

Pakistan's role and strategic priorities in Afghanistan since 1980

By Safdar Sial

■ Executive summary

Pakistan's Afghan policy in the 1980s and 1990s largely remained focused on seeking strategic depth in Afghanistan and countering the traditional Afghanistan-India alliance, which had been creating trouble for Pakistan by supporting the Balochi insurgents and promoting the idea of a greater Pashtunistan. This policy gradually developed a progressive and broader outlook during the post-9/11 environment and the subsequent "war on terror" without Pakistan's making any compromise on its legitimate interests in Afghanistan. Currently Pakistan is struggling to build confidence and establish good relations with Afghanistan. Apart from ensuring a peaceful, stable and non-hostile Afghanistan, which is imperative for and directly linked to Pakistan's internal security, such efforts also form part of Pakistan's emerging foreign policy outlook, which largely builds on its economic and energy needs and internal pressures to counter extremist and militant threats. Pakistan's inaction against the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqanis could also be partly explained in terms of its internal security and capacity rather than the strategic depth doctrine. Pakistan wants to support an Afghan-led process of political reconciliation, but there are visible differences among stakeholders regarding talks with the Taliban. Failure to develop and implement a coherent policy and methodology for reconciliation in Afghanistan could have grim consequences for the security and stability of Pakistan, Afghanistan and the wider region.

Background

Bilateral relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have always been more or less uneasy. Afghanistan opposed Pakistan's membership of the United Nations (UN) after the latter's independence mainly due to Afghan claims on the Pashtun territories located on the Pakistani side of the Durand Line (Grare, 2006).¹ Afghanistan had started to promote the idea of annexing Pakistan's Pashtun-dominated areas immediately after the founding of Pakistan and continued troubling Pakistan in this regard through the 1950s and 1960s to the late 1970s. Afghanistan rejected the July 1947 referendum in Pakistan, saying it offered no choice to the Pashtuns of the erstwhile North-West Frontier Province, now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, other than that of becoming part of either India or Pakistan (Grare, 2006).

The Pashtun-dominated Parcham (Flag) party in Afghanistan made a few lackadaisical attempts to promote the idea of a greater Pashtunistan as an independent country that would be constituted by the Pashtun-dominated areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan.² Although the idea never became popular in either country,³ it heightened Pakistan's security concerns about its western border. Nonetheless, Afghanistan continued to challenge Pakistan over the Durand Line "through diplomatic pressure, tribal incursions, and support for secessionist movements" in Pakistan (Tellis, 2011: 3).

According to Naseerullah Khan Babar, who at the time was serving as inspector-general of the Frontier Corps, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's government had started supporting the anti-

1 The Durand Line is a virtual border agreed in 1893 between the British Empire and the Afghan king and is not recognised by Afghanistan.

2 Email interchange between the author and Aqeel Yousufzai, a Peshawar-based journalist and author of three books on militancy in Pakistan and Afghanistan, April 21st 2013.

3 Not only did the majority of Afghan people reject the idea of a greater Pashtunistan, but the Pashtun leadership in Pakistan, particularly Wali Khan, head of his own faction of the National Awami Party, which later became the Awami National Party, also rejected it. Although the most powerful among regional nationalist movements, the Pashtun nationalist movement in Pakistan declined gradually, first in the wake of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and then in the post-9/11 scenario, particularly in the 2002 election, which resulted in the formation of a government of religious political parties in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. As Tahir Amin (1998: 227) puts it, "one of the structural factors for this change was the fair representation of the Pashtuns in the military and roughly even representation in the top civil bureaucracy".

Daud resistance movement in Afghanistan as early as 1973 in the form of providing weapons and clandestine guerrilla training, with a view to countering such moves by Afghanistan (Amin, 2001). Afghanistan's Islamist leaders Burhanuddin Rabbani and Gulbadin Hekmatyar were considered by the Bhutto government as the means to counter the hostile designs of Daud's second regime in the 1970s. Later, during Ziaul Haq's rule in Pakistan, Hekmatyar and Rabbani continued to receive funding, training and equipment from Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Directorate. Both leaders were also on good terms with Pakistan's Jamaat-e-Islami (Amin, 2001).

The Soviet-Afghan war and the Zia regime

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the subsequent Soviet-Afghan war (1979-89) gave Pakistan the opportunity to counter the notion of a greater Pashtunistan and Indian and Soviet influences in Afghanistan, and to attempt to install a friendly government there. Although the war was called a "jihad" against "Soviet infidels", there is a near consensus among political analysts that Pakistan's decision to support the Afghan Islamist resistance groups in the 1970s and 1980s was strategic and not ideological in nature (Rana & Sial, 2013). General Zia's use of religion as a motivating factor was merely a tactical move to obtain recruits and funds for the war and also to justify it. Similarly, the Pashtun ethnic ethos was used to persuade tribesmen in the north-west of Pakistan to fight along with their Pashtun brothers in Afghanistan against Soviet aggression and the occupation of their land.

