

Obama's Afghanistan Strategy: A Policy of Balancing the Reality with the Practice

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Abstract

President Barack H. Obama promised to stabilize Afghanistan. President Obama in 2009 introduced the AfPak or Afghanistan and Pakistan Policy. Obama's AfPak Policy in outlining America's intentions in Afghanistan was announced over two phases: the Obama March 27, 2009, Afghanistan Strategy and the Obama December 1, 2009, Afghanistan Strategy. The AfPak Policy's recognition that there is no military-only solution to the Afghan quagmire and focus on soft powers and nation-building efforts distinguishes it from Bush's Afghanistan Policy. The Policy will fail if the US fails to consolidate the power of the central government, abandons the intra-Afghan dialogue and if the dialogue it suggests with powers with stakes results in 'sourcing out' Afghanistan again. President Obama should not have made public the July 2011 deadline for a drawdown and eventual withdrawal of the US troops from Afghanistan in his December 1, 2009, tier of AfPak Policy announcement. The US has a 'stabilizing' role and therefore, must work out an alternative approach such as strengthening the existing 'declaration of strategic partnership' with Afghanistan to remain engaged. The Obama administration should have shared Secretary Gates's fear that the Afghans will view the US as an occupying power similar to the Soviet Union. The US needs to convince Afghanistan's neighbors that Afghanistan is a sovereign state and its sovereignty and territorial integrity must be respected by the international community. The Policy's assertion that the US is not an occupier and respects Afghanistan's rights as a sovereign state when it remains engaged in its politics is praiseworthy.

Keywords: The US Interests, Obama Afghanistan Strategy, the US AfPak Policy, Security, Genuine Intra-Afghan Dialogue, Empowerment, Democratic Space, al-Qa'eda, the Taliban

1. Introduction

President Barack H. Obama promised that his administration in pursuit of the US interests would stabilize Afghanistan. President Obama in 2009 introduced two strategies that outlined America's intentions in Afghanistan. President Obama unveiled his first Afghanistan Strategy on March 27, 2009 and his second Afghanistan Strategy on 1 December, 2009. The two strategies dubbed as AfPak Policy or a Policy for Afghanistan and Pakistan are closely related and should be read in interrelationship. This study outlines the US interests and foreign policy objectives under President Bush and President Obama, analyses America's objectives of defeating al-Qa'eda, the intra-Afghan dialogue and dialogue with Afghanistan's neighbors, empowering the central Afghan government to assume greater responsibility in running its own affairs, stability of Pakistan and factors that will doom the policy into failure. The Policy is indeed a departure from Bush's lofty promise of democratizing Afghanistan. The Obama Policy's recognition that there is no military-only solution to the Afghan quagmire and focus on soft powers and nation-building efforts in addition to military activities distinguishes it from Bush's Afghanistan policy. The intra-Afghan dialogue America's AfPak Policy assumes requires the Obama administration to support the Government of President Hamid Karzai.

2. America's Interests

Analysis of the success or failure of the Obama AfPak Policy requires discussing the *raison d'être* of the US military presence and strategic engagement in Afghanistan and the region. Discussion of the motives behind the US strategic engagement in Afghanistan and the region provides a context for the US Afghanistan policies initiated by all the US administrations since the 1950s, including those of President Obama and his predecessor, G. W. Bush. According to the Joint Council on Foreign Relations-Asia Society Independent Task Force Report (ITFR) 2003, America's foreign policy goals in post-Taliban era were helping Afghanistan to: "(1) re-establish a viable self-governing democratic Afghan state; (2) secure the country's borders, maintain domestic peace, and

deprive terrorists of a haven; (3) stand on its feet economically and resume its traditional role as an interregional trade corridor; (4) protect the rights of women and minorities and eschew religious extremism; and (5) control narcotics production”(Independent Task Force Report, June 2003). The Report suggests that the US foreign policy priorities should include reintegrating Afghanistan into world politics and reviving Afghanistan’s sovereignty, territorial integrity and political system. Interestingly, the Obama December 1, 2009, policy announcement pointed out another US foreign policy concern: protection of Pakistan’s nuclear arsenals and ensuring that they do not fall into the hands of “al-Qaida and other extremists” (Obama Speech, 1 December 2009) who would seek and use them. To my best knowledge, it is the first time that Pakistan’s nuclear arsenals attract attention in such a high profile policy speech. For Obama, regaining America’s prestige and credibility lost under George W. Bush has also become an essential foreign policy concern (Rashid 2008, LVI-LVIII & Vaishnav 2004, 246).

However, academics argue that the US Afghanistan policies are closely connected to its interests in the region. They believe that Washington’s Afghanistan policies are driven by its core strategic concerns. The US military presence in Afghanistan is, therefore, justified on the basis of the core US strategic concern that is: establishing the US military and economic hegemony as a necessary condition for maintaining the military and economic balance of power in the region and combating sources of threats stemming from within the Afghan society and the region to the US hegemony (Wiarda 2002, 20-26 and Rashid 2008, XLVI-XLVIII). Academics suggest that Afghanistan’s geostrategic position in the region provides the US with ‘strategic depth’ to keep an eye on regional hegemons (Daley 1989, 499-500) and hence the US is bent on occupying Afghanistan (Rashid 2008, XLIX). US’s occupation of Afghanistan will assist the US to: (1) contain the regional hegemons such as Russia, Iran, China, India and Pakistan, (2) acquire access to the Central Asian (known as the next Middle East) markets and energy resources, and (3) combat terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism (Mackenzie 2001, 97-100 & Ahady 2001, 129). They argue that the US intends to establish permanent military bases in that country. But the US can achieve its objectives if Washington is able to create political elites in Kabul and Islamabad who understand Washington’s core concern (Klass 1988, 922-33) necessary for maintaining a favorable balance of power in the region. While the US often did/does not have difficulty in dealing with the ruling elites in Pakistan (Rashid 2008, 24-31), creation of pro-US political elites in Kabul imposes serious constraints on America’s ability to create a genuine democratic space for the people of all walks of life and ideological orientations in Afghanistan and the region. Creation of democratic space as such is believed to be essential for peace and stability in Afghanistan and the region.

