship with India; the shape of a comprehensive US South Asia Strategy; and the viability of an extended US run in Afghanistan given its domestic concerns and the possible uncontrollable fallout from an early departure. Built upon the idea of a Regional Security Complex in South Asia and the inevitable interdependency of Pakistan and India's security concerns that influence their behaviour in Afghanistan, the purpose of this thesis is to answer the questions posed above and look at their implications for India, which as the hegemony in the Regional Security Complex has the most to lose and yet remains under-utilized by the US in its seeking of a regional solution to its problems.

1.2 Research Questions

The following research questions have been posed and I attempt to answer these first to provide foundations for the analysis provided in the main research question.

Research Question 1

What were the salient features of the AF-PAK policy and what are the specific implications of this strategy on Afghanistan and Pakistan and on the US' greater South Asian strategy?

Research Question 2

What is the basis of Pakistan's interests in Afghanistan, its policies and how does this impact Pakistan's strategic objectives concerning India?

Research Question 3

What is the nature of India's engagement in Afghanistan and how does Afghanistan fit into the concept of an Indian 'Grand Strategy'?

Main Research Question

What are the implications of the AF-PAK strategy for South Asia and India's (and Pakistan's) endgame in Afghanistan?

Thus these research questions and their answers will be addressed in detail and along with findings. With these findings, I hope to be able to show that the US' AF-PAK strategy and how it is enacted has real implications for India's engagement in Afghanistan and for the greater South Asian region. I will also conclude by analysing the implications for India within the context of the current security dynamic in South Asia.

1.2 Literature Review

Given the contemporary nature of the task at hand, it is foolhardy to expect a number of books and in-depth publications on the subjects. The strategies discussed and policies enacted are very much ongoing, presenting this thesis with a dynamic resource base and knowledge bank to tap into. Whilst relying largely on recent articles and opinion pieces published by scholars of South Asia and Afghanistan, to support analysis and inferences the thesis does make use of books and articles that have benefitted from the looking glass of inflection to shore up the sections that make use of history to state their points.

To understand the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the source that most turn to for a comprehensive scholarly criticism of US policy is Ahmed Rashid's decisive essay, *Descent into Chaos*⁶ which provides an overview of the situation in the region and insightful commentary on the missteps taken under the Bush administration which have continued to impact the situation today. The book also provides a comprehensive look at all the various actors in Afghanistan and their motives. Other publications that have served valuable lessons include *Soldiers of God: With Islamic Warriors in Afghanistan and Pakistan*⁷ by veteran journalist Robert Kaplan for its detailed reading into the motivations of the Taliban and other insurgent groups, and *An Afghan Diary*⁸ by former Indian Foreign Secretary JN Dixit, which clearly details India's past dalliance with Afghanistan.

Looking at India-Pakistan relations and the general situation in South Asia, it is hard to look beyond Sumit Ganguly and *Conflict Unending*⁹, which analyses India-Pakistan relations from the partition, Kashmir, Nuclear weapons and conflicting ideologies. The book provides valuable insights and for the interaction of the two in Afghanistan. *India and the United States in the 21st Century: Reinventing Partnership (Significant Issues)*¹⁰ by Ambassador Teresita Schaffer provides a valuable insight into the burgeoning India-US strategic relationship. Another book recently published by Robert Kaplan *Monsoon*¹¹ provides the basis for understanding key geopolitical motives in South Asia, as it metaphorically traces the flow of the monsoon winds

⁶ Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos* (London: Penguin, 2009).

⁷ Robert D. Kaplan, *Soldiers of God: With Islamic Warriors in Afghanistan and Pakistan* (New York: Vintage, 2001).

⁸ J.N. Dixit, *Afghan Diary* (New Delhi: Konark Publishers, 2000).

⁹ Sumit Ganguly, *Conflict Unending* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

¹⁰ Teresita C. Schaffer, *India and the United States in the 21st Century: Reinventing Partnership* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2009).

¹¹ Robert D. Kaplan, *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power* (New York: Random House, 2010).

across the subcontinent and compares this flow to current geopolitical trends in the region.

A number of books published in recent years, have come to address the phenomenon that is now India, and its international relations thinking. Keeping in line with its rising profile due to its increasing economic, military and political clout, there has been an influx of contemporary scholarly literature that looks at how India makes its decisions on the international stage. With varied approaches, these books consider the impact of history, internal dynamics, contemporary foreign policy and India's growing ambition as they place scholarship in different settings. The seminal *Handbook of India's International Relations* edited by David Scott¹², is a veritable piece of scholarship, with chapters written by some of the brightest contemporary India scholars and theoreticians. Chris Ogden's opening chapter on *International 'Aspirations' of a Rising Power* and Harsh Pant's essay on *India's Strategic Culture* along with Sreeram Chaulia's thesis on *India's Power Attributes* lay the groundwork for any attempt to understand the evolution of India's strategic thinking and its current attributes. David Scott and Raghav Sharma's chapters on India-Pakistan relations and India Afghanistan relations have proved invaluable resources for the shaping of this thesis and understanding the importance of underlining a comprehensive South Asia strategy for the US. Another publication of note on Indian policy and realist perspectives is David Malone's *Does the Elephant Dance? Contemporary Indian*

¹² David Scott, ed., *Handbook of India's International Relations*, ed. David Scott (London: Routledge, 2011).

*Foreign Policy*¹³ and older influential texts include *International Relations in India: Theorising the Region and Nation*¹⁴ by Kanti Bajpai and Siddharth Mallavarapu.

In addition to books, the thesis relies on a number of journal articles, occasional papers, conference proceedings, opinion pieces, Task-force reports, commissioned reports, expert analysis, newspaper articles and publications by and official statements from official and government sources as a source of valuable secondary data, essential to proving the hypothesis. Finally, this thesis has been shaped by a number of personal interviews and conversations with influential journalists, scholars and policy makers, who for the most case have declined to be named but include amongst others, Afghan and Indian Ambassadors currently in service.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

Afghanistan, with its unique location straddles multiple regions, South Asia, Central Asia and even the Persian Middle East. Given its majority Pashtun linkage to Pakistan and its modern history, where it was served as a buffer zone between the British and Russian imperialists, Afghanistan has been seen more as part of South Asia¹⁵. Yet, there has been little attempt by the US to broach a regional solution to the Afghan problem, preferring to rely upon international approaches that have relied on NATO and US partners leading the way. The AF-PAK strategy was a much needed change in the way the US viewed Afghanistan, realising the role Pakistan had to play and other regional powers like India and China.

¹³ David M. Malone, *Does the Elephant Dance? Contemporary Indian Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹⁴ Kanti P. Bajpai and Siddharth Mallavarapu, *International Relations in India: Theorising the Region and Nation* (Orient Longman, Limited, 2005).

¹⁵ See Defining the Region in Center for a New American Security, *Beyond Afghanistan: A Regional Security Strategy for South and Central Asia*, (Washington D.C.: Center for a New American Security, 2011).

Afghanistan sits at the crossroads of three different security systems as well, yet seems to be impacted most by the on goings in South Asia¹⁶. The conceptual framework for this thesis is therefore based upon the idea of a Regional Security Complex (RSC) in South Asia, with India as the dominant regional hegemony¹⁷. The use of a security complex makes sense because the current security situation in South Asia is seen to fulfil a number of conditions for an RSC. An RSC, as determined by scholars Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, emphasizes an inter-subjective structure of security issues by state actors while stressing that geographic proximity is the foremost generator of security concerns¹⁸.

For states to be in an RSC, first, the processes of securitisation and de-securitisation between states must be so intertwined that their security concerns cannot be resolved apart from the other. Second, this intertwining should be able to differentiate the prevalent security complex from surrounding ones¹⁹. Applying this to South Asia, India serves as the regional hegemony and fulfils the role of the dominant power. It has been able to transform its relations with all the South Asian towards hegemony except with Pakistan²⁰, due to the nuclearization of the sub-continent and Pakistan's extended military capabilities. Thus the India-Pakistan security conflict continues to endure. There remains a high level of interdependency in the security interests of both actors and the external theatres that they manifest themselves in across South Asia.

¹⁶ Melanie Hanif, "Indian Involvement in Afghanistan in the Context of the South Asian Security System," *Journal of Strategic Strategy* (Henley-Putnam University) 3, no. 2 (2010): 13-26.

¹⁷ Shahrbanou Tadjbakhs, *South Asia and Afghanistan: The Robust India-Pakistan Rivalry*, Paper 2 of the PRIO Project "Afghanistan in a Neighbourhood Perspective" (Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo).

¹⁸ For a greater understanding of Regional Security Complex Theory see, Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998).

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Melanie Hanif, "Indian Involvement in Afghanistan in the Context of the South Asian Security System," *Journal of Strategic Strategy* (Henley-Putnam University) 3, no. 2 (2010): 13-26.

Afghanistan is one such theatre of extended security interplay between Pakistan and India. India's willingness to expand its responsibility in the RSC, especially through contributions to stabilizing Afghanistan, could fill existing gaps²¹ other regional and international actors have not been able to do. Yet India's intentions are opposed by Pakistan who does not wish to see Indian domination in the RSC. This poses questions to US strategy in the region. By exploring the answers to this, I hope to find a basis for understanding the interactions of all these actors as this thesis aims to explore.

1.4 Organisation

Keeping in line with the research questions and theoretical framework, the thesis is divided into five chapters to attempt to best explain these. The three main chapters that constitute the body of the thesis follow the Introduction, and the final chapter that considers the implications of the US' AF-PAK strategy serves as the conclusion. A comprehensive bibliography is included at the end. The Chicago Manual of Style's Notes and Bibliography documentation system has been used for referencing.

Chapter 2 addresses *Research Question 1*. It reviews the conceptualization of the AF-PAK strategy, and the underlying motivations and conditions that resulted in the interagency review commissioned by President Obama after he came to power in 2009. It explains the salient features of the AF-PAK strategy taking into consideration its iterative nature. The chapter further delves into the specific situation and challenges posed to the strategy in Afghanistan and Pakistan, to assess the impact the

²¹ Melanie Hanif, "Indian Involvement in Afghanistan in the Context of the South Asian Security System," *Journal of Strategic Strategy* (Henley-Putnam University) 3, no. 2 (2010): 13-26.

strategy has had so far. Within Afghanistan, it specifically addresses the nature of American operational objectives with respect to the Taliban and Al-Qaeda and their achievability. It also questions the more controversial parts of the strategy that include the possibility of reconciliation with and reintegration of certain elements of the Taliban. In Pakistan, it looks at the role of US strategy in controlling the excesses of its local partner– the military. This is necessary to ensure that US objectives in the Pashtun borderlands are met and that Pakistan’s civilian administration is given a chance to address the systemic failures that are ripping the core of Pakistani society apart. The chapter concludes with a look at the challenges for US policy in South Asia by introducing the India factor and linking the AF-PAK strategy clearly to the challenges US-India relations will face, which need to be addressed before the US can leave a stable Afghanistan behind.

Chapter 3 addresses *Research Question 2* and analyses Pakistan’s role. It addresses the current nature of Pakistani engagement within Afghanistan and puts in perspective Pakistani thinking on Afghanistan. It also looks at the contentious relations between Pakistan’s military establishment with the Afghan government. It then proceeds to look at the nature of Pakistan’s interests in Afghanistan and the strategic drivers of these interests. This has particular significance due to the US’ impatience with Pakistan in recent months, after the death of Osama bin Laden and Pakistan’s failure to mount comprehensive counterinsurgency campaigns in its troubled tribal areas and Balochistan. The chapter concludes by looking at Pakistan’s strategic objectives and the nature of its ties with India. It also looks more specifically at the ‘zero-sum’ game it seems to be locked into with India.

Chapter 4 addresses *Research Question 3*. It remains vital to the methodological flow of the thesis as it serves to link India's Afghan engagement to the wider question of India's relations with Pakistan, as the regional hegemony, and its relations with the US as a rising world power. To do this, it places the current Indo-Afghan engagement within a suitable structure for analysis, and examines how it fits into the idea of an Indian 'Grand Strategy.' This Strategy explains how India sees the world in the future, not just in specific foreign policy or military strategy terms. It considers the value of the historical ties between Delhi and Kabul and the role India has had in the consolidation and reconstruction processes in Afghanistan. Finally, the chapter concludes with a look at Indian strategic interests in Afghanistan vis-à-vis Pakistan and its greater regional and grand strategic imperatives. Chapter 4 also serves as a basis for further academic exploration of how the AF-PAK strategy will impact Indian interests, as discussed in the final chapter.

Chapter 5 serves as the concluding chapter for this thesis and links the answers obtained from the exploration of *Research Questions 1 – 3* to answer the *Main Research Question* and analyse the impact of current US policies. It looks at the possible implications of the AF-PAK strategy for Indian interests in Afghanistan and the region, and also serves as a primer for the US' greater South Asia strategy, addressing future challenges and the idea of strategic alignment between US and Indian interests. Chapter 5 also lays out broad conclusions and passes remarks on possible future scenarios within the AF-PAK matrix.

Chapter 2

2.0 – The US AF-PAK Strategy

The AF-PAK strategy was brought out in response to US President Barack Obama's concern that not enough attention was being paid to Afghanistan²². The strategy was iteratively developed through 2009, starting with a White Paper in March and a review report that was released in December. The strategy lays the basis for a groundwork that shapes US interest in Afghanistan, and more importantly recognizes that the situation in Pakistan, a major part of the problem, will also have to be addressed before the strategy will see success in Afghanistan. It looks at key US goals and recognizes that the US is not to stay in Afghanistan indefinitely. It is, significantly, recognised as a pathway out of Afghanistan for the US²³.

The first part of the chapter will look at the shaping of the AF-PAK strategy and the significant changes made under President Obama. It will take into account the iterative nature of the strategy and acknowledge the additions and corrections brought in the later months, with an explanation of current perspectives that are being employed. Consequently, second, it will present the underlying features of the strategy and address the key goals on which the initially commissioned White Papers and Interagency Report were based.

²² Reuters, *Obama orders Afghan-Pakistan policy review*, News Report (Reuters, 2009).

²³ The New York Times, "White Paper of the Interagency Policy Group's Report on U.S. Policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan," *The New York Times*, March 27, 2009.

Third, it will look at the specifics of the strategy in Afghanistan; evaluate them alongside the US's key goals, address the threats and obstacles the strategy faces and evaluate the progress the US has made on various fronts mentioned in the strategy, including the troop surge and reconciliation attempts. It will also address the progress made by the Karzai government and the local Afghan administration in response to the greater emphasis on improving governance and ensuring delivery of public goods.

Fourth, it will delve deeper into the challenges that the current strategy faces in Pakistan in the face of the continued insurgency in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan. This is particularly relevant in light of the capture and death of Osama bin Laden earlier this year which marks the partial achievement of one of the primary goals of the US – eliminating Al-Qaeda and other terror groups inimical to the US.

The final section of this Chapter will examine how the AF-PAK strategy fits into the greater US South Asia strategy, i.e. AF-PAK + India. One of the hallmarks of the Obama strategy was to reconsider the Bush strategy of de-hyphenation of India from Pakistan, and define the role of India within the gamut of its AF-PAK strategy more clearly, and hence linking its AF-PAK strategy more clearly to its overall South Asian strategy. This is commensurate with US strategic thinking, which sees a growing India as a potential check on Chinese adventurism in the region²⁴ and an increasingly reliant partner that shares the same democratic values as the US.

²⁴ Condoleezza Rice, "Campaign 2000: Promoting the National Interest," *Foreign Affairs* (Council on Foreign Affairs), January/February 2000.

2.1 History & Conceptualization

With over eight years of American policy failure and a lack of policy coherence interests under the Bush regime, which seemed too busy with its underlying neoconservative motives and involvement in Iraq²⁵, the US was on a precipice in Afghanistan when President Obama came into power. Tied down into a seemingly ‘unwinnable’ conflict with a resurgent Taliban in the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderland, and escalating violence that threatened to reverse the strategic gains made since the Afghan intervention, the US was faced with serious questions over its role as a guarantor of regional stability. The motives of its main partner in the war on terror, Pakistan, were questioned too. Doubts were raised about the ability of the ruling military establishment to confront the insurgency in Pakistan’s tribal areas, which were driving US losses in Afghanistan. Further, Pakistan’s continued use of irregular warfare against India, its *bête noire*, was exacerbating regional tensions and driving South Asia to the brink of war²⁶. President Obama responded to this by commissioning a strategic review of the US policy in Afghanistan and Pakistan, with experts from the CIA, former Ambassadors and senior Military officials.

The resulting ‘White Paper,’ issued by the White House in March 2009, laid out five clear and achievable goals for the US in Afghanistan. These goals sought to: disrupt terrorist networks in Afghanistan and Pakistan; promote better, more effective and accountable governance in Afghanistan; develop more self-reliant Afghan forces that could take on counter-terrorism activities without US assistance; assist efforts to establish and enhance civilian control, constitutional governance and economic

²⁵ Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos* (London: Penguin, 2009).

