

## **Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations from 1978 to 2001: An Analysis**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The entry of Soviet forces into Afghanistan in December 1979 was a watershed happening. The event brought about, inter alia, a qualitative change in Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan as well as balance of power in South Asia. The United States and its allies deciphered the Soviet move an attempt to expand its influence to areas vital for Washington's interests. America knitted an alliance of its friends to put freeze on Moscow's advance. Pakistan, as a frontline state, played a vital role in the eviction of the Soviet forces. This paved the way for broadening of traditional paradigm of Islamabad's Afghan policy. But after the Soviet military exit, Pakistan was unable to capitalize the situation to its advantage and consequently had to suffer from negative political and strategic implications. The implications are attributed to structural deficits in Pakistan's Afghan policy during the decade long stay of Red Army on Afghanistan's soil.

**Key Words:** Durand Line, Pashtunistan, Saur Revolution, frontline state, structural deficits, expansionism, Jihad, strategic interests, Mujahideen, Pariah, Peshawar Accord

### **Introduction**

Pakistan-Afghanistan relations date back to the partition of the subcontinent in August 1947. Their ties have been complex despite shared cultural, ethnic, religious and economic attributes. With the exception of the *Taliban* rule (1996-2001) in Afghanistan, successive governments in Kabul have displayed varying degrees of dissatisfaction towards Islamabad. A number of factors have been contributed to the present dismal state of their bilateral relations, but the historical cause of this lack of trust has been the issue of the Durand Line<sup>\*</sup>; tensions between Islamabad and Kabul have also emanated from their divergent strategic outlooks and dissimilar national ethos. Tanvir Ahmad Khan, the former Foreign Secretary of Pakistan, in his interview with the author, commented that "the colonialist attitude of Pakistan's early political leadership in dealing with Afghanistan during the early post-independence period alienated the two neighbors." Pakistan

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<sup>\*</sup> Durand Line is the 2640 kilometers long porous international border between Afghanistan and the semiautonomous tribal regions of Pakistan. It was the result of an agreement, known as the Durand Line Agreement, signed in 1893 between Britain and Amir Abdur Rahman Khan of Afghanistan.

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regarded itself as the surrogate of the British and believed that it had inherited not only the responsibilities but also the privilege of guiding Afghanistan in its foreign policy. The Afghan ruling elite resented this successor-imperialist attitude and sought to counterbalance it by cultivating relations with India, Pakistan's archrival. New Delhi's sympathetic attitude towards Kabul on the issue of *Pashtunistan* brought them closer and gave the conflict a South Asian dimension.

The principal drivers which had influenced and shaped Pakistan's traditional thinking on Afghanistan were, first, astride presence of the ethnic Pashtun population on either side of the Durand Line. This demographic division which was the result of Durand Line has been the root cause of their awry relations since 1947.\* The second driver was Pakistan's competition with India for influence in Afghanistan which has persisted since the departure of the British from the subcontinent in 1947. As a matter of fact, it is the running hostility between Islamabad and New Delhi that lies at the heart of the present phase of unrest in Afghanistan.

### Structural Deficits

Structural deficits are in-built limitations in a policy. They appear when governments lacking in constitutional legitimacy confront an international situation affecting them directly. It is the incumbent elite which determine a particular state's interests and policy objectives. They tend to view international developments through the prism of their position in the domestic power structure. They ensure the response must not affect their position in the domestic power paradigm. In the process, they under-appreciate the implications involved in the development: their conception of long-term perspective of state's interests is either vague or entirely missing. Consequently, long-term view of the changes taking place in the surroundings and identification of state's interests accordingly do not constitute the part of the decision-making process. This policy works well in so far as their stay in power is concerned but the incentive built in the system reward short-term; and when the momentum of the development subsides, the structural deficits become pronounced and negatively affect the long-term interests of the country.

### Research Problem

The United States' interest in the Afghan conflict began to wane once the Soviets withdrew their military from Afghanistan in 1989. American disengagement did contribute to destabilizing the situation in Afghanistan and its slide to civil war in

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\* At the time of partition of the subcontinent, Afghanistan claimed certain Pashtun areas of Pakistan. The areas were: the frontier states of Dir, Swat, Chitral, and Amb; Baluchistan and the Baluchistan states of Kalat, Makran and Les Bela. They were to constitute an independent Pashtun state.

the early 1990s. This may be regarded as one of the explanations of otherwise a complex issue. It will be argued that, apart from the aforementioned viewpoint, structural deficits too in Pakistan's Afghan policy during the period of its 'frontline state' status, were instrumental in Afghanistan's precipice to civil war, consequently produce negative implications for Pakistan as well as for the South Asia.

## **Research Methodology**

Historical perspective methodology has been employed to evaluate Pakistan-Afghanistan relation in the period 1978-2001. Their multifaceted relationships are rooted in history. The regions that now make up Pakistan had political, religious and cultural interactions with Afghanistan before the emergence of Pakistan in August 1947. Their ties thereafter were a continuation of the old pattern. Since information relating to the period is still unfolding, there is a need of constantly keeping it abreast with new revelations. This shortcoming has been overcome by conducting the study in the framework of historical perspective.

## **Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations from 1978 to 2001**

Pakistan-Afghanistan relations in the period 1978-2001 began with the gory exit of President Daoud from power in April 1978 and lasted till 11 September 2001, the day the fateful event of 9/11 had taken place. The period has been divided into four phases for the purpose of evaluating the implications.

### **Phase One: April 1978 – December 1979**

This phase began with the triggering of the Saur Revolution\* in Afghanistan in April 1978. The development was a watershed happening inasmuch as "for the first time in the history of Afghanistan an end has been put to the sultanate of Muhammad Zaid ... [and] [a] the power has been passed into the hands of the masses" (Matinuddin, 199). The Revolution sent a wave of trepidation to Islamabad as it was an ominous development in a country geographically so abutted with Pakistan that it could not remain insulated from it. The change brought new political and, later on, social realities: Afghanistan was no longer a country governed by conservative nationalist posse of rulers; the new rulers of Afghanistan did not belong to traditional ruling class but they were equally nationalistic in their outlook; however, the accentuating point was that they were inspired by revolutionary ideology.

