

Pakistan's Afghan Policy in the Post 9/11 Era: Challenges and Options

Basharat Ali*
Nazir Hussain**

ABSTRACT

Peculiar past, cultural and geographical experiences remain centre for pursuance of Pakistan's foreign policy towards Afghanistan. Post 9/11 scenario brought all sorts of challenges for it at the world level. Pakistan has also been engaged in balancing out the impact of external and internal dynamics on policy outcomes. Indefinite US presence, Indian preferential treatment in Afghanistan and misperceived Pakistan's role by the Afghan government are major challenges with regards to address the external constraints. Pakistan's foreign policy structures and processes stand challenged due to persisting war like situation in Afghanistan, thus warranting security oriented priorities. Prevailing environment and likely future scenes hint at policy prescriptions which must safeguard the legitimate interests while having an effective management and control of Pak-Afghan border. Pakistan would have to learn to live with the US presence and nexus of hostile agencies in Afghanistan by exploring new vistas for policy pursuance.

* Ph.D Scholar, School of Politics and International Relations, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad.

** Director, School of Politics and International Relations, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad

Introduction

Pakistan and Afghanistan share about 2500 km of border and their relations have seen warmth and coldness, owing to the changing context from time to time. During the Soviet occupation (1979-1989); relations were marked by hostility at the government level but at the same time, Afghan people remained friendly towards Pakistan. During Taliban Era (1996-2001), Afghanistan stood as a friendly state at the state level. This state of relationship took one-eighty degree turn after the fateful incidence of 9/11. Though Pakistan has been a strategic ally of the US in War on Terrorism, it has been witnessing a fluctuation in Pak-Afghan relations. Pakistan's inability to take strenuous action against Taliban, especially the Haqqani Group invited critical attitude of Afghan government. Other irritating issues include interruptions in supply convoys crossing from Pakistan at Torkham and Chaman. Transit trade issue, between Afghanistan and Pakistan has also been in play to test the foreign policy rigors. The subversive activities of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Baloch insurgents in Afghanistan have been other souring points in foreign policy domain towards Kabul. An out of proportionate space given to India by Afghanistan reinforces Pakistan's fear of double encirclement from eastern and western borders. In spite of these major challenges, Pakistan's efforts to accommodate Afghanistan's concerns have been in play to take on foreign policy smoothly.

However, Pakistan's foreign policy managers have been busy in transforming challenges to opportunities for positive attributes towards stable and productive Pak-Afghan relations. Therefore, the US and Indian engagement in Afghanistan coupled with hostile Afghan government, necessitates a pragmatic review of prevailing environment, constructing the evolving scenarios and formulating appropriate policy options.

Theoretical Framework

Debate to develop foreign policy analysis theories swing between general and specific theory i.e. moving from generalization to specific or moving from specific to generalization. James Rosenau came up with the middle ground i.e. middle range theory; country specific. "The developing of middle range generation was through aggregating statistical exploration and confirmation. There is also a need to integrate information at each level of analysis, from individual leaders to international systems, in understanding foreign policy."¹ Core of foreign policy analysis revolves around the dynamics of a country's behaviour in its relations with other states. At the same time, before reaching to a specific decision, the policy makers have to be cognizant of the internal as well as external environment. It is essential to have perspective of the other country's domestic arena to afford pragmatic initiations and conclusions of foreign policy decisions. According to Kegley and Rosenau:

To analyze foreign policy decisions the input incorporated from the target country has to be based on specific dynamics, which include unique history, culture and prevailing circumstances which help to construct specific propositions to have data spread over time with peculiar data points to decipher particular patterns. These data points offer a laboratory for scientific inquiry in the sense that its structures, processes and policy outcomes at different moments in time constitute a system that can be analyzed for pattern and fitted to a theory.²

To proffer his 'specific country theory' for foreign policy's analysis, James Rosenau laid down four foundations.³ These mainly guide to synthesize the policy outcomes within the perspective of unique ideographic details of a specific country. Firstly, the foundation rests on "the theory of national

1 Steve Smith, Amelia Hadfield and Tim Dunne, *Foreign Policy, Theories, Actors, Cases* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 16.