Former US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, argued that democratic state building was part of US interests when it dismantled the Taliban regime in 2001. However, Tim Dunne suggests that promotion of principles and the ideals of democracy, rule of law and human rights, if at all, constitutes the weak link of America’s global concerns, in general and those of the Bush administration in particular (Dun 2001, 186-201). Unfortunately, Washington’s pursuit of strategic interests often, if not always, results into policies which do not conform to its lofty principles of American exceptionalism and promotion of democratic values and tradition (Wiarda 2002, 35-36). The contradiction in the US policy in pursuit of its strategic interests and democratic norms are even more evident in America’s institution building endeavors in post-Taliban Afghanistan and in the US relations with Pakistan or Iran. Indeed, the evidences suggest that the US inability or lack of willingness in providing a genuine democratic space for the Afghans of all walks of life and ideological orientations created more insurgency and security problems; descending Afghanistan and the region into chaos. It also harmed the US and other Western countries’ chances of making Afghanistan a model of democracy and peace for other countries. While electoral corruptions for elections of the president in 2005 and 2009, of the parliament in 2006 and district councils in 2009 are often cited cases of lack of commitment to democracy, violations of human rights and freedoms, lack of support to civil society are democratic values too costly to be respected within the Afghan political landscape in the presence of the US and other Western nations in Afghanistan (Rashid 2008, LII-LIII).

However, the *New York Times* editorial wrote that President “Obama has come back to first principles. Unlike President Bush’s vague talk of representative democracy in Afghanistan, President Obama’s Policy has ‘defined a more specific mission’ that is not to control or occupy Afghanistan or dictate its future, but to disrupt, dismantle and defeat al-Qa’eda” (The *New York Times*, 28 March 2009). Therefore, America under President “Obama is framing the American commitment as a counterterrorism mission aimed at denying safe havens for al-Qa’eda, with three main goals—training Afghan security forces, supporting the weak central government in Kabul and securing the population” (The *New York Times*, 27 March 2009). But, the Obama administration, in addition to defeating al-Qa’eda and stabilizing Afghanistan, should also show more commitment and willingness to provide democratic

space for the Afghans of all walks of life and ideological orientations which is believed to be essential for lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan.

3. President George W. Bush's Afghanistan Policy

President George W. Bush, in his early days in office, continued the official policy of his predecessor towards Afghanistan and its Taliban rulers. However, America's *qualified support* for the Taliban changed after 9/11 (Ahady 2001, 132 & Nojumi 2002, 198-199). By then Afghanistan had become a failed state devoid of effective security and distributive institutions. The army, the police, industry, administration and education were almost non-existent. To create effective, democratic Afghan state that can defeat terrorism and deliver popular security, the ITFR urged the Bush Administration to: (1) strengthen the hand of President Hamid Karzai and intensify support for security, diplomatic, and economic reconstruction in Afghanistan (Task Force Report 2003), (2) enhance its painfully slow pace of development of the Afghan National Army and training of the Afghan police force, (3) ensure that the verbal promises of financial contributions by the US and the international community is put in practice, and (4) initiate a plan to demobilize, demilitarize and reintegrate the regional militias or the remnants of the Afghan anti-Soviet resistance (Task Force Report 2003). Importantly, the US should make sure that Washington's "*assistance priorities are consistent with those established by the Karzai government and that programs are implemented under the aegis of Afghanistan's central government.... The United States should be careful not to undercut him (i.e. Karzai) by setting its own priorities and bypassing Kabul in program implementation*" (Task Force Report 2003).

In line with the Task Force recommendations "President George W. Bush pledged to the Afghan people that the United States would undertake a Marshal Plan-like effort to rebuild the war-torn country..." (Vaishnav 2004, 244). The US actively engaged itself in the process of institution building and democratization. There have been some achievements. Afghanistan promulgated a new constitution in 2003 and laws on political parties and elections in 2004. It held elections for the President in September 2004 and the Parliament in October 2005. It also held its second elections for the President and the Parliament on October 20, 2009. The democratic institutions as such thus far have not empowered the Afghans.

Externally, the ITFR urged that "the United States should undertake a major diplomatic initiative to obtain a high-level international accord or agreement against outside interference in Afghanistan's domestic affairs" (Task Force Report 2003). The US should also "press Iran, Russia and Pakistan to bring their real policy towards Afghanistan fully into line with their stated policy of supporting the Karzai government" and earnestly encourage Kabul's neighbors "to accept Afghanistan's frontiers" (Task Force Report 2003), including the long disputed Durand Line border with Pakistan. The ITFR also made a plausible recommendation on the tribal-belt border dispute between Afghanistan and Pakistan that the US administration may resolve the dispute on the basis of the Durand Line status quo, a settlement obviously not acceptable to the ruling elites in Kabul.

A caveat in the Task Force Report is in order. It failed to recommend to the Bush Administration constructive engagement of the 'dissatisfied core Afghan groups' within and outside the government of President Karzai. Dissatisfied core Afghan groups refer to those groups that (1) have or can galvanize public support cutting across the Afghan ethnic divide or from one ethnic group, (2) feel being deprived of and denied participating in the political process, (3) have the institutional and organizational ability and the will to resist, (4) have the potential and ability to contribute to development and stability in Afghanistan, and (5) participation in the political process will create a 'political balance', essential for democratization and political stability in Afghanistan. Political balance may refer to existence of conditions in which no ideological or ethnic force or political party dominates the political process in such a way that would favor the dominant group. It is interesting to argue that coalition building between groups with identical ideological, ethnic or strategic interests may not result into creation of domination by one group as such a coalition would be extremely difficult to build and if formed will short-live; the reason being, as Afghanistan's experience over the past three decades suggests, severe conflicts of personalities and serious differences amongst the leaderships of the groups will make compromises difficult and coalitions short-live. The Bush administration strongly rejected the possibility of dialogue with dissatisfied Afghan core groups. The March 27 strategy of the Obama AfPak Policy has recognized this fact and called for intra-Afghan dialogue.

The Report equally failed to address the prospects of collaboration between the dissatisfied Afghan core groups excluded from the political process and the powers with vested interests in the politics of Afghanistan. The great power game looms large in Afghanistan. The Bush administration declared Iran as a member of the "axis of evil". It adopted hostile policies towards the Russian Federation. The ITFR also did not make reference to the contentious issue of the withdrawal of US troops at appropriate time. The Bush administration adopted policies

that provided a recipe for what Richard N. Haass described as losing the hard won peace (Task Force Report 2003). The Administration instead defied the ITFR's recommendations. The US often did not act on the advice of the Afghan government and believed that it can have direct control of the Afghan affairs and often acted alone. While economic development and issues of governance in Afghanistan were neglected, much of the fund promised by the international community was provided to the foreign contracting NGOs for Afghanistan, leaving the government with approximately 20-21% of the fund for only operational purposes. Afghanistan, since the 2001 Bonn agreement up until now does not have industrial sector that can contribute to state revenue and employment. The major employer thus has been the drug mafia and narcotic industry. The US policy instead of "eliminating" or "neutralizing" the dissatisfied Afghan core groups provided a recipe for deteriorating security situation. Its policies therefore systematically, directly or indirectly, discredited the democratically elected government of President Karzai amongst the Afghans and the international community. President Obama has the difficult task of correcting the wrongs of the Bush Administration.

