

The Interplay of Dynamics Influencing Pakistan Afghanistan Relations (by Khalid Aziz) - 25.04.16

Introduction

Since the US engagement in Afghanistan after 9/11 many attempts have been made to get both Afghanistan and its neighbor Pakistan working in unison; however, this has remained at best a pious hope rather than an accomplished fact. This article makes an attempt to examine the important dynamics around a few important issues that are crucial for developing an understanding why such an engagement has not transpired favourably so far?

James Clapper, the Director of US national Intelligence, in his testimony to Congress predicted that there would be severe challenges to Afghan national cohesion during 2016. He wondered whether the Afghan state will be able to withstand the threat facing her. Ahmed Zia Massoud a senior advisor to President Ashraf Ghani of Afghanistan recently said that, peace with Taliban sponsored under the QCG composed of Afghanistan, Pakistan, US and China was unlikely. He was also critical of Pakistan's role in Afghanistan.

Disguised within the comments of Ahmed Zia Massoud is an attempt to scape-goat Pakistan for a predicted failure of the QCG talks because the structure of the Afghan state as it stands today its revision after the US intervention in December 2001, has brought into play powerful ethnic forces that are not interested in reconciliation with the Taliban, as it will mean power-sharing, a formulation in which the new Afghan power elite composed of Tajiks and Hazara, are least interested. Secondly, Pakistan too has a strategic objective; it has been supportive since the days of the Afghan Jihad (1978-89), of the Afghan Pashtun ethnicity in order to neutralize any future threat based on claims for the creation of 'Pukhtunistan' or to permit India to cause problems via Afghanistan on Pakistan's Western borders.

There are already accusations of linkages between the TTP and foreign intelligence agencies, who want to use them against Pakistan. The constant castigation of the Haqqani network and advice to Pakistan to de-link itself from that proxy group, is a reflection of a security threat felt by Pakistan.¹ It is very unfortunate that such is the case but apparently the multiplicity of issues and complex motives of many interested players in Afghanistan, does not indicate that the struggle in this unfortunate region is ending yet.

Policies and state narratives in Pakistan and Afghanistan are a product of their peculiar geography. The implication of geographic centralism has been recognized since long. However, its consequences were best defined by Arnold Toynbee, the historian. He classified nations into two categories; those that lay across highways and became passages either for trade or as routes for invading armies, who came to capture the rich resources of a region. The second category of nations were those, that were enclosed and had no possibility of linkages and became blind-alleys and thus stagnated.

¹ Kabul attack of April 19th that killed 64 persons planned by Haqqani network accuses Afghanistan, <http://bit.ly/1NlpRmP>

Both Afghanistan and Pakistan partake the characteristics of a regional 'round-about' that permit trade and also act as a path-ways for invasion of the Indian heart-land from the East and Central Asia as well as the Middle-East. Before the advent of steam-power and the prominence of oceanic travel that developed in the 17th and 18th century, this region was the center of 'Great Power' rivalry. After the artificial closure of this region by Cold-War from 1950 - 1992 both Afghanistan and Pakistan were locked into an era of low growth, violence, wars and poverty.

Since Pakistan and Afghanistan face the same regional challenges and also have similarity of culture, common ethnicities and close religious links (based on the Deobandi interpretation of Islam), they will gain more by cooperation than acrimony. It is these factors that led President Karzai to say that both Pakistan and Afghanistan, are con-joint twins.² Nature has placed them as neighbors, where they share a 2430 kilometers long border.

Uniting Factors

Therefore, let us first examine some of the factors that allow for the creation of 'fraternity' amongst the people of both the countries, and that compels them to assist each other in times of distress. In 1920, a call was made by the Muslims of India led by the Jamiat –Ulema e Hind, for the restoration of the Caliphate, that had been ended by the European powers at the conclusion of World War I, when new nations were formed in the Middle-East by truncating the former Ottoman Empire.

India was declared Darul Harb (land of war) by the Muslim clergy of undivided India, it enjoined the Muslims to leave India and go where they could practice their religion in freedom and peace. It led to an exodus of 60,000 Indian Muslims to Afghanistan; 40,000 alone came from Punjab, which at that time included what is today's KP.