Immediately after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan⁴ the U.S. started providing secret military aid to the mujahideen (Islamist resistance fighters) fighting against the Soviets, which was later converted into a combined effort by the U.S., Britain, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Pakistan, and China to train, fund and equip the mujahideen. In 1980 the government of Saudi Arabia decided to share the costs of this operation equally with the U.S. (Ostermann, 2003). Pakistan's role was very significant in the provision of guerrilla training, weapons and funds to the mujahideen. Pakistan's premier intelligence agency, the ISI, operated training camps in the country's tribal areas in collaboration with the CIA. The recruitment of fighters was not an issue as the ideological campaign for jihad launched by the Zia regime in partnership with religious political parties served this purpose. A countrywide campaign to raise funds was undertaken and particularly the Deobandi *ulema* (religious scholars) undertook the task of recruiting students from the *madrassas* (Islamic religious schools), schools and colleges. Apart from those of Afghan and Pakistani origin, mujahideen from Arab, African and other countries were trained in a multitude of training camps established in Pakistan and then sent to fight Soviet troops in Afghanistan. A network of welfare

and charity organisations soon emerged from Chitral in Pakistan's erstwhile North-West Frontier Province (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province) to Chaghi in the Balochistan province that served as a financial life line for the Afghan jihad. Mostly established by Arab individuals, these organisations were also active in Quetta, Karachi and Islamabad, although most of them were based in Peshawar (Rana et al., 2010).

In the 1980s Pakistan witnessed a sharp increase in the growth of religious organisations with sectarian and jihadist agendas, mainly because of state patronage of the so-called Afghan jihad.⁵ Pakistani jihad groups such as Harkatul Jihad-e-Islami (HuJI) and Harkatul Mujahideen (HuM) and jihad commanders had established good relations with their Afghan and foreign counterparts in Afghanistan. They shared training camps in Pakistan and fought together in Afghanistan. Peshawar and the tribal areas became a hub of local, Afghan and Arab militants and their base camps.

Gulbadin Hekmatyar's Hizb-e-Islami, Burhanuddin Rabbani's Jamiat-e-Islami, Professor Abdul Rabb Rasool Sayyaf's Ittehad-e-Islami, Maulvi Younus Khalis's Hizb-e-Islami-Khalis, Syed Ahmed Gillani's Mahaz-e-Milli Islami (National Islamic Front of Afghanistan), Sibghatullah Mojaddedi's Jebh-e-Nijat-e-Milli (Afghanistan National Liberation Front) and Muhammad Nabi Muhammad's Harkat-e-Inqilab-e-Islami formed the seven-party "mujahideen coalition" that was funded, trained and equipped by Pakistan, the U.S. and others to fight the Soviets and the communist regime in Afghanistan. Most of these parties were predominantly Pashtun. Only Rabbani's Jamiat-e-Islami had a majority of ethnic Tajik mujahideen. Nonetheless, it had close relations with Pakistan's Jamaat-e-Islami – a key party that was co-opted by Zia and the ISI for the Afghan "jihad".

Not all of the Afghan mujahideen groups received equal treatment from Pakistan in terms of the channelling of funds and weapons to them and training. Pakistan expected that extremist Pashtun groups and those friendly to Pakistan would be able to "transcend ethnic divisions and denounce the traditional Afghan claim on Pashtunistan" (Grare, 2006: 9). Pakistan's former prime minister, Benazir Bhutto, described the strategic purpose of Zia regime's selective treatment of mujahideen groups in the following words:

There were significant elements within it [the Afghan mujahideen] that were more open to cooperation and civility with the West, and there were hard-liners. But the hard-liners were supported by General Zia ... the ISI, looking beyond the end of the war, seemed keen on developing close working relations with these elements within the mujahideen whom they would try to empower

⁴ Soviet forces entered Afghanistan on December 27th 1979 to support the communist regime against resistance fighters.

⁵ Many of these have remained focused on Afghanistan since then; they fought along with the Taliban, first against anti-Taliban groups and then against the U.S. and allied forces.

to rule the new Afghanistan and give Pakistan strategic depth by extending Islamabad's influence northward to counter Kabul's traditional ties with India (Bhutto, 2008: 113-14).

While Pakistan was courting mujahideen groups to seek strategic depth⁶ in Afghanistan, India considered it extremely important that Afghanistan should not fall under Pakistani influence. Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi had told the Soviet president in 1987 that such a scenario would be absolutely unacceptable to India.⁷ Afghan president Najibullah told his Soviet counterpart during his meeting with him in Moscow on August 23rd 1990 that India was pursuing its own interests in connection with Kashmir and was "stubbornly trying to involve Afghanistan in opposing Pakistan without trying very eagerly to give specific support to settling the Afghan problem" (Ostermann, 2003: 191). This epitomises the proxy war that was being fought in Afghanistan during the 1980s. Apparently, all the stakeholders were busy securing their respective strategic interests there instead of focusing on the security and stability of the country.

Some analysts have argued that neither the U.S. nor Pakistan worked on the political aspects of the war, and particularly how to deal with the post-war situation, including the transfer of power to a representative body of all groups and sections of Afghan society. Others also assert that Zia's policy of selective treatment kept the Afghan mujahideen divided, which also became one of the key factors leading to the post-1989 civil war in Afghanistan (Amin, 2001).

After the Geneva Accords on Afghanistan,⁸ Afghan mujahideen groups continued their fight against the Najibullah regime with support from Pakistan and its militant groups. Afghan president Najibullah had warned in his address to the UN General Assembly on June 7th 1988 that Pakistan's continuous violations of the accord could cause a delay in the agreed timetable for Soviet troop withdrawal (Ostermann, 2003). Under the agreement, however, the Soviets completed their withdrawal and left Afghanistan by February 1989.