Milan Vaishnav calls Bush's post-Taliban rebuilding of Afghanistan as "nation building lite or nation building on the cheap" (Vaishnav 2004, 245). He says "a close examination of the American record in post-9/11 Afghanistan suggests, however, that the US role in post-conflict rebuilding of that country has fallen short of ... expectations. Relying on a "light footprint" approach that placed the onus of the reconstruction burden on Afghans themselves, the Bush administration sought to distinguish its efforts from costly forays into "nation building".... Unfortunately, in practice this light-footprint approach has amounted to nation-building lite or nation-building on the cheap" (Vaishnav 2004, 245).

4. President Barack H. Obama's Afghanistan Policy

President Barak H. Obama administration reviewed the US Afghanistan policy in pursuit of America's interests. However, the Obama Afghanistan Policy is a policy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, the reason being that his administration has come to realize that stability in Afghanistan is inextricably linked to developments in Pakistan. According to policy makers in Washington, the safe havens of extremists and al-Qa'eda in Pakistan must be eliminated if the US successfully concludes its war on terror and reintegrate Afghanistan into the community of states. Hence the Obama Afghanistan Policy is dubbed as the Obama AfPak Policy. The Obama AfPak Policy has two tiers and is composed of two components. President Obama announced his AfPak Policy in two stages. He announced the first tier of his Policy on March 27, 2009 and the second tier of his policy on December 1, 2009. Pundits of the Afghan politics may argue that the Obama December 1 Strategy for Afghanistan supplants his March 27 Strategy for Afghanistan. However, the Obama December 1 Strategy should be viewed as complementing his March 27 Strategy. President Obama in announcing the second tier of his AfPak Policy on December 1, 2009, argued that the US foreign policy goals remained the same. What has changed was that the conditions on the ground required the US to commit some 30000 more troops, bringing the total number of US troops to 100000, to stabilize Afghanistan and successfully conclude the war. The December 1, 2009, tier of the Obama Policy for Afghanistan is suggestive of the fact that the level of US military and civilian commitments entailed in his March 27, 2009, Strategy for Afghanistan was insufficient.

President Obama, on March 27, 2009 reset America's goals in the region and how to achieve them. According to him, America's new goal was "to disrupt, dismantle and defeat al-Qa'eda in Afghanistan and Pakistan and to prevent their return to either country in the future" (Obama Speech March 2009). He argued that the al-Qa'eda challenge was not "simply an American problem. It, instead, is an international security challenge of the highest order. Terrorist attacks in London and Bali were tied to al-Qa'eda and its allies in Pakistan, as were attacks in North Africa and the Middle East, in Islamabad and Kabul. If there is a major attack on an Asian, European, or African city, it, too, is likely to have ties to al-Qa'eda's leadership in Pakistan" (Obama Speech March 2009). The President, therefore, made it clear that his administration expects Kabul, Islamabad and the international community to do more. President Obama also unveiled a series of initiatives that combine military action with diplomacy, economic aid and development expenditure to achieve this goal.

With regard to Afghanistan, President Obama's speech candidly focused on a strategy premised on the following assumptions: (1) The security situation has become "increasingly perilous" since 2001, as the war rages on, and insurgents control parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan. (2) The possibility that the Afghan government could fall to the Taliban and Afghanistan will again be a base for terrorists. (3) President Obama stated that "Afghanistan has been denied the resources that it demands because of the war in Iraq. Now, the US must make a commitment that can accomplish its goals in Afghanistan" (Obama Speech March 2009).

America, therefore, needs a strategy that is stronger, smarter and comprehensive. America must no longer deny resources to Afghanistan to enhance its military, governance, and economic capacity. The Strategy emphasized

that the US needs to train the Afghan security forces, so that they can eventually take the responsibility for the security of their country which will enable the US to bring its troops home, hinting at eventual withdrawal of US troops without fixing a deadline at this stage. The Strategy appeared cautious on fixing a deadline for troop withdrawal as the road ahead to the endgame has been and made even more complex and uncertain. Yet, it is not known why President Obama in his December 1, 2009, announcement of strategy for Afghanistan promised drawdown and eventual withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan by July 2011. According to the March 27 Strategy, the US will send 4000 additional troops not for combat purposes but to train Afghan Security Forces. By 2011 Afghanistan is expected to have 134,000 well trained security personnel and a police force of 82,000. The US would need to make the Afghan elected government a functional democracy that can rid itself of corruption and deliver services to its people and observe the basic human rights of all Afghans—including women and girls.

The US also needs to focus on developing the Afghan economy undercut by booming narcotics trade. Special attention will be given to the agriculture and education sectors. However, the Strategy appears to neglect development of Afghanistan's industrial sector which could hamper progress and development in other sectors of society. The industry, for instance, can be the main employer and source of jobs, snatching away many from resorting to serve as employees of the narcotic cartels and the war industry. It can contribute to creation of middle income group and reduction of poverty. If ignored, which has been the case since 2001, will have far reaching implications for the security of Afghanistan. The Strategy also focused on dialogue and reconciliation. The US while bent on defeating the uncompromising core of the Taliban with force, offers carrot to those who have taken up arms because of coercion, or simply for a price. The process, however, must be spearheaded by the Afghans (local leaders and the government) supported by the US.

The Strategy linked the security of Afghanistan to political developments in Pakistan. According to President Obama, the future of Afghanistan is inextricably linked to the future of Pakistan. The officials within the Obama Administration believed that the most difficult part of their approach was dealing with Pakistan, an often chaotic place with an erratic relationship with the US. President Obama alluded to the view that "since 9/11, al-Qa'eda leadership (Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri) and its extremist allies have moved across the border to the remote areas of the Pakistani frontier using this mountainous terrain as a safe haven to hide, train terrorists, communicate with followers, plot attacks, and send fighters to support the insurgency in Afghanistan. For the American people, this border region has become the most dangerous place in the world" (Obama Speech March 2009).