²⁶ See, Richard A. Opiel Jr. and Salman Massod, "Pakistan Moves Troops Amid Tension With India," *The New York Times*, December 27, 2008: A1.

vibrancy in Pakistan; and involve the international community to a greater extent in Afghanistan and Pakistan²⁷. The strategy, apart from accepting the failures of previous policies, did not lay down a clear groundwork for achieving these goals, particularly in Pakistan.

The strategy created the first tangible opportunity to recalibrate the US' involvement in Afghanistan and was welcomed as an opportunity for the US to regain the foreign policy credibility it had squandered with its misadventures under the Bush regime²⁸. The Obama regime recognised the duality in the purposes of attempted state building and a military response, and proposed to address this with more palpable soft power measures for reconstruction and counterinsurgency. It also called for an increase in ISAF troops, reconciliation with moderate Taliban (in its later iterations), and a greater scrutiny and involvement of Pakistan and its response to the insurgency in its tribal areas.

The AF-PAK strategy was unique in its novel nomenclature, hyphenating Afghanistan and Pakistan into one situation. A result of the long campaign during the Bush years to de-hyphenate India from Pakistan (Indo-Pak), it conceptualized Afghanistan and Pakistan as one unit. As a cognitive moniker, as Ayesha Khan notes:

²⁷ The White House, *White Paper of the Interagency Policy Group's Report on U.S. Policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan*, White Paper (Washington D.C.: The White House, 2009).

²⁸ Wahabuddin Ra'ees, "Obama's Afghanistan Strategy: A Policy of Balancing the Reality with the Practice," *Journal of Politics and Law* (Canadian Center of Science and Education) 3, no. 2 (2010): 80-93.

This means the conflation of two separate but parallel conflicts – the insurgency in Afghanistan and militancy in Pakistan – into one existential threat²⁹.

It also construed a new special, geopolitical entity that straddled the border areas of both countries and expanded the operating space of the ‘War on Terror’. It recognized the theatre of war as the Pashtun belt that abuts the Durand line on both sides and focused the efforts of the US on the hunt for Al-Qaeda within that region.

General Stanley McChrystal, leader of the ISAF in Afghanistan, was made responsible for the implementation of the initial AF-PAK strategy, and by August 2009 he had submitted a report to the Obama administration on the feasibility of the strategy and the necessary steps that he would need to take. Amongst them, the two most important called for up to 45,000 additional counter-insurgency personnel to take on a resurgent Taliban, and more importantly the need for the US to find a credible partner in Afghanistan to support the billion dollar initiatives that had been undertaken to build institutional capability³⁰. The report was controversial, not only because it called for more troop numbers, but also because it cast aspersions on President Karzai’s abilities following his recent re-election, which were marred by calls of fraud. Under pressure from the Military, President Obama then called for another interagency review, the results of which Obama integrated into his speech to the WestPoint Military Academy in December 2009.

²⁹ Ayesha R. Khan, *Conceptualizing AfPak: The Prospects and Peril*, Asia Programme Paper: ASP PP 2010/01 (London: Chatham House, 2010).

³⁰ Eric Schmitt and Thom Shanker, "General Calls for More U.S. Troops to Avoid Afghan Failure," *The New York Times*, September 21, 2009: A1.

In the speech Obama, whilst restating the key objectives of the March strategy – defeating terror and Al-Qaeda, doubled-down³¹ and supported General McChrystal's call by earmarking additional troops for the surge. The revised strategy was explicit in marking an exit-plan for the US, scaling down on the agenda of state building in Afghanistan and instead mandating an intense focus on the Ministries of Interior and Defence³². However, it was less straightforward about its methods in Pakistan, instead choosing to focus on Afghan mis-governance and issuing a veiled warning to President Karzai, calling for more accountability. While the strategy departed significantly from the March strategy, it was still a continuation of the AF-PAK line of thinking and would be supplemented by the ensuing *Afghanistan and Pakistan Regional Stabilization Strategy*³³ that was released in January 2010, before the London Conference on Afghanistan that month. The announcement at the conference of a US plan to integrate low-level and mid-level Taliban who were not driven by ideological compulsions, gave the AF-PAK strategy its final shape, similar to its current constructions.

2.2 Underlying Features of the Strategy

Looking at the principle aspects of the strategy and the operational framework discussed in the detailed stabilization strategy, and considering the rhetoric in Obama's speeches, it is possible to conclude the following:

³¹ Sheryl Gay Stolberg and Helene Cooper, "Obama Adds Troops, but Maps Exit Plan," *The New York Times*, December 1, 2009.

³² C. Christine Fair, *Obama's New Af-Pak Strategy: Can "Clear, Hold, Build, Transfer" Work?*, Afghanistan Paper #6 (Waterloo, CA: Center for International Governance Innovation, 2010).

³³ Department of State, *Afghanistan and Pakistan Regional Stabilization Strategy*, Office of the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakista (United States of America, 2010).

First, the strategy expanded the theatre of war to Pakistan's borderlands with Afghanistan and treats Afghanistan and Pakistan as two countries but a singular challenge as mentioned above. This was due to the increasing perception that Pakistan's tribal areas were a safe-haven for Al-Qaeda with much of the current Al-Qaeda leadership ensconced in Pakistan. The bin Laden raid earlier this year and the capture and killings of other key Al-Qaeda operatives have provided testimony to this. The strategy also scrutinizes the role of Pakistan and calls for greater support from the Pakistani establishment to take on counterterrorism measures in its tribal areas. It links the future of Afghanistan to the success or failure of political development in Pakistan. It also deviated significantly from the transactional nature of the Bush Strategy³⁴ with Pakistan by calling for a trilateral framework at the highest levels, aimed at fostering the bilateral relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan in the areas of political, economic and security cooperation³⁵. The main goal of the strategy was not long-term occupation or direct control, instead it sought to build Afghanistan to a point of security, whilst addressing the fundamental dilemmas in Pakistan to guarantee a long-term stability.

Second, the strategy was refocused on disrupting, defeating and dismantling the Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan and preventing their return. This was a significant deviation from the earlier key goal of taking on terrorist groups that threatened the US, mentioned in the March stratagem, and a significant departure from the Bush ideology with its attempts at nation-building and long-term plans for redevelopment it had conceived in Iraq. The highlighting of Al-Qaeda as its primary objective, was to open a Pandora's box of questions over the US ambitions in Afghanistan even though

³⁴ Sumit Ganguly, "Afghanistan Should not Spoil the Party," *India Today*, November 6, 2010.

³⁵ Ishtiaq Ahmad, "The U.S. Af-Pak Strategy: Challenges and Opportunities for Pakistan," *Asian Affairs: An American Review* (Routledge), 2010: 191-209.

it cleared the air over the assumed use of Afghanistan as a US base for a future 'great game' for the hydrocarbon and resources reserves of Central Asia³⁶. Whilst stating clearly that the US would start moving out once this goal had been met, it increased pressure domestically. After the death of Osama bin Laden³⁷, questions resurfaced over the effect a staggered conflict in Afghanistan had on a stagnant domestic economy. Further, it affected regional calculations, putting allies like India and other Afghan neighbours in a quandary over their extended role in Afghanistan. Additionally keeping in line with the objective of disrupting Al-Qaeda, the strategy would also seek to ensure that Pakistan's nuclear arsenals did not fall in to the hands of Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups. This signalled the fear that many in the US establishment shared of an unchecked growth of Al-Qaeda and growing radicalization within the Pakistani establishment itself.

Third, the strategy outlined the framework for extensive US obligations to Afghanistan and Pakistan, focussing on the growth of the civil sector and propping up political institutions in both countries. It also seeks greater responsibility and accountability from both Pakistani and Afghan partners, with President Obama clearly stating that there would be no more 'blank cheques' issued³⁸. The US obligations also include greater investment in both countries' capacity to take on extremism with the US committing funds for training of the Afghan National Security forces (ANSF), to take over the holding role the ISAF currently plays, and further financial commitments to the Pakistani Frontier Corps so they can create a counterinsurgency corpus. There were also additional economic aspects of the strategy including the

³⁶ Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos* (London: Penguin, 2009).

³⁷ Mark Landler, Thom Shanker and Alissa J. Rubin, "Killing Adds to Debate About U.S. Strategy and Timetable in Afghanistan," *The New York Times*, May 2, 2011.

³⁸ United Press International, "Obama: No more blank check for Afghanistan," *UPI.com*, December 1, 2009.

Kerry –Lugar Act, passed in November 2009, for which Pakistan would receive up to US \$7.5 billion to support institution building measures, which intended to shore up civil society, constitutional governance and give the civilian government a chance to consolidate the gains it had made.

Fourth, the strategy included a significant change of policy on the ground level. By recognizing the value of General McChrystal's call for additional troops, the strategy talked about a troop surge, diplomatic surge and an increase in the number of 'Special-Op' forces. President Obama ordered an additional 50,000 troops to be made available in Afghanistan by the middle of 2010, over the course of two surges, ordered in March and December 2009. It also made a significant change with its 'boots on ground' strategy, countering the Bush doctrine that used overwhelming air power to compensate for a light ground force³⁹; the strategy that Obama put in to place was the reverse. Other tactical changes included greater measures to protect Afghan civilians over the lives of US troops and changing the mindset of 'operational culture'⁴⁰. Finally, the strategy was unique in laying down timetables for the achievement of goals both operationally and in evaluating the overall efficacy of the AF-PAK strategy. President Obama publicly called for troop draw-downs starting in July 2011, for which a schedule has since been announced which sees troops back at pre AF-PAK levels by the summer of 2012⁴¹.

Finally, the strategy broke new ground with its attempt to go beyond the Bush regimes attempts at reconciliation through Kabul, by reaching out specifically to

³⁹ Ayesha R. Khan, *Conceptualizing AfPak: The Prospects and Peril*, Asia Programme Paper: ASP PP 2010/01 (London: Chatham House, 2010).

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Mark Landler and Helene Cooper, "Obama Will Speed Pullout From War in Afghanistan," *The New York Times*, June 2, 2011.

elements in the Taliban that were not motivated by fundamental ideological rationales through its reintegration plans. It, however, reconfirmed the core use of military strategy and force against the other elements of the Taliban that would not concede, clearly putting in place a 'carrot and stick' approach with the lower and middle rung elements of the Taliban who were presumably motivated out of fear or out of financial concerns. It put in place provisions to guarantee compensation to those Taliban who renounced the insurgency. These announcements, made at the London Conference in January 2010, caused considerable disconcertion amongst other regional powers, including India, Iran and Russia, who now saw the US giving in and considering negotiations with the Taliban as the implied next step, a move that was detrimental to their interests in the region⁴².

2.2 Afghanistan

Looking specifically at the US strategy in Afghanistan, it seeks to weaken the Taliban insurgency in the rural areas of the South, breaking the momentum that Taliban has gathered. To do this, President Obama ordered a troop and civilian surge, which would provide an increased capacity to train the ANSF, and in the near term, provide an opportunity to begin a transfer of responsibility and resources to Afghan sources. The strategy also called for greater involvement of NATO partners and other international institutions and emphasised the need for the US to rely more on its local Afghan partners and international organisations present in the region. This is necessary to build conditions for sustainable security and deprive the insurgency of popular support. In short, the policy involves a reassigning of responsibilities and duties to the Afghan forces, allowing the US to move back to a more typical

⁴² M K Bhadrakumar, *Taliban's return and India's concerns*, June 27, 2011, <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/article2139551.ece> (accessed July 5, 2011).

reconstruction and developmental role, largely limited to economic and developmental assistance and personnel and capacity training. As former UN Mission in Afghanistan Political Officer and South Asia scholar, C. Christine Fair notes:

Thus, the counter-insurgency mantra of “clear, hold and build,” has become under Obama “clear, hold, build and transfer.”⁴³

The strategy in action meant that the US and ISAF forces broke new ground with their military targets, taking on the insurgency in Southern Afghanistan, contesting the Taliban’s influence in areas it had long since re-consolidated under the Bush largesse⁴⁴, where its writ had been dominant for years. The troop surge was immediately put to use, with the use of Special Forces in the targeting of higher-level Al-Qaeda leaders through improved intelligence collection and the use of aerial unmanned drones. With increased pressure on the Taliban, the hope is to create venues for negotiation and surrender for lower level cadre, who remain ideologically indifferent and tempted by financial gain and compensation. On the civilian front, the civilian surge has already had impact in the institution and capacity building areas, and the stringency with developmental aid has ensured better accountability against corruption within the Karzai government⁴⁵.

Yet there remain a number of challenges to the Afghanistan strategy, the first that lie no less than in its conception, which continue to impact the US and the entire region, as explained below.

⁴³ C. Christine Fair, *Obama's New Af-Pak Strategy: Can "Clear, Hold, Build, Transfer" Work?*, Afghanistan Paper #6 (Waterloo, CA: Center for International Governance Innovation, 2010).

⁴⁴ Council on Foreign Relations, *U.S. Strategy for Pakistan and Afghanistan*, Independent Task Force Report No. 65 (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2010).

⁴⁵ Council on Foreign Relations, *U.S. Strategy for Pakistan and Afghanistan*, Independent Task Force Report No. 65 (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2010).

First, the military strategy calls for a reversal of Taliban momentum with a larger ISAF presence and a more people-centric counterinsurgency (COIN) approach that also aims to train the ANSF to eventually assume responsibility for the security of Afghanistan. The COIN strategy, while focussing on protecting large population centres and agricultural areas essential to the economy in the Pashtun dominated half of the country, will involve taking on strategic support and supply routes of the Taliban with the help of superior technology, intelligence gathering and the use of drones. This is an urban-centric approach aimed at ensuring the goodwill of the majority Pashtun population and aims to protect local lives over taking out insurgents. Yet, one of the biggest questions that hang over this policy is its actual impact on the Taliban. The strategy aims to secure urban areas and take out key supply lines to prevent the Taliban from controlling population centres, yet the Taliban remains a largely rural phenomenon that derives its legitimacy from the hinterlands⁴⁶.

There exist serious doubts about the other constituent of this military strategy – the efforts to consolidate the ANSF and ensure that they are ready to accept the transfer of responsibilities from the ISAF in the near future. The aim is to expand the size of the ANSF to up to 400,000 troops once the transfers are in full force to meet the needs of policing, security and administrative support of the government. The current strength of about 240,000⁴⁷ is only half the amount and attrition rates remain high. Other challenges to the ANSF include charges of corruption and preying upon innocent Afghans. Further capacity restrictions include illiteracy and a lack of skills

⁴⁶ C. Christine Fair, *Obama's New Af-Pak Strategy: Can "Clear, Hold, Build, Transfer" Work?*, Afghanistan Paper #6 (Waterloo, CA: Center for International Governance Innovation, 2010).

⁴⁷ Council on Foreign Relations, *U.S. Strategy for Pakistan and Afghanistan*, Independent Task Force Report No. 65 (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2010).

that hamper the logistical, training and administrative procedures expected of the ISAF that the ANSF will take over. The training of the ANSF, too, has generated much controversy amongst regional partners, with India and Pakistan both seeing a chance to train the ANSF as an option for future leveraging against each other in their struggle for support in Afghanistan.

Second, the efficacy of the civilian surge, that aims to develop capacity, economic investments and developmental aid that President Obama intended in his strategy, remains questionable given the massive structural - political and economic weaknesses that continue to plague the Afghan state today. Quite simply, the faculty to accept these goods and put them to use in the Afghan state is severely crippled. Three decades of war has left Afghanistan with a severe dearth of human capital, with a 90% illiteracy rate and amongst the lowest Human Development Index (HDI) figures in the world. This anarchic situation has directly translated into the lack of a functioning state and little legislative control in much of the country. The Karzai government is reliant on powerbrokers and warlords to enforce its writ outside of Kabul. In other parts, the government is seen as part of the problem. The fracas over the last Presidential election showcased the difficulties in establishing some semblance of democracy across the country. The number of illegitimate votes, disenfranchised voters and widespread allegations of cheating were a testimony to the lack of democratic progress in the country. More serious allegations of corruption and ineptitude against the functioning of most of the central administration and ministries mean the mechanisms for dealing with aid and further institutional support barely exist. Additionally questions about the structure and abilities of the civilian surge

itself have been raised⁴⁸. The civilian surge was put into place to ensure a greater civilian-military plan and coordination at the district and regional levels to build local self-governance capabilities and administrative skills. The abilities, skills and motivations of the people that constitute the civilian surge have been questioned too, along with the unclear framework for civilian-military interaction and actual achievement of objectives in the field.

Third, the AF-PAK strategy fails to clearly enunciate the differences between the US led strategy of reintegration and the Karzai government led objective of reconciliation with different insurgent groups and the Taliban. The support of a strategy for reintegration of lower and mid-level Taliban was the major tactic that emerged from the London Afghanistan Conference in 2010, yet it differed fundamentally from the Karzai government's strategy of reconciliation with certain factions of the Taliban and other insurgent groups⁴⁹ through negotiation rather than compensation or a 'carrot and stick' approach that reintegration states. The US however has remained opposed to the idea of reconciliation, preferring to reintegrate lower rungs and using military force on the higher levels of the Taliban for obvious reasons. This risks driving a rift between the US and the Karzai government, as the US remains worried about the deals Karzai will make to remain in power with warlords, power brokers and parts of the Taliban it wishes to see captured. Other doubts over both strategies include scepticism about a real lack of ideology across the lower rungs of the Taliban and the fear that extremists and other figures reviled by Afghans could return to Kabul⁵⁰.