2 C.W. Kegley and J.N. Rosenau, *New Direction in the Study of Foreign Policy* (New York: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 61.

3 Charles F. Hermann, Charles W. Kegley and James N. Rosenau, *New Directions in the Study of Foreign Policy* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987).

adoption which limits at reviewing evidence of a policy behaviour on data about the specific politics, economics and the past experiences of the country. This is done through empirical proof of accessing the data to hypothesis through rigorous standards of acceptable evidence."Secondly, it relates to:

values and decision rules at work, when a specific country demonstrates any particular foreign policy decision. Rules for such decisions are embedded in the value and decisional framework through which their reactions are processed. It is a framework that is embedded in the orientations of those who gather intelligence, in the minds of Foreign Service Officers, who interpret it, in the perceptual screens of top officials and in the conventions of committee procedures and interagency rivalries.

Thirdly, the foundation involves "seizing upon traces of change in their behaviour and reconstructing alternative scenarios as to what promoted the occurrence of change." This remains the core of the theory, "the leadership drives its orientations toward the domestic foreign conversions partly from the country's particular historical, cultural and geographic experiences. Here leaders attach relative importance to maintain a balance between internal and external demands."⁴ In the backdrop of these foundations time to time changes in foreign policy behaviours are attributed to Pakistan's peculiar culture, previous interactions with Afghanistan, geostrategic location and other compulsions of internal and external dynamics.

Determinants of Pakistan's Afghan Policy

"External constraints and internal preferences interact sometimes clashing and at sometimes producing virtuous synergies."⁵ Determinants at the domestic level have been primarily centered on instability in FATA by Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and in Balochistan by Baloch insurgents having their safe havens in Afghanistan. Another dominating

4 Hermann, Kegley, and Rosenau, *New Directions in the Study of Foreign Policy*. Also see, James N. Rosenau, *A Scientific Study of Foreign Policy* (Asbury: Nichols Publishing Company, 1980).

5 Smith, Hadfield, and Dunne, *Foreign Policy*, 149.

internal determinant has been intelligence agencies' role in carving the contours of foreign policy towards Afghanistan. Porous border with weak border control mechanism, smuggling of goods and narcotics, guns running and stay of more than 1.5 million Afghan refugees on the Pakistani soil have also been impacting foreign policy.

Major external determinants relate to space enjoyed by India in Afghanistan. Under the garb of consultation, Indian advisors are present at the ministerial level where their main focus is to nurture anti-Pakistan policies. The leverage is further enhanced by the high-up Afghan bureaucracy with anti-Pakistan posture, as most of them are trained from Indian institutions. The nexus of Afghan intelligence agency; National Directorate of Security (NDS) and Indian intelligence agency, Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) execute covert operations against Pakistan's security and stability through TTP and Baloch insurgents who are sheltered under the RAW funded facilities and provision of equipment and weapons. Such machinations by RAW against Pakistan have a pivotal role in stirring an insurgency and instability in FATA and Balochistan. Arresting of a RAW operator Kulbhushan Yadav in 2016 by Pakistan remains an irrefutable evidence of the nefarious activities of RAW inside Pakistan. To protect against a grave nature of security threat from Indian's double encirclement, Pakistan's policy has to respond to this security menace.

Afghan government is rearing TTP and Baloch insurgents to employ as a counter weight to Afghan Taliban. Furthermore, the US attitude and its unclear exit strategy remains a real challenge for Pakistan's policy-makers. Latest external factor configuring in Pak-Afghan policy is emergence of "ISIS Khurasan Chapter" in eastern Afghanistan. Its close proximity to Pak-Afghan border radiates a potential appeal of religious nature to Pakistani groups like TTP, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Sipha-e-Sahaba etc. As per the history, Pakistan's policy has to factor in all internal as well as external dynamics to construct effective policy alternatives.

Historical Perspective

Bitter memories of Pak-Afghan relations persist from early years of diplomatic history. After the creation of Pakistan in 1947, Afghanistan was the only country, which opposed Pakistan's entry into the United Nations. This opposition from Afghanistan was based on an excuse of disputed Durand Line. Pakistan has absolute clarity on the issue and as per the international laws/ conventions takes this Durand Line as an established border.