Therefore, Pakistan will get military assistance to root out the terrorists, strengthen its democratic institutions and \$1.5 billion economic assistance over the next five years to build schools, roads, and hospitals and create opportunity zones in the border region to develop the economy and bring hope to places plagued by violence. While publicly President Obama emphasised the aid and development, privately, the US would tell what military steps it expects Pakistan to take (Pakistan's *Dawn Daily*, 28 March 2009). When and where, the Strategy hints, Pakistan could not do the job; the US may act unilaterally at times without consulting Islamabad. The Strategy, to make Pakistan meet its objectives, suggests a Trilateral Dialogue among the United States, Afghanistan and Pakistan to meet regularly, with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates representing the US. It will serve as the hub for "intelligence sharing and military cooperation along the border, while addressing issues of common concern like trade, energy, and economic development" (Obama Speech March 2009).

The Strategy put benchmarks to ensure that the governments in Afghanistan and Pakistan develop policies and institutions that reflect the intentions and objectives of the Strategy. However, "setting benchmarks for Pakistan could be particularly difficult. For years, the United States has simply paid bills submitted by the Pakistani government for counterterrorism operations, even during truces when its military was not involved in counterterrorism. Pakistan has resisted linking its aid to specific performance criteria and officials acknowledged that developing those criteria could be problematic" (The *New York Times*, 28 March 2009).

Finally, the Strategy contemplates a strong multilateral approach, when and where necessary, which has three dimensions: (1) engaging international institutions, (2) seeking assistance from friendly European and NATO allies, and (3) engaging all the countries particularly Afghanistan's neighbors with stake in Afghanistan. President Obama expects his European and NATO allies to provide both military and non-military assistance so that US can achieve its objectives and Afghanistan stabilizes. The United Nations to be mandated to coordinate international action and assistance, and a "Contact Group for Afghanistan and Pakistan" will function as a consultative forum whose members will include America's NATO allies, Central Asian and the Gulf States, Iran, Russia, India and China (Obama Speech March 2009).

On December 1, 2009, President Obama announced another strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan. The December 1 Obama Strategy did not deemphasize the March 27 Obama Strategy's recommendations, the US policy options and the level of cooperation expected from the Afghan government, Pakistan, Afghanistan's other neighbors and the international community and the US NATO allies. The December 1 Obama Strategy suggests greater and well coordinated cooperation to finish the job quickly. While America's goals in Afghanistan remained unchanged that is "the defeat of al-Qa'eda's terror network", the December 1 Obama Strategy focused on reasons of sending additional 30000 troops to Afghanistan, timeline for drawdown of the US troops from Afghanistan and the need for transfer of responsibility to the Afghan Government.

President Obama announced that the US will send 30000 more troops to Afghanistan to successfully conclude the war. He argued that in the wake of increasing violence and deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan, the US security was once again seriously at stake. Without more troops the US risked failure in its war on terror. The December 1 Strategy outlines a threefold objective of troop increase. The Strategy aims to: (1) deny al-Qa'eda safe haven in Afghanistan, (2) reverse the momentum of the Taliban insurgency and (3) strengthen and develop the capacity of Afghanistan's own security forces to eventually take over the fight. The Strategy predicts that the military can achieve the above objectives in 18 months time and begin to drawdown by July 2011. But troop drawdown can begin only after a comprehensive assessment of the security situation and the state of "readiness" of Afghanistan's military and police forces to provide security to its own people (Obama Speech December 2009).

All the three elements—additional troops, deadline for troops drawdown and transfer of responsibility to the Afghan army and the police—of the December 1 Obama Strategy have attracted criticism. Critics have argued that the Afghan war cannot be won with sending more troops. The Obama administration should have focused more on the non-military components of March 27 Strategy. They have equally opposed announcement of deadline for troop withdrawal, as it will strengthen enemy's resolve to resist the US and NATO forces. The critics have also argued that though the additional troop buildup will include 5000 trainers to prepare the Afghan security forces to take over the responsibility for the security of their country. It is very difficult to believe the widely corrupt military and police force will be ready to assume responsibility and provide security to the Afghans. However, the deadline for withdrawal can be dismissed as a gimmick to sell the policy at home and among Afghanistan's neighbors and powers with vested interests, the reason being that the US will only decide to drawdown its troops after conditions according to the US military and policy makers were right. President Obama's reference to "conditions on the ground" in his December 2009 speech suggests that the US troop drawdown could be slowed or even halted if conditions do not improve.

Yet some academics are not certain what the strategy behind his exit strategy is as he gave little clues. How would he withdraw troops which have increased nearly three times as many as when he took office? One reason for strategy behind his exit strategy could be to pressure the Afghan President Hamid Karzai to reform his corruption-riddled administration. It could backfire, however. What happens if Karzai fails to clean up his government due to lack of cooperation from international community. However it is in the interest of US and Afghanistan that President Obama fulfills his pledge that the US would improve the Afghan security forces, help improve Pakistan's ability to fight terrorists and help the Afghan President Hamid Karzai to eliminate corruption.

According to Helene Cooper and Eric Schmitt, "in the end the plan is markedly different, though perhaps no less difficult, from the goals his predecessor set for the region.... President Bush spoke of lofty goals that included building nations that could stand as models of democracy in the Muslim world. By contrast ... President Obama framed the issue as one that relies on one central tenet: protecting Americans from attacks like the one that occurred on September 11, 2001" (The *New York Times*, 28 March 2009). Senator Russell D. Feingold incorrectly described the Policy as "overly Afghan-centric and not more regional" (The *New York Times*, 27 March 2009) for two reasons. First it is indeed a policy for Afghanistan. Second stability of the region is closely linked to stability in Afghanistan.

5. Factors of Failure of the Obama Afghanistan Policy

The Obama AfPak Policy could be described as a careful middle course that combines avoiding getting bogged down in a bloody and inconclusive war in Afghanistan and fears of walking away from the region. The Policy "keeps the U.S. committed but not too committed" (Claude 2009). Contrary to the March 27 component of the Policy, the December 1 component of the Policy appears to promise fast results and sweeping achievements. The overall Policy "contains benchmarks that give Obama a chance to review the strategy at regular intervals" (Claude 2009). Putting safeguards for implementations and expected outcomes are helpful as they provide inbuilt flexibility and permit greater degree of adaptability. But the December 1 Strategy's promise of sweeping and fast

results can be harmful and can make the Policy mal-adaptive. The December 1 Strategy will turn the Policy into a strait-jacket not a roadmap to develop benchmarks and measure progress along the way and make changes, if necessary” (Claude 2009). According to David S. Claud, however, the Policy’s focus is “constricted and clear-eyed”. Everything else is viewed as secondary to the main goal of defeating “al-Qa’eda hiding along the Afghan-Pakistan border region” (Claude 2009). What distinguishes the Obama AfPak Policy from that of its predecessor’s is its recognition that there is no military-only solution to the Afghan quagmire.