The rise of battle-hardened militant groups and the militarisation and radicalisation of the Pakistani-Afghan border areas were among the critical consequences of the Soviet-Afghan war for both Pakistan and Afghanistan, and also major irritants in bilateral relations between the two countries for years to come.

1990s: the Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif regimes

During the 1990s Afghanistan witnessed the fall of the Najibullah regime, a subsequent civil war and then the rise of the Afghan Taliban to power, during which the country became a hub for an assortment of militant groups, including al-Qaeda, Central Asian militants, and Pakistani sectarian and jihadist groups. During this period four democratically elected governments, two each of the Pakistan People's Party and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, alternately ruled Pakistan, but none completed its due term. Pakistan's Afghan policy remained more or less the same as during the Soviet-Afghan war, although now with limited resources and leverage on political stakeholders in Afghanistan. As in the 1980s, Pakistan's security establishment, mainly the ISI, largely led Pakistan's Afghan policy during these years. Encouraged by the success of the jihadist experiment against the Soviets, it thought to strengthen and expand the experiment, particularly against India (Haqqani, 2004).

After the Soviet withdrawal the communist regime of Najibullah attempted to put an end to mujahideen resistance, but the discontinuity in political, economic and military support from the Soviet Union after its dissolution in December 1991 and Pakistan's continued support of the mujahideen made the regime too vulnerable to confront the threat (Grau, 2004). Eventually, the mujahideen entered Kabul on April 27th 1992 and executed Najibullah.

Pakistan supported Sibghatullah Mojaddedi to become the first president of the Islamic state of Afghanistan in 1992 after Najibullah's demise. Three years earlier the Afghan mujahideen groups selected him as president of the Afghan interim government with the agreement of Rawalpindi, Pakistan's military headquarters. Challenged by Burhanuddin Rabbani's newly established leadership council, Mojaddedi resigned within about two months of assuming the presidency, which resulted in a worse civil war among various groups of Afghan mujahideen, mainly those led by Burhanuddin Rabbani, Gulbadin Hekmatyar, Ahmed Shah Masood and Rasheed Dostum.

The Taliban emerged as a direct consequence of this civil war. Under the leadership of a seminary teacher, Mullah Omer, the Taliban drew up a minimum agenda: to restore peace, disarm the population, enforce sharia law, and defend Islam in Afghanistan (Sial, 2009). The foreign militants, including those from Pakistan, saw a ray of hope and started concentrating in Kandahar, where the Taliban movement originated. Osama bin Laden also moved his headquarters there. The mujahideen of Jalaluddin Haqqani and the two main Pakistani militant groups, HuM and

⁶ The strategic depth doctrine was designed to use Afghanistan as a buffer to counter Indian and (previously) Soviet encirclement of Pakistan.

⁷ Excerpt from the record of a conversation between M. S. Gorbachev and the then-general secretary of the Central Committee of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, Najibullah, July 20th 1987, as cited in Ostermann (2003).

⁸ The Soviets had indicated in mid-1987 that they would withdraw from Afghanistan. Pakistan and Afghanistan signed a bilateral agreement in Geneva on April 14th 1988 with the U.S. and the Soviet Union as guarantors in which they agreed to normalise their relations, strengthen international peace and security in the region, and observe the principles of non-interference and non-intervention in each other's internal and external affairs.

HuJI,⁹ also converged around Kandahar (Rana & Gunaratna, 2007). Pakistani groups were assigned by Mullah Omer to recruit students (*taliban*) from seminaries in Pakistan and Osama bin Laden donated huge funds for this purpose, while Haqqani took on the responsibility of training the new recruits from Pakistan on a short-term basis (Rana & Gunaratna, 2007). Pakistan's ISI played a key role in these arrangements to support the Taliban. Eventually, in 1996 the Taliban captured Kabul. The Taliban regime in Afghanistan was another high point for Pakistani jihadist groups, who at the time enjoyed the complete support of the Taliban and expanded their camps to train not only Pakistani militants, but also Taliban recruits against the Northern Alliance.¹⁰ The rise of the Afghan Taliban had a cascading effect in Pakistan's tribal areas, where many Taliban groups emerged later to pursue a similar agenda. The Arab, Central Asian and Pakistani militants who had fought the anti-Soviet jihad became more active and entrenched in Pakistani-Afghan border areas during this period.

Besides military and financial support, Pakistan also provided political support to the Taliban regime in collaboration with Saudi Arabia. During Benazir Bhutto's second government in 1993 Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam leader Maulana Fazlur Rahman "made several trips as chairman of the National Assembly's Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States to seek financial and military help for the Taliban" (Stephen, 2003: 93). The role of the then-interior minister, Naserullah Babar, was also very significant in this way. Benazir Bhutto claimed in her book, *Reconciliation: Islam, Democracy and the West*, that her government encouraged the Taliban to work with the international community (Bhutto, 2008: 115):

the Taliban entered into negotiations with the U.N. special envoy to Afghanistan to create a broad-based government [including the Northern Alliance], the treaty was to be signed by the Taliban on November 6, 1996 [about one month after they captured Kabul], however, with the overthrow of the PPP government in Pakistan on November 4, the Taliban took advantage of political turmoil in Pakistan [and] the treaty was not signed.