Islamabad's unease on the cataclysmic developments in Afghanistan stemmed primarily from its anxiety that the installation of the new revolutionary regime might stoke Afghanistan's irredentist claims on Pakistan's Pashtun territories. And

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\* The Revolution in Afghanistan took place in the month of April in 1978 which coincided with the month of named Saur in the Persian calendar. That is why it is also called the Saur Revolution.

its apprehensions regarding “revival of the *Pashtunistan* issue were realized when on 9 May 1978 the Afghan President, Nur Muhammad Taraki, referred to the border dispute with Pakistan after meeting the ageing Pashtun leader A.G. Khan in Kabul” (Hussain, 2005).

Besides, the new regime of the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) intended to revolutionize the Afghan society and remodel it on socialist pattern. The new government, soon after assumption of power, issued guideline, in pursuance of its objective, “for the redistribution of land, equality for the ethnic minorities, emancipation for women, and education for all” (Urban, 1988, p. 16). Pakistan feared spill-over effects of the Saur Revolution once it stabilized itself inasmuch as the historical direction of political developments in Afghanistan had invariably been towards the subcontinent. The military regime in Pakistan was of the view that “a Soviet-backed Afghanistan had the potential to unleash forces challenging the military dominance over an elitist state run with the connivance of a status quo coalition of semi-feudal rural gentry and the relatively small financial-industrial group” (Hussain, 2005).

Pakistan’s initial reaction to ‘Saur changes’ was, notwithstanding the early unease, that they “will not make any difference in Pakistan-Afghanistan relationship” (Pakistan Times, January 1, 1980). Islamabad preferred not to snap diplomatic ties with the new Afghan Government and soon-to-end start of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations took place with the granting of diplomatic by Pakistan of Marxist-oriented regime on 5 May 1978. The then military government hoped that “bilateral relations would improve with the return of stability in Afghanistan” (Adeeb, 1987).

The new Afghan Government too reciprocated Pakistan gesture and Nur Muhammad Taraki, the prime minister and president of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA), in his maiden press conference after the Revolution, said that “his Government will try to solve the border dispute with Pakistan peacefully” (The Dawn, May 7, 1978). Later on, the Afghan President reiterated stance in his address to the nation on Radio Kabul in which he said that his “country would promote friendship and cooperation with the neighboring countries” (Pakistan Times, May 9, 1978).

President Zia-ul-Haq of Pakistan paid a visit to Kabul in September 1978 and held discussion with his Afghan counterpart on the ‘one political difference’ that “had already been brought within the reach of a settlement through negotiations with President Daoud before he was overthrown” (Mahdi, 1999). However, he was unable to bring Tarakai and Amin around to his point of view. Later on, the two met again at the Havana Non-Aligned Summit in September 1979. The meeting was significant because the Pakistani President “failed to give a conclusive response to Tarakai’s offer, as reported by the Soviet envoy-counselor at Kabul, Vasili Saffronchuk, of recognizing the Durand Line if Pakistani authorities closed it for the rebels” (Hussain, 2005).

The initial auspicious beginning did not develop to give specific positive direction to Pakistan-Afghanistan relations and soon dissolved into thin air. Notwithstanding the fact that the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan was ruling the country but the situation in the country was fluid and uncertain due to growing resistance against the government. Kabul believed that Islamabad was not only supporting the resistance but providing training and material assistance regime's opponents. According to a statement issued by President Taraki and appeared in the *Kabul Times* on 24 August 1979 "reactionary circles of Pakistan and religious fanatics in Iran together with reactionary imperialist accomplices are interfering to a major extent in Afghanistan's internal affairs" (Mukherjee, 1984).

Pakistan denied that its territory was being used for training rebels and for supplying arms to them, but it had been amply reported that opponents of the Afghan regime were receiving training and equipment from Pakistan. The *Washington Post* on February 2, 1979 reported that "Afghan dissidents are undergoing guerilla training at a base 12 miles north of Peshawar" (Mukherjee, 1984). An eyewitness account described that "at least two thousand Afghans were being trained at former Pakistan Army bases guarded by Pakistani patrols" (Cordovez & Harrison, 1995). It was reported that from "about November 1978 to May 1979, reactionary circles in Pakistan had interfered in Afghanistan 61 times" (Mahdi, 1999). A number of reasons have been cited to determine factors that had prompted the Soviet Union to send its forces into Afghanistan, it is argued that "had Pakistan not played the base-area role it did, and had not the Chinese and Arabs provided their backing, it is much less likely that the Russians would have gone into Afghanistan directly" (Halliday, 1982).

The embryonic insurgency began to snowball into a full scale with the guerrillas receiving extraneous aid. It appeared the Saur Revolution was heading towards collapse within twenty months of its birth. There were two reasons: "By April 1979, the one-year-old PDPA regime was under siege from within. An equally contributory factor was the war within the revolutionary leadership. Afghan factionalism proved fatal for the *Khalq* phase of the revolution" (Gupta, 1986). With the passage of time, the resistance against the regime in Kabul became so extensive that no less than three-quarters of the country was engulfed by rebellion.

### **Phase Two: December 1979 – February 1989**

The second phase which began with the introduction of Soviet forces into Afghanistan in December 1979 and terminated with their departure in 1989 was the most tumultuous period in the annals of the Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. Islamabad's refusal to accord diplomatic recognition to the Soviet-installed regime of Babrak Karmal and the presence of Soviet military forces on Afghan soil were the defining factors in the ensuing trajectory of their ties. The cataclysmic development transformed Southwest Asia into an area of international political gravity where the rival superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, vied

for the protection of their interests through their proxies: Pakistan and Afghanistan respectively.

### **Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan**

The entry of Soviet forces into Afghanistan in December 1979 took the world with surprise. “By sending 80 000 Soviet troops over the Hindu Kush Brezhnev had changed the power equation in the region” (Matinuddin, 1991). Thitherto the dominant themes influencing the ties Pakistan and Afghanistan were the Pashtunistan and the Durand Line. The advent of such a large number of foreign forces accentuated the existing complexity in Kabul-Islamabad relations and security considerations came to occupy to be an overriding theme in their relations for nearly a decade.

Three consequences followed from the development: on the one hand, it resulted in the end of the historic ‘buffer state’ status of Afghanistan between Pakistan and USSR, and thus had a direct bearing, in the estimation of Pakistan, on its security. Given the relative weakness of the Afghan Army, Pakistan’s security was not as threatened. But the advent of Soviet forces in Afghanistan altered the scenario and Pakistan felt itself vulnerable in the face of Soviet presence. The security policy makers in Islamabad were apprehensive that “if allowed to consolidate its hold, the Soviet Union could later leap down the Bolan and Khyber passes to fulfill the historical czarist ambition for access to the warm waters of the Arabian Sea” (Sattar, 2010).