The Policy’s focus on defeating al-Qa’eda, while refocusing of the US Afghanistan policy to the basics, suggests a shift in focus in the Washington’s Afghanistan policy. The Policy reflects a growing understanding within the Obama Administration that a decisive blow to al-Qa’eda does not come from Afghanistan as previously understood as much as it could come out from Pakistan. This made the Obama Afghanistan Policy a policy for Afghanistan and Pakistan and hence dubbed as AfPak policy within the official circles in Washington. The Policy is cognizant of the fact that the security of Afghanistan is closely linked or the main source of insecurity in Afghanistan is stemming from the hide outs closely linked to established institutions in Pakistan. Hence, the Policy suggests that the problems associated with terrorism and violence have their origin in Pakistan, a fact, intentionally or unintentionally, neglected by policy makers in Washington since the collapse of the Taliban. The negative outcome of this US neglect was consistent rejection by the Bush Administration of attempts at creating opportunity for intra-Afghan dialogue, as anyone fighting against the US-led forces was easily categorized as followers of al-Qa’eda. This broadened the scope of resistance and anti-US feelings within the Afghan community, even though those resisting were not al-Qa’eda affiliates. The Obama Policy while bent on fighting the extremist and al-Qa’eda, intends to reverse this tendency by winning the hearts and minds of the Afghans. The Obama Policy has proven wrong the proponents of the view that Taliban and al-Qa’eda were essentially the Afghan phenomena (Rashid 2000, 17-30 & 2008, 9). In addition, the Policy provides an opportunity for Afghans not affiliated to al-Qa’eda resisting the foreign forces to enter into a constructive and meaningful dialogue, discussed later, with the government of President Karzai supported by the US and international community.

The US has offered additional military and economic assistance to Pakistan to undertake a more effective counterinsurgency measures along its border with Afghanistan. But the Policy does not hint at reforming Pakistan’s traditional system of education of the so-called religious schools known as ‘*madrasa*’. It is widely believed that many of the Taliban have been trained in these religious schools throughout Pakistan. In the 1930s, the then Afghan King Nadir Shah, King Zahir Shah’s father, established religious schools that were closely monitored by Afghanistan’s Ministry of Religious Affairs. The state provided and developed its curriculum, appointed its teaching staff and bore all the expenses incurred, resulting in intellectuals relatively in touch with realities of modern life. It is not certain whether the reforms patterned on the Afghan experience would be helpful. However, what is important is attention the Obama Administration needs to pay to ensure that these religious schools in Pakistan teach what Islam requires of its followers to promote its humane and peaceful mission. The Policy needs to focus on mechanisms that could in the long run bring about ideological transformation and pave the way for de-radicalization of politics both in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The much anticipated December 1, 2009, component of Obama’s AfPak Policy has failed to address this issue too.

The Policy puts pressure on Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) to de-link itself from the Taliban (Rashid 2008, 4). Pakistan’s *Dawn Daily* editorial is pessimistic about the concession by Pakistan’s military establishment. Academics have argued that Pakistan’s support for the Taliban was driven by Islamabad’s perception that Afghanistan provided Pakistan with a ‘strategic depth’ and ‘trade route’ to Central Asian markets (Zib 2002, 56-7, Rashid 2000, 26 & 2008, 26 & Nojumi 2002, 130-133). But, if a consensus emerges within the inner circle of policy makings in Islamabad that Afghanistan is a sovereign state and its sovereignty and territorial integrity to be respected by the international community, including Pakistan and Iran, then there will be every reason to believe that Pakistan’s military establishment and the ISI will focus on stabilizing Pakistan and its frontier borders with Afghanistan.

The US may not be able to meet the growing threat of al Qa’eda and militancy if it fails to stabilize Afghanistan. President Obama has unveiled his Policy at a time when the conflict is worsening, the lives of the people are not visibly improving, and the intervention by American-led foreign powers is increasingly resented (The *New York Times*, 27 March 2009). The discussion below focuses on the chances of success of President Obama’s Afghanistan Policy.

5.1. Intra-Afghan Dialogue

The December 1, 2009 Strategy does not include recommendations for intra-Afghan dialogue or talking to Afghanistan’s neighbors as it was basically a strategy announcing troops increase. However, it also did not argue

against one suggested by the March 27 Strategy. The March 27, 2009, Strategy proposes two-level and yet closely linked dialogues as both must be emphasized simultaneously. First, the Strategy suggests an intra-Afghan dialogue. Second, it suggests a dialogue between the US and Afghanistan's neighbors and powers with stakes in its stability or instability. However, the aim of the dialogue with powers with vested interests in Afghanistan must be to deter them from influencing the intra-Afghan dialogue favorable to their interests at the expense of the US interests and stability of Afghanistan. Sourcing out Afghanistan once again, as the US did in the 1950s and again in the 1990s, is a recipe for instability and will doom the Strategy into failure. President Karzai after announcement of December 1, 2009, US Strategy considered the international community as the main obstacle that has so far failed the dialogue his government has initiated with the Taliban. One can safely argue that the US until now, has not succeeded to deter the powers with vested interests from interfering and influencing the intra-Afghan dialogue.

The Strategy categorically points at holding dialogue with the moderate Taliban or indigenous resistance against the US-led Afghanistan military campaign. It is necessary that the dialogue should be between the resistance and the Afghan government, albeit in close consultation with the US. Indeed the basis for the dialogue exists and indeed there exist the dissatisfied Afghan core groups and activists that neither belong to the so-called mainstream Taliban movement nor to al-Qa'eda network. The former US national Security Advisor, Brzezinski has rightfully argued that the Taliban and al-Qa'eda are not the same phenomenon. According to him, the Taliban are the Afghan phenomena who are not involved against the West/US outside Afghanistan. They resist the West's policy in Afghanistan. He believes that the US needs to differentiate between the two and try to accommodate the Taliban as for him the resolution of the Afghan problem should be more through dialogue not military force (*Aljazeera*, October 2008). However, it is also essential to distinguish the network of dissatisfied core Afghan groups from what the Strategy has referred to as the core Taliban that must be defeated by force. Therefore, not all those resisting the West and the US policies in Afghanistan share the ideology of the core Taliban. Establishing distinctions as such is essential as it will help to isolate al-Qa'eda and the core Taliban from those resisting against occupation of Afghanistan.