Ordinary Afghans welcomed the refugees in their midst. Another reason for this consanguinity is that many Afghan religious scholars and Imams of important mosques received their 'Sanads' from Deoband seminaries and Madrassahs in India, and later Pakistan.

This hospitality was returned by Pakistan, when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in December 1979, when more than 5 million Afghans left their homes and moved to Pakistan as refugees, mimicking the movement of people that occurred during the Khilafat movement in 1920, but on a much bigger scale. Not only were the refugees welcomed, but were allowed free movement within the country, they were also allowed to start businesses and obtain employment. Their children received education and they could use the available medical facilities too.

A Mis-Founded Territorial Claim

The only contentious issue in the path of development of good relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan is the boundary dispute between the two countries on the Durand Line. Afghans have laid claim to areas that constitute KP and Fata and lie within Pakistan. They say that the border between Afghanistan and British India was forced upon Amir Abdur Rahman by imperial Britain and was thus they did not recognize it; it is despite the fact that under international law agreements of a preceding state devolve upon the successor state.

² "We don't want proxy wars in Afghanistan, Karzai says," <http://reut.rs/1Sln0FJ>

The creation of Pakistan and inclusion of territory that Afghanistan claimed to be hers, created suspicions in Pakistan after its creation in 1947. Afghan abstention in the voting for Pakistan's entry into the UN in Sept 1947 was another hostile act.³

During British rule in India, the Afghans continued to build influence amongst the tribes in Fata and Malakand. After 1947, they became more aggressive in their sponsorship by encouraging the separatist Pukhtunistan movement, aimed at creating an independent Pashtun nation out of Pakistani territory. Both India and the Soviet Union supported the Afghan claims. Thus this issue became an important component of the Cold-War rhetoric in which the US supported Pakistan.

In November 1947 the Afghan King Zahir Shah dispatched Sardar Najibullah as a special envoy to Pakistan. One of the three demands made by him to the government of Pakistan was that KP and Fata should be constituted into a separate state. To have made such a demand to another sovereign country showed the impracticality of the idea! This is what makes the demand of the Afghans regarding the Durand agreement so unrealistic.

The attempt of the Afghan state to lay a claim upon KP and Fata is based on the 18th century invasion of India by Ahmad Shah Abdali and occupation of territory. In 1749 the Mughal ruler ceded sovereignty over Sindh province and areas of Northern India, west of River Indus in order to save Delhi from an attack. In 1757, despite the earlier agreement, Delhi was sacked anyway but the Mughal were allowed to retain the throne as long as they acknowledged Ahmad Shah's sovereignty over Punjab, Sindh and Kashmir. Ahmad Shah left for Kabul soon after establishing his son Timur Shah as ruler of the new possessions.

However, as the Mughal empire began to weaken the Sikhs and Marathas became resurgent. By the end of 1761 the Sikhs dominated the Punjab. In 1762 Ahmad Shah attacked the Sikhs in Lahore and massacred them in Amritsar that holy city. The Sikhs rebelled against Ahmad Shah after two years. Ahmed Shah tried to subdue the Sikh but failed. By the time of his death the control over Punjab passed to the Sikhs, who ruled it until 1846, when they were defeated by the British in the First Anglo Sikh war in 1846 and it was annexed by Britain. She had earlier in 1843 annexed Sindh. Britain gained full control over the Sikh Kingdom of Lahore after defeating the Sikhs in the 2nd Sikh war. Latter in 1887 Britain obtained control over parts of Baluchistan.

Even otherwise, the claim of the Afghans based on the conquest of Ahmad Shah in the 18th century is based on dubious ground. If that is a basis for claiming territory then the Macedonians surely can make a rightful claim to most of Central Asia, Afghanistan, and the Indian Sub-Continent, Iran and Iraq, as once they were ruled by Alexander the Great, who was a Macedonian! This is surely an absurd proposition that is neither supported by precedent or international laws.

³ Aziz, Khalid. "Conditions for a successful transition in Afghanistan Post 2014," Pp, 22-23, <http://bit.ly/24cJ0Xk>

Ahmad Shah Durrani's Empire in 1772



In 1893 the Durand Line was demarcated between Amir Abdur Rehman of Afghanistan and British India, represented by Mortimer Durand, who was then the foreign secretary to the government of India. This line cut through lands occupied by the Pashtuns. To improve governance and gain greater control Britain created the province of NWFP, by separating it from the Punjab in 1901, (now KP).