Diplomatic relations with Afghanistan passed through a less problematic period upto 1973 when Sardar Daud abolished the kingship and became president of Afghanistan. In early years of government, he raised the Pushtunistan issue (to have an independent country for Pushtuns living on Pakistan's north western part) on the behest of anti-Pakistan lobby. But soon after, he realized that the issue of Pushtunistan was whipped to keep Pakistan under pressure and leading to a persistent instability. Sanity prevailed when Pakistan's Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Sardar Daud, developed mutual understanding to resolve the irritants of diplomatic ties between the two countries. The Soviet Union did not like Sardar Daud's independent initiatives to improve ties with his neighbours, especially with Pakistan. Ultimately, he was killed through Saur Revolution in April 1978, and People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) with the Soviet support occupied the presidency; eventually, leading to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979.

This development fetched in new dynamics to Pak-Afghan relationship where Pakistan, for its security, was forced to undertake certain measures. These measures included extending discrete support to the Afghan resistant groups (Jihadis) and coordinating the US and Muslim countries' support against the Soviet invasion. From 1979 to 1989, diplomatic ties between Afghanistan and Pakistan remained at the lowest ebb. After the withdrawal of Soviets in 1989, Jihadi groups agreed to have an interim government in April 1992. Disagreement over the accord resulted in infighting

that lasted till 1996.⁶In this process, Afghan masses suffered from atrocities at the hands of Afghan warlords. In 1994 Taliban emerged at Kandahar and managed to establish themselves at Kabul in 1996. A testing time of diplomatic ties with Taliban started when Pakistan started exerting pressure on Taliban to disown Osama Bin Laden and his Al-Qaeda for being involved in terrorist attacks against the US. In spite of Pakistan's pursuance, Taliban did not agree and as an outcome of the US wrath after 9/11, the US installed an interim government in Afghanistan. Since the establishment of US-led Coalition against Taliban, Pakistan has been struggling to create good neighbourly relations with Afghanistan to develop a peaceful and prosperous region. Policies toward Afghanistan are instrumentalized from the perception of insecurities caused by Durand Line, Indian influence, appearance of Daesh, unstable environment and growing ungoverned spaces in Afghanistan.⁷ Moreover, Pakistan has concerns about India's ever enhancing influence in Afghanistan.⁸

After 9/11, the US entered with full fire power and might without any prior consultation and a joint action plan to annihilate the Al-Qaeda operators inside Afghanistan.

"The US had no serious plans for Afghanistan after the war. Bush administration had little appetite for nation building or peacekeeping."⁹This non-serious approach clearly hints at Americans' unreal perception of Afghan War. They failed to see the end of war in Afghanistan with positive note. During the war once Bush told to the US special representative Zalmay Khalidzad, "Zalmay we are not there to fix their problems. Zalmay you have to take your hands off the bicycle, we had to allow Afghan friends to succeed or fail at

6 Abdul Sattar, *Pakistan's Foreign Policy: 1947-2012* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 197.

7 Concluding address by Tehmina Janjua (Islamabad: Islamabad Policy Research Institute, 2017), 38.

8 Bob Woodward, *Obama's War* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 167.

9 Steve Coll, *Directorate S* (New York: Penguin Press, 2018), 76-77.

their own.”¹⁰ Under these circumstances, Islamabad was trying to reconstruct the Pak-Afghan relations with new options while remaining cognizant of Pakistan’s ability to incorporate national interests and external constraints.

Prevailing Environment in Afghanistan

Afghanistan, even after 17 years of the US presence, is unable to have peace and stability. Because of Taliban incessant attacks and Afghan forces’ inability to stall these attacks, perpetuate war like situation exists. Peace efforts, pushed forward by stakeholders always remain short of any meaningful results. This state exists due to divergent interests of stakeholders and predominately due to the US undeclared exit strategy and its lacking commitment to mature any peace process. The formation of Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) was good initiative by the US, China, Afghanistan and Pakistan to propel the peace process. However, the QCG met many times but without any meaningful output. Main reason for QCG’s non-deliverance remains the non-committal approach of the US and Afghanistan. In the fourth meeting of QCG, all parties pledged to contact Taliban and share progress. In the meeting, China and Pakistan shared their input but the US sharing was just non-committal, which shows that the US owes least commitment towards peace process in Afghanistan.¹¹