The dissatisfied Afghan core groups were either intentionally excluded from the political process initiated in Bonn in 2001 or, as the Strategy has correctly diagnosed, were lured into taking up arms due to the deteriorating economic and security conditions. However, the intra-Afghan dialogue must be a process that is genuine and comprehensive. It should engage and pull into the political process all the Afghans particularly the groups with considerable grass root support within the Afghan political fabric, and adopt pragmatism in approach and implementation. It should attempt to reach out to all including the core Taliban, as it will isolate and cut the relations between the Taliban across the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. This can be helpful for the governments in Afghanistan and Pakistan to manage the resistance by engaging them into the political process of the respective countries. This comprehensive and genuine intra-Afghan dialogue will ultimately reduce the chances of violent confrontation among the Afghans and facilitate a democratic dialogue among the diverse ideological and ethnic groups in Afghanistan.

The Obama Administration needs to be cautious, however. The Administration should particularly treat cautiously advocates of piecemeal dialogue from within President Karzai's opponents who fear loss of support among the Afghans to him if he succeeds to gain the hearts and minds of the dissatisfied Afghan core groups. The Bush Administration has been ill advised by its American Afghanistan experts and the Afghans closely associated with the Bush Administration to exclude the dissatisfied Afghan core groups from the political process on the assumption that the US would be able to defeat and root them out. As President Karzai, on March 28, 2009, in welcoming the Obama March 27 Strategy, rightfully argued that these dissatisfied Afghan core groups were mistakenly enlisted as terrorists along al-Qa'eda activists and demanded their delisting from the United Nations' list of terrorism. According to President Karzai, delisting is the first crucial step to forging a genuine intra-Afghan dialogue. It can serve as a real confidence-building mechanism between the US and the resistance.

Therefore, President Karzai's national reconciliation/reintegration endeavors can provide the basis for this genuine intra-Afghan dialogue. The prospects of a genuine reconciliation process would be furthered by removing names of Afghans whom, Karzai believed, should have not been enlisted by the United Nations. It will provide the opportunity for many Afghans to abandon resistance and partake in the political process. It is due to these delicate issues that President Karzai called the Obama March 27 Strategy better than he expected (*Associated Press*, March 2009). President Karzai on 28 January 2010 in London Conference on Afghanistan once again reiterated that his government was committed to reintegrate the resistance groups into the political process. He also promised to set up a national council for peace and reconciliation and convene a peace *jirga*

(assembly) to persuade the resistance to join the political process. The international community has promised to support President Karzai's reintegration initiative and agreed to set up a 'trust fund' to finance his reconciliation campaign.

On February 27, 2009, Al-Jazeera news network reported that British-backed secret talks were underway with Afghanistan's former Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. According to Professor Patricia Degennaro of the Center for Global Affairs of the New York University the talks were a central part of attempts to end conflicts in Afghanistan. Hekmatyar's *Hezb-i-Islami* (Islamic Party) of Afghanistan has been the most effective resistance faction that fought the Soviet-backed Communist regime. He received major share of the US military and financial assistance in the 1980s. He fled and lived in Iran after the Taliban captured Afghanistan's capital Kabul. In 2001, he opposed the US invasion and returned to Afghanistan. According to sources close to him, the Bush administration approached Hekmatyar before dismantling the Taliban regime on the condition that his party agrees to US-led campaign against the Taliban and their al-Qa'eda in Afghanistan. Hekmatyar refused to cooperate and declared war against presence of foreign forces in Afghanistan. The United Nations supported by the US declared him a 'terrorist' and excluded him from the political process initiated in Bonn, 2001. Hekmatyar has a record history of opposing interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan particularly by Russia, Iran and Pakistan. Hekmatyar still commands considerable support both within Karzai's government and within the public through political wing of his registered *Hezb-i-Islami* with Afghanistan's Ministry of Justice. Great Britain's involvement in the deal with Hekmatyar suggests that President Karzai has Washington's support. The names President Karzai may request the UN to remove from its terrorism list could include Hekmatyar. Academics and experts argue that the main factor behind Hekmatyar's deal with the US is Afghanistan's strategic stability and territorial integrity in the wake of the rising regional powers such as Russia, Iran, Pakistan and India.

It appears that the dialogue between the US and President Karzai and Hekmatyar thus far has progressed well. After representatives of Hekmatyar and the Afghan Government meeting in the Maldives in January 2010, President Karzai's Office has confirmed that the Afghan Government had received Hekmatyar's five-member delegation headed by its senior member, Qutbuddin Hilal. This was the first time such a high profile open negotiation took place in Kabul. Hekmatyar's conditions include a scheduled withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan, propagation of a new constitution for the country and holding fresh elections (*BBC*, 22 March 2010). The US should undertake similar peaceful initiatives with different resistance groups and reintegrate them into the political process. However, if the US is serious in reintegrating the Taliban and the resistance into the political process, it needs to do more than supporting the dialogue between the Afghan Government and the resistance. The US must make sure that the powers with vested interests in Afghanistan do not interrupt the negotiation process with the Taliban and the resistance. According to former UN envoy, Kai Edie, the arrests of several Taliban leaders by the Pakistani authority involved in the secret negotiations with the UN hampered channels of communication with the group. (*BBC*, 19 March 2010).

The December 1, 2009, Strategy by announcing the drawdown has removed in any negotiation the perceived obstacle of the issue of a timeline for withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan. President Obama has declared July 20, 2011 as the date for drawdown of US troops from Afghanistan. Despite the assurances by President Obama, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates that the US will not abandon or source out Afghanistan, fixing a deadline for the drawdown and withdrawal is a premature decision. The July 2011 deadline foreshadows the complexity of the situation, the nature of the threat and the enemy and the actors involved. Given Afghanistan's weak security institutions and predatory neighbors bent on interference, one would assume and even expect that the anti-US resistance share this core US concern. The resistance knows it well that Afghanistan is a failed state with the US capable of rescuing its very existence and reintegrating it into international system. It has virtually no functioning institutions of governance, the army and the police. Moreover, the elusive enemy could not be eliminated and still remains active. Little has been achieved in terms of reform and development of the Afghan security forces and the army.