⁴⁸ C. Christine Fair, *Obama's New Af-Pak Strategy: Can "Clear, Hold, Build, Transfer" Work?*, Afghanistan Paper #6 (Waterloo, CA: Center for International Governance Innovation, 2010).

⁴⁹ Ayesha R. Khan, *Conceptualizing AfPak: The Prospects and Peril*, Asia Programme Paper: ASP PP 2010/01 (London: Chatham House, 2010).

⁵⁰ Mark Lander and Alissa J. Rubin, "War Plan for Karzai: Reach Out to Taliban," *The New York Times*, January 28, 2010: A4.

The reconciliation process is important, because it is understood as the way forward in Afghanistan once the US cements its withdrawal plans. Both Pakistan and India see a timetable for a US withdrawal as a return to an ethnic consolidation and possible sectarianism⁵¹. Talks are already underway with pre 2001 partners and allies within the Afghan matrix, as Pakistan sees its lot with the Taliban, and India and Iran invoking the Tajik backed alliances they facilitated in the past. It is clear though, that if the reconciliation process is not properly managed by the Karzai government and the US is unable to take a clear stand, it risks destabilizing Afghanistan; resetting the gains made from the intervention and laying down the real possibility of a return of the Taliban in some form or the other.

2.3 Pakistan

The US strategy in Pakistan is fundamentally different from its strategy in Afghanistan in the sense that it has a tangible (if supportive) partner on the ground that can share responsibility for enumerating the strategy. The Pakistani establishment though has wavered in its support of the US' objectives, not least because of the civilian-military divide that has come to characterize the functioning of the Pakistani state. Whilst the Obama strategy has been criticised for being rather abstract and reactionary to internal dynamics of the situation, it aims largely to restrain the terror operators that threaten American interests (either in Afghanistan or worldwide) from their bases in Pakistan and to contain the risk of upheaval in Pakistan, that could either spill over into the greater South Asian region and risk nuclear war or put the

⁵¹ Sumit Ganguly, *Afghanistan Is Now India's Problem*, July 19, 2011, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/07/19/afghanistan_is_now_indias_problem (accessed July 29, 2011).

security of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal at risk⁵². In order to achieve these objectives, the strategy therefore hopes to reduce the impact of the army within domestic politics, build civilian institutional capacity, create conditions for sustainable economic growth, reign in terror and growing radicalism, and address the greater sub-continental security and political concerns, including relations with India.

The need to rebalance the civil-military relationship in Pakistan has not been lost on the Obama administration. The army has had a disproportionate role in the governance of the country from the Fifties and continues to do so. As Middle East scholar, Isaac Kfir notes:

In Pakistan, the army wields tremendous power and influence and has direct say in government policies and the management of society as seen in the way Zia-il-Haq allowed groups such as the Jama'at-e-Islami (JI) to penetrate every facet of Pakistani society, especially the military.... All these factors, coupled with ethnic and social tensions, precipitate the development of a quasi-praetorian system, which fundamentally aims to prevent the growth of a democratic system⁵³.

The US strategy emphasises its support for the civilian administration and seeks to build trust in its relationship with the military, in the hope that it is able to build a stable civil-military matrix, where the relationship will not fluctuate in the future⁵⁴. This is important because the US Army relies on the military for valuable intelligence and logistical support to take on the Taliban, yet needs to shore up civilian capabilities

⁵² Council on Foreign Relations, *U.S. Strategy for Pakistan and Afghanistan*, Independent Task Force Report No. 65 (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2010).

⁵³ Isaac Kfir, "US Policy toward Pakistan and Afghanistan under the Obama Administration," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 13, no. 4 (December 2009): 20-33.

⁵⁴ Paul Staniland, "Caught in the Muddle: America's Pakistan Policy," *Washington Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 133-148.

if Pakistan is to be able to address the structural deficiencies that enable the conditions for a quasi-praetorian state, and enforce military dominance.

With the Pakistani army, whilst supporting its quenching thirst for armaments and military aid (US \$17 billion has been given since the Afghan intervention began, used to purchase F-16 aircraft, anti-ship missiles, attack helicopters and missile defence systems), US strategy must address several clear incongruities within its policy actions, most of which significantly affect the AF-PAK strategic aims of empowering the civilian leadership of the country.

First, the US continues to see the Pakistani army as a strategic interlocutor and this affects the re-balancing attempts⁵⁵. The US is reliant on the military to provide logistical, informational and strategic operational support to ISAF in Southern Afghanistan. It also relies on the Pakistani Army to take on insurgent groups sympathetic to the Taliban in its tribal areas. As Pakistan's interlocutor role gets more vital, Pakistan (the military establishment) will be in a better position to extract more concessions from Washington⁵⁶. The question is whether it can do this so much as to where the US will overlook the creeping dominance of the security establishment over an elected civilian governance in exchange for a more vigorous counter insurgent strategy on its western border that would support American military needs⁵⁷. Herein lies one of the biggest quandaries posed to the US as it seeks to control the domestic impact of the military. Further, as the US begins its withdrawal, it is clear that the Pakistani Army will become more powerful as it shapes the negotiations around a

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ C. Christine Fair, *Obama's New Af-Pak Strategy: Can "Clear, Hold, Build, Transfer" Work?*, Afghanistan Paper #6 (Waterloo, CA: Center for International Governance Innovation, 2010).

⁵⁷ Sumit Ganguly, "Afghanistan should not spoil the party; The Indo-American relationship is more enduring than the transactional US-Afghanistan-Pakistan nexus," *India Today*, November 15, 2010.

future Afghan state through its Taliban proxies –a situation which would give it control over not one but two potential governments.

Second, one of the biggest incongruities that has plagued the US strategy in Afghanistan from the times of the Bush administration has been the inability of the Pakistani army to cease its support for groups that are inimical to US interests in Afghanistan. The military has continued to support elements of the Afghan Taliban, providing sanctuary and protection, and in some cases has even sabotaged attempts at reconciliation between breakaway factions of the Taliban⁵⁸. The US remains aware that Pakistan is unlikely to abandon the Taliban, given its importance in a future Afghanistan situation and as a hedge against India. This fundamental difference in national interests must be reconciled before the US will be able to influence the Army to curb its errant ways.

Finally, there is a clear radicalisation and growing anti-American sentiments within the army as well, which have the ability to affect how much the US is able to rely on the military establishment as a strategic partner. The growing infiltration of jihadists into the Pakistani Army poses a clear logistical threat to US interests. The May 2011 attacks on the Karachi Naval base, which is an important stop on the NATO supply route, and other suspected attempts of military jihadists to sabotage aircrafts, plan assassinations and the leak information to the Taliban⁵⁹, all lay testament to this. Further, increasing anti-American sentiment across all levels of the Pakistani Armed Forces is a cause for worry – partly due to the fact that the US has been able to influence the appointments of key positions within the military. In response to this,

⁵⁸ Ahmed Rashid, "The Way Out of Afghanistan," *The New York Review of Books*, January 13, 2011.

⁵⁹ Prem Mahadevan, *Pakistan After Bin Laden*, CSS Analysis in Security Policy, Center for Security Studies (CSS), ETH Zurich (Zurich: Center for Security Studies (CSS), Zurich, Switzerland).

the military leadership has been seen as taking a hard line against the West⁶⁰, creating additional problems for the US.

Within the realm of civilian government, in addition to its aims of redressing the civilian-military imbalance in the functioning of the state, the US has made clear plans to address the systemic weaknesses in Pakistan's public institutions, without which the battle against extremism and militancy within Pakistani society will not be won⁶¹. These weaknesses are substantive; vital civilian institutions like the judiciary, police force and administration are plagued by corruption and ineptitude. With poor economic growth, state failure, inadequate security and an ineffective justice system, citizenry is easily estranged, and extremists, who can offer an alternative to an anarchic state, are welcomed. Further, the ethnic and filial nature of much of Northern Pakistani society, with its tribal laws and parochial structures, under its own semi-autonomous governance, has exacerbated the problems with extremists moving into larger-than-life roles within tribal society.

The Kerry-Lugar-Berman Act, which pledged US\$1.5 billion a year in non-military assistance to Pakistan over 5 years, has had some impact. Progress has been made with the funds being put to use in hydropower, infrastructure, health-care, finance and projects across the country. A further US \$150 million was allocated for flood relief measures in the wake of the wide spread destruction and disaster caused by the floods in the summer of 2010. To help combat the rot in political state structures, there exist a number of capacity building and educational programs that have been aimed at bureaucratic institutions, the police and judiciary. Similar attempts are being made to

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Council on Foreign Relations, *U.S. Strategy for Pakistan and Afghanistan*, Independent Task Force Report No. 65 (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2010).

bring about changes within political parties and the political system⁶². There have been successes in engagement with civil society groups, and there is significant credit due to the US, that the civilian government has stayed in power without the army overstepping and staging a coup, based on its recent history. The US has also focussed on creating conditions for sustainable economic growth in Pakistan. With macroeconomic conditions looking largely pessimistic⁶³ over the last few years, and an economy largely reliant on US aid, the Obama strategy has looked at stoking economic progress as a means of combating the underlying failures that make extremism appealing.

In conclusion, as Christine Fair notes, whilst there are limits to US national power in Pakistan, there needs to be a further reorganisation of US AF-PAK strategy with Pakistan as the main focus, rather than it being a logistical and resource support to Afghanistan (the current focus of the strategy)⁶⁴. The reasons are obvious. The US commands a considerable leverage over Pakistan both civilly and militarily. Its large-scale funding and aid programs have contributed to the coffers of both establishments, and indirectly perpetuate the current rent-seeking state and elitist establishment. It therefore needs to be more coherent and forceful in the nature of its demands if it wishes to see success, as it is unlikely that it will risk alienating the establishment, given their reliance on US economic resources. Finally the US can afford to be more stringent in demanding accountability from Pakistan and enforce the evaluation criteria laid out in the Kerry-Lugar Act as it seeks greater support for its

⁶² Paul Staniland, "Caught in the Muddle: America's Pakistan Policy," *Washington Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 133-148.

⁶³ See, The World Bank, *Pakistan: Data and Statistics*, 2011, <http://go.worldbank.org/A3KI6L8RI0> (accessed January 14, 2011).

⁶⁴ C. Christine Fair, *Obama's New Af-Pak Strategy: Can "Clear, Hold, Build, Transfer" Work?*, Afghanistan Paper #6 (Waterloo, CA: Center for International Governance Innovation, 2010).

counterinsurgency campaigns, if it is to be able to achieve its grander plans in the region.

2.4 AF-PAK within a Greater US South Asia Strategy (AF-PAK + India)

There was much disconcertion amongst the strategic community in India when President Obama announced the AF-PAK strategy in March 2009⁶⁵. The basis of the strategy, which implied that the situation in Pakistan was critical and needed to be addressed urgently, echoed much of what India had been saying in the Bush years. Pakistan's support of the Taliban in Afghanistan was working against the US, similar to its support of other insurgent groups like the LET and JEM with their anti-India agendas. The strategy also echoed Indian fears of Pakistan having too much influence in Afghanistan in their quest for strategic depth against India, through its support of the Taliban and the economic pressure it was able to extend on the Karzai government by controlling the major supply route into the country. Yet the response to the AF-PAK strategy in India was largely muted, even though it implicitly shared these concerns. This was due largely to the following factors. First, the strategy, while dehyphenating India from Pakistan (not seeing things in term of Indo-Pak, something it had lobbied Washington to do for years⁶⁶) and bundling Pakistan together with Afghanistan served one of its long-term objectives, it did not clearly address the situation in Pakistan to India's liking⁶⁷. It did not visibly call for a Pakistani clampdown on cross-border terror groups and yet called for a greater Pakistani rapprochement with India over Kashmir. Second, it offered Pakistan more military

⁶⁵ Harsh V Pant, *AfPak Strategy Solves Nothing*, ISN Security Watch (Zurich: International Relations and Security Network, 2009).

⁶⁶ Ashley Tellis, "The Merits of Dehyphenation: Explaining U.S. Success in Engaging India and Pakistan," *The Washington Quarterly* (The Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology) 31, no. 4 (Autumn 2008): 21-42.

⁶⁷ Ali Ahmed, *Af-Pak: A Strategic Opportunity for South Asia?*, IPCS Special Report 87 (New Delhi: Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, 2009).

and economic aid to purchase weapons that it could use against India⁶⁸, in the hope that this would be used in the counter-insurgency campaigns in its tribal areas. Third and most significantly, it publicly expressed support for reconciliation talks with the certain elements of the Taliban in Afghanistan, as long as its core aims that Al-Qaeda and other terror groups inimical to US interests would not be allowed to operate on Afghan soil were met. This was in direct opposition to the line India had toed against all elements of the Taliban (good or bad)⁶⁹ and seriously affected India's strategic calculations for Afghanistan in the future.

India's main ideological difference with the US on how it sees South Asia is the US' linking of the current AF-PAK strategy with the ongoing dispute between India and Pakistan, particularly over the territory of Kashmir⁷⁰. Current US thinking links the resolution of this dispute with Pakistan's Afghan strategy by clearly identifying that Pakistan's policies in Afghanistan are centred on India, and that Pakistan will continue trying to contain and disrupt Indian interests in Afghanistan as part of its strategy of asymmetric warfare to hurt India over Kashmir⁷¹. Pakistan's preoccupation with India has cost, and continues to cost, the US in its presence in Afghanistan. Its continued support of the Taliban and groups that work against US interests as well as its large military presence on its eastern flank with India affects its ability to take on the insurgency in its tribal areas and disrupts the functioning of the state.

⁶⁸ See for example, BBC, *Musharraf admits US aid diverted*, September 14, 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8254360.stm> (accessed February 20, 2011).

⁶⁹ Harsh V. Pant, *AfPak Strategy Solves Nothing*, ISN Security Watch (Zurich: International Relations and Security Network, 2009).

⁷⁰ For more on Kashmir see, Sumantra Bose, *Kashmir: Roots of Conflict, Paths to Peace* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003).

⁷¹ Barnett R. Rubin and Ahmed Rashid, "From Great Game to Grand Bargain," *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2008.

Yet there are others who dispute the claim that solution to the Kashmir dispute is key to the Afghan situation. In a hard hitting editorial, *Newsweek* editor Fareed Zakaria claimed that building trust and fixing the trust-deficit between India and Pakistan was vital to American concerns in Afghanistan, and not regarding the resolution of a singular aspect like Kashmir as paramount⁷². It is also highly unlikely that the Pakistani army will actually accept a resolution over Kashmir, if instilled upon them by a weak civilian government, thus taking away the army's *raison d'être*, a strong anti-India sentiment.

As the situation in Afghanistan moves towards an endgame, there remains substantial fear in India that a US withdrawal could mean a return to Taliban control of Afghanistan and pose a clear threat to the critical strategic investments India has made in the Afghan reconstruction process. It is essential that the US recognizes this and seeks a regional solution to the situation that involves India and allays its concerns if the US wants to see a stable South Asia. The US can no longer afford to believe that the situation in Afghanistan is not linked to the enduring India-Pakistan conflict, and must stress the need for ties with each country, commensurate with their size and standing. US-India ties took a hit in the early phase of the Obama regime in 2009⁷³ and General McChrystal's leaked assertions to *The Washington Post* that in his opinion increasing Indian influence in Afghanistan would exacerbate tensions with Pakistan⁷⁴, did little to improve things. It is unlikely that either side wants to return to

⁷² Fareed Zakaria, "The Prize is India," *Newsweek*, November 20, 2009.

⁷³ Harsh V. Pant, *AfPak Strategy Solves Nothing*, ISN Security Watch (Zurich: International Relations and Security Network, 2009).

⁷⁴ See, *The Washington Post*, "COMISAF Initial Assessment (Unclassified) -- Searchable Document," *The Washington Post*, September 21, 2009 and Rajiv Chandrasekaran, "McChrystal Preparing New Afghan War Strategy," *The Washington Post*, July 31, 2009.

the lows of 2009, given the recent warming of relations after President Obama's India visit in 2010 and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's visit to re-assure India on the Afghan withdrawal process earlier this year. These meetings signalled a significant rethink in the South Asia strategy⁷⁵.

US strategy in South Asia must take into account Indian interests in Afghanistan, and the US must serve as a bridge between India and Pakistan to ensure both countries' interests in a non-radical Afghanistan are met. In the words of scholar, Walter Anderson:

The US role, more broadly, should be to get India and Pakistan to work together to further their common interests in economic growth, defeating terrorism and a stable bilateral relationship. US policy in Afghanistan affects important Indian interests and India will have to cope with the consequences of American policy⁷⁶.

⁷⁵ Andrew Quinn and Kritivas Mukherjee, "Clinton pushes India on nuclear law, market access," *Reuters*, July 20, 2011.

⁷⁶ Walter K. Andersen, "Reviving the Momentum in US Engagement with India: An American Perspective," *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs* (Sage) 66, no. 1 (2010): 13-33.