Pakistan Muslim League governments led by Nawaz Sharif (1990-93 and 1997-99) did not make any difference as far as Pakistan's Afghan policy was concerned. According to some counts Nawaz liked, admired, and wanted to emulate the Afghan Taliban and even tried to pass legislation during his second term that would grant authoritarian powers to the Pakistani chief executive similar to those held by Mullah Omer in Afghanistan (Bhutto, 2008). However, the

efforts of Pakistan's military and political leadership to further the cause of strategic depth in Afghanistan through supporting the Taliban not only led to a continual "destabilising" proxy war in Afghanistan, but further militarised and radicalised the Pakistani-Afghan border areas. It also politically isolated Pakistan because no other country in the region was happy with either the Taliban or Pakistan's support for it. Pakistan was one of the three nations that had recognised the Taliban government, the other two being Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (Rashid, 1999).

India, Iran and Russia supported the Northern Alliance against the Taliban, fearing that the Arab, Central Asian and Pakistani militant groups sheltered in Afghanistan could create security challenges for them. India was concerned about the Kashmir-focused Pakistani militant groups' nexus with the Taliban and the Arab and Central Asian militant groups. Vehement Saudi support for the Taliban and its involvement in sectarian-related killings in Mazar-e-Sharif heightened Iranian concerns.

The fears of regional and other countries were further strengthened after the Taliban gradually came under the influence of the global jihadist network al-Qaeda, which, according to Ahmad Rashid (2008: 16), "had a strong desire to keep the Taliban isolated from the world, but too dependent on its financial and logistic support base as a means of tactic and strategy". He further notes that between 1996 and 2001 al-Qaeda trained an estimated 30,000 militants from around the world in Afghanistan (Rashid, 2008).

Post-9/11 The Musharraf era

Al-Qaeda's September 11th 2001 terror strikes in the U.S. revealed the intensity of the danger the Taliban regime in Afghanistan posed by its sheltering of al-Qaeda and other terrorists. Pakistan once again became the frontline ally of the U.S. in the ensuing war in Afghanistan, but this time against the Taliban regime that it had groomed and supported. By joining the U.S.-led war on terror, President Pervez Musharraf tried to avoid Pakistan's isolation from the world and its being bracketed with the militants, counter India's possible rise in the Afghan theatre, and secure political legitimacy and financial assistance for his regime. Musharraf reaffirmed his resolve time and again to "break Pakistan-based terrorist groups and to pull the country away from the brink of a theocratic state" (Ayooob, 2002: 51) in order to give a message to the world that Pakistan had revised its policy towards Afghanistan and jihadist groups (Haqqani, 2004). But as the events and

⁹ HuJI was previously associated with Harkatul Inqilab-e-Islami and fought alongside Ahmed Shah Masood against the Taliban for six months after the latter's emergence. It joined the Taliban along with Harkatul Inqilab-e-Islami after Mullah Omer enforced Islam in captured areas. When HuM and HuJI came together in one camp, Osama bin Laden and Pakistan's ISI convinced them to merge, as both were engaged in recruiting Taliban fighters from Pakistan and their different identities were creating problems among Deobandi seminaries. After 11 years the organisations reunited on the platform of Harkatul Ansar (Rana & Gunaratna, 2007).

¹⁰ Pakistani militant groups that later fought alongside the Afghan Taliban after the U.S. attack on Afghanistan in 2001 included HuM, HuJI, Jaish-e-Mohammad, Jamiat al-Furqan, Jamiatul Mujahideen, Al-Badar Mujahideen and Lashkar-e-Taiba (Rana & Gunaratna, 2007).

developments in the following years revealed, this was not an easy path. Nor did Pakistan have the required will, capacity, and public support to counter the threat of militancy and terrorism. Nonetheless, the divergent strategic interests and widespread mistrust among key stakeholders in Afghanistan despite their mutual co-ordination and collaboration in the war on terror offered little prospects for a coherent and constructive counterinsurgency policy in Afghanistan and the Pakistani-Afghan border areas.

While Musharraf was under tremendous international pressure to launch an extensive campaign against the Afghan and other militants hiding in Pakistan, Pakistan's internal sociocultural and politico-ideological dynamics offered severe impediments to Pakistan's outright reversal of its previously pursued jihad policy and "create[d] a backlash from the well-armed Deobandi extremist groups at home" (Rashid, 1999: 413-14). The absence of the required political consensus to do so; the existence of pervasive support for the Afghan Taliban and anti-U.S. sentiments among religious, political and public discourses; and fear of losing and turning hostile the militant groups regarded as "strategic assets" by Pakistan were other impediments. Even then the Musharraf government delivered significant successes as a coalition partner in the war on terror in terms of arrests and killings of al-Qaeda militants, the provision of logistical and intelligence support to allied forces fighting against the Taliban in Afghanistan, and co-operation in CIA-led drone strikes in Pakistan's tribal areas targeting militants creating trouble in Afghanistan.

In Pakistan's fight against the local Taliban and other militants, thousands of its people and security forces personnel lost their lives. Nevertheless, Pakistan did not take action against the Afghan Taliban present in Pakistan, including those in the Quetta Shura and members of the Haqqani network. Musharraf's military operations against the Pakistani Taliban were also selective and were mostly directed against the groups involved in terrorist activities inside Pakistan. While some observers regard this selective action against Afghan and Pakistani militants as linked to capacity and internal sociocultural and political constraints, others see it as a strategic choice. Pakistan was deeply concerned that any action making the Afghan Taliban hostile could increase the militant threat within the country, besides undermining its future strategic position in Afghanistan.