Secondly, Pakistan in line of its policy of not granting diplomatic recognition to foreign sponsored governments refused to recognize the Moscow-propped Babrak Karmal regime in Kabul; and this disconnect injected complexity in their ties, and, thirdly, Pakistan’s role in the Afghan *jihad* exacerbated deterioration in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. As a matter of fact, it was Pakistan’s response to the Soviet military entry into Afghanistan and the niche the country came to occupy in the strategic paradigm of Pakistan vis-a-vis India that were instrumental in defining the trajectory of implications for Pakistan.

### **United States Reaction to Soviet Intervention**

United States and the West deciphered the Soviet military escapade in Afghanistan as a first step towards realization of the Soviet approach to warm waters. Stabilized revolutionary regime in Afghanistan under the tutelage of USSR was deemed to pose threats to strategic interests of the United States and its western allies. Besides, the Kremlin move was interpreted as a threat to the stability of the adjacent areas that are vital to the economies of the industrialized states. To safeguard the collective interests of the western world, Washington declared that “an attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means, including military force” (State of the Union

Address by Jimmy Carter, 1980). The Soviet military incursion into Afghanistan morphed the area of Southwest Asia into region of international political gravity and “Afghanistan was, from now on, no less a victim of its geographical factors than of its internal confrontations” (Rais, 1994).

The United States along with its western and regional allies knitted an alliance to halt the likely Soviet advancement and not allowing the Revolutionary regime to consolidate itself. Pakistan was co-opted in the alliance as a ‘frontline state’ to achieve the fruition of aforementioned objectives. The ‘frontline state’ status conferred upon Pakistan the prerogative of being the only conduit for financing, training and equipping Afghan *Mujahideen* engaged in resisting the Soviet military presence in Afghanistan. Considering the likely repercussions America decided to bolster its regional security network in an attempt to contain the communist expansion. President Carter, on May 4, 1980 declared: “We will provide military equipment, food and other assistance to help Pakistan defend its independence and national security against the seriously increased threat from the north” (Address to the Nation on the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan by Jimmy Carter, 1980).

The Soviet military advent into Afghanistan was a God-sent opportunity for Zia-ul-Haq, the military dictator of Pakistan who had ousted the first elected Prime Minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, in July 1977, and, later on, had him hanged to death in 1979 on a trumped charge of engineering the murder of a political opponent. He was an international pariah and his regime was isolated. He utilized the Soviet military presence in Afghanistan to consolidate its position internally by marginalizing the democratic opposition. On the external front, the military’s Afghan adventure got it much needed support from its old patron, the United States.

Pakistan’s ‘frontline state’ status enabled it to receive massive assistance, military and financial from the United States. “In 1981, the US and Pakistan initialed US \$3.2 billion worth of economic and military assistance spread over six years, followed by US\$4 billion over the next six” (Hussain, 2005). Besides, America provided Pakistan with sophisticated military hardware and arranged for the training and education of the Pakistani army officer corps. Secondly, Pakistan was the only country invested with privilege to channelize external aid, military and financial, to Afghan *Mujahideen* engaged in resisting the Soviet presence in their country. This fact provided Islamabad to exercise immense influence on the *Mujahideen*.

During this phase, Pakistan and Afghanistan relations were less of two independent states as both were serving as respective proxies of the two rivals, the United States and the Soviet Union. This status vitally influenced their independent approach to the crisis adversely impacting their ties. For example, as early as 1983, the Soviet leadership under Gromeyko sounded out the real possibility of the solution of Afghan imbroglio. Since Pakistan had already committed itself whole-hog to the western bloc and thus surrendered its space of pursuing foreign policy independent of the United States, the compromise regarding the withdrawal timetable could not materialize, and morphed the Afghan

crisis into a quagmire. As a matter of fact, “the domestic political interests of the Zia regime were too tied up with the US economic and military aid package to allow it to act independently on the Afghan issue” (Rais, 1994).

From 1979 to 1989, Pakistan-Afghanistan relations in the first phase of the post-Daud period were touching nadir as successive Afghan regimes repeatedly criticized Pakistan of sponsoring *Mujahideen* who were resisting the central government in Kabul. Material now available verifies that the accusations from Afghanistan were not baseless as is evident from the first-hand account provided by Brigadier Mohammad Yousaf, the Director of the Afghan Bureau of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) from 1983-1987. Discussing the nature of his stewardship of the Afghan Bureau of the ISI, he explicitly admits “during my four years some 80 000 *Mujahideen* were trained; hundreds of thousands of tons of arms and ammunition were distributed, and ISI teams regularly entered Afghanistan alongside the *Mujahideen*” (Yousaf & Adkin, 1992).

### **Phase Three: February 1989 – April 1996**

The Geneva Accords negotiated and signed under the auspices of the United Nations were a significant development which paved the way for the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan. The de-induction of foreign forces though realized in February 1989 but it did not result in any improvement in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. This was due to the fact that Islamabad, instead of exercising disengagement and allowing Afghans to settle their affairs, continued its interventionist approach in Afghanistan, though there was section of military establishment which was of the opinion that given the complex orientation of the war which it had assumed in the wake of the Soviet pullout, Islamabad should have detached itself from the Afghan imbroglio and used the knowledge of the country to guide the Afghan leadership inasmuch as Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence knew all of them (Schofield, 2012).

### **Jalalabad Fiasco**

Pakistan’s objectives in the period 1989-1992 centered on endeavors to engineer installation of a favorable regime in Kabul, and in pursuance of this it combined military attacks against the border towns like Jalalabad and secretly supported coup plans to get Najibullah out. The Jalalabad campaign, aided by Islamabad, was the first major attempt by *Mujahideen* in the post-withdrawal phase to unseat, militarily, the relatively well entrenched Najibullah’s government. The campaign which ended in disaster was severely criticized by some *Mujahideen* leaders who were critical of its strategic dimensions. Abdul Haq, a noted *Mujahideen* leader, sarcastically commented: “How is that we Afghans, who never lost a war, must take military instructions from Pakistan, who never won one” (Gutman, 2008).