An examination of the various treaties between Afghanistan and British India show that Afghanistan consistently accepted the Durand Line.⁴ However, despite a clear classification of the Durand Line as the international frontier, it has been made controversial by Afghan rulers, perhaps to win support of her Pashtun population, who are its largest ethnic constituent, with 42% of the total population.

The 'Pukhtunistan' Imbrolio

The Afghan support for Pukhtunistan and its denial of the Durand Line as an international border has been the greatest calamity to have befallen on the Afghan-Pakistan relations. As soon as Pakistan came into being it was confronted by a hostile India bent upon its destruction. It was also at this time that Afghanistan began advocating an independent nation for the Pashtuns. This hostile Afghan move was supported by both India and the Soviet Union.

⁴ Caroe, Olaf. "The Pathans," Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1958, Pp 463-466.

An analysis of the Afghan position regarding the Durand Line shows how obsessive policies divorced from reality and based upon myths can cause harm. Evidently, the basis for creating the myth of a Pashtun nation was driven by the Afghan leadership's desire to get resonance from her Pashtun elite on whose support the Afghan ruling class depended. It was the reason that the Pukhtunistan myth was created.

Sardar Daud the Afghan Prime Minister and latter its President after the coup of 1978, began to see the futility of the Durand Line dispute with Pakistan and started to mend bridges with Pakistan under a mediation effort undertaken by the Shah of Iran; Soviet Union's suspicion of Sardar Daud's intention is likely to have led to the PDPA coup and Russian military intervention in Afghanistan in Dec 1979.⁵

After the communist takeover of Afghanistan in 1978 and the subsequent Soviet invasion of December 1979 the Pashtun dynamics of the Afghan state should have been relegated to just a memory. Unfortunately, it is continuously brought into play that leads Pakistan to keep the Afghan Pathan elements happy. It is truly a Zero sum strategy!

The reconfiguration of the Afghan state after the Bonn-1 accord in December 2001 has clearly relegated the Pashtuns to a minority. Since then the Tajiks and the Hazara elite have become the dominant benefiting ethnicities in the reformed Afghan state structure. The Tajiks who constitute 70% of the Afghan military are now the main factor controlling Afghan policy. Thus, in a sense the issue of the Durand-Line although agitated from time to time, by a minority Pashtun elite member like Karzai, has for all practical purposes died a natural death.

The new Afghan elite is less interested in it except to block Pakistan from getting close to the Pashtuns of Afghanistan. Some of the recent leaks by Afghan officials regarding the death of Mullah Umar, the erstwhile leader of the Talibans, and the disclosure of the memorandum of understanding between the ISI and the Afghan NDS in Afghan parliament, were meant to block any movement towards a settlement of the Afghan government with the Talibans. Apparently, there are forces within the Afghan government who do not wish to see reconciliation, which would end the war in Afghanistan.

Furthermore, whenever Pakistan raises the issue of improving border management, the Afghans demur and refer to their interpretation of the Durand-Line, blocking security arrangements on the international boundary. It is a senseless dynamic whose time has long past and does not have any further role to play in Pak-Afghan relations any more.

Given below is a time-line of the highlights of issues that arose between the two nations as a result of the Pukhtunistan issue that was closely linked to the matter of the Durand Line;

⁵ Khan, Riaz Muhammad, "Afghanistan and Pakistan: Conflict, Extremism and Resistance to Modernity," Oxford University Press, 2011, P. 166