During the Musharraf regime the key political priorities of Pakistan's Afghan policy included achieving peace and security in the Pakistani-Afghan border areas; ensuring fair representation of Pashtuns in the Afghan government; securing Pakistan's legitimate interests vis-à-vis India's growing political, military and financial ambitions in Afghanistan; and ensuring that Afghan land was not used

to fuel insurgency in Balochistan and Pakistan's tribal areas.

Many believe that the power-sharing approach introduced by the first Bonn Conference on Afghanistan in 2001¹¹ was flawed because it was not inclusive of all sections of Afghan society and thus supported the promotion of warlords and faction leaders in the political arena and marginalised Pashtuns, which eventually undermined prospects for political reconciliation and encouraged the resurgence of the Taliban movement (Sial & Basit, 2011). As in the 1980s and 1990s, regional stakeholders also did not prioritise the Afghan agenda and tried to secure their own interests in Afghanistan by pursuing proxy wars there. This is evident from the fact that three major groups had emerged at Bonn: the Iran-backed Cyprus group, the Pakistan-backed Peshawar group, and the Hamid Karzai group backed by the international community (Sial & Basit, 2011). Pakistan wanted the inclusion of some moderate Taliban leaders in the new Afghan setup, but the Northern Alliance, Russia, India and Iran were against this option (Grare, 2006). Although the Musharraf government was disturbed by the possible rise of the Northern Alliance, it had fewer options in the post-9/11 situation to assert its likes or dislikes (Abbas, 2010). Pashtuns felt marginalised by their representation in the transitional administration formed in June 2002. However, in the 2005 elections in Afghanistan Pashtuns won 113 out of 243 seats, replacing many of the important Northern Alliance leaders in parliament (Grare, 2006). The Musharraf government did not interfere in Afghanistan's 2004 presidential elections (Kronstad, 2008) and 2005 parliamentary elections.

As mentioned earlier, one of the fundamental factors behind the Musharraf government's decision to join the war-on-terror coalition was fear of a potential U.S.-India alliance in Afghanistan that could further cement the traditional Northern Alliance-India alliance against Pakistan. Secondly, India could have placed Pakistan under immense pressure with support from the international community over the issue of militancy in Kashmir by Pakistan-based groups (Zeihan, 2010). The Musharraf regime remained worried over Indian policy and activities in Afghanistan. While India's key concern was that the Taliban should not hold power again in Afghanistan and give shelter to anti-India militant groups supported by Pakistan, Pakistan thought "India's economic and political linkages were building up Indian capacity to destabilize Pakistan through supporting Baloch insurgents" (Verma & Schaffer, 2010: 1).

Nonetheless, President Musharraf was continuously accused by his Afghan counterpart of providing safe havens to the Taliban and other militants involved in insurgency in Afghanistan. However, some analysts suggested that such allegations did not really mean that Pakistan was primarily responsible for insurgency and instability in Afghanistan,

11 The conference drew up a roadmap for the political transformation of Afghanistan into a democratic state.

since they also served President Karzai's political purposes by placing the blame for his own failures on his neighbours (Grare, 2006). Nonetheless, there is no denying the fact that Musharraf's policy towards militants and his counterterrorism campaign neither countered the militant threats facing Pakistan nor significantly contributed to Afghanistan's counterinsurgency drive.

The cross-border infiltration of militants into Afghanistan from their so-called "safe sanctuaries" in Pakistan's tribal areas continued during the Musharraf era. These militants belonged to the Afghan Taliban, particularly Haqqani militants, Arab and Central Asian groups, Pakistani Taliban and some of the Pakistani jihadist groups. Meanwhile, Taliban from Pakistan's Quetta district supported the insurgency in southern Afghanistan. Around 2006 Gulbadin Hekmatyar was also active in the Kunar, Nangarhar, Kapisa, Laghman, and Nuristan provinces of Afghanistan and paid regular visits to Peshawar and Bajaur Agency in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) (Grare, 2006).

The Musharraf regime was challenged by local groups of Taliban in the FATA and their associates – splinter groups of Pakistani jihadist groups, al-Qaeda and Central Asian militants – most of whom had fought alongside the Afghan Taliban in Afghanistan against the U.S. and had then turned against Pakistan and its army due to the latter's alliance with the U.S. The other prime motive of the Pakistani Taliban was to enforce Islamic law in Pakistan and establish an Islamic caliphate state. During Musharraf's rule, between 2003 and January 2008 the Pakistani army launched as many as seven small and major military operations in the FATA, mainly against tribes sheltering and supporting al-Qaeda and Taliban fleeing Afghanistan, and Pakistani Taliban militants attacking the Pakistani army and people. Until 2006-07 a division of pro- and anti-Pakistan Taliban had emerged and the focus of military operations was largely on the anti-Pakistan Taliban, particularly the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) – an umbrella organisation comprising about 40 Pakistani Taliban groups in the FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) established in 2007 – and its affiliated groups.¹²

Besides military operations, the Pakistani army and government signed a number of peace agreements with tribes and Pakistani Taliban in South and North Waziristan during Musharraf's rule. Almost every military operation eventually ended with the government or army reaching a truce with the Taliban. The government considered these operations and peace agreements as victories, whereas the Pakistani Taliban "used these agreements strategically to their advantage; these deals had not only consolidated their control in certain areas but also helped them make new recruits, vital for making further advances" (Rana et al., 2010: 198).