Chapter 3

3.0 Pakistan in AF-PAK

Irrespective of the often tetchy and sometimes fallow relations between the two countries, Pakistan continues to play an essential role in Afghanistan as a result of its geostrategic location, shared linguistic, cultural and tribal past and involvement in Afghanistan for much of the last three decades. The Durand line, the much-maligned border that serves to separate the two, is often no more than a cartographer's dream and its permeability lays the basis for an extended Pakistani involvement across the border. Pakistan sees much of Afghanistan as an extension of its zone of influence, using the vast tribal networks and sectarian Islamist orders that remain sympathetic to its cause to achieve a duality: that it does not fall afoul of the US, and to limit India's presence and operational space in Afghanistan.

The AF-PAK strategy was received with much disconcertion in Pakistan⁷⁷, with particular criticism of the hyphenation of Pakistan and Afghanistan. This change in political discourse implied that Pakistan was seen not within the same prism as India, and instead the US viewed the country as in the same sordid state as its praetorian neighbour. The travails that the AF-PAK strategy hopes to address though, have changed little from 2009 and Pakistan continues to be bogged down, unable to meet US strategic objectives. There has been little improvement in the civilian-military relationship, as the elected government continues to play second fiddle to the Army

⁷⁷ See, India Today, "Obama being unfair in comparing Pak with Afghanistan: Gilani," *India Today*, March 31, 2009 and Josh Rogin, *Team Obama scuttles the term "AfPak"*, January 20, 2010, http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/01/20/team_obama_scuttles_the_term_afpak (accessed March 15, 2011).

Chief on most strategic issues⁷⁸. Economic growth has remained stagnant and good governance and institutional development has taken a back stage to political dysfunction and corruption. Pakistan's support of cross-border terrorism and terror groups that operate in Afghanistan, inimical to US interests and against India continues. As Paul Staniland notes:

Pakistan security policy remains dominated by the military, the country's economic performance and political stability are both troubling, and the broader region has become even less secure⁷⁹.

This chapter will therefore evaluate the question that Pakistan poses with a threefold approach. Contemporary scholarship tends to view Pakistan's response to the AF-PAK strategy as largely conditioned around its strategic needs in Afghanistan and a direct consequence of the imbalanced relationship it shares with India. Using this premise, this chapter will therefore seek to explore: First, the current nature of Pakistani engagement with Afghanistan, put in the perspective of current Pakistani thinking on Afghanistan and its relationship with the Afghan government and the United States; Second, it will look at the nature of Pakistan's interests in Afghans and the drivers of these interests. This has particular significance in the recent months with the death of Osama bin Laden and the insurgency across North East Pakistan. Finally, the chapter will address its strategic objectives and the nature of its ties with India and look more specifically at the 'zero-sum' game in which it seems to be locked – with India across Afghanistan and other theatres of their engagement. This provides an essential explanation and theoretical backdrop to India's presence in Afghanistan, which is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

⁷⁸ Paul Staniland, "Caught in the Muddle: America's Pakistan Policy," *Washington Quarterly* Vol. 34, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 133-148.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

3.1 Pakistani Policies and Strategies in Afghanistan

Bilateral ties between Pakistan and Afghanistan got off to a tepid start in the years following Pakistani Independence in 1947. At the heart of this was the dispute over the Durand Line and the Pashtun lands that were spread along the line which served as the border between the two states. Afghanistan's initial claims were irredentist and called for a reversal of the British signed agreement, claiming it had no validity. Afghanistan's behaviour was driven by a feeling that Pakistan was unlikely to survive given its complex dynamics and that if it did, a stable democracy could endanger the monarchy in Afghanistan with Afghans seeking to replicate its success⁸⁰. Kabul sought to allay these fears by openly supporting India on the Kashmir issue and in turn using Indian support against Islamabad. Pakistan therefore based its response to Afghanistan largely on an existential security theme as it aimed to: first, make it unlikely that an Indo-Soviet alliance would control Kabul⁸¹; and secondly, put in place a regime that was reciprocal to Pakistani interests.

After this period of hostility in the Fifties and early Sixties, diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan returned to a frame of normalcy, as Afghanistan was openly sympathetic to the Pakistani cause in the 1965 war with India⁸². Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's attempts at consolidation took relations a step further, until the Afghan monarchy was the overthrow and Sardar Daud returned to power in Kabul. Daud would pose major problems to the Pakistani establishment with his open support of

⁸⁰ Christopher L. Budihas, *What Drives Pakistan's Interest in Afghanistan?*, No. 82, The Institute of Land Warfare (The Association of the United States Army, 2011).

⁸¹ William J. Barnds, *India, Pakistan, and the Great Powers* (New York: Praeger, 1972): 124

⁸² For more on the Indo-Pakistan war, see, Sumit Ganguly, *Conflict Unending* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

the Baloch insurgency⁸³ and the Pashtun nationalists in the country's border regions. Faced with an increasingly volatile situation in its hinterlands, Islamabad was forced to reconsider its objectives and chose to strategically back the Islamist led anti-Daud forces. Pakistan consolidated its support behind the Tajik professor Burhanuddin Rabbani and the Pashtun professor Ghulam Mohammad Niazi⁸⁴ as it hoped that the overriding religious cause would be sufficient to overcome any sectarian differences. This move was to become the forerunner to Pakistani strategy in Afghanistan, as it would continue to back an Islamist cause in the years to come to achieve its objectives.

The Soviet invasion in 1977 put Pakistan in the pitch of the battle as it became the overseer of American and Saudi finances and their distribution to ensure that the Soviets were adequately opposed. Faced with a massive refugee and humanitarian crisis and a hostile Superpower that was sympathetic to India at its doorstep, General Zia-ul-Haq, who seized power in a coup, quickly deflected interest in the domestic political situation in Pakistan and used the opportunity to realise a number of Pakistani strategic objectives in Afghanistan. By convincing the US to bankroll the *Mujahideen* and then controlling their movements, Pakistan was able to lay a foundation in Afghanistan that would ensure that Pakistan would remain a key player in the Afghan matrix for years to come. The parallel economies – drugs and arms that grew out of insurgent games that Pakistan played – would have a resounding impact on the social

⁸³ For more on the Baloch insurgency, see, Owen Bennett Jones, *Pakistan: Eye of the Storm* (Bolton: Yale University Press, 2003).

⁸⁴ Lubna Abid Ali, "Religious Radicalism, Resurgence of Taliban and Curbing Militancy in Pakistan: Implications for Pak-Afghan Relations," *International Journal of Business and Social Sciences* 1, no. 2 (November 2010).

fabric and regional dynamics⁸⁵ as the Soviet Union collapsed and Pakistan laid the stepping stone for a government sympathetic to its cause in Kabul⁸⁶.

All of this had an even greater impact on Pakistan's internal dynamic. The military, an all-powerful institution from the time of partition, was further reinforced with Zia's decade long hold on power. With no Western criticism forthcoming, Pakistan's democratic tradition was held at ransom by greater American and Saudi needs and the diktats of Cold War *realpolitik*. The social makeup of the country changed. Its Northern provinces and Baluchistan wore an entirely different look as over 3 million Afghan refugees⁸⁷ made Pakistan their home in the Eighties. Clan and tribal relations were adjusted and old filial ties recalculated, as the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) directed the flow of the *Mujahideen*. The greatest impact though was to come on the religious makeup of the country. Purporting to be a secular state at partition, religious radicalization was a rather slow process in Pakistan in the decades immediately after, as economic growth, development and the creation of political institutions showed Pakistanis a glimmer of hope. Yet General Zia's coup, the international support he received, and the proxy war in Afghanistan had the most telling impact on the country. Zia openly began a process of *Islamisation* of the Army and state institutions and encouraged overt shows of adherence. Further, Saudi Arabian support meant that

⁸⁵ Hassan Abbas, *Militancy in Pakistan's Borderlands: Implications for the Nation and for Afghan Policy*, Report (New York: The Century Foundation, 2010).

⁸⁶ For a more specific discussion on the regional impact of this, including the movement of post-Soviet Jihadists into Kashmir, see, Vernon Hewitt, *Conflict and Crisis in Kashmir, 1989-95 (Crisis in World Politics)* (Edinburgh: Keele University Press, 1998) or Sumit Ganguly, *Conflict Unending* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

⁸⁷ Olivier Roy, "Islamic Radicalism In Afghanistan And Pakistan: Writenet Paper No. 06/2001," *UNHCR Refworld*, 2002, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/3c6a3f7d2.pdf> (accessed March 3, 2011).

Madrasahs flourished and soon the idea of a global jihadist state flowed freely in Pakistan⁸⁸, as radicalization took hold.

The return of civilian rule to Islamabad and successive elected governments had little impact on Pakistan's objectives in Afghanistan. The collapse of the Soviet-installed Najibullah government, led Pakistan to rely on its time-tested strategy of supporting Islamist groups, and it put its lot in with a Pashtun-led Islamist movement called the Taliban. The Taliban's control of the Pashtun lands and the provinces of Kandahar and Herat meant that Pakistan could easily support and supply the outfit given its geographic contiguity to Pakistan's northern provinces, much like it had done with the *Mujahideen*. Further, Pakistan continued to support various other proxies in Kashmir against India and used Taliban controlled areas for training camps and as a base to ensure that its policies of cross-border terror were continued. The compelling victory of the Taliban in 1998 against much of the 'warlord'-led and Tajik supported Northern Alliance allowed the Taliban to gain power in the South and the West of the country. This meant that Pakistan's primary motive, of ensuring a regime that was sympathetic to its interests in Kabul, was realised. For Pakistan, the strategy had worked and it could continue to support groups that punished India for its involvement in Kashmir with Taliban support⁸⁹.

The post 9/11 US led intervention in Afghanistan would alter the dynamic for Pakistan. Faced with a choice of being branded as hostile by the US, with American troops at its doorstep and a rapidly deteriorating security situation with India that

⁸⁸ Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos* (London: Penguin, 2009).

⁸⁹ Specifically the 1999 Indian Airlines hijack that ended in Kandahar (see, Celia W. Dugger, "India Intensifies Hijacking Dispute," *The New York Times*, January 7, 2000) and the release of Maulana Azhar (see, The New York Times, "India Is Negotiating With the Hijackers in Afghanistan," *The New York Times*, December 28, 1999).

straddled its Eastern border⁹⁰, or supporting US intervention, Pakistan was forced to abandon its Taliban allies. For Pakistan the choice was simple. General Musharraf chose to support the US with the hope that Pakistan would be able to use its past experience in Afghanistan to ensure that it would have its say in the choice of a Taliban successor. This was simply the best course of action⁹¹. The other option involved not supporting the US, which apart from inviting its wrath, would see India play a possible lead role in a complete reversal of Pakistan's strategic aims as the US sought revenge in the hunt for Al-Qaeda.

3.2 The Basis of Pakistan's Afghan Interests

Pakistan has significant interests in Afghanistan that co-exist with, or form the basis of, its strategic and security imperatives. These interests are driven by a number of facets that impact Pakistan's national identity, geostrategic location, ethnic makeup, religious social fabric, institutions and the state of its democracy. As Christopher Budihas of the Institute of Land Warfare notes, there are four major components that drive Pakistani interests in Afghanistan:

...internal security complexities, external security challenges, dynamics of internal Pakistani politics and the quest for economic resources—are interwoven with those of Afghanistan.⁹²

In order to provide an understanding of the significant and varied nature of Pakistani strategic objectives it is necessary therefore to understand the underlying dynamics of the Pakistani interests in Afghanistan from which its strategic objectives take shape

⁹⁰ See, David Rohde, "Matching India's Move, Pakistan Will Pull Troops From Border," *The New York Times*, October 18, 2002.

⁹¹ Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos* (London: Penguin, 2009).

⁹² Christopher L. Budihas, *What Drives Pakistan's Interest in Afghanistan?*, No. 82, The Institute of Land Warfare (The Association of the United States Army, 2011).

and are formed. A number of these interests are issues the US Strategy towards Pakistan seeks to address, some which concur with the US Strategy and others that are detrimental to the US's Afghan aims.

Pakistan's internal security compulsions are a rampant concoction of the overlay of its tribal and ethnic structures and its Islamist social fabric, especially in Balochistan and the Pashtun FATA regions. The Taliban and its various cross-border factions, Al-Qaeda, the Pakistani Taliban and itinerant refugee populations, continue to have a major impact on state security in Northern Pakistan. The situation is further complicated by Pakistan's insistence on picking and choosing the issues and groups it will address with force (which affect Pakistan's internal dynamics) and ignoring other groups that play a supporting role in furthering Pakistani interests in Afghanistan, a sure recipe for danger. Further, the growing radicalization amongst the ranks of Punjabis and in the South, and the greater influence commanded by Punjab and Kashmir based groups like the Lashkar-e-Toiba (LET) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JEM), pose an additional threat to Pakistan's internal stability⁹³ – no matter how much Pakistan believes it is able to control and direct the energies of these groups towards Kashmir and India.

Pakistan's ability to address the demands of the Baloch and Pashtun tribes is limited. With both regions on the Afghan border, the claims for Baloch autonomy and half-century long Baloch self-determination movements affect Pakistan's decision making in Afghanistan. The opening of Indian consulates in Kandahar and Herat amongst others has increased Pakistani claims of Indian involvement in the Baloch insurgency

⁹³ Prem Mahadevan, *Pakistan After Bin Laden*, CSS Analysis in Security Policy, Center for Security Studies (CSS), ETH Zurich (Zurich: Center for Security Studies (CSS), Zurich, Switzerland).

and India's use of Afghanistan to encircle Pakistan⁹⁴. With the Taliban, it is slightly more complicated. The strict Wahabist interpretation of Islam and social hierarchies mirror those of the Pashtun Code (*Pakhtunwali*) and provide the Taliban a fertile breeding ground for their ideas amongst the Pashtuns. The Pashtuns inter-tribe nationalism and loyalties that stretch across both sides of the Durand Line ensures that Pakistan is consistently at loggerheads with a number of Pashtun Tribes as it is becoming increasingly unsuccessful in making a distinction between the Pakistani Taliban (that is viewed as against Pakistan) and the Afghan Taliban (that is viewed as essential to Pakistani future objectives).

The thinking within Pakistani elite circles continues to emphasise the importance of the Afghan Taliban⁹⁵, which in turn contributes to the touchy relationship Pakistan shares with the ruling Afghan elite. The Afghani elite continue to see this extended Pakistan support for the Taliban as undermining the Afghan cause.

The Pakistani Taliban or Tehrik-e-Taliban (TTP), which emerged in the period soon after 9/11 in response to the US bombings and the Pakistani military movement into the borderlands of the Swat Valley, South Waziristan and the NWFP, were largely a home-grown Islamist phenomenon. They arose in response to the perceived complicity of the Pakistani Military to attacks on Pakistani Muslims by the US. The rise of the TTP was a reaction to the inability of the Pakistani state to effectively administer deep rooted class divisions in tribal society and political deprivation that

⁹⁴ C. Christine Fair, *India in Afghanistan and Beyond: Opportunities and Constraints*, Report (The Century Foundation, 2010), 3-26.

⁹⁵ Ahmed Rashid, "The Way Out of Afghanistan," *The New York Review of Books*, January 13, 2011.

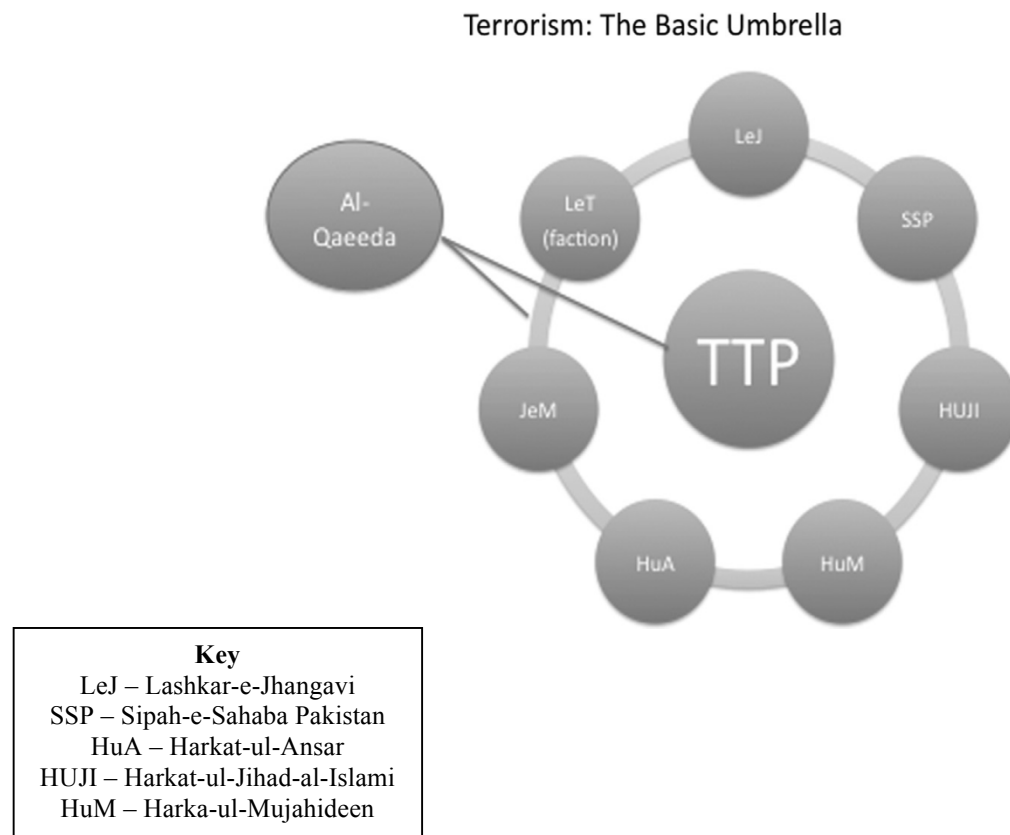
resulted in a weak state-society bond⁹⁶. A loose alliance of groups, the TTP serves as an umbrella organisation and a base for various non-state actors to carry out their ideological battle⁹⁷. The TTP (see Figure 1) remains a potent threat because it is able to draw together groups from across the different ideological spectrums that feature in the Islamic sphere in Pakistan today – Wahabi, Salafi and Deobandi. The TTP largely aims to destabilize the state apparatus and to ensure that the Taliban is the only source to provide succour to the people. Additionally, the TTP aims to ensure that the government passes structural and constitutional changes to enact a system of governance that is acceptable to the Taliban agenda (Sharia)⁹⁸. It is in this that the TTP found common ground with Mullah Omar and the Quetta Shura, and redefined their ambition to include cross-border support for the Afghan Taliban and a promise to take on the Pakistani state in its attempt to support the US troop surge in Afghanistan⁹⁹.