## Dissolution of Soviet Union

In the 1980s, the Soviet Union appeared to be a dominant superpower but behind the mask of the Iron Curtain Russia was simmering. Centralized economy had stagnated and the economic development was faltering. Millions of rubbles had been channelized into Eastern Europe to boost communist allies and what was left drained into a costly armed race with the United States. Graft on the situation was a disastrous Afghan military adventure which had swallowed millions of dollars. There was perception in the Communist Party leadership and Soviet people that the country had lost its way. It was Gorbachev's policy of glasnost and perestroika that gave implosive orientation to the simmering discontent which eventually climaxed in the dissolution of USSR in 1992.

The collapse of the Soviet Union was a turning point in international politics inasmuch as it resulted in the dissolution of a world order characterized by its division into two blocs: the Soviet Union and the American. The development further complicated the regional scenario and brought about qualitative change in and around Afghanistan. And the Soviet-propped regime of Dr. Najibullah was the first casualty. Externally, Afghanistan was no more a neighbor of a superpower but three successor Central Asian states. They share not only border but religious and ethnic similarities with Afghanistan, and this transformed the country into an arena of expanded extraneous players.

The new changed environment in Afghanistan provided Islamabad with an opportunity to rectify anomalies in its Afghan policy and retrieve the space it had lost in its relations with Kabul. Dr. Najib's resignation in consequence of a soft palace coup produced power vacuum in Kabul aggravated the urgency for an interim political framework to guide the affairs of the country. But the factions were not prepared to iron out their differences and remained stuck to their petty self-interests. Islamabad, realizing the sensitivity of the ground situation in Afghanistan and its impact on its security, exerted all its influence and brought the Peshawar-based leadership of *Mujahideen* to agree on a provisional political set up which was formalized in the Peshawar Accord on 24 April 1992.

## The Peshawar Accord 1992

According to the provisions of the Accord, Sibghatullah Mojaddedi and Burhanuddin Rabbani would administer the affairs for two and four months respectively, while cabinet positions were apportioned among the parties with the consensus that the top leaders would not take the positions. "The signing of the Peshawar Accord had engendered a certain optimism that the stalemate persisting since the Soviet withdrawal had ended and that Afghanistan might finally be able to turn a new page for the better" (Khan, 2012).

The signing of the Peshawar Accord in 1992 was a significant step in the wake of President Najib's exit from power. The historic development removed the

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principal obstacle to the formation of a broad-based government in Afghanistan. The Accord arrested the likely slide, albeit temporarily, of the country to civil war as many feared that the procrastination exhibited by *Mujahideen* in developing consensus regarding power-sharing could trigger bloodbath that would drown Kabul. The Prime Minister of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif, hailed the agreement and termed it “the biggest achievement of the Afghan war and expressed the hope that *Mujahideen* coalition would smoothly take over power in Afghanistan” (Pakistan Times, April 27, 1992).

Notwithstanding the optimism the Agreement had generated, many analysts were skeptic regarding the success of it. They contended that the proposed provisional government comprised parties which had fundamental ideological and policy differences, and critics apprehended that “they can be expected to move towards a vicious power struggle in the political arena. The danger is that in the volatile situation that obtains in Afghanistan today even squabbling and posturing over spoils of power can trigger violence and bloodshed” (Dawn, April 26, 1992). Many Afghan nationalists and royalists too were quite vocal in criticizing the Peshawar Accord. They believed that the Accords contained a roadmap for their country drawn by extraneous powers not in accordance with the aspirations of Afghans but taking into consideration their geostrategic interests. One noted expert on Afghanistan observed “the issue of Afghanistan’s future and the question of Afghan self-determination had been decided at the provincial headquarter of a foreign government and in a meeting where non-Afghans outnumbered Afghans. The Accords were an indication that from now onwards the Afghans would have to deal with more than one ‘Soviet Union’” (Kakar, 1995).

### **Pakistan and the Islamic State of Afghanistan (ISA)**

The assumption of power by erstwhile Peshawar-based *Mujahideen* and the establishment of the Islamic State of Afghanistan (ISA) represented realization of Islamabad’s objective, i.e. installation of a pro-Pakistan government in Kabul. As a matter of fact, the two countries started the new phase of their relations on a positive note. Pakistan was the first country to grant diplomatic recognition to the government of the Islamic State of Afghanistan. It was the first government in Afghanistan in twelve years to which Pakistan had accorded diplomatic recognition. Nawaz Sharif paid an official visit to Afghanistan on the very next day of Mujaddedi’s arrival in Kabul and presented the new government of Afghanistan a check of US \$10 million (Khan, 2012).

The skeptics were not incorrect in their prognosis regarding the success of the Agreement because they soon ran into difficulty due to Hekmatyar’s, a favorite protégé of Islamabad, inflexible attitude. He refused to become part of the signing contending that “the position of prime minister reserved for his party should not be subordinated to that of the president and the position of the defence minister (to which Massoud had been appointed by Mujaddedi) should fall under the control of the prime minister” (Rasanayagam, 2003). His intransigence plunged the country

into civil war. Later on, Rabbani's, who had succeeded Mujaddedi to the office of the president, refusal to hold elections for his successor plunged Afghanistan into another phase of fighting in Afghanistan. The fresh round of the fighting made the Saudi King, Fahd, issue an appeal for peace. Consequently, "Pakistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia again joined hands to promote another accord among the Afghan leaders" (Sattar, 2010). Another accord was signed on March 7, 1993 with the blessings of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Iran and came to be known as Islamabad Accord. The significant aspect of the Accord was that it endorsed Rabbani's continuation as president and elected Hekmatyar as the prime minister.

### **Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations under Rabbani**

The initial enthusiasm generated by Mujaddedi's assumption of power evaporated soon, and Pakistan-Afghanistan relations began to drift towards estrangement under the Rabbani regime. The underlying causes of alienation between the Kabul and Islamabad were the latter's support for Hekmatyar, and Rabbani's pursuit of independent foreign policy. Rabbani and his Defense Minister, Ahmad Shah Massud, were not happy with Pakistan's support to their rival, Hekmatyar, during and after the war of resistance against the Soviets. They wanted to use Iran, Russia and India as new levers to counter Pakistan's influence in Afghan politics.