The final years of Musharraf's rule witnessed a phenomenal surge in the TTP-led terrorist assault in Pakistan, particularly after the July 2007 military operation against the Red Mosque in Islamabad. Through this assault the TTP and its affiliated tribal and Punjab-based militant groups started making inroads into settled districts of KP, mainly Swat, and Punjab, including Islamabad. Analysts assert that the increasing security threat from Pakistani militants, including the TTP and its affiliated tribal and Punjab-based sectarian militant groups, made it more difficult for the Pakistani security establishment to take action against the Afghan Taliban, which it had already done little to confront so far, fearing a serious backlash. Others argue that Musharraf's selective policy towards the various brands of militants was based on strategic choices in terms of Pakistan's future role in Afghanistan.

The post-Musharraf democratic regime

After coming to power in 2008 the Pakistan People's Party (PPP)-led coalition government provided full support to the army in its counter-militancy campaign in KP and the FATA. The federal government and the Awami National Party government in KP tried to take ownership of the war against terrorism and to create political and public consensus to counter domestic terrorism, a glaring example of which was the Swat military operation in 2009 that was equally supported by political parties, the media and the people. As in the country's internal security activities, the army also had the leading role in the security and defence aspects of Pakistan's foreign policy towards Afghanistan and in the U.S.-led war on terror. With regard to the Afghan Taliban, Pakistan's traditional approach of inertness continued despite repeated requests from the international allies in Afghanistan for Pakistan to act against the Taliban and threats to force it to do so. Meanwhile, Pakistan continued to regard India's political, economic and military activities in Afghanistan with suspicion. Afghanistan's signing of a strategic partnership with India in October 2011 further increased Pakistan's fears that it was being marginalised in Afghanistan.

Several other significant events and developments that happened in this period made Pakistan more concerned about its western borders with Afghanistan, including the U.S. operation that killed Osama bin Laden in Abbotabad in May 2011 and the NATO air strikes on two Pakistani military checkpoints on the Pakistani-Afghan border in November in the same year that caused the death of 26 Pakistani soldiers (Rana & Sial, 2013). Violations of Pakistan's borders and incursions by NATO and Afghan forces,¹³ and cross-border attacks by the Pakistani Taliban sheltered in Afghanistan¹⁴ further compounded the problem.

¹² Pakistani Taliban groups not involved in terrorist activities inside Pakistan were deemed pro-Pakistan or pro-government Taliban, such as the Maulvi Nazir and Gul Bahadur groups. They were exclusively focused on Afghanistan. The anti-Pakistan Taliban were those carrying out attacks inside Pakistan, particularly the TTP, together with their relatively lesser engagement in the fight against the U.S. in Afghanistan. The Afghan Taliban led by Mullah Omer denies any links with the TTP.

Nonetheless, the increasing threat from an assortment of militants frequently attacking Pakistan's security forces, political leaders and civilians significantly contributed to create a realisation among Pakistani policymakers, including the political and military leadership, that a militarised or Talibanised Afghanistan and Pakistani-Afghan border would add to insecurity and violence in Pakistan. A chapter in the Pakistani army's 2013 *Green Book* – a yearly compilation of comments and analyses by the army's serving and retired officials that is considered a reflection of the army's doctrine – described internal security threats as being a more pressing concern than external aggression (*Herald*, 2013). General Kayani, the commander-in-chief of the army, asserted on several occasions that religious extremism, radicalism and militancy pose a grave threat to the country's security. His August 14th 2012 speech was widely debated in the national media as a realistic and factual assessment of the threat posed by militants and religious extremists to the security and stability of Pakistan. On February 1st 2010 Kayani told a press conference for Western correspondents in Islamabad that Pakistan did not want a Talibanised Afghanistan, because it could not wish anything for Afghanistan that it did not wish for itself. He explained that strategic depth did not mean controlling Afghanistan, but for Pakistan it meant only a peaceful, stable and friendly Afghanistan (Subramanian, 2010). Similarly, Pakistan's ambassador to the U.S., Sherry Rehman, said at a meeting in Colorado in July 2012 that Pakistan's old policy of seeking strategic depth in Afghanistan had changed and so had its attitude towards India (*Dawn*, 2012).

Over the years Pakistan – particularly its embassy in Kabul – launched extensive efforts to reach out to non-Pashtun Afghans in an effort to demonstrate that Pakistan's Afghan policy was no longer entirely focused on Pashtuns. Pakistan's ambassador to Afghanistan has made extensive visits to northern Afghanistan and inaugurated several Pakistan-funded development projects there. Pakistan's foreign minister, Hina Rabbani Khar, told journalists on July 24th 2012 following her briefing on Pakistani-Afghan relations to the Parliamentary Committee on National Security that Pakistan favoured no particular ethnic group in Afghanistan and that it wanted to establish relations with all groups equally (Rana & Sial, 2013).