Time Line of events related to the Durand line issue

S.No	Date	Comments
1	26.7.49	1. PAF bomb by mistake a village on Afghanistan side of Durand Line. An Afghan Loya Jirga and Afghan Govt announced that they did not recognize the Durand line.
2	1955 - 1957	2. Diplomatic relation between both countries broken; and re-established
3	Feb 1958	3. King Zahir Shah visits Karachi on the invitation of Pakistan (1958) and an improved trade & transit agreement is signed as a result in May 29,1958
4	1959	4. Relations become bad when both king Zahir Shah & Sardar Daud broad cast speeches over radio supporting establishment of Pukhtunistan.
5	23.11.59	5. Pak protest over violation of its airspace by Afghan aircraft.
6	10.1.60	6. Afghan foreign minister Sardar Naim visits Pakistan to improve relations.
7	March, 1960	7. Soviet Premier Khrushchev supports Afghan claims on Pukhtunistan. 8. Pakistan foreign Min Manzur Qadir suggests that a referendum should also take place in Afghanistan whether the Pashtuns wished to join Pakistan or Afghanistan. Sardar Naim, the foreign minister rejects this idea.
8	18.7.60	9. Afghanistan refuses visas to Pakistan working in Afghanistan.
9	4. 8.60	10. Pakistan sends numerous protest notes about mal-treatment of Pakistanis by Afghan authorities.
10	28.9.60 23.9.60	11. Pakistan reports presence of Afg mil units & tanks opposite Bajaur. 12. Afghan call 70,000 reservists. 13. Afghan militias infiltrate into Bajaur
11	(Sept) 1960 (May 1961)	14. Afghan militias start attacks on border areas of Bajaur. 15. Afghan send regular forces. 16. Pakistan air force and army repel Afghan forces.
12	3.4.61	17. Soviet paper 'Pravda' publishes an article hostile to Pakistan. Soviet Union reaffirms support to Afghanistan for Pathan self-determination.
13	4.4.61	18. Premier Sardar Daud arrives in Moscow for talks on Pukhtunistan with Khrushchev
14	6.4.61	19. Pakistan claims bombing raids in Bajaur destroying an ammunition dump owned by Badshah Gul a resident of Bajaur supporting the Afghans.
15	19/20.5.61	20. Afghan mil attacks Miskinai & Sangpura Pakistani posts in Bajaur
16	21.5.61	21. PAF used to retaliate against Afghan attacks on Bajaur. 22. Latter Pakistan ground operations take prisoners and capture propaganda hand bills. 23. Other Afghan agents were arrested from Peshawar & Mardan districts. 24. Pakistan alleges that Soviet Union supplied weapons, and financial assistance for these moves by the Afghan military.

The Indian Factor

Wise men reflect that sometimes imaginary shadows appear to be larger than the object itself. It is here that the hang – over of the myth of Pukhtunistan, induces the Afghans to see the Indians as a favorite nation, while Pakistan next door through which the routes to Afghanistan's prosperity lie and where Afghans migrated during the Soviet invasion, is rubbished. Although clearly, without the presence of the Pakistani safe-haven for the Afghans, they would have been taken over by the Soviets. Yet, despite all the favorable analysis of the situation Pakistan suffers from Afghan negativism and hostility. It is a myopic view of an important neighbor of Afghanistan.

However, there is a problem for Pakistan in such a construction of reality by the Afghans. India is clearly hostile to Pakistan. The Afghans use a riposte when her friendship with India is seen as hostile by Pakistan – the Afghans respond that as a sovereign nation it is their right to decide who their friends are. That may be correct. But then Pakistan as a sovereign nation must take all measures possible to defend its interests. It becomes even more pressing for Pakistan to take preventive action, now that the Indian national security Advisor Ajit Doval, has publicly threatened that India will take hostile action against Pakistan through proxies. Evidence is mounting of Indian manipulation of the TTP and the BLA against Pakistan. If this is so, then Pakistan should not be expected to change its policies.⁶

This brief discussion clearly indicates the following; 1) that Afghan insistence on its interpretation on the issue of Durand Line is redundant as policy; 2) Afghan friendliness with India causes Pakistan to react and Afghanistan is seen in a hostile light; 3) the suspected Indian support for the TTP or BLA forces Pakistan to limit trade and other bilateral economic engagements that could be of help to Afghanistan; 4) corollary of these arguments also impinges negatively upon Pak-US relations, since the US is a strategic partner of India including in nuclear matters, creates mistrust in Pakistan and delays the settlement of the crisis in Afghanistan.

Conclusion

Clearly if the Afghan Pakistan region is to benefit from its natural advantages as a great round-about, that can benefit its people and the region through trade and connectivity, then it is time that regional suspicions are removed as early as possible. Perhaps it will be more productive to have a regional reconciliation that includes Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Iran, China and the US before reconciliation can be brought about between the Taliban and the Afghan government that would be the right place to work upon in the QCG.

⁶ <http://is.gd/swqQpM>, A clip from Indian TV, announcing India's support for the independence of the Baluch.