### **Pakistan and Hekmatyar**

The progressive slide in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations under the Rabbani regime is ascribed, for one, to Islamabad's support to Gulbaddin Hekmatyar of extremist Hizb-i-Islami. He had been chosen by the Pakistani Military Establishment and provided him with military aid more in proportion his actual influence on the field. The special favor which was accorded to him by Inter- Services Directorate was "with the view that he should head the post-communist government in Kabul in order to further Islamabad's wider regional interests" (Saikal, 2012). The dicey obtaining situation in Afghanistan subsequent to the collapse of Dr. Najib's regime had polarized the Afghan geographical spectrum along ethnic lines. And Islamabad's "policy further ethnicized the post-Soviet politics in Afghanistan by its support of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar against Rabbani – a Tajik from Badakhshan province" (Jalalzai, 2003).

Hekmatyar had been invited to join the government. Later on, he was awarded the position of the prime minister as a result of the Islamabad Accord but he refused to share power with Rabbani who became President in June 1992 and Massoud who assumed the office of the Defense Minister. Instead, he initiated campaign against the government under the guise of driving out communist militias and launched massive rocket attack on Kabul. This triggered a devastating civil war in Afghanistan "in which rival factions divided along ethnic lines- Pashtuns in the south, Uzbek and Tajiks in the north, and Shia Hazara in the centre- battled each other" (Hussain, 2002).

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Pakistan continued to provide covert assistance to Hekmatyaar hoping that he would be able to dislodge Rabbani administration and capture the capital. But by 1994 Hekmatyar had clearly failed, losing ground militarily while his extremism divided the Pashtuns, the majority of who loathed him. Hekmatyar's failure to wrest power from Rabbani and Massod "led Islamabad to make two inseparable conclusions. One was that Hekmatyar had become a serious liability for Pakistan. Another was that now Pakistan lacked policy to enable it to secure a receptive government in Kabul" (Saikal, 2012).

Pakistan and Afghanistan relations began to exhibit strains with the ascension of Rabbani to the office of the President and his reluctance to abide by the terms of the Peshawar Accord. Later on, his pursuit of foreign policy bordering more on nationalism but intended to neutralize Islamabad's influence further deteriorated the ties of the two countries. What irked Islamabad was the fact that President Rabbani was careening towards New Delhi. His regime's decision to open a new chapter in Afghanistan's relations with India, despite the Indian government's good relations with the former Communist regime, was deciphered by Pakistan a step inimical to its strategic interests. Pakistan was clearly discomfited by Rabbani and Massud's "inviting Indian technicians and intelligence operatives in air force and other military installations. The creeping back of Russian and Indian influence in Afghanistan was the last thing Pakistan could expect to happen" (Rais, 2004).

Pakistan and Afghanistan relations became frosty when, on 23 February 1994, Pakistan's Embassy in Kabul had been attacked and burned by an officially inspired and directed Kabul mob. An Afghan employee of the embassy had been killed, and the ambassador and military attaché had been wounded. Pakistan demanded an official apology and money to rebuild the embassy. The protesters' main grievance was the food blockade, which had been imposed by Hekmatyaar who controlled the route leading to Kabul from Pakistan. Later on, Pakistan and Afghanistan relations further soured "when four Afghan nationals, who had hijacked a school bus in Islamabad, were shot dead by Pakistani commandos" (Hussain, 2002).

The re-election of Rabbani as President in June 1994 gave impetus to existing deterioration in Pakistan and Afghanistan relations. Islamabad accused the Afghan leader of perpetuating his power illegally. The blunt statement of the Foreign Minister of Pakistan that "anything that happens after June 1994 will have no legitimacy" stoked anti-Pakistan sentiments in Kabul and provoked anti-Pakistan protests in Kabul, including rocket attack on the Pakistan Embassy in Kabul" (Hussain, 2002, p.191). The Kabul government interpreted the declaration "as a pronouncement from Pakistan challenging the legitimacy of the rulers there" (The Nation, July 3, 1994).

### **Emergence of Taliban**

The emergence of the Taliban on the Afghan scene in a highly dicey political environment added complexity to the situation. Afghanistan believed that the

Taliban were the protégé of Pakistan and this further antagonized the two neighbors. However, Pakistan believed that “the Taliban phenomenon was the product of popular disgust at the internecine squabbling amongst the warlords” (Sattar, 2010). But the Rabbani government continued to accuse Pakistan of supporting and assisting the Taliban with equipment and manpower. Even Mujaddedi, Rabbani’s predecessor, blamed Islamabad for unrest in Afghanistan. He advised Pakistan that “You stop giving Taliban safe sanctuaries inside your borders, and the unrest will disappear overnight. It is only the help and support from Pakistan that see them trying to keep Afghanistan unstable”. (The News, June 15, 2004).

In December 1995, during a United Nations General Assembly debate on Afghanistan, the Deputy Foreign Minister of Afghanistan, Abdul Rahim Ghafurzai, alleged Pakistan of supporting the Taliban with arms, military equipment logistics, and military intelligence. Not only accusing Islamabad of having had a hand in the Taliban success, Kabul also charged Pakistan of “underwriting the Taliban budget of \$ 120 million per month. Pakistan rejected the charges and stated that the root cause of the conflict in Afghanistan arose out of the failure of President Rabbani to quit his office long after the expiration of his legal term in early 1994” (Magnus & Naby, 1998).

### **Rise of Taliban**

The Peshawar Accords paved the way for power transfer to erstwhile Mujahideen leaders but the transition “from a wartime alliance to a legitimate constitutional government has not proved to be any easy one” (Magnus & Naby, 1998). Ordinary Afghans were expecting the new rulers to bring law and order and stability in a country ravaged by a long war but they were deeply disappointed as the new Afghan leaders proved incapable of bringing peace in Afghanistan. Their rule lasted from April 1992 to May 1996 can be described as a period of chaos, destruction, killing and deepening of intra-Afghan differences along ethnic and tribal line. Afghan politics of the period could be characterized by ever-changing of loyalties and alliances.

It was in the milieu when Afghanistan was in the midst of a devastating and drifting towards virtual disintegration that “the Taliban had come out of the blue” (Yusufzai, 2002) and burgeoned into a force which overwhelmed the country and established its government in Kabul. But a section of experts on Afghanistan did not subscribe to the above explanation; they did acknowledge the role of the internal conducive ambience in the Taliban’s rise but contended that “the truth has to be that its genesis was altogether more deliberate” (Ewans, 2001). They argued that without the extraneous support, it would not have been possible for the Taliban to exhibit such swiftness.