The Obama Policy has recognized this weakness of the Afghan nation well. The absence of a functional central government in Kabul and the inability of the Afghan army and police compelled the US-led coalition since 2001 to virtually depend on US and the NATO to make decisions concerning the security with no input from the Afghans. This is viewed by many Afghans within the government and the resistance as being deprived of having control over their own destiny. The December 1, 2009, component of the Policy aims to accelerate the process of nation building and enabling the Afghan army and police to take over responsibility of the security of their own people. However, can the US have assurance of the loyalties of the Afghans being drafted for serving in the army and the police? Can Washington trust that the inexperienced army it will transfer responsibility to will not

politicize its role in the politics of Afghanistan to protect America's security interests in the region and Afghanistan? However, it is interesting to note that since the 2001 US-led military campaign, neither the US under Bush nor the international community have seriously invested into strengthening the Afghan institutions and training the Afghan army and the police as emphasized by the Obama Strategy. The December 1, 2009, Strategy appears to accelerate development of the capacity of the Afghan army and the police.

The US can become a stabilizer and not an occupier. The US presence is to stabilize the region and ensure that neither Afghanistan nor its neighbors feel threatened by each other. The July 2011 Troop deadline suggests that Washington may once again repeat its historic mistake of abandoning Afghanistan. Warlordism and anarchy will return to the country. Afghanistan will become once again a hub of terrorist network and activities and subject to interference of its predatory neighbors. Aside from May 2005 Declaration of US-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership, there does not exist a bilateral military agreement between the Afghan government and the US that permits the US the right of establishing permanent bases in Afghanistan, as signing one will be met with strong resistance from the Afghans. Afghanistan's security and welfare requires the capacity and power which it does not have. The Afghans and the resistance know these facts well. Hence, it needs to depend on the military and political assistance from the international community particularly the US. But the assistance should not be at the cost of their national identity and Afghanistan's sovereign rights. A relevant question, therefore, is how can the Obama Policy reconcile the conflicting issues of US interests and security in Afghanistan and the region, Afghanistan's security and dependence on foreign forces and empowerment of the Afghans to control the decision-making process over security and welfare programs of their country? In other words, can the US and foreign forces operate in close consultation and permission of the Afghan government? Neither the March 27, 2009, nor December 1, 2009, component of the Obama AfPak Policy has outlined a clear direction for close US-Afghan military cooperation after the withdrawal of US troops. The US, therefore, should have made the July 2011 timeline for troop withdrawal public at an appropriate time. It should have remained confidential for practical reasons, while working out an alternative approach to remain engaged in Afghanistan and the region as strong US presence is in the interests of both Kabul and Washington. The US must clearly define the delicate fault line between the US presence and Afghanistan's control over its destiny. The Afghans specially the ones currently resisting the US and NATO troops must be convinced that the US presence does not overshadow Afghanistan's sovereignty.

5.2. Dialogue with Afghanistan's Neighbors

Closely related to intra-Afghan dialogue is the Obama Strategy's emphasis on a dialogue with Afghanistan's neighbors and the powers with stakes in Afghanistan's stability. The Strategy envisages two types of dialogue: one between the US and Afghanistan's neighbors and the other between Afghanistan and its neighbors with no direct US involvement with the outcomes of the negotiations ultimately depending on the US. The Obama Administration has started the process on dialogue and negotiations. On March 31, 2009, it convened an international conference, attended by 72 countries, on Afghanistan in the Netherlands. Other instances of dialogue include Afghanistan-Pakistan-Turkey meeting on Afghanistan's security in early April 2009 and the Strategy's intention of institutionalizing Afghanistan-US-Pakistan trilateral security arrangement.

Obviously Washington believes that stakes are high in bringing Afghanistan's neighbors into negotiating table. But the dangers and threats that may stem out of the cooperation with these countries may overshadow the benefits. The most unfavorable scenario will include 'sourcing out' Afghanistan to its neighbors. The US must not, as it did in the past, source out Afghanistan when it engages Afghanistan's neighbors over issues of security, development and institution building. Where Afghanistan is today is due to the US policy of strategic withdrawal and abandoning Afghanistan in 1990s. Afghanistan has been sourced out to Pakistan and Saudi Arabia and interference by Iran, Russia and India has been ignored (Rashid 2008, 3-4, 11, 20). The US returned decisively only after Afghanistan has been turned into a failed state. The US should not negotiate with Afghanistan's neighbors dividing the task of nation building in and economic development of Afghanistan. The negotiation should focus on telling these countries that Afghanistan is a sovereign nation and that they bring their real policies towards Afghanistan into line with Afghanistan's natural right. They should be told that interference of any sort in the internal affairs of Afghanistan and exploiting its sectarian and ethnic demography or composition will not be tolerated as such attempts are detrimental to stability in Afghanistan and only serve the interests of these countries with vested interests.

5.3. Empowerment and Nation-Building

According to President Obama, the AfPak Policy will succeed as the US is not in Afghanistan to occupy it or to run it but to assist and strengthen the Afghan government. President Obama, in announcing the December 1,

2009, Strategy, once again reiterated that US has no interest in occupying Afghanistan. According to him, the US had lost focus and the Policy is devised to refocus and finish the job in Afghanistan. The US aims to defeat al-Qa'eda and extremism and eventually empower the Afghans to run their own affairs without foreign control and interference. The US in empowering the Afghans needs to ensure that: first, Afghanistan's neighbors do not interfere in the internal affairs of Afghanistan and are convinced that the central government in Kabul does all diplomatic, social, financial, military and economic transactions. Second, the US itself also needs to operate with full knowledge and consultations of the central government. All the foreign forces including that of the US must be brought under the purview of the Afghan government through an agreement ratified by Afghanistan's parliament provided by Article 90 of its Constitution. In addition the foreign security and the commercial contractors, the donors' technical experts' programme and every activity undertaken by the international community must be brought under the control of the central government. The policies adopted and practiced by the international community since the Bonn Agreement in fact have crippled the legitimacy and capacity of Afghanistan's national institutions. Empowerment will link the Afghans with their government (Task Force Report, April 2009). The international community needs to transfer its all functions to relevant Afghan institutions. The US must stop and avoid direct military operations in the Afghan cities and villages without the knowledge of the Afghan government.

The US needs to help the central government in Kabul to devise a comprehensive action plan for restoration of security, nation building, development and reconstruction of Afghanistan. The Afghans know better their priorities and what best can improve the security and socio-economic conditions of their people. America needs to integrate its security agenda with the action plan. The US, Afghanistan's neighbors and international community's crucial role would include working closely with the central and provincial governments to make sure the Policy's goals are met by providing the necessary means and facilities. Vaishnav argues the US-warlords-Northern Alliance partnership in removing the Taliban entrenched warlords throughout the country. This resulted in the failure of the US nation building efforts (Vaishnav 2004, 245 & 252-254). Therefore, the Obama administration must break America's partnership with the warlords, distance itself from them and make sure that they do not become the main beneficiary of the action plan and security institutions.