⁹⁶ Mohammad Amir Rana, *Taliban Insurgency in Pakistan: A Counterinsurgency Perspective*, (Pak Institute for Peace Studies, 2009).

⁹⁷ Ayesha Siddiq, "Pakistan's Counterterrorism Strategy: Separating Friends from Enemies," *The Washington Quarterly* (Center for Strategic and International Studies) 31, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 149-162.

⁹⁸ Mohammad Amir Rana, *Taliban Insurgency in Pakistan: A Counterinsurgency Perspective*, (Pak Institute for Peace Studies, 2009).

⁹⁹ Carlotta Gall, "Pakistan and Afghan Taliban Close Ranks," *The New York Times*, March 26, 2009: A1.

Figure 1¹⁰⁰

Further, the impunity with which Al-Qaeda continues to operate on Pakistani soil plays an important role in shaping the internal security dynamic in Pakistan. Once thought of as a repository of Arab ideology and Arab jihadists who made Pakistan a base after the Afghan *jihad* in the Eighties and the proxy war in Kashmir in the Nineties, Al Qaeda has gathered significant mainstream support within Pakistan itself, with estimates that a large faction comprises of Pakistanis from the Punjab and Sindh rather than Arabs. Pakistan is now recognized as the global headquarters for the Al-

¹⁰⁰ Ayesha Siddiqi, "Pakistan's Counterterrorism Strategy: Separating Friends from Enemies," *The Washington Quarterly* (Center for Strategic and International Studies) 31, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 149-162.

Qaeda¹⁰¹, and the organization has an assured presence in the FATA and the mountainous regions of the North. Al-Qaeda continues to play a bridging role, bringing together various factions and tribal groups to achieve its revisionist agenda, training and offering support via its foreign operatives to the TTP, Taliban and Punjabi outfits like the LET and JEM. The recent Osama bin Laden episode and its execution in Abbottabad, a largely garrison town, testify to the fact that Al-Qaeda has penetrated the Pakistani security establishment and illustrates the level it is currently able to operate at. Al-Qaeda with its revisionist agenda of global *jihad* plays a significant role in Pakistani posturing, because it remains the primary target of the US AF-PAK strategy, and any perceived Pakistani ineptitude in dealing with Al-Qaeda will be met with increased scrutiny and disapproval from the US, significantly impacting Pakistan's leveraging abilities in Afghanistan.

In addition to these organised groups, there are other factors that shape the Pakistani internal dynamic and hence Afghanistan – namely the large itinerant Afghan refugee population that inhabits Pakistan. Part of two separate waves of forced migration (as a result of the Soviet invasion and the US intervention), these easily impressionable young Afghans, who survive often homeless in refugee camps and ghettos, were easy targets for extremist ideologies. This mass exodus bears resentment to foreign forces in Afghanistan and to the Pakistani establishment itself in response to the heavy-handed tactics it has employed against them, including forced repatriations and deportation¹⁰². With over 2 million¹⁰³ displaced people in Pakistan, these refugee

¹⁰¹ Agencies, *US fears over al-Qaeda in Pakistan*, April 30, 2009, <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/americas/2009/04/2009430181416309946.html> (accessed April 20, 2011).

¹⁰² Olivier Roy, "Islamic Radicalism In Afghanistan And Pakistan: Writenet Paper No. 06/2001," *UNHCR Refworld*, 2002, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/3c6a3f7d2.pdf> (accessed March 3, 2011).

camps form breeding grounds for hatred and provide easy entry to the Taliban and various other radical preachers often whose *madrassas* remain the only option for education and a better life. The effects of this have been well documented. In the period of strife in Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal, refugees who had been increasingly radicalised in Pakistani *madrassas* contributed to the Islamist polemic and provided the rank and file of the Taliban¹⁰⁴ on their return. Their current involvement with the Taliban on both sides of the border and ideological leanings cannot be ignored as they continue to wield influence in Afghanistan, either through their tribal and filial networks or on their return to the country itself.

The chaotic situation within Pakistan's ruling establishment, too, forms a vital cog in the wheel of its Afghan policy. In response to the myriad internal security and external strategic challenges that silhouette Pakistan's Afghan interests, lies the response of Pakistan's state institutions to these challenges and the methods and approaches they employ. While this has been discussed in some detail in the chapter 2, the impact of the Civil-Military divide cannot be underestimated in the formation of its Afghan policy. Pakistan's inabilities in over 60 years of existence to create suitable and stable democratic institutions, including a functioning constitution and a functional party system without an underlying Islamist overtone, make a federated Pakistani state almost impossible to run. The unstable civilian government has been viewed as a corrupt, power-grabbing bastion of the urbane middle-class and elite¹⁰⁵. This is a sharp contrast to the relative stability and support the Military enjoys amongst the general populace, who seem content with a more autocratic Islamist

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Karin Brulliard, "Enduring army role in Swat spurs questions about Pakistan's civilian government," *The Washington Post*, April 2, 2010.

system of governance¹⁰⁶. Eventually this difference in perceptions, allows the Military an advantage as it gets to dictate its terms to the civilian government, including in its stance on Afghanistan¹⁰⁷. The Military's continued support of non-state actors has come to define the differences in the conceptualisation of a counter-terror strategy and Pakistan's Afghan policy between the civilian government and the Military.

Another underlying factor that continues to shape Pakistani responses to Afghanistan are the diverse external threats to its objectives. External security challenges to Pakistan vary in nature but largely revolve around the security challenges created as a result of Pakistani support of the US and its AF-PAK strategy (of which it has some say). More definite external security concerns exist in terms of Iran and India, in which it has no control over but must incorporate into its strategic decision making. The Pakistani response to the US and its policies of drone strikes and more recently sorties into the heart of Pakistani territory (the bin Laden episode), has been decidedly ambiguous. Pakistan officially remains committed to US objectives in Afghanistan and acknowledges that part of the problem originates in tribal borderlands where the Taliban, TTP and Al-Qaeda have had a relatively free say and are able to move across the Durand line without much trouble. The US led ISAF response to this has been to try and cease this cross-border activity by employing the use of unmanned aerial drone strikes with tremendous success. There have, however, been occasions of failure, where innocent victims have been targeted. This has led to a large misperception within the Pakistani population that its government is freely abetting a foreign power in its strikes on Pakistani soil, again to the detriment of government

¹⁰⁶ Owen Bennett Jones, *Pakistan: Eye of the Storm* (Bolton: Yale University Press, 2003).

¹⁰⁷ Ayesha Siddiqa, "Pakistan's Counterterrorism Strategy: Separating Friends from Enemies," *The Washington Quarterly* (Center for Strategic and International Studies) 31, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 149-162.

popularity¹⁰⁸. Further threats to increase clandestine incursions into Pakistan¹⁰⁹ have not gone down well either. While Pakistan's government has been quick to condemn the US and these attacks, the US's approach makes Pakistan and its establishment a continued target of radical groups who view the Pakistani government as susceptible to US influence, and in many cases affecting Pakistani calculations in regard to Afghanistan.

Additionally, India and Iran present Pakistan with external challenges it cannot control or directly influence. Its strategic objectives vis-à-vis India are discussed in more detail, in the next section of this chapter but in simple terms, Pakistan and India are locked in a battle for the strategic depth that Afghanistan provides the two countries. A number of Pakistani steps in Afghanistan are dictated by Indian moves there and vice-versa. With Iran, things run slightly differently. Placed on opposing sides of the Afghan matrix in the Nineties, with Iran firm supporting the Dari speaking Tajik minority and Pakistan the Pashtuns, Iran was the first main target of the Taliban and did not condone Pakistan's support for the Taliban. Iran and Pakistan have differed in the past over the conditions of the Shia minority in Pakistan and the Baloch insurgency that straddles their common border. The relationship remains strained¹¹⁰. Pakistan fears Iran's ambitions in Afghanistan in its open attempt to position itself as Kabul's best land access route to the sea and as a major trading partner to Afghanistan. Iran's economic posturing and its joint infrastructure creation

¹⁰⁸ Salman Masood and Pir Zubair Shah, "C.I.A Drones Kill Civilians in Pakistan," *The New York Times*, March 17, 2011: A4.

¹⁰⁹ Mark Mazzetti and Dexter Filkins, "U.S. Military Seeks to Expand Raids in Pakistan," *The New York Times*, December 20, 2010: A1

¹¹⁰ Harsh V. Pant, "Pakistan and Iran's Dysfunctional Relationship," *Middle East Quarterly*, Spring 2009: 43-50.

activities in West Afghanistan and Eastern Iran in collaboration with India¹¹¹, which uses Iran as the access point for Indian goods to Afghanistan, has Pakistan worried about a potential encirclement by Delhi and Teheran.

Finally, one cannot overlook the economic nature of Pakistan's Afghan interests. Many have called the US-Pakistan relationship largely transactional¹¹² based on Pakistan's reliance on aid in exchange for support of the US, which remains true to a point. The Pakistani economy is currently structured around foreign aid and in desperate need of other avenues for growth. Afghanistan presents Pakistan with that opportunity. Much like India and Iran who view Afghanistan as central to the trade route and the doorstep to vast hydrocarbon reserves and the economic potential of Central Asia, Pakistan believes it has the advantage, given its strategic location and the existing routes that are built around the Karachi port which provide Afghanistan and much of Central Asia access to the sea¹¹³. Pakistan sees itself pitted against Iran as the access route to the seas for its Northern neighbours and is working closely with China to ensure that it is able to achieve this. The construction of the port in Gwadar in Balochistan, with Chinese aid, will be a key element of its strategy to entice trade. Pakistan views Afghanistan as central to its energy needs and sees the potential for Afghanistan to be a major transit point for Turkmen gas and the creation of a pipeline¹¹⁴. Additionally, Pakistan needs to consolidate its position as Afghanistan's largest trading partner in the wake of competition from India, which has been

¹¹¹ Christophe Jaffrelot, *A Tale of Two Ports: Gwadar and Chabahar display Chinese-Indian rivalry in the Arabian Sea*, January 7, 2011, <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/tale-two-ports> (accessed April 15, 2011).

¹¹² Sumit Ganguly, "Afghanistan Should not Spoil the Party," *India Today*, November 6, 2010.

¹¹³ Manu Pubby, *Advantage India as US looks for new supply route to Afghanistan*, December 28, 2008, <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/advantage-india-as-us-looks-for-new-supply-r/403377/> (accessed May 1, 2011).

¹¹⁴ Atul Aneja, *TAPI gas pipeline project poised for breakthrough*, December 1, 2010, <http://www.hindu.com/2010/12/01/stories/2010120164421500.htm> (accessed March 13, 2011).

investing heavily in the last few years. Indian competition in the agriculture, foodstuffs and retails good sectors in Afghanistan have had a negative impact on the Pakistani economy as it struggles to catch up with more competitively priced Indian exports that Kabul seems to prefer.

3.3 Pakistan's Strategic Objectives & India

Pakistan's strategic objectives in Afghanistan can largely be understood as stemming from and as a factor of its enduring rivalry with India. Based in the roots of partition and furthered in cause by a cycle of war and proxy wars, Pakistan views India as inimical to its existence and therefore resorts to a search for 'strategic depth' and strategic assets to counter India. This has been a hallmark of Pakistani policy since 1971, brought about by the Indian role in the dismemberment of Pakistan¹¹⁵. The concept of strategic depth has been part of the geopolitical setting of South Asia from partition and as Sripathi Narayan notes:

Strategic depth refers to the distance from the border or the front line to the key centers of population, industry and cities. It provides space for a state to regroup and organize itself to counter the enemy's initial thrust.....Pakistan's geographic narrowness and the presence of key heartlands and communications networks near its borders with its mortal enemy India means that lack of strategic depth has long haunted its military planners¹¹⁶.

It is therefore in Afghanistan, that Pakistan seeks strategic depth against India. With a pliant and supportive regime in Kabul, Pakistan will be able to exploit this and

¹¹⁵ Sumit Ganguly and Nicholas Howenstein, "India-Pakistan Rivalry in Afghanistan," *Journal of International Affairs* (Columbia School of International and Public Affairs) 63, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 2009): 127-140.

¹¹⁶ Sripathi Narayan, "Pakistan and Afghanistan," *Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies*, no. 94 (July 2010).

continue its policy of asymmetric warfare against India, using Afghanistan as base (as evident from the Taliban years and use of terror, including the 1999 Indian Airlines hijacking).

Yet some reject this realist inspired definition of strategic depth, questioning how a malleable Afghanistan government will be able to support Pakistan in times of conflict with India, if Pakistan was already under attack and needed to seek aid from Afghanistan. For others the concept of strategic depth is more notional and connected to a greater Islamic ideology, where Pakistan would seek an alliance with the Islamic countries that surround it and are in its greater neighbourhood. Therefore the strategic depth would be in its civilizational bond, against a Hindu (non-Islamic) India, as noted by Brave New Foundation researcher Josh Mull¹¹⁷.

The idea of a strategic depth though fits well with the concept of a zero-sum game that has been employed to describe current India-Pakistan relations. The use of a neorealist paradigm to expand upon and explain Pakistan's Indian objectives is addressed in more detail in the following chapter. In his seminal paper that explored the India-Pakistan conflict, Rajesh Rajgopalan concludes that Neorealism, as defined by Kenneth Waltz¹¹⁸, can be used to explain the India-Pakistan conflict. This is a direct consequence of the prevailing international political structure in Asia, and that the gross imbalance of power within this structure constraints both sides, but more so Pakistan¹¹⁹. Pakistan, as the weaker power, has very little room to manoeuvre and therefore is trust-deficient in regard to India. Extrapolating this, Rajagopalan notes

¹¹⁷ Josh Mull, *Pakistan's "Strategic Depth" and Endless War in Afghanistan*, July 7, 2010, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/josh-mull/pakistans-strategic-depth_b_638699.html (accessed May 1, 2011).

¹¹⁸ See, Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

¹¹⁹ Rajesh Rajagopalan, "Neorealist Theory and the India-Pakistan Conflict," *Strategic Analysis* (IDSA) XXII, no. No. 9 (December 1998): 1261-1272.

that the conflict has little to do with specific disputes or their resolution (i.e. Kashmir or Afghanistan), but rather functions along the needs of the nebulous internal and domestic political concerns that currently govern Pakistan. The idea thereof, that Pakistan would seek to use Afghan as a strategic space against India (even if it were detrimental to both Pakistan and India), is in continuity with this thinking.

To achieve its objectives, Pakistan has used whatever means possible, ensuring that at times even Afghanistan's search for greater cooperation with India has been scuttled. It views Indian developmental assistance and investments in Afghanistan with apprehension and fears increasing Indian influence. Till recently, it denied overland access to Afghanistan for Indian goods and vehicles across its territory (the shortest possible route) and forced India to ship materials to Afghanistan via Iran. Further, it has not been weary of providing various insurgent groups like the Haqqani Network (with which it is at loggerheads with in Waziristan) with support to ensure that Indian strategic assets in Afghanistan are hurt. The 2008 and 2009 bombing of the Indian Embassy in Kabul was seen to have had a Pakistani hand¹²⁰. Further attacks on Indian infrastructure and road-building projects continue. When India sent in the Indo-Tibetan Border Police to secure its interests, Pakistan leaned upon the US to question India's role¹²¹. Furthermore, as mentioned previously, Pakistan has openly accused India of supporting Baloch insurgents and facilitating this through a ring of consulates and networks it is building in towns across the Pakistani border. It seeks to put in a spoke in the wheel of India's economic plans for Central Asia.

With talk of reconciliation and reintegration now in the air, keeping in line with Pakistan's realist take on the situation, it is currently trying to broker negotiations

¹²⁰ M K Bhadrakumar, *Pakistan warns India to 'back off'*, October 10, 2009, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/KJ10Df01.html (accessed April 13, 2011).