The PPP-led government also committed itself to supporting an Afghan-led and -owned reconciliation process. Particularly since 2009, Pakistan and Afghanistan were moving towards that objective, along with efforts to defuse bilateral tensions evolving joint and regional frameworks to manage border security and counterterrorism, and improve trade and co-operation. But the assassination of

the head of Afghanistan's High Peace Council, Burhanuddin Rabbani, in September 2011 nearly derailed this process (Rana & Sial, 2013).¹⁵ The two countries revived the joint efforts for political reconciliation with the November 2012 visit of the new head of the High Peace Council, Salahuddin Rabbani, son of the slain Burhanuddin Rabbani. Pakistan released about a dozen detained Afghan Taliban members and said it would release more to help political reconciliation in Afghanistan.

Another key political priority of the PPP-led coalition government was to enhance bilateral trade and economic ties with Afghanistan. The two countries signed the Afghan-Pakistani Transit Trade Agreement on October 28th 2010, in terms of which Pakistan would facilitate Afghan exports to India up to the Wagha border, Lahore, in Afghan trucks. On December 11th 2010 Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India agreed to proceed with the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline. These two major projects, along with CASA-1000, a high-voltage DC/AC transmission system between the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan, could lead the partnering countries to a shared sense of security and economic interdependence (Rana & Sial, 2013).

Pakistan's present and emerging position on Afghanistan

At present the Pakistani Foreign Office; its ambassador to Afghanistan, Muhammad Sadiq; and the military establishment are striving hard to build confidence and establish friendly relations with Afghanistan. Apart from ensuring a peaceful, stable and non-hostile Afghanistan, such efforts also form part of Pakistan's emerging foreign policy outlook, which largely builds on the country's economic and energy needs and internal compulsions to counter extremist and militant threats.

Afghanistan's return to civil war is neither desired nor affordable by the countries in the region. Pakistan does not want Afghanistan to drift into civil war and become a hotbed of proxy wars among regional countries. As a first step, as mentioned earlier in this report, Pakistan has been attempting to reach out to northern factions in Afghanistan to promote its image among all ethnic factions as a friend of Afghanistan. However, it could take a long time and numerous efforts on the ground to win the confidence of the Afghan people. This can be explained by the widespread historical mistrust of and grievances they hold against Pakistan, due to its past support for the Taliban regime and also for the alleged sheltering of the militants who carry out attacks inside Afghanistan. Secondly, Pakistan desperately wants a peaceful reconciliation among the various ethnic factions and groups in Afghanistan, including the

13 According to data compiled by the Pak Institute for Peace Studies, between 2007 and 2010 NATO forces and the Afghan National Army violated Pakistan's borders at least 263 times, which included missile and rocket attacks on Pakistani checkpoints by Afghan forces, clashes between security forces, and air and land incursions into Pakistan.

14 These militants are part of the Pakistani Taliban factions that fled to Afghanistan's border provinces, mainly Kunar and Nuristan, during the military offensive in Swat in 2009. In 2011 and 2012 these militants carried out at least 30 cross-border strikes on Pakistan's border with Afghanistan at Chitral, Upper and Lower Dir, and Bajaur and Kurram in the FATA, resulting in the killing of 250 Pakistani security personnel and civilians (Rana & Sial, 2013).

15 Afghanistan claimed that the suicide bomber who killed Rabbani was sent from Pakistan, possibly by the Afghan Taliban based in Pakistan.

Taliban, in order to reduce the risk of violence and militancy there and also to ensure a peaceful transfer of power should any reconciliation process require this.

Pakistan's inaction against the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqanis should be seen largely as an effort not to add to the internal threats it faces from an assortment of militants rather than a plan to seek strategic depth in Afghanistan. Nor does Pakistan want the Taliban to rule Afghanistan. Pakistan is also mindful of the fact that its image among the Afghan people as a pro-Taliban and destabilising factor could push Afghanistan and its people further away from Pakistan and closer to India, which in Pakistani eyes could use Afghanistan to create trouble in Pakistan.

Conclusion

Since the 1980s Pakistan's Afghan policy has largely been constructed and led by the Pakistani army, including when politicians ruled the country in the 1990s and also during the post-Musharraf democratic regime. The army's traditional India-centric security approach dominated Pakistan's Afghan policy in the 1980s and 1990s, but gradually a more progressive outlook emerged in the post-9/11 scenario.

During the 1980s President Ziaul Haq and Pakistan's premier intelligence agency, the ISI, in collaboration with the U.S., Saudi Arabia and others, funded, trained and equipped Afghan mujahideen to fight against Soviet forces. The war gave Pakistan the opportunity to seek strategic depth in Afghanistan and to counter the traditional Afghanistan-India alliance that had been creating trouble for Pakistan by supporting the Balochi insurgents and promoting the idea of a greater Pashtunistan. Afghanistan served as a proxy war zone for a multitude of stakeholders who were not interested in the country's security and stability. Regional stakeholders' selective support of the Afghan mujahideen and ethnic groups pushed Afghanistan towards a civil war. During the 1990s the Pakistan-backed Afghan Taliban succeeded in capturing Kabul. Pakistan's Afghan policy in the 1980s and 1990s paved the way for the rise of a plethora of militant groups that later not only challenged the security and stability of Afghanistan, Pakistan and the wider region, but also had serious implications for Pakistan's relations with its neighbours.