Pakistan’s role in the creation of the Taliban and their rise to power has been extensively debated. Pakistan never officially acknowledged support to the Taliban. The then Prime Minister of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto, denied any Pakistan

backing of the Taliban in February 1995 saying that “We have no favorites in Afghanistan and we do not interfere in Afghanistan” (Rashid, 2000). But despite Pakistan’s denials, the Taliban’s conduct of military operations and exhibition of entirely alien tactics on the battlefields of Afghanistan lent credence to the point that they were foreign sponsored. “The speed, mobility and sophistication in executing targets were not the hallmark of semi-literate madrassa students with rudimentary training in the use of small arms” (Hussain, 2005).

#### **Phase Four: April 1996-September 2001**

The advent of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) turned a new and favorable leaf, from Islamabad’s perspective, in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. From the beginning of their rule in 1996 to their abandonment by Pakistan in the wake of 9/11, the period is described as “the highest point of Pakistan’s influence in Afghanistan” (Dalrymple, 2013). Pakistan had been striving since April 1992 for “a friendly and amenable Pashtun-led post-communist regime in Kabul [which] would pre-empt the revival of the calls for a ‘Greater Pashtunistan’ that had so bedeviled Pakistan’s relations with Afghanistan since August 1947” (Rasanayagam, 2003). A day after the Taliban captured Mazar-e-Sharif, Pakistan accorded general recognition to the Taliban government on May 25, 1997 and became the first country to do so. According to the then Foreign Minister of Pakistan, “We feel that the new government fulfills the criteria for de jure recognition. It is now in effective control of most of the territory of Afghanistan, including capital Kabul, and is representative of all country” (Frontier Post, June 28, 1997).

Pakistan-Afghanistan relations during the Taliban rule bore the trappings of patron-client states relations. An eminent and accomplished expert on Afghanistan noted “Islamabad not only guided the Taliban in the conduct of war but provided manpower also to sustain them in power. Between 1994 and 1999, more than 80, 000 trained Pakistanis were sent into Afghanistan who fought along with Taliban” (Maley, 2002). The patron-client equation between Pakistan and the Taliban-led Afghanistan was explicit since America had been exerting pressure on Pakistan to persuade Kandahar to hand over the Arab Osama to Washington. That was the direct hint at what the United States thought of Islamabad’s relationship with the Taliban.

The extent of Pakistan’s financial and material assistance to the *Taliban* regime has been documented by Pakistani writers and journalists. It had been reported that “in 1997/98 Pakistan provided the Taliban with an estimated US\$ 30 million in aid. This included 600, 000 tons of wheat, diesel, petroleum and kerosene fuel which was partly paid by Saudi Arabia” (Rashid, 2000). The purpose of this assistance was to run the country’s war machine. Pakistan assisted the *Taliban* in “infrastructure, telecommunication, airports, public works, water and power development and technical support to the Radio *Shariat*” (Rashid, 2000, p. 185). Besides, Islamabad helped provide a new communications network,

refurbished Kandhar airport and supplied parts and armaments for the approximately 30 warplanes and helicopters the Taliban have captured.

Pakistan's extensive support to the *Taliban* regime was evident when "in 1998 the Pakistan government's Coordination Committee for Afghan Policy directed the cash strapped Finance Ministry of Pakistan to earmark 300 million rupees for the Taliban administration in Kabul" (Rashid, 2000). The said amount disbursed over six months at a rate of 50 million rupees a month had to be paid to the Taliban officials and commanders as a salary. Naseerullah Babar, the Interior Minister in the second Benazir government (1993-1996) and accredited to grooming the *Taliban*, was quoted to have justified Pakistan's crucial backing for the militia arguing that "our boys were protecting Pakistan's interests" (Hussain, 2005).

### **Pakistan, Iran, and the Taliban**

Afghanistan's overlapping ethnicity has been a source of traction for regional players to stake their influence in the political affairs of Afghanistan. Pakistan's explicit support to the *Taliban* had given the Afghan issue regional trappings. The cumulative effect of induction of the *Taliban* in the Afghan conflict was sufficed to motivate Pakistan's rivals in the Afghan game, namely Iran, India and Russia, to arrive at an informal strategic understanding to bolster the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance led by the veteran Commander Ahmad Shah Massoud. The Iranians, in particular, were not hesitant of showing their "distrust of the *Taliban* and had seen Pakistan's hand in the phenomenal success of the students' militia" (The Muslim, December 10, 1995).

Iran had condemned the December 1979 Soviet action but it did so discreetly though "it considered the intervention to have been instigated by the United States" (Khan, 2012). Since it was engaged in its war with Iraq, it exercised a low profile in the Afghan conflict but continued to coordinate with Pakistan. On the conclusion of Iran-Iraq War, Tehran had renewed its interest in Afghanistan after its war with Iraq in 1980s. A State Department cable found that "the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan in February 1989 and the fall of the communist regime in Kabul in April 1992, set the stage for a more or less open competition for influence in Afghanistan between Pakistan and Iran" (Jones, 2009).

It was after the installation of the *Mujahideen's* Islamic government in Kabul in 1992 that Pakistan and Iran started observing that they had different agendas for Afghanistan. Tehran was already skeptical of Islamabad's collaboration with the United States and Saudi Arabia while sponsoring the Afghan *Mujahideen* and it was not pleased when the Afghan *Shias* were left out of Islamabad-sponsored Peshawar Accord on power-sharing between various Afghan factions. It wanted to ensure a certain percentage representation for the *Shia* groups in the interim arrangement.

The emergence of the *Taliban* on the Afghan scene further damaged Islamabad-Tehran relations. Iran was of the view, "if *Taliban* are able to establish their government in the whole of Afghanistan, it may become a *Sunni* state with

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little harmony with Tehran” (The Muslim, November 14, 1996). Its policy in connection with Afghanistan was, first, that it wanted united but neutral Afghanistan. It feared that fragmentation of the country would result in the emergence of weak successor states that could easily be manipulated by its enemies to undermine its security. Secondly, Tehran deciphered the emergence of the *Taliban*, an orthodox Sunni sect, a conspiracy of its rivals, Saudi Arabia and the United States to encircle it; therefore, it wanted “its own people in Kabul” (The Nation, November 19, 1996).