¹²¹ See Stanley McChrystal's Statement, *Ibid*.

between the Karzai government and parts of the Taliban in which it exercises control. Pakistan sees the Taliban as a strategic asset that it can use in a future post-US scenario with consensus government. Pakistan remains weary of Indian ties to the Panjsheri Tajik establishment that dominates Karzai's government and views the Taliban as a necessary counter to this should fighting break out and there is a return to ethnic factionalism and strife. Pakistan also remains sensitive to the goodwill India enjoys amongst the majority Afghan populations.

How the situation in Afghanistan will unfold depends largely on the role of Pakistan and its internal dynamics. Its primary interest in the short-term is to negotiate into power a government in Afghanistan that is sympathetic to its interests and to ensure at all costs that India is not able to gain an advantage over Pakistan at this stage. This interest places Pakistan in the peculiar predicament of having to use militant and asymmetric means in its strategy to ensure that India is not able to achieve its objectives. Pakistan seems set on moving forward in this way, despite of the fact that it is slowly losing control of these very actors it supports (the Taliban, LET and JEM) and signs show the very real possibility of these actors turning against the Pakistani establishment itself.

Chapter 4

4.0 India's Afghan Strategy

On the fringes of the Himalayas that border South Asia, over the centuries Afghanistan has always enjoyed a special relationship with the Subcontinent, driven by its cultural and ethnic proximity and its strategic location as a pit stop on access routes to the rest of Asia. For Afghanistan, once viewed as a pawn in the imperial 'Great Game' between British India and Russia¹²², ties with India moved beyond the constricting realm of colonial rhetoric with the 1947 partition of British South Asia. The dispute over the Durand Line, and the very existence of Pakistan, ensured that ties between the two grew stronger for much of the 20th Century. For India, its post-Taliban re-emergence within the Afghan milieu has come at a time when it seeks a greater role, not just in the region, but also as a rising world power – serving as test of the viability of its 'Grand Strategy'¹²³.

Yet, ever since US President Barack Obama's call for a conditional troop withdrawal from Afghanistan in November 2009¹²⁴ created shockwaves across the world, India has been confronted with the hard reality of what this portends for its stake in the future of Afghanistan. As the first phased drawdowns are already underway at the time of writing, Indian policymakers continue to explore different measures to achieve end objectives in Afghanistan and the impact of escalating Indian

¹²² Lord George Curzon, *India and Empire* (London: Oriental and India Office Collections at the British Library, 1859).

¹²³ Harsh A. Pant, "Indian Strategic Culture: The Debate and its Consequences," in *Handbook of India's International Relations*, ed. David Scott, 14-22 (London: Routledge, 2011).

¹²⁴ See, Peter Baker, "With Pledges to Troops and Iraqis, Obama Details Pullout," *The New York Times*, February 27, 2009: A6. and David E. Sanger and Peter Baker, "Afghanistan Drawdown to Begin in 2011, Officials Say," *The New York Times*, December 1, 2009.

engagement, in the wake of shifting discourse and new negotiations with the Taliban and other groups that are perceived to be hostile to India.

India's decade long with involvement in Afghanistan has come at a heavy cost in the face of repeated onslaughts, attacks and repeated questioning of its motives by Pakistan. Yet India remains committed to ensuring that it continues to provide developmental assistance and the humanitarian aid it has promised. However, questions continue to be raised at home and abroad about the sustainability of this vision and the need perhaps to re-look its methods and their impact if India is to continue to enjoy Afghan goodwill.

This chapter therefore seeks to explore the various options available to India as the 'endgame' in Afghanistan approaches. First it tries to place current Indo-Afghan engagement within a suitable structure for analysis and how it fits into the idea of an Indian 'Grand Strategy'¹²⁵. Second, it proceeds to look at the historical ties between Delhi and Kabul; third, it looks at the role India has had in the US-led advance across Afghanistan since 2001. Finally, it considers strategic interests in Afghanistan that serve as the basis for Indian engagement and creates a basis for further academic exploration of how the US strategy in Afghanistan will impact Indian interests.

4.1 A Grand Plan (Theoretical and Analytical Framework)

In order to analyse and place in perspective India's strategy in Afghanistan, especially if we are to arrive at options that will be available to India in an 'endgame' scenario, it is necessary to develop a suitable theoretical base and a functional analytical

¹²⁵ Harsh A. Pant, "Indian Strategic Culture: The Debate and its Consequences," in *Handbook of India's International Relations*, ed. David Scott, 14-22 (London: Routledge, 2011).

framework. I will do this by first arguing that it is necessary to look at India's Afghan strategy within the framework of a comprehensive 'Grand Strategy' rather than an exclusive foreign policy or military strategy that does not take in to account its constraints, domestic implications or the international politics of India within a South Asian security paradigm.

Second, I will place India's current engagement in Afghanistan within the realist tradition of International Relations, specifically using the work of Kenneth Waltz¹²⁶ and his work with Structural Realism, and argue that India's Afghan policy goes beyond mere foreign policy rhetoric and more within a theory of International politics, with a specific focus on the 'zero-sum' game it is locked into with Pakistan.

The idea of a nascent Indian 'Grand Strategy' finally taking shape has been doing the rounds for the past two decades or so. India was forced to shed its *Nehruvian* non-interventionist liberal ideology in a flash after the hard lessons of the 1962 war with China. Yet within a world increasingly filled with the hard reality of *realpolitik*, India was unable to completely jettison its normative approach and lacked the economic and political influence to transition its policies to those that matched the times it lived in. However, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the preponderance of the US in a uni-polar world, India was forced quickly to adapt. Its economic restructuring and growing political influence, along with a healthy dose of *realpolitik* and its anti-imperialist stance against China and the US, helped it gain dominance in South Asia and its near abroad¹²⁷. Towards the end of the Nineties, the emergence of a Hindu Nationalist Bharatya Janata Party (BJP) government, its aggressive nuclear

¹²⁶ Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

¹²⁷ Chris Ogden, "International 'Aspirations' of a Rising Power," in *Handbook of India's International Relations*, ed. David Scott (London: Routledge, 2011).

nationalism, and demands for a greater role for India in the world community, enunciated India's Great Power aspirations and the commensurate 'Grand Strategy' that went along with it. India's time had more or less come. It stood tall in the face of sanctions after the nuclear tests, its economic clout continued to rise and it made full leverage of its 'soft-power' and 'hard-power' capabilities to realise the path to its aspirations.

Looking specifically at the idea of India's interest in Afghanistan, as merely one element of its overall strategy, scholar on South Asian security Rudra Chaudhuri states that it be considered a foreign policy issue that can shape the contours of an emerging grand strategy. India's security interests in Afghanistan are best guaranteed by political-economic determinants rather than military imperatives, thereby drawing parallel lines between foreign policy and its grand strategy.¹²⁸ Assistant Professor at Georgetown University, C. Christine Fair delves into the idea of a strategic space that India seeks to explore and notes, observing from Indian academic and foreign policy analyst, C. Raja Mohan¹²⁹, that India in its grand strategy divides the world into three concentric circles: it seeks dominant power status in South Asia, its local neighbourhood; it seeks greater engagement and responsibility in the Indian Ocean world; and finally, India aspires to its place in the world as a global player with an increasingly proactive stance¹³⁰. Therefore, Afghanistan, which lies across the three concentric circles, is a matter of primary concern for India's 'Grand Strategy'. First,

¹²⁸ Rudra Chaudhuri, "Dealing with the Endgame: India & the AfPak Puzzle," in *IDSA International Workshop on National Security Strategy* (Institute for Defense and Security Analysis, 2010).

¹²⁹ C. Raja Mohan, "India and the Balance of Power," *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 4 (July/August 2006): 17-34 as quoted in C. Christine Fair, "Under the Shrinking U.S. Security Umbrella: India's End Game in Afghanistan?," *The Washington Quarterly* (Center for Strategic and International Studies) 34, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 179-192.

¹³⁰ C. Christine Fair, "Under the Shrinking U.S. Security Umbrella: India's End Game in Afghanistan?," *The Washington Quarterly* (Center for Strategic and International Studies) 34, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 179-192.

Afghanistan straddles its local neighbourhood, where India struggles with Pakistan for influence (the first circle). Second, Afghanistan sits also on the border of its zone of extended influence in Central Asia and Iran in the Indian Ocean World (the second circle). Finally, Afghanistan, remains a region where other 'Great Powers' seek strategic depth, including the US, China and Russia (the third circle).

As mentioned previously, India and Pakistan remain locked in a 'zero-sum' game, of which their current engagement in Afghanistan is one of the highlights of a persistent and intractable conflict.

Structural Realism at its most basic argues that; the state is viewed as a unitary actor, and the international "state of war" results less from the actions of individuals or individual states, and more from the system in which they exist¹³¹.

Thus, structural realism looks at the international politics of a state at a system level. If we look at this in terms of India-Pakistan relations or in the South Asian Regional Security Complex, India serves as the hegemonic power, and Pakistan continually seeks to balance India's hegemonic status with internal balancing acts (irregular warfare) or through external alliances (China) or in external theatres (Afghanistan). Further, as a rising power, India adopts a more pro-active role in its neighbourhood, forging greater security and economic linkages¹³² that continue to upset the balance of power with Pakistan.

¹³¹ Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

¹³² Harsh V. Pant, "Indian Dilemmas in Afghanistan," *India in Transition*, March 29, 2010.

A number of scholars have therefore argued that India-Pakistan conflict can be best explained by a neorealist approach given the persistence of the conflict. Rajagopalan primarily states that¹³³:

The India-Pakistan conflict is the direct consequence of the imbalance of power between the two states and Pakistan's insecurity about this imbalance. The persistence of the conflict is a consequence of the persistence of this imbalance and of Pakistan's attempts to correct it. The structure of the international system in South Asia has constrained the choices available to India and Pakistan in their relations with each other¹³⁴.

Therefore, it is logical that Pakistan will seek to balance India, to correct these imbalances in their power capabilities. As Rajagopalan further notes, Pakistan has sought in the past to seek external balancing by seeking alliances with Great Powers like the US and China, against India in the past¹³⁵. Pakistan successfully used the Taliban regime in the Nineties as an external counter against India making Afghanistan an external actor in the balancing act. With the Taliban in power, Pakistan could afford to concentrate its resources on the Indian border and, more importantly, a friendly Taliban regime gave Pakistan a free hand to use Afghanistan as a base for cross-border terror camps and as a supply route into Kashmir to conduct terror campaigns against India.

¹³³ See, Kanti P. Bajpai and Siddharth Mallavarapu, *International Relations in India: Theorising the Region and Nation* (Orient Longman, Limited, 2005) and David Scott, ed., *Handbook of India's International Relations*, ed. David Scott (London: Routledge, 2011).

¹³⁴ Rajesh Rajagopalan, "Neorealist Theory and the India-Pakistan Conflict," *Strategic Analysis* (IDSA) XXII, no. No. 9 (December 1998): 1261-1272.

¹³⁵ Rajesh Rajagopalan, "Neorealist Theory and the India-Pakistan Conflict," *Strategic Analysis* (IDSA) XXII, no. No. 9 (December 1998): 1261-1272.

India, faced with these structural constraints, is therefore forced to view the containment of Pakistani influence in Afghanistan as its priority within its Afghan policy as part of its greater strategic initiatives.

4.2 Historical Ties

The benevolence in contemporary Indo-Afghan relations dates back to the 1947 partition of India. The Afghan refusal to recognize the legitimacy of the Durand Line as its border with Pakistan, its support for the idea of a greater *Pakhtunistan* and its vote against the entry of Pakistan into the United Nations in 1948¹³⁶, laid bare its bitter contestation of the newly formed state. Further, Afghanistan saw in India an ally, with which it shared a convergence of interests over a border and ethnic dispute with Pakistan. India's support of the Afghan stance, which questioned the Pakistani inclusion of Pashtun lands and tribes into its border, garnered support of the Afghans as India continued to ply Pakistan over its presence in Kashmir. Thus for over two decades, relations remained strong, aided by cultural and moderate economic links.

This relative bonhomie was first tested for a short period in the 1965 Indo-Pakistani war¹³⁷ and then survived the overthrow of the monarchy in 1973, and the long period of instability that would follow till the installation of the ensuing communist governments. However, the first major challenge – the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, proved to have a lasting negative effect on India's dealings with the Pashtun majority of Afghanistan¹³⁸. India's purported support after initial condemnation of a

¹³⁶ Raghav Sharma, "India's Relations with Afghanistan," 107-117 (London: Routledge, 2011).

¹³⁷ Sumit Ganguly and Nicholas Howenstein, "India-Pakistan Rivalry in Afghanistan," *Journal of International Affairs* (Columbia School of International and Public Affairs) 63, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 2009): 127-140.

¹³⁸ Robert C. Horn, "Afghanistan and the Soviet-Indian Influence Relationship," *Asian Survey* (University of California Press) 23, no. 3 (1983): 244-260.

Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan on December 25 1979, to sustain a pro-Soviet communist regime that came to power through a coup, would cost its goodwill in Afghanistan and support in the international community¹³⁹.

India's credentials as a leading member of the Non-Aligned Movement had been long established as one of the hallmarks of its *Nehruvian* foreign policy in the decades following Independence. The Janata government of the time, led by Chaudhary Charan Singh, the caretaker Prime Minister, had genuinely tried to blaze a 'non-aligned' trail in its foreign policy. Therefore, remarks he made were welcomed both domestically and internationally when he vociferously objected to the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. As scholar Shailaja Menon,¹⁴⁰ notes from the Ministry of External Affairs records:

An official statement clarified that India supported the sovereign right of the Afghan people to determine their own destiny free from foreign interference.¹⁴¹

However this polemic barely lasted a fortnight, as Indira Gandhi swept back into power buoyed by a landslide victory and made her pro-Soviet bias very apparent.

In sweeping instructions to Brajesh Mishra, the Indian Representative to the UN, before the Sixth UN Emergency Session on January 12th 1980, Gandhi asked Mishra to suggest that the Soviet Union sent troops into the region at the behest of the Afghans and India was gravely concerned over the actions of the US, China, Pakistan

¹³⁹ Raghav Sharma, "India's Relations with Afghanistan," 107-117 (London: Routledge, 2011).

¹⁴⁰ Shailaja Menon, "Security issues in Indo-US relations in the 1980s and 1990s," PhD dissertation (Kottayam, 1995).

¹⁴¹ Ministry of External Affairs, *India's View on the Afghan Situation*, Annual Reports (New Dehli: External Publicity Division, 1981).

and other Western states¹⁴². She further added in Delhi on January 16th that she trusted Soviet assurance that troops would be withdrawn at once feasible and that India had more to fear from the concerted cold-war type responses of the US and China in response to the Soviets¹⁴³. India's views shocked much of the third world suggesting that it was little more than a crony client state of the Soviet Union. As Menon suggests, such criticism was understandable, because the very notion of intervention was an anathema to former colonies¹⁴⁴.

However, converse to popular public perception, Gandhi was discomforted by the Soviet military presence in her neighbourhood and endorsed a twin policy of publicly not condemning nor unanimously endorsing the Soviet presence in the region, and yet calling for a withdrawal privately. India was caught in a quagmire and rationalized India's acceptance of the intervention with the strategic division in South Asia between India and Pakistan¹⁴⁵. India's security concerns within Afghanistan at that stage were regional rather than global. With the US rearming Pakistan in response to the situation in Afghanistan, India felt that its lot was best cast with the Soviets so as to ensure that the perception gap between the US and India did not escalate out of the regional context¹⁴⁶.

¹⁴² Partha S. Ghosh and Rajaram Panda, "Domestic Support for Mrs. Gandhi's Afghan Policy: The Soviet Factor in Indian Politics," *Asian Survey* (University of California Press) 23, no. 3 (March 1983): 261-279.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Shailaja Menon, "Security issues in Indo-US relations in the 1980s and 1990s," PhD dissertation (Kottayam, 1995).

¹⁴⁵ Partha S. Ghosh and Rajaram Panda, "Domestic Support for Mrs. Gandhi's Afghan Policy: The Soviet Factor in Indian Politics," *Asian Survey* (University of California Press) 23, no. 3 (March 1983): 261-279.

¹⁴⁶ Partha S. Ghosh and Rajaram Panda, "Domestic Support for Mrs. Gandhi's Afghan Policy: The Soviet Factor in Indian Politics," *Asian Survey* (University of California Press) 23, no. 3 (March 1983): 261-279.

Delving further into India's tacit approval of the Soviet intervention into Afghanistan, as Robert Horn notes, India's response was further conditioned by the US' economic aid and rearming of Pakistan, its Islamabad brokered rapprochement with China and a fear of the *Mujahideen* giving Pakistan leverage in the area¹⁴⁷. India's pro-Soviet tilt in its foreign policy was well established after the 1965 war with Pakistan and it depended solely on the Soviet Union for arms and other defense weaponry. This reliance on the Soviet Union was further conditioned on the geopolitical situation in Asia as schisms between India and China and China and the Soviet Union widened. Further, the Soviet Union had stood by India on the Kashmir issue and supported the formation of Bangladesh at the UN Security Council deliberations.