Corruption is rampant and is a major hindrance to security and development in Afghanistan. Indeed it has become a contentious issue in US-Karzai relations. The Obama Policy has made it plain and clear to President Karzai that he must deal with the problem of corruption afflicting his administration. However, reduction of corruption requires the long overdue constructive collaboration of the US and the international community with the Government of President Karzai (Rashid 2008, LIV, 171-218, 403). The US and the Afghan government need to work out a formula or institutionalize a ministerial level national coordination agency that allocates and distributes funds or aid that ensures transparency and accountability. The proposed coordinating agency is broader in scope and functions than that of the Independent Directorate for Local Governance in the President's Office. The NGOs as well as all other central and provincial agencies must be placed under the control of this central agency and held accountable to it. The agency should regularly report the progress and efficiency of the programs and policies to the central government and other relevant authorities including the Afghan public and the United Nations. The action plan should be reviewed quarterly, bi-annually and annually on the basis of the progress report and the needs of the people. The Obama Administration is contemplating to create a Russian style post of the prime minister appointed by the President to coordinate the distribution of funds to provinces and developmental projects (*The Guardian*, 22 March 2009). It is a good idea to create the post of prime minister with economic functions only, as Afghanistan is not ready for a parliamentary system of government. The structure and dynamics of the party system in Afghanistan have yet to create conditions of political balance. At present the danger of domination and manipulation of decision making processes and power by one group is real in Afghanistan. Parliamentary system may provide opportunity for the dominant group to rule without being checked or held accountable. President Karzai's intra-Afghan dialogue is expected to open a window of opportunity for all Afghans to participate in the political process which could result in formation of a genuine multi-party system with more than one parties playing crucial role and providing the possibility of alternation of power. Until then the presidential system, despite its shortcomings, serves Afghanistan's interests best.

The action plan must be comprehensive and pay attention to all aspects of life of the Afghans. However, its immediate focus should be security, education, health care system, agricultural and the industrial sectors, and transportations and telecommunications system. Afghanistan needs schools and hospitals. Its universities need libraries and books. Since the Bonn Agreement of 2001, the agricultural sector has been totally ignored. Afghanistan virtually has no irrigation system. One will find farmers unable to get water supply to the crops they cultivate almost throughout the year. The action plan must develop schemes that provide subsidies to the Afghan

farmers, hence, shying away from poppy production. One can safely argue that donors' money has not been invested in development of the Afghan industry that could employ millions of Afghans. President Obama has rightly argued that many of the Afghans have taken up arms against the US and foreign forces for a price. This was avoidable if the industry could employ them instead. Development of Afghan industry will provide jobs while development of the Afghan agricultural sector will divert the Afghan farmers from poppy cultivation and this will serve as a blow to narcotic trade.

Afghanistan needs a better trained army and police to protect its population and borders in the event of withdrawal of foreign forces. The number of regular military and police officers should be in accord with the threat levels and the government can sustain in the long run. It should not raise eyebrows over security issues in the capitals of its neighbors. The US continued presence on terms acceptable to the Afghans and in accord to Afghanistan's sovereign rights can alleviate its neighbors' security concerns. The army, the police and the foreign forces should be put under the control of central government.

The nation building efforts should focus on strengthening a centralized system of government. Assistance to provinces and local districts should be channeled through ministerial level agency of the central government as such practices will develop more confidence in the central government. An approach that perceives Afghanistan administratively fragmented on the basis of ethnicity or tribal affiliation is detrimental. It increases chances of exploitation of the so-called autonomous administrative regions. Analysts argue that decentralization not necessarily will prevent corruption and misuse of power and resources. Indeed what created more opportunities for corrupt practices is marginalization of the central government by the international community's approach in distributing the aid and nation building. The central government could only get its operational budget from its donors. The donors created a parallel or shadow government through contractors and NGOs and the US-British Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), undermining the central government, resulting in loss of confidence in the central government (Vaishnav 2004, 251). In fact conditions such as these provided breeding ground for the widespread corruption in Afghanistan. Instead of decentralizing decision making, Afghanistan needs a coherent and integrated system of accountability that can hold the institutions in the central government, the provinces and the local levels accountable. International community bypassing the central government created more problems rather than solving them (Task Force Report 2009). The idea of parallel governments, one with Afghan character and the other run by international community will not empower the Afghans, as they will feel deprived and isolated. Hence, resistance against the US and the international community will continue unabated.

Attainment of the goals of the Obama Policy of promoting intra-Afghan dialogue requires continuity of a strategic alliance between President Karzai and the Obama Administration. Karzai has become a widely acceptable negotiating partner by the individuals in the resistance interested in dialogue. Ideologically, Karzai is a moderate Afghan nationalist who combines Afghanistan's Islamic heritage, anti-Soviet resistance and pro-West policy orientation (Rashid 2008, 3-23). The Obama Administration should not distance itself from Karzai. The US policy of distancing itself from Karzai at this crucial moment is, therefore, detrimental to stability and the US interests in Afghanistan.

6. Conclusion

After the withdrawal of Soviet troops the US lost interest and left the Afghan crisis unresolved. Afghanistan moved to "the brink of humanitarian disaster of unimaginable dimensions.... The costs of such an approach, both for the Afghans and the wider world, are now all too obvious, and it is unlikely that Washington would wish to repeat its earlier mistake [N]eglect of Afghanistan is no longer an option ... [which], at least, became clear from the dreadful events of September 2001" (Maley 2001, ix). But Washington erred and left the job unfinished for what is known as the ill-conceived war in Iraq. The chances of success of the Obama Policy become many if it succeeds to consolidate the powers of the central government and remove the possibility of cooperation between the indigenous resistance groups and foreign powers (especially regional powers and Afghanistan's neighbours) with vested interests in the politics of Afghanistan. The Policy has correctly suggested an intra-Afghan dialogue but a dialogue that is genuine and not influenced by the powers with vested interests in Afghanistan. Despite the announcement of July 2011 drawdown of the US troops, the US must not abandon and source out Afghanistan. The US must remain engaged and must work out mechanisms so that the Afghans feel empowered to decide over their own destiny and do not feel that their sovereign rights are infringed. Afghans can develop confidence in the US and the latter can count on the Afghan loyalties through its nation building efforts and developing the Afghan agricultural and industrial sectors, which have been neglected as they can provide jobs for millions. If the United States failed to consolidate the power of the central government, break its alliance with warlords and make significant headway on social and economic reconstruction,

Afghanistan will be a permanently failed state with serious implication for global security and the future of democracy in that country and the region.

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