In the entire peace process, the US holds a key position and apparently shows no serious attempt to conclude a viable peace settlement. This seems to be one of its chosen strategies in Afghanistan, as current chaos and continuous fighting in Afghanistan provides a *casus belli* to the US for its prolonged stay. The US presence in Afghanistan extends it a pivot to check/contain upcoming influence of China, Russia and extend, if need be, a punitive arm against Iran and

10 ZalmayKhalilzad, *The Envoy* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2016),100.

11 Keynote address by Dr.Hazrat Omer Zakhilwal, *Achieving Peace in Afghanistan: Challenges and Prospects* (Islamabad: Islamabad Policy Research Institute, 2017), 11-13.

Pakistan. To maintain its potent military presence “the US has built robust fortresses mainly at Bagram, Shindand(Herat), Kandahar, Jalalabad, Khowst, Faizabad(Badkshshan), Mazar-e-Sharif and Bamyān.”¹²

India seems well positioned in the decision-making hierarchy of Afghanistan for anti-Pakistan and pro-Indian decisions, while manoeuvring through its consultants present in all key Afghanistan ministries and border security forces. RAW enjoys the support of NDS and CIA to use Afghan soil against Pakistan, through Pakistan's insurgents having shelter in Afghanistan i.e. TTP and Baloch dissidents. “The US needs to continue to limit Indian involvement in Afghanistan if it is to have any hope of a long term cooperative relationship with Pakistan.”¹³The Northern Alliance of Afghanistan, Tajik and Uzbek combined having around 36 percent ethnic representation enjoys mostly the top government hierarchy. Because of their longstanding disliking for Pakistan and conspicuous sponsorship of CIA and RAW they do not miss any chance to propel anti-Pakistan trajectories i.e. remain busy to hatch anti-Pakistan stance and plans. China, Russia and other neighbourly states of Afghanistan desire stability and peace but feel handicapped for any contribution because of the US dominance in Afghan affairs and a weak Afghanistan. Taliban who are an Afghan entity to be reckoned with, retain potential not just in survivability but also the potency for an endless fight. Taliban's gains are being enlarged with every passing day. “Afghanistan has weak military and control 56 percent area, which was previously 64 percent. Taliban control 15 percent of districts.”¹⁴Taliban stance to continue fight is neither diminished nor do they budge from their conditions to participate in peace talks i.e. exit of occupation forces, Taliban's recognition as Islamic Emirate, rewriting of Afghanistan constitution on Islamic lines etc. Afghan

12 *Milbases.com* 12:30 19/5/18

13 Anatol Lieven, *Pakistan: A Hard Country* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), 364.

14 Coll, *Directorate S*, 82.

government is not willing to accept any Taliban demand expect offering them to be part of political process in Afghanistan. Another latest development which makes the Afghan situation more alarming is the presence of Daesh in Afghanistan which is a dangerous addition to existing imbroglio.

External dynamics impact the internal environment of policy making. In spite of having suffered more than 70,000 casualties and \$4 billion in economic field, Pakistan is being propagated as a part of the problem rather than a solution. It remains a centre of criticism for not controlling Taliban as their old ally, whereas Taliban are not under the control of Pakistan. On this issue, Pakistan is exposed to a long time pressure tactics by the US to 'Do More' to exercise an effective control over porous border. Pakistan has embarked upon fencing the most vulnerable parts of the border; so far 70km of border has been fenced in FATA. Knowing the history of US disengagement pattern (after withdrawal of Soviets from Afghanistan in 1989) Pakistan is trying to share the concerns about evolving a joint exit strategy. In this regard, General Kayani gave a 13-page summary to President Obama, in which he advised:

You are not going to win war, and you are not going to transform Afghanistan. The place has devoured empires before you; it will defy you as well. Stop your grandiose plan and let's get practical, sit down, and discuss how you will leave and what is the end state we can both live with.¹⁵