India's official recognition of Babrak Karmal's pro-Soviet government in Afghanistan continued to undermine its moral stature in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), and its decision to restore the Indo-Afghan Joint Commission for economic and technical assistance, which had been abeyance since the coup in 1978, further cost it influence within Afghanistan and internationally¹⁴⁸. It signed further trade, cultural and educational agreements and promised assistance with healthcare and nutrition¹⁴⁹. With the subsequent Najibullah government, India continued to try and exercise influence with its developmental and technical assistance programs to little avail as its close relationship with the Soviets identified it with a hated regime and hence an illegitimate representative of foreign interests¹⁵⁰.

¹⁴⁷ Robert C. Horn, "Afghanistan and the Soviet-Indian Influence Relationship," *Asian Survey* (University of California Press) 23, no. 3 (1983): 244-260.

¹⁴⁸ Raghav Sharma, "India's Relations with Afghanistan," 107-117 (London: Routledge, 2011).

¹⁴⁹ Shanthie Mariet D'Souza, *India, Afghanistan and the 'End Game'?*, Working Paper, No. 124 (Singapore: Institute of South Asian Studies, 2011).

¹⁵⁰ Vikash Yadav and Conrad Bawra, "Relational Control: India's Grand Strategy in Afghanistan and Pakistan," *India Review* (Routledge) 10, no. 2 (2011): 93-125.

With the Soviet withdrawal and the consequent collapse of the Soviet Union, India's support for Najibullah waned until his government finally collapsed in 1992. Unpopular with the Pashtun majority, India threw its weight behind the Islamist *Mujahideen* coalition led by Burhanudin Rabbani in the early wars of the 90's, and against the Pakistani backed Hekmatyar group. Additionally, India remained preoccupied with other global events and a rapidly changing world order as it rose to seek its place¹⁵¹. After 1994 when the civil war began in Afghanistan, India extended its support to the Panjsheri Tajik leader Ahmed Shah Massoud, in the hope that he would be able to deal with the rising threat of the Pakistan supported *Mujahideen* and the Taliban.

With the Taliban finally establishing control across Kabul and much of the Pashtun lands, India's writ in Afghanistan came to an end in March 1996. The Taliban victory represented a long-term goal for the Pakistani establishment – a supportive regime in Kabul which would grant it sufficient strategic depth and leverage against India.¹⁵² For its part, India would suffer the Taliban, largely silently, withdrawing its Ambassador and refusing official recognition of the regime. The presence of the Taliban also had a disastrous effect on the Islamic uprising in Kashmir. With the collapse of the Afghan state there was an immediate spill-over effect in Kashmir as Pakistan backed *Mujahideen* infiltrated the region, culminating in the 1998 hijacking of an Indian Airlines flight, the subsequent release and flight of terrorists (including Maulana Azhar) in Kandahar, followed by indirect Taliban support for the 1999 Kargil War with Pakistan.

¹⁵¹ Harsh Pant, "India's Challenge in Afghanistan; With Power Comes Responsibility," *Contemporary Readings in Law and Social Justice* (Addleton Academic Publishers) 2, no. 1 (2010).

¹⁵² Sumit Ganguly and Nicholas Howenstein, "India-Pakistan Rivalry in Afghanistan," *Journal of International Affairs* (Columbia School of International and Public Affairs) 63, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 2009): 127-140.

Given the advantage Pakistan enjoyed with the Taliban in control in Afghanistan, it was imperative that India continue to maintain, or try and secure, some sort of support in the region. India chose to continue its linkage with Massoud and his United Islamic Front, which was now known as the Northern Alliance, a predominantly Tajik guerrilla group with shades of Hazara and Uzbek support. It entered into a support platform with Iran, which was fundamentally opposed to the Sunni Taliban, along with Russia and the Central Asian Republics worried about the rise of fundamental Islam in their southern regions. This in turn proved to be a valuable decision as India played an important role in the support of Northern Alliance fighters via Tajikistan in the build up to the US led invasion in 2001.

4.3 A Post-Taliban Reset

The significant routing of the Taliban at the hands of the US led forces post 9/11, allowed India a toehold in the complex web of control that would emerge as tribal leaders, warlords and returnees sought to gain control of Kabul. At the centre of this was the consensus Pashtun candidate and the first tribal leader who had openly dared challenge the Taliban in the east – Hamid Karzai¹⁵³. Karzai who was Indian educated, came to power as the head of the first interim government, after the Bonn Conference and along with his pro-India Tajik foreign minister Abdullah Abdullah, and allowed India to begin work on a new Afghan strategy. It immediately announced a US \$100 million reconstruction aid package and upgraded its Liaison Office to a full-fledged

¹⁵³ Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos* (London: Penguin, 2009).

Embassy along with reopening its 4 consulates in Mazar-e-Sharif, Jalalabad, Kandahar and Herat¹⁵⁴.

In addition to its strategic manoeuvring, India began work on a policy of high-level engagement using a combination of soft power, economic aid and international political contributions aimed at political reconciliation and nation building in Afghanistan¹⁵⁵. Its well-heelled support of the Northern Alliance through the 90's paid rich dividends as a number of influential members, including Defence Minister Mohammed Fahim and Uzbek warlord Rashid Dostum, leaned towards India in the rebuilding phase. As early as 2002, on his first trip as Interim Chairman, Karzai visited Delhi and sought Indian assistance and support in rebuilding the Afghan state.

Manmohan Singh's hallmark visit in 2005, as the first of an Indian Prime Minister in thirty years, added further impetus to a burgeoning relationship. The two-day visit, which paid scant respect to security concerns and threats, laid the grounds for greater involvement in Afghanistan. Singh along with former King Zahir Shah laid the foundation stone for a new parliament to be built in Kabul and announced another \$50 million in reconstruction assistance. The visit re-affirmed Indian commitment to seeing democracy succeed within an Afghan milieu, and the commitment of both partners to consolidate and continue building on a historical relationship. This had larger regional implications as it smoothed the ground for a later invitation on India's

¹⁵⁴ Ministry of External Affairs, "India-Afghanistan Relations," *Ministry of External Affairs*, January, 2011 <http://www.mea.gov.in/meaxpsite/pressrelease/2011/01/bilateralafganistan.pdf> (accessed April 4, 2011).

¹⁵⁵ Harsh Pant, "India's Challenge in Afghanistan; With Power Comes Responsibility," *Contemporary Readings in Law and Social Justice* (Addleton Academic Publishers) 2, no. 1 (2010).

behalf for Afghanistan to join the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)¹⁵⁶.

As the Indian Ministry of External Affairs notes, India has played an active role in the redevelopment of Afghanistan, and as of January 2011 Indian assistance to Afghanistan stands in the regions of US \$1.3 billion, the largest of any non-Western commitment to the region¹⁵⁷. India's assistance to Afghanistan, which pales in comparison to Western sums, is unique in the fact that it seeks to do this within the framework of the Afghan National Development Strategy in partnership with the Afghan government. What this means is that unlike Western donors that seek to work with (mostly) non-Afghan contractors and agencies, Indian assistance at all levels is aimed at engaging local communities and organisations to achieve its aims, therefore, enabling the effectiveness of various levels of Afghan governance. This has further succeeded in ensuring that India retains a vast amount of goodwill and again enjoys the trust of a majority of Afghans¹⁵⁸.

On further examination, Indian assistance can be divided into four broad areas: infrastructure projects, humanitarian assistance, small and community based development projects, and education and capacity development¹⁵⁹. These can be seen

¹⁵⁶ Siddharth Varadarajan, *Democracy not the preserve of the West: Karzai*, August 30, 2005, <http://www.hindu.com/2005/08/30/stories/2005083008221200.htm> (accessed May 2, 2011).

¹⁵⁷ Ministry of External Affairs, "India-Afghanistan Relations," *Ministry of External Affairs*, January 2011, <http://www.mea.gov.in/meaxpsite/pressrelease/2011/01/bilateralafganistan.pdf> (accessed April 4, 2011).

¹⁵⁸ For example, see, Smruti S. Pattanaik, "India's Afghan Policy: Beyond Bilateralism," in *Fellows' Seminar* (New Delhi: Institute for Defense Study and Analyses, 2011).

¹⁵⁹ Ministry of External Affairs, "India-Afghanistan Relations," *Ministry of External Affairs*, January 2011, <http://www.mea.gov.in/meaxpsite/pressrelease/2011/01/bilateralafganistan.pdf> (accessed April 4, 2011).

within the vista of building a stable Afghan democracy and government and ensuring sustainable economic development in the country.

In the realm of infrastructure, India's signature investment has been the construction of a 218 km long road from the Delaram Ring Road, a major transportation hub in Western Afghanistan, to Zarang on the Iran-Afghanistan border in the South-West. This is a vital trade route and Zarang serves as an entry-point for Indian goods into Afghanistan that are shipped into Chahbahar Port in Iran. India was forced to enter into this circuitous venture, given the lack of a land border with Afghanistan and Pakistani refusal to let Indian goods traverse Pakistan on route to Afghanistan. In the future India hopes to extend this route to connect to the Central Asian Republics via Iran and Afghanistan, as it seeks greater trade and energy ties with them. Other notable investments in infrastructure include the construction of a 200 km long electricity transmission line from the Uzbek border region to Kabul, in cooperation with the World Bank and the Afghan Government. India is also committed to ensuring the completion of the Afghan Parliament building in Kabul and the Salma Dam hydro-power project in the Herat Region. The much-hyped Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-Indian (TAPI) gas pipeline project, if undertaken, will underscore the extent of Indian infrastructure assistance to Afghanistan¹⁶⁰.

Indian humanitarian assistance, in the form of direct food aid, is extensive. India's commitment to one million tons of wheat aid has been further supplemented by projects to support children; since 2007, over 2 million schoolchildren receive

¹⁶⁰ Sujay Mehdudia, *TAPI project will be the new Silk Route, says Deora*, December 11, 2010, <http://www.thehindu.com/business/Economy/article946191.ece> (accessed March 13, 2011) and Atul Aneja, *TAPI gas pipeline project poised for breakthrough*, December 1, 2010, <http://www.hindu.com/2010/12/01/stories/2010120164421500.htm> (accessed March 13, 2011).

fortified biscuits every day from Indian aid. In addition medical personnel provide access to free medical care to over 30,000 Afghans every month¹⁶¹. Further humanitarian assistance was provided in the wake of the US intervention and the ensuing period of fighting across the country as India provided winter clothing and blankets, and earthquake relief in 2003. India additionally kick-started over a hundred village based community projects focussed on self-sustainability and aiming to improve community life in 2005. These aimed to put emphasis on areas such as self-governance, administration, agriculture, health, education, rain-water harvesting and solar energy.

India has invested a large amount of human capital in Afghanistan aimed at restoring the war-ravaged institutional capacity in the country; it has contributed over 700 professionals with far-ranging expertise in diverse fields, including Civil Servants, Diplomats, Paramedics, and NGO workers, Judges, Lawyers, Engineers and Teachers. The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) runs a vocational centre for much-needed technical skills in Kabul and the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), a premier Indian NGO, runs programs for women entrepreneurs in Bagh-e-Zanana. India has also contributed to the extensive expansion efforts of Afghan National Television to reach out to the provincial capitals from Kabul. India has been responsible for the reconstruction of a number of schools and hospitals and has provided over a 1000 vehicles to assist with transport and medical transport concerns

¹⁶¹ Ministry of External Affairs, "India-Afghanistan Relations," *Ministry of External Affairs*, January 2011, <http://www.mea.gov.in/meaxpsite/pressrelease/2011/01/bilateralafganistan.pdf> (accessed April 4, 2011).

across Afghanistan. There continues to be a rising demand for Indian projects and technology in the areas of cold storage, IT, logistics and healthcare¹⁶².

India's most significant contribution though has come in the fields of education and cultural diplomacy. India currently provides 675 university scholarships for Afghans under the aegis of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and 675 annual short-term India Technical and Educational Cooperation (ITEC) scholarships. Further, India pledged another 100 research fellowships to Faculty members and 200 scholarships to graduates to build crucial capability and know-how, and faculty development in the fields of agriculture and food sustainability¹⁶³. As part of its cultural diplomacy Indian musicians and artists have trained young Afghans in the arts. India's cultural and education initiatives form an imperative part of its soft-power strategy and have been crucial in securing the oft-mentioned goodwill of the Afghan people, as India sets out to win their hearts and minds.

4.4 Indian Strategic Interests

Current Indian interests in Afghanistan are varied and manifold, keeping in line with India's greater strategic and economic objectives. While there is much debate¹⁶⁴ within contemporary scholarship as to how qualify Indian interests in Afghanistan, they have been broadly fitted into those that are based around the longevity of an Indian grand plan and those that are of a more short to medium term nature, specifically directed at another actor within the regional security complex – namely

¹⁶² Shanthie Mariet D'Souza, "Nation building in Afghanistan and India's national strategy," in *IDSANational Security Strategy Workshop* (New Delhi: Institute for Defense and Security Analysis, 2010).

¹⁶³ Ministry of External Affairs, "India-Afghanistan Relations," *Ministry of External Affairs*, January 2011, <http://www.mea.gov.in/meaxpsite/pressrelease/2011/01/bilateralafganistan.pdf> (accessed April 4, 2011).

¹⁶⁴ See all scholars previously cited in this paper, especially Harsh V. Pant and Sumit Ganguly

Pakistan. This approach encompasses the analytical framework of the 'Grand Strategy' and the strategic realism of India's foreign policy. Therefore, there is a broad consensus that Indian interests in Afghanistan encompass the following:

Primarily, India's short-term interest in Afghanistan is defined by its need to seek strategic depth against Pakistan¹⁶⁵. India and Afghanistan have a shared history of using each other to further their ambitions vis-à-vis Pakistan; both have irredentist claims against parts of Pakistan or the areas it currently occupies. Afghanistan has never accepted the Durand line as the border and claims the Pashtun areas of Pakistan as its own. India, on the other hand, denies the existence of Pakistani Kashmir. The idea therefore that India would seek Afghanistan as its strategic ally and as an operating space against Pakistan, within the realm of its current engagement in the country is extremely pertinent. As discussed earlier, the Indian and Pakistani rivalry within the regional security complex is essentially seen as a 'zero-sum' game, with each trying to outdo the other in Afghan so as to ensure that any gains made are made at the cost of the other, stuck in a classic security dilemma¹⁶⁶.

India seeks to prevent the restoration of any form of a resurgent Taliban regime in Afghanistan, and moreover India seeks to limit Pakistan's influence over any emergent regime to ensure that one inimical and hostile to India does not gain

¹⁶⁵ Sumit Ganguly and Nicholas Howenstein, "India-Pakistan Rivalry in Afghanistan," *Journal of International Affairs* (Columbia School of International and Public Affairs) 63, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 2009): 127-140.

¹⁶⁶ John H. Herz, "The Security Dilemma in International Relations: Background and Present Problems," *International Relations* (Sage Publishing) 17, no. 4 (2003).; John H. Herz, "Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* (Cambridge University Press) 2, no. 2 (January 1950): 157-180.; K. Alan Kronstad, *What Drives Subcontinental Insecurity?: A Multitheoretic Examination of the India-Pakistan Conflict Dyad*, Dissertation (University of Southern California, 2009).

power¹⁶⁷. The existence of a fundamentally hostile Afghan regime (e.g. the Taliban in the late Nineties) gives Pakistan and its various security elites far more operating space against India. With the establishment of a friendly regime across the Durand line in Afghanistan, Pakistan can afford to concentrate its security, military and covert capabilities across the Line-of-Control (LOC) in Kashmir and in support of various terror groups that operate across the border. Further, a friendly regime in Kabul will ensure that Pakistan will no longer need to draw upon large security resources against the insurgency in its Tribal Areas and the NWFP, and can instead direct these against India.

Second, intertwined with the idea of seeking strategic depth against Pakistan, lies India's other major concern: countering the threat posed to India to by radical and fundamentalist Islamic movements in its strategic space and within its domestic socio-political realm. The need to secure India's strategic space from the various non-state actors that could exist in a fundamentally hostile Islamic radical environment is quite apparent. The Indian Airlines hijacking and subsequent release of terrorists in 1998, the attack on the Indian parliament in 2001, and the more recent Mumbai terror attacks in 2008, all perpetrated by groups like the *Lashkar-e-Toiba* (LET) and the *Jaish-e-Mohammed* (JEM) who in the past have had large training and recruiting camps in Afghanistan, serve as stark reminders for India of the danger posed if Afghanistan becomes a safe haven for these non-state actors. Further, the impact of these groups on the delicate situation in Kashmir and on India's 150 million strong, largely underprivileged Muslim population cannot be ignored. In recent years a number of home-grown terror groups with strong cross-border links to the LET &

¹⁶⁷ Sumit Ganguly and Nicholas Howenstein, "India-Pakistan Rivalry in Afghanistan," *Journal of International Affairs* (Columbia School of International and Public Affairs) 63, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 2009): 127-140.

JEM, like the banned Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) and the Indian *Mujahideen* (IM) cannot be disregarded¹⁶⁸.