Iran’s reaction to the Taliban success in Afghanistan was one of anger. Locked in a struggle with Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United States for influence in Central Asia, Tehran viewed the *Taliban* victory as a part of a plot by Sunnis and the United States to isolate it. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the supreme religious head of the country, called the “*Taliban* a disgrace to Islam, a remark that was formally protested to the Iranian charge d’affaires, who had remained in Kabul” (Magnus & Naby, 1998).

In pursuance of protecting its interests Iran extended support to the opponents of the *Taliban*, including the Rabbani government in Kabul. On 29 October 1996, Iran hosted a regional conference on Afghanistan which was attended by Russia, India, Turkey, China and some Central Asian Republics. Indian presence in the conference was unsettling for Pakistan as it would have no objection at all Iran hosting it. But it found it strange that India, which has no common border with Afghanistan, had been invited. Given the embittered history of Indo-Pak relations, Islamabad regarded the presence of India as giving New Delhi a chance to counter Islamabad in the region. Therefore, Pakistan “by orchestrating the success of the *Taliban* outflanked Tehran which, Pakistan, regarded ‘intruding in our domain’ through, for instance, brokering the Rabbani-Hekmatyar rapprochement” (The Nation, October 13, 1996).

## Post 9/11

The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001 changed the world. The event transformed the region of Southwest Asia again into an area of international political gravity. President Bush’s describing “the attack as ‘Pearl Harbor’ of the twenty first century” (Khan, 2012) made completely clear for President Musharraf the ramifications of the stunning assaults that were seen worldwide in real time. Fingers were instantly pointed at Osama bin Laden and his organization, *Al-Qaeda*. Owing to Pakistan’s role in the promotion of the *Taliban* and, later on, materially helping them sustaining in power, it was regarded as the only country to have substantial influence on the *Taliban* government, therefore, it was certain that Islamabad would have to make some difficult decisions in the days to come.

Pakistan was facing a dilemma how to synchronize its national interests with the imperatives of international situation. Its options could be reduced to two mutually exclusive courses: “either to make common cause with Washington in its



war against *Al Qaeda* network based in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan or persist with its pro-Taliban Afghan policy and, as a consequence, suffer international condemnation” (Hussain, 2002). In opting for a course, Pakistan had to decide whether Islamabad had “the potentials to face the USA and international community by siding with the Taliban in the aftermath of 9/11? Could Pakistan afford to compromise its vital national interests including its nuclear assets and its Kashmir policy?” (The News, April 23, 2004)

Having analyzed pros and cons of the situation and assessing the implications for Pakistan’s strategic interests, Islamabad finally decided to switch its policy of supporting the *Taliban* to siding with the international coalition against terrorism. Islamabad decided to cooperate with the United States and international coalition for military action against the *Taliban* regime in Kabul. Pakistan’s new policy, dictated by exigencies of the international environment geared up against terrorism, ushered in paradigm shift in Islamabad’s thinking towards *Taliban*. They had slid down from strategic assets to a liability.

### Implications for Pakistan

Afghanistan witnessed watershed changes when the post-Daoud phase began in April 1978. They represented, on the one hand, its break from the past, and, on the other, were seminal in nature inasmuch as they paved the way for the taking place of later changes. But the developments did not lead to any conducive shift in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations; rather, their awry ties further exacerbated with the introduction of Soviet forces into Afghanistan and installation of Babrak Karmal as the replacement of President Amin in December 1979. Collateral to its ‘frontline status’, Pakistan hosted more than three million externally displaced Afghans which earned it huge goodwill amongst Afghan populace and was a political asset. But Islamabad mismanaged the opportunity to capitalize on the political asset after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. There may be other explanations of mismanagement but one argument upon which the present research is based points to structural deficits in Islamabad’s Afghan policy from 1979 to 1989 as the critical factor which inhibited realization of its political and strategic objectives.

Pakistan’s political objectives were centered on its quest for establishment of a broad-based government in Afghanistan. It was USSR which, in late 1986, first floated the proposal of a government of national reconciliation before any agreement on the withdrawal timetable. But Pakistan rejected it, terming it a ploy to prolong the Soviet military stay in Afghanistan. Later on, when de-induction appeared to be possible in consequence of understanding between Washington and Moscow, Islamabad began to insist on the formation of such a government before the start of actual withdrawal. Zia-ul-Haq, the President of Pakistan, was even prepared to issue a statement in support of a Soviet military stay in Afghanistan till the formation of such a government. But the hard-line *Mujahideen* leaders rejected the idea by refusing to enter into any dialogue with the government of Dr.

Najibullah contending “we have shed blood, not to share power at the end of the day; we have done so to wrest power for ourselves” (Khan, 2012).

Later on, when Pakistan, after the exit of President Najib in 1992, negotiated Peshawar Accords between the Peshawar-based Mujahideen and engineered their installation to power, it was widely expected that Pakistan-Afghanistan relations would take course inasmuch as the new Afghan rulers were beholden to Islamabad for its support during the Afghan *jihad*. But Pakistan’s dys-judgement was instrumental in undoing what it had managed to achieve due to the Peshawar Accord. This was reflective on two accounts: first, there was no qualitative difference between successive communist governments in Afghanistan from 1978 to 1992 and the interim *Mujahideen* government insofar as both dispensations were foreign sponsored and supported. This fact called for adjustment of contours of policy to the Afghan psychological sensitivities to foreign intervention in Afghanistan’s affairs.

Secondly, and this was the logical corollary of the first, the dynamics of internal Afghan politics had so aligned that extraneous influence in the domestic politics of Afghanistan could be detrimental to the stability of Afghanistan. However, Pakistan buoyed by the retreat of the Soviet Union from Afghanistan, continued to patronize its favorite, Hekmatyar of Hizb-e-Islami, whose forces relentlessly pounded Kabul and contributed to the slide of Afghanistan to fratricidal war. Hekmatyar “once described in the Sunday Times as the ‘Afghan Pol Pot’” (Gall, 2012) was responsible for the killing of more Afghans than they died during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

### **Pakistan and the Taliban**

The assumption of power by the *Taliban* in Afghanistan in 1997 represented apparently fruition of Pakistan’s political and strategic objectives it had been striving for since April 1992.i.e. a favorable Pashtun-led regime in Kabul. That was why, Pakistan was the first country which had granted diplomatic recognition to them a day after they captured Mazar-e-Sharif on May 24, 1997. The *Taliban* government managed to restore law and order in Afghanistan and enjoyed control over ninety percent of the territory and though dominated by Pashtuns, its broad-based character was flimsy. The leaders of Northern Alliance, an anti-Taliban group which had valiantly resisted the Soviet military presence in Afghanistan, had no representation in the government. The more important fact was the narrow international space of the *Taliban* government. Apart from Pakistan, only two other countries, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, had granted diplomatic recognition to it. Iran, an important neighbor of Afghanistan, had not recognized the *Taliban* regime and even supported, along with India and Russia, the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance led by Ahmad Shah Masood.