During the changed post-9/11 environment and subsequent war on terror, Pakistan was not in a position to continue its earlier pro-Taliban and pro-jihadist policy. However, it did not compromise on its legitimate interests in Afghanistan that related in particular to countering India's growing ambitions there and ensuring that Afghan land is not used to fuel insurgency in Balochistan and Pakistan's tribal areas. However, increasing internal threats from the Pakistani Taliban and other militant groups and Pakistan's growing concerns about its western borders with Afghanistan have eventually made it impera-

tive for the country's policymakers to prioritise the establishment of a peaceful, stable, demilitarised and neutral – if not friendly – Afghanistan.

There is a growing realisation among Pakistan's strategic policymakers that the growing non-conventional (or non-traditional) security threats from domestic militants and Pakistan's western border are worse and more complex than the conventional threats emanating from its eastern border. An unstable and militant-controlled Afghanistan could add to these threats. A similar perception, however, persists about a pro-India Afghanistan.

This realisation makes the case for Pakistan looking to support the establishment of a politically accommodative Afghan Taliban that is part of mainstream Afghan politics, disengaged from insurgency and isolated from al-Qaeda. This is probably one of the factors that have restrained Pakistan so far from launching a military campaign against the Afghan Taliban, because making this group hostile could add to the threats emanating from domestic militants and Pakistan's western border. It would not serve the purpose of political reconciliation and eventual peace and political stability in Afghanistan. Thus the Afghan Taliban is not being seen as a means to advance Pakistan's strategic agenda, or depth, in Afghanistan in the way it did in the 1990s, but rather as a strategic priority to counter security threats from domestic militants and from the country's western border with Afghanistan. Nonetheless, Pakistan does not want the Afghan Taliban to control Kabul because this could undermine peace and stability in Afghanistan and provide an impetus to Islamist militancy in Pakistan.

Pakistan is also concerned about the mysterious and confused U.S. policy for political reconciliation in Afghanistan because it could have negative implications for Pakistan's security after international forces withdraw from Afghanistan in 2014. Pakistan wants to support an Afghan-led inclusive reconciliation process, but the U.S. does not seem willing to back such a process. Pakistan's underlying objectives in terms of its end game in Afghanistan are to ensure that there is a degree of peace and stability in Afghanistan – which is imperative for Pakistan's own peace and stability – and an inclusive government in Kabul that fairly represents all sections of Afghan society, is not hostile to Pakistan and limits the Indian presence in Afghanistan to only development activities (Yusuf et al., 2011).

Some of the Pakistan's foreign policy experts and analysts argue that the perception that Pakistan continues to use militants as proxies in Afghanistan as part of its strategic depth doctrine and a counterbalance to India is an old narrative and in contradiction to the emerging internal and external security approaches in Pakistan. Nonetheless, others assert that cross-border attacks in Afghanistan by the Afghan Taliban hiding in Pakistan could be "sharply reduced if the Pakistani army closed the bases of such groups inside Pakistan" (Independent Task Force, 2010: 20).

However, Pakistan's inertness in this regard could be better explained in terms of its internal security and capacity perspectives rather than the strategic depth doctrine. Pakistan cannot stretch the capacity of its military beyond certain limits, and it is already engaged in fighting militants in various parts of the FATA and KP. Nor can it manage the cross-border movements of militants alone. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, Pakistan thinks that making the Afghan Taliban hostile will add to the domestic militant threat it faces and make its western border more insecure even if the Afghan Taliban is reconciled and included in the Afghan government or not. The Afghan Taliban is not involved in terrorist activities in Pakistan and does not agree with the legal justification for carrying out attacks in Pakistan of the TTP, i.e. the Pakistani Taliban, which is engaged in terrorist activities in Pakistan. The TTP is also apparently not under the influence of the Haqqanis or Mullah Omer. Pakistan does not want the Afghan Taliban to ally with the TTP and other groups attacking Pakistan, which could be the case if Pakistan launches military operation against it. Furthermore, while the U.S. and Afghanistan struggle for political conciliation with the Afghan Taliban, which might translate into a future political role for the Taliban in Afghanistan, Pakistan does not want to make it hostile.

Nonetheless, the Afghan Taliban is an independent entity with a distinct political ideology and agenda and is not a Pakistani tool. An International Security Assistance Force report in 2012 said that the Taliban itself did not trust Pakistan, "yet there was a widespread acceptance of the status quo in lieu of realistic alternatives" (ISAF, 2012). This also partly explains the changed relationship between Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban, which can be described as a marriage of convenience rather than a strategic alliance. A fact to be noted is that even when it ruled Afghanistan (1996-2001) the Afghan Taliban did not recognise the Durand Line as the international border between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Pakistan has been hosting about three million Afghan refugees since the 1980s. At present the number of such refugees in Pakistan is around 2.7 million, of whom 1.7 million are registered with the authorities. Pakistan considers this a significant contribution towards sharing the burden of Afghanistan and continues to do so despite the fact that refugee camps have served as bases for militant recruitments and criminal activities.

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■ THE AUTHOR

Safdar Sial has been working with the Islamabad-based research and policy advocacy organisation Pak Institute for Peace Studies as a research analyst since March 2007. His work focuses on conflict, insecurity, and violence in Pakistan and Afghanistan; regional political, strategic and security issues; and media and governance. He has published extensively in national and international journals and is a co-author of *Dynamics of Taliban Insurgency in FATA*, and *Radicalization in Pakistan* and editor of *Critical Ideologies: A Debate on Takfeer and Khurooj*.

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