But on the other hand, US strategy with Pakistan was not three cups of the tea but three bangs on the table. Persistence of war like situation in Afghanistan leads to the fact that policy making within Pakistan is predominantly taken over by Pakistan Army and Ministry of Foreign Affairs feels curtailed to inject diplomatic share in policy projections. Lately, the decision of Pakistan government to include FATA into KP province would extend a fulcrum to policymakers to flush out illegal migrants of Afghanistan and deny anti state

15 Vali Nasr, *The Dispensable Nation: American Foreign Policy in Retreat* (Toronto: Random House of Canada Limited, 2013), 88.

activities in FATA with more assertion. This definitely addresses the geographical constraints of the policy makers. Keeping the external as well as internal dynamics in mind, Pakistan needs to come up with viable policy options to deal with Afghanistan. Amidst testing times, these options can serve as guidelines for a better foreign policy outcome.

Challenges for Pakistani Policy-making

The foremost predicament for Islamabad policy makers has been to deal with Kabul along with other counterparts. After the Soviet Revolution and Soviet invasion, the Soviet Union was the bystander in Kabul. Afterwards, under the Rabbani regime, India, Russia and Iran stood side by side till 1996. It was only during the Taliban regime (1996-2001) where Pakistan had to deal with Taliban only. Since 2001, after the US invasion of Afghanistan, India and the US remain there to be dealt along with Kabul. Other challenges for foreign policy makers have been regarding the unclear exit strategy of the US. After the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, the US ejected itself abruptly, even without having installed a broad-based government in Kabul. The ad-hoc and afterwards a controversial government of Rabbani resulted in perpetual infighting among Afghan factions without having possibility of peace. Taliban regime held a strict control around 90 percent of Afghanistan while remaining rigid and restricted to outward diplomatic projections and resultantly their state recognition was extended by the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan only. After 9/11, the US invaded Afghanistan without working details of cooperation, particularly military, with Pakistan.

Till this day, Pakistan was declared a strategic partner of the US. All major stakeholders in Afghanistan have their respective stakes, mostly divergent to one another. This diversion has been a major stumbling block to develop conversions of orientation to develop a synergy, which could end the four decades long war like situation in Afghanistan.

Some internal dynamics have also been impacting foreign policy decisions. The major one has been a weak structural

and institutional arrangement with weak action plans. Another predicament to achieve the policy decision impact was the fragile implementation arc where diplomats felt curtailed due to war in Afghanistan and the non-provision of compatible resources. The former puts restraints on the manoeuvrability and free movement/interaction with the Afghan community, while the latter puts inhibitions to undertake on matching developmental and social initiative as compared to their competitors i.e. Iran, India etc. Last but not the least, Pakistan's geographic compulsions always affect policy implementation measures; mainly the reason being the porous border and overlapping Pushtun ethnicity along the border. This state of affairs lent negligible border management against illegal trade and crossings of militants. Such realities present an uphill task to come up with befitting policy options. At this critical juncture of Pak-Afghan diplomatic relations, one has to construct pragmatic policy solutions, while basing their assessment on the prevailing environment.

Conclusion

Given the historical experiences, prevailing security environment and the interest of regional/global stakeholders, Pakistan policy makers have to balance out the impact of external dynamics on foreign policy choices. A weak and unstable Afghanistan allows safe havens for TTP and Baloch dissidents; while remaining diplomatically vibrant, Pakistan has to put in an effective border management and control. Seeing Pakistan's previous Afghan policy and continuous infighting, the policy makers are required to develop consensus to exercise diplomatic and military means to actualize foreign policy outcomes with due synergy. Pakistan's exterior diplomatic manoeuvre must centre on regionalizing the Afghan peace process while finding common grounds to stand together with Russia and China. Pakistan's Afghan policy must have an inbuilt ingredient of countering a persistent fear of insecurity jetting out of the indefinite presence of the US military in their strong fortress and nexus of CIA, RAW and NDS. Pakistan's foreign policy

prescriptions have to be realistic in nature and responsive to the developments and unflinching commitment in implementation arc. The peace and stability in Afghanistan is of paramount importance not only for Pakistan, but also it is in the larger interest of the entire region. Therefore, there is a sincere and serious need to consider new policy options in consultations with all the stakeholders of Afghanistan.