## Strategic Depth

The strategic interest of Pakistan in having a pro-regime was “the quest for strategic depth, in light of the power asymmetry with its arch-rival, India” (Roy, 2001). Policy makers in Islamabad believe that the given vast imbalance in traditional military framework between Pakistan and India is unbridgeable; besides, its nuclear cushion is vulnerable due to spatial limitations inherent in its geography. Therefore, in order to compensate weaknesses, they want friendly Afghanistan to secure strategic depth where they could retrieve country’s nuclear arsenal and later on use it for reverse offensive.

During the Afghan *jihad*, one of the reasons which had been instrumental in shaping Pakistan policy to support Islamists to the exclusion of nationalists and royalists was that it needed people it could control. “The strategy behind this one was central to Pakistan’s defense to create strategic depth against India through the formation of an Islamic bloc stretching from Pakistan to Central Asia” (Marsden, 1998). Afghanistan, therefore, is a key to successful working of the idea of strategic depth, for it vitally requires that the Afghan government not only close associate of Pakistan but also willing to help Pakistan fight India. “When the Taliban were in power, they were seen as the perfect partner for the Pakistani military. Although widely viewed in the west as medieval if not barbaric, the Taliban regime was valued in Pakistan as fiercely anti –India and therefore deserving Pakistani arms and assistance” (Dalrymple, 2013).

Pakistan continued to support the *Taliban* regime to stay in power by providing material and financial assistance but Islamabad’s pro-*Taliban* policy isolated it at regional and international levels because, as already pointed out, during the zenith of its rule, the *Taliban* government was recognized by only three countries in the world. What was more, Pakistan’s best efforts failed to get the Kabul regime seat at the United Nations. And, finally, even Islamabad’s all-weather friend, China, had not granted recognition to the Afghan government. The situation “delivered a serious blow to the cause of regional cooperation within the framework of ECO, promoted extremism, obscurantism and even sectarian terrorism in Pakistan” (Dawn, March 4, 2006).

## Conclusion

Afghanistan has been in turmoil for the past four decades. The overlapping interests of multiple stakeholders have made the situation so complicated that there appears no imminent political stability in the immediate future. With the shifting of focus from ideological orientation to economic consideration, there is a dire need for peace in Afghanistan because the strategic position of Afghanistan is such that it holds key to peace in the region. There is a perception that durable solution of Afghan crisis is not possible without accepting Pakistan’s vital role to this effect. This is due to the fact that it is so geographically abutted with Afghanistan

that its participation in any exercise aimed at restoring peace in Afghanistan is indispensable.

But Pakistan and Afghanistan relations have never been smooth since their beginning in 1947. The primary reason of their alienated relationships is the legacy of British imperialism which has so plagued their ties that resultant trust deficit is the main hurdle. Graft on the situation is the Indian influence in Afghanistan, and this aspect is critically significant because Islamabad views its ties with Kabul in the context of New Delhi's growing soft image and political influence in Afghanistan. Pakistan resents it and believes that it has negative implications for its security. It is this rivalry which is at the heart of the present crisis in Afghanistan and deeply impacting South Asian region.

At the heart are strategic and psychological issues which have shaped Pakistan's relations with India. The 'sandwich paranoia' of Pakistan explains the strategic side of the problem. Islamabad believes that rise in Indian influence in Afghanistan will be an existential threat to its geographical integrity. And it does not want to engage itself in two-front confrontation. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the first elected leader of Pakistan, soon after assumption of power in the wake of the separation of East Pakistan, issued a secret memorandum to his Chief of Army Staff, directing him "to prepare for two-front future war with India as Afghanistan would attack because there had been fears that it might during the 1971 war" (Wolpert, 1993).

'Fregoli delusion' seems to have overtaken Pakistan's thinking when it comes to its relations with India. The syndrome is the delusional belief that one or more familiar persons, usually persecutors following the patient, repeatedly change their appearance. In case of Pakistan-India relations, Islamabad apprehends that New Delhi will use Kabul's soil against it in future. The root of the syndrome is traced to tragic events accompanied with the partition of the subcontinent and Indian National Congress' attitude towards the creation of Pakistan. India's role in the dismemberment of Pakistan in 1971 has further strengthened the Fregoli perception in Islamabad.

Peace in Afghanistan cannot be delayed due to its long-term impact on South Asia. Given Pakistan's not friendly relations with India and Afghanistan and its substantial legitimate concerns vis-à-vis India in Afghanistan, the more pragmatic approach seems to be that the initiative must come from Kabul. The argument is that the onus of stability, if it rests upon Pakistan, equally devolves upon the Afghan political leadership. It is up to the leadership how far it goes in accommodating Islamabad's legitimate Afghanistan-originated security apprehensions.

Afghanistan overlapping ethnicity has been a source of traction for its neighbors to exert for influence in the country. At the regional level, there is a need for a regional conference of Afghanistan's neighbors, influential states of the region and principal international stake holders. It is necessary for peace in Afghanistan that its neighbors pledge not to interfere in its internal affairs and will

allow the Afghans to settle their affairs by themselves. Likewise, the Afghan leadership must ensure that its soil will not be allowed to be used against any other country. The most important point is that the principal players must not ignore Pakistan's concerns about India's role in the region and its serious nuisance potential against Pakistan's security. India is already involved in fueling subversion and instability in Pakistan's tribal areas and Baluchistan.

Peace in Afghanistan requires the regional stakeholders like Russia, China, Iran, India and Pakistan to play a positive and constructive role to make Afghanistan a peaceful country. No state can be expected to compromise its national interests but it is utmost important to avoid any policies that create strategic imbalances in the region which has two nuclear-capable neighbors. Such policies may fuel an arms race between them with an escalatory effect on their military budgets and arsenals. The risk of a Pakistan-India proxy war in Afghanistan is fraught with perilous implications for South Asian and global peace. Consequently, Afghanistan will remain a trouble spot of South Asia.

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