Third, though Afghanistan does not share a contiguous border with India, it has always been a traditional entry point to Central Asia. A large portion of India's future trade and energy aspirations lay within Central Asia and India views a stable Afghanistan as a potential re-enabler of the civilizational contact that India shared with the region. This idea has historical precedent right from the days of the Grand Trunk Road or *Shah Rah-e-Azam* that traversed the east and the west of the subcontinent, spawning from Kolkata to Kabul, which eventually connected on to the Silk Route to Asia beyond. India views Central Asia as a region where it hopes to exercise its past civilizational influence in order to meet the burgeoning energy needs of its growing population and its security concerns vis-à-vis China and the threat from intransigent Islamic fundamentalism. The idea of a Great Game for the resources and strategic space of Central Asia is well known, and India hopes to play catch up to the US, Russia and China in the region by exhibiting its commitment to Afghanistan. The TAPI pipeline, the long-term construction of a route to the Chahbahar port in Iran and the creation of an Uzbek-Afghan electrical grid testify to the importance of Afghanistan to India's Central Asian strategy¹⁶⁹.

¹⁶⁸ C. Christine Fair, "Under the Shrinking U.S. Security Umbrella: India's End Game in Afghanistan?," *The Washington Quarterly* (Center for Strategic and International Studies) 34, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 179-192.

¹⁶⁹ For a more detailed explanation of the importance of Afghanistan to India's Central Asian Strategy see, Shashank Joshi, "India's AF-PAK Strategy," *The Rusi Journal* 155, no. 1 (February/March 2010): 20-29.

Fourth, keeping within the idea of an ever expanding purview for Indian Grand Strategy, Afghanistan presents India with the best opportunity (or primary chance for failure) to put their strategy into practice. As Harsh Pant notes:

Afghanistan is now a test case for India as a regional and global power on the ascendant.¹⁷⁰

This has major implications for South Asia itself. If India can display its primacy within the Regional Security Complex and ensure that its strategic aims in Afghanistan are met, without upsetting the nuclear balance with Pakistan, and by using its economic and rising political influence, India will be in a much better position to deal with other issues within the Complex. This will help India in the case of relations with Bangladesh and Nepal, which continue to thwart India's ambitions in the region, especially given the greater Chinese presence. Only once India is able to deal with its regional concerns, will it be able to look at securing its greater interests on a larger stage, the Indian Ocean World, and eventually as a global power in its own right as part of its Grand Strategy.

Additionally, India's involvement in Afghanistan gives it a chance to engage other key players in the region that have had major roles in the Afghan milieu in the past. First this would be Russia, which inherited the mandate of the Soviet Union in Central Asia and still remains a guarantor of the security of many of the Central Asian states. Second, Iran, with its long border with western Afghanistan, the fact that Dari is the second largest spoken language amongst the Tajiks and the Hazaras, and the hostility it faced from a Sunni Taliban that came to power, gives it reason to seek alliance with India. In addition, these nations were the prime benefactors of the Masud led Northern

¹⁷⁰ Harsh V. Pant, "Indian Dilemmas in Afghanistan," *India in Transition*, March 29, 2010.

Alliance that took on the Taliban initially; this is an alliance they may choose to revive should a Taliban return on the anvil¹⁷¹.

Russia scuttled India's plans for its first airbase in the region when it pushed the Tajik government to rescind its offer to host this in 2005¹⁷², yet sees eye to eye with India on the need to combat any radical Islamic instability in Afghanistan that could directly threaten the status quo in Central Asia and indirectly the Asian republics within the Russian Federation. Their shared history in the region also ensures that India constantly seeks to engage Russia both bilaterally and within the Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) forum to ensure that both their objectives in Afghanistan are served. With Iran, India's engagement with Afghanistan has enjoyed a renaissance of late¹⁷³, and both share a common interest in ensuring that the Taliban does not return to control, having been the amongst first to suffer at the hands of the Taliban in the past. Iran also continues to have an unsteady relationship with Pakistan and in some ways seeks Indian support to assuage this threat. Further, India's championing of Iranian ports and the establishment of an alternative trade route instead via Iran and west Afghanistan (instead of through Pakistan), have ensured that the two have seen eye to eye in the recent past, as Indian containers have made their way across the region.

Finally, Indian economic interests in Afghanistan continue to expand beyond government sponsored programs and investments. India's large private and public

¹⁷¹ Shanthie Mariet D'Souza, *India, Afghanistan and the 'End Game'?*, Working Paper, No. 124 (Singapore: Institute of South Asian Studies, 2011).

¹⁷² Sudha Ramachandran, *India air base grounded in Tajikistan*, December 1, 2010, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/LL01Df02.html (accessed March 14, 2011).

¹⁷³ Harsh V. Pant, "India's Relations with Iran: Much Ado about Nothing," *The Washington Quarterly* (Center for Strategic and International Studies) 34, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 61-74., and Jayshree Bajoria, "India-Afghanistan Relations," *Council on Foreign Relations*, July 2009.

sector companies are becoming aware of the potential Afghanistan presents as a destination for goods and services, as well as a source of valuable raw materials and resources. Bilateral trade stands at US \$368 billion and could potentially be double of that in five years according to FICCI¹⁷⁴. Afghanistan, currently a net agricultural exporter to India, is also seen as a potential food security resource. A number of private Indian firms are involved in a number of restructuring and construction sub-contracted projects across Afghanistan and private and public Indian steel firms are considering the creation of a unified Indian steel consortium for a joint bid for exploration rights of the Hajigak iron ore mines in the Bamiyan province. This could be amongst the most coveted iron ore resources in the world due to the size of the find and its high ferrous content¹⁷⁵ and therefore could offer great benefits to India's economic muscle.

¹⁷⁴ Federation of India's Chamber of Commerce and Industry, *Despite casualties, India remains committed to Afghan projects*, <http://www.ficci.com/ficci-in-news-page.asp?nid=3820>.

¹⁷⁵ Prince Mathews Thomas and Cuckoo Paul, *India's Ore Play In Afghanistan*, May 10, 2011, <http://www.forbes.com/2011/05/10/forbes-india-ore-play-in-afghanistan.html> (accessed May 25, 2011).

Chapter 5

5.0 Implications & Scenarios

President Obama's speech at the NATO summit in Lisbon in November 2010 was significant because it played down the importance of the July 2011 deadline he had put upon beginning troop draw-downs in the past¹⁷⁶. In the speech, he indicated that the US would remain significantly involved in Afghanistan till at least 2014 by when it was hoped that the ANSF would be trained and ready for a transition of responsibilities. This development, another addition to the AF-Pak strategy set the ball rolling amongst other regional powers as they began work on strategies for a post American Afghanistan after 2014. To adequately consider the implications of the AF-PAK strategy on India and its significance for South Asia, we are better served by constructing possible scenarios for Afghanistan and what this will entail over the next three years, as the US contemplates withdrawal.

Scholar, Shanthie Mariet D'Souza draws up three probable scenarios for Afghanistan over the next 3 years¹⁷⁷. The scenarios are presented below; in the order that they are most likely to occur, with an explanation of the implications of each scenario for Indian and US interests.

The first and most likely scenario, considers a reduced US presence in Afghanistan, with an increased focus on counterinsurgency operations in urban areas, protecting

¹⁷⁶ Karen Travers, David Kerley, *Obama's Goal by 2014: Afghans Take Lead on Security, US Footprint "Significantly Reduced"*, November 20, 2010, <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2010/11/obamas-goal-by-2014-afghans-take-lead-on-security-us-footprint-significantly-reduced/> (accessed August 1, 2011).

¹⁷⁷ Shanthie Mariet D'Souza, *India, Afghanistan and the 'End Game'?*, Working Paper, No. 124 (Singapore: Institute of South Asian Studies, 2011).

key cities and effectively serving as a defence force. This is in line with the COIN policies of the current AF-PAK strategy but will mean that the Afghan government will lose its writ across much of south and eastern Afghanistan, with its control being reduced to key cities in the north and the west. In this scenario, the Taliban and other Pashtun Islamist groups will keep control of the border region, which will form the basis for any future settlement and talks.

For the US, this will reduce some of its dependence on Pakistan and allow it to maintain a light footprint, keeping with its drawdown objectives. With a smaller region to protect, the costs to the US will be less and will allow it to focus on reconstruction activities. Further, with this geographic setting, the US might be in a position to negotiate with the Taliban and ensure that it will not support the return of Al-Qaeda, in exchange for letting it keep control of the Pashtun lands. For India, while this is not an ideal scenario, it will allow India to keep up its developmental and economic activity in a region where much of it is already located. It will also give India a chance to engage with the Tajiks and the ethnic groups in the north and the west, to counter Pakistan's obvious influence in a Taliban controlled south. Indian forces could also have a training role for the ANSF future and as possible replacements to the ISAF in some regions.

The second scenario is less likely to occur, but considers the possibility of a rapid US withdrawal before 2014 due to domestic constraints in the US. This scenario is also a possibility if the US is unable to negotiate a political settlement and leaves in 2014, opening up Afghanistan to a potential *Balkanisation*. Should the US seek a 'quick-fix' and leave in a rush, the immediate return of the Taliban and groups allied to it is

rather probable. This situation would leave Afghanistan in chaos, with different ethnic groups and warlords jostling for power and control. It would also mean a safe haven for groups like the LET, JEM and Al-Qaeda and their anti-India ideologies. While the Tajik led Northern Alliance remains dormant, it is likely this sort of situation could see its revival as non-Pashtun groups seek cover for their interests.

For India, this would mean seeking a quick return to the pre-Taliban grouping of India, Iran, Russia and the Central Asian states supporting groups opposed to the Taliban, like the Northern Alliance or individual warlords like the Uzbek, Rashid Dostum. This would be a blow to India's economic and developmental activities, which it would have to cease and look at an exit from Afghanistan. The other possibility, as some within the Indian military establishment have argued would be to place 'boots on the ground' and have an Indian military presence in Afghanistan to guard its interests or seek to execute surgical strikes on Afghan soil against terror groups inimical to it. This scenario will also see the entire gamut of machinations of the Pakistani and Indian security establishments play out against each other in Afghanistan.

The third scenario while most ideal, remains most unlikely as it is built around the premise of increased NATO involvement and greater US investment and commitment to the state building cause it has tended to avoid under the Obama administration. If the US were to choose to walk this path it would have to involve some sort of rapprochement between India and Pakistan, to ensure that Pakistan was able to commit to fully supporting the US. For India, this would certainly be the best solution, because it would be built upon a more comprehensive US South Asia

strategy, with India playing a lead role. This would imply increased economic investment and greater Indian involvement in training and development of the ANSF and other Afghan institutions.

5.1 India's Endgame in Afghanistan

It is clear from the above that India's options in deciding the shape of its future engagement in Afghanistan are limited. Quite simply, India is not the master of its own fate in Afghanistan. It continues to take its cues from the US and its strategic options are limited, given its lack of a land border with Afghanistan. It must therefore be reliant on US planning and support for every move it seeks to make, a situation that benefits its rival Pakistan immensely. Sumit Ganguly in an influential essay written in July 2011 claimed that India has much to lose with a US withdrawal in the face of an untrustworthy Pakistan military exerting even greater influence¹⁷⁸. Further, he added it was imperative that India's policymakers came up with a plan for a post US Afghanistan, because while the US had the options of washing its hands of Afghanistan, India did not¹⁷⁹.

As talk of endgame draws near India's options remain conceptual at this stage and rely on its ability to convince the US of its fears. With the US, India needs a clear dialogue as to what kind of role the US sees for India in its vision for Afghanistan and a future South Asia. India needs to emphasize the deeper needs of a comprehensive South Asia policy that is centred on India and also needs to agree to US demands to take a more patient stand on Pakistan. With Pakistan, India needs to convince

¹⁷⁸ Sumit Ganguly, *Afghanistan Is Now India's Problem*, July 19, 2011, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/07/19/afghanistan_is_now_indias_problem (accessed July 29, July 2011).

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

Pakistan; that its vision goes beyond South Asia and does not threaten Pakistan's existence. India will benefit from a stronger civilian government in Pakistan and needs to stress rapprochement to quell the influence of the military establishment, which is built upon its anti-India rhetoric.

With its former partners in the Afghan milieu, Iran and Russia, India needs to put in place a fallback strategy, in case the situation in Afghanistan disintegrates. While ending its economic activities in Afghanistan would be the immediate fallout of a situation like that, things will be a lot of worse, if the Taliban is allowed to control the entire country, allowing Pakistan to direct its anti-India policies from Afghan soil. India, Iran and Russia have a lot to lose with the return of a hard-line Sunni Islamist power like the Taliban to control in Afghanistan. It is in their best interests to ensure that the Taliban's energies are spent dealing with internal opposition in Afghanistan, rather than giving it a chance to concentrate its energies on supporting Pakistani terror groups.

In Afghanistan, if the situation moves towards one, with a limited Afghan government and a negotiated settlement with the Taliban as discussed in the first scenario, it is imperative that India continue to engage Afghanistan as an economic trading partner and enforce its position as a land bridge to Central Asia. This would move ties beyond the 'donor-benefactor' relationship that currently endures. India must also persist with its training of the ANSF and capacity building measures and help instil public confidence in the Afghan government. Further India should spread its bets and along with ties to the Tajiks and other minorities, India must make an effort to reach to out clans within the Pashtun belt to ensure continuing Pashtun support of its moves.

5.2 US' South Asia Policy

With the AF-PAK strategy shaped the way it is currently, the US' South Asia policy is flawed and accords undue influence to Pakistan. Pakistan's influence with the Taliban and groups like the Haqqani network is tangible and it will be called upon to broker a solution in Afghanistan. A Pakistani brokered solution is unlikely to stand the course of time as it will serve only Pakistani interests. Yet the AF-PAK strategy fails to consider adequately the use of regional powers and Afghanistan's neighbours to achieve a tangible solution that is lasting and serves South Asian interests. The arguments used against a comprehensive regional approach, by the Obama Administration are weak. As Melanie Hanif concurs, perhaps the time has come for the US to look at this differently and consider a wider South Asian strategy in Afghanistan. This would include a more dominant role for India¹⁸⁰, provided India off course accepts the responsibility.

India and the US seek an Indian rapprochement with Pakistan. India seeks to move on beyond Pakistan and aspires to its rightful place in a new world order. The US sees rapprochement as the key to Afghan stability. Whether a rapprochement is possible or not, the US needs to convince India to come to some kind of settlement with Pakistan's military establishment to ensure that South Asia remains stable. Yet India, while acknowledging the US as a friend and ally has come to see the US as increasingly unpredictable in its decision making allowing Pakistan to dictate terms to it. If the US were to leave Afghanistan, and leave India and Pakistan jostling for position, the fallout for India-US ties could be high.

¹⁸⁰ Melanie Hanif, "Indian Involvement in Afghanistan in the Context of the South Asian Security System," *Journal of Strategic Strategy* (Henley-Putnam University) 3, no. 2 (2010): 13-26.

For the US' South Asia policies to succeed it needs to make sure that Indian concerns about the Taliban are taken into consideration and it needs to do more by using its leverage with Pakistan to push it to seek settlement with India.

5.3 Conclusions

The situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan continues to remain bleak a decade on from 9/11. The options for the United States are increasingly limited as it struggles to deal with structural inefficiencies and state failures in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Karzai government's grip on power is slipping and is losing support and the faith of the Afghan people. While the Taliban are weakened, they remain in control of the South and Eastern parts of the country. The US recognizes this and is willing to negotiate with elements of the Taliban it sees as amenable. For this it needs Pakistan and its military. The Pakistani military with its vice like grip on Pakistani institutions, remains wary about Indian interest in Afghanistan. In its conquest for strategic depth against India, it seems it is willing to put at stake, its relations with the US and the stability of the Pakistani state. The US however needs the Pakistani military to play interlocutor, with the Taliban as it searches for a respectable path out of Afghanistan. Therein lays the paradox, as the US searches for a way to deal with a partner that itself is a root cause of the instability that plagues US interests in Afghanistan.

For India, the situation is equally grim. Faced with the realisation that its extensive investment and reconstruction support in Afghanistan are under threat from the US' impending withdrawal, India has 3 years before US troops are withdrawn in 2014, to consider its strategies and hedge its bets as the endgame draws near. It has finally come to terms with the idea that it must be willing to deal with a future Afghan state

that includes members of the Taliban as its representatives. Yet, there has been no concrete plan of action evident from the Indians as they seek to the limit the impact of fallout to their interests. It is imperative that they act fast and ensure that they are party to the talks with Taliban as the search for a political solution to the quagmire goes on and not let Pakistan get the upper hand. Simultaneously it needs to consider the serious possibility of the revival of the India-Iran-Russia strategic grouping and work on avenues for supporting the old Tajik backed Northern Alliance, should the possibility of factionalism, rear its ugly head over a political solution.

The US and India share a number of similar concerns in South Asia and continue to have an ideological basis for a strong and lasting friendship. Their relations have made rapid strides in the past decade and perhaps it is time for the US to openly consider India as the bulwark of its South Asia policy, provided both the US and India, have an idea for what kind of role they see for Pakistan, and are able to allay its few relevant concerns. It is probably the best bet for South Asia.

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