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## Afghanistan In 2014 And Beyond: What Happens Next?

Priya Gahlot, PhD. Senior Research Scholar, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India

Dr Ashwani Jassal, Assistant Professor, University of Delhi, New Delhi, India

### Abstract

*After the September attacks in 2001, international strategic politics wore a new garb on an infected termite structure. Under the guise of War on Terror, securing and upholding the tenets of democracy, governments were threatened, countries targeted and labelled, alliances created, covert and overt attacks carried out, and after more than a decade, the world transformed into a more dangerous place than it was before. Not learning from the past, the US and its allies took the task of taming countries that either followed their dictates or broke off from their traditional Western masters.*

*This paper will assess the impact that would get reflected in the ground level with the change of US strategy in the South Asian region in general and Afghanistan significantly when world analysts predict the decline of US strategic prominence on the world stage forthcoming years. To what extent the two nuclear power neighbouring states India and Pakistan will play a significant role to balance the region as well as stabilising or destabilising Afghanistan.*

### Keywords:

Afghanistan, Terrorism, Foreign Affairs, United States of America, India, Pakistan, Taliban, International Relations

## The Afghanistan Conundrum – The Impact of the Withdrawal

After the September attacks in 2001, international strategic politics wore a new garb on an infected termite structure. Under the guise of War on Terror, securing and upholding the tenets of democracy, governments were threatened, countries targeted and labelled, alliances created, covert and overt attacks carried out, and after more than a decade, the world transformed into a more dangerous place than it was before. Not learning from the past, the US and its allies took the task of taming countries that either followed their dictates or broke off from their traditional Western masters.

This paper will assess the impact that would get reflected in the ground level with the change of US strategy in the South Asian region in general and Afghanistan significantly when world analysts predict the decline of US strategic prominence on the world stage forthcoming years. To what extent the two nuclear power neighbouring states India and Pakistan will play a significant role to balance the region as well as stabilising or destabilising Afghanistan.

These years have seen a significant number of extraterritorial military interventions. In addition to the persistence of traditional forms of Occupation, some of these interventions have given rise to new foreign military presence conditions on a State's territory, sometimes consensual but often imposed.<sup>1</sup> They have raised various legal questions, particularly in these four areas: determining the beginning and end of Occupation; delimiting the rights and duties incumbent upon an occupying power; identifying precisely the legal framework governing the use of force in occupied territory; and assessing the relevance of the concept of Occupation for the United Nations' administration of the domain.<sup>2</sup>

Recent occupations have prompted a great deal of commentary on occupation law's alleged failure to authorise the introduction of wholesale changes in the legal, political, institutional and economic structure of the territory under the user control of a foreign power. It has been claimed that occupational places an undue emphasis on preserving the continuity of the occupied territory's socio-political situation. It has also been claimed that the transformation of an oppressive governmental system or rebuilding society in complete

<sup>1</sup> Occupation may be defined as the effective control of a foreign territory by hostile armed forces. This definition derives from Article 42 of the Hague Regulations of 1907, which states that "Territory is considered occupied when it is actually placed under the authority of the hostile army. The occupation extends only to the territory where such authority has been established and can be exercised." Occupation law applies in all cases of total or partial occupation of foreign territory, whether or not the occupation meets with armed resistance. As a general rule, it provides the legal framework for the temporary exercise of authority by the occupant, striking a balance between the occupier's security needs and the interests of the ousted authority as well as those of the local population. Under occupation law, the sovereign title relating to the occupied territory does not pass to the occupant, who has, therefore, to preserve as far as possible the status quo ante. In other words, the occupying power must respect, as far as possible, the existing laws and institutions of the occupied territory. It is however authorized to make changes where necessary to ensure its own security and to uphold its duties under occupation law, particularly the obligation to restore and maintain public order and safety and the obligation to ensure orderly government in the areas concerned. *Occupation and Other Forms of Administration of Foreign Territory* (2012), Expert Meeting Report, International Committee of the Red Cross, March, Geneva, p. 7, <https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/publications/icrc-002-4094.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> 28th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, "IHL and the Challenges of Contemporary Armed Conflicts," September 2003, Doc. 03/IC/09, Pt. II, pp. 14-15; 30th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, "IHL and the Challenges of Contemporary Armed Conflicts," October 2007, Doc. 30/IC/07/8.4, Pt VII, pp. 29-30.

collapse using Occupation could be in the international community's interests. Further, such undertakings might even be necessary for the maintenance restoration of international peace and security.<sup>3</sup>

Determining precisely when an occupation had ended is deemed to be an arduous task. However, it has been emphasised by many that the legal criteria for establishing the end of Occupation should mirror those used for determining when it began. Therefore, the continued physical presence of foreign forces, their ability to exercise authority over the territory concerned instead of the territorial sovereign, and the continued absence of the territorial sovereign's consent to the foreign forces' presence should cumulatively be assessed evaluating the ending of Occupation. Should any of such circumstances come to an end to exist, the domain ought to be regarded as having terminated.<sup>4</sup>

Most of the countries that have been affected, including Afghanistan and Iraq, lack a strong central government, having strong tribal structures in place, resisting Western norms of governance. They have rebelled, by changing forms, forging alliances, and never losing strength through this period of crisis, regaining strategic geopolitical position and space through these years. In the three operations carried out by the United States, Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, and the two phases of Operation Iraqi Freedom (which ended in 2010) and Operation New Dawn in Iraq. The tally of personnel killed and wounded in action might briefly picture the casualties amongst the Afghanis and Iraqis who fought against such operations.

#### Overall Casualties in OIF, OND, and OEF, 2001-2014

(as of January 10, 2014)<sup>5</sup>

	<b>US Servicemember deaths</b>	<b>US Department of Defense Civilian Deaths</b>	<b>US Servicemembers Wounded in Action</b>
Operation Iraqi Freedom	4,410	13	31,942
Operation New Dawn	66	0	295
Operation Enduring Freedom	2,299	3	19,572

One can easily deduce that when attacks have taken place through tactical missile strikes, drone attacks, as well as with strategic attacks by ground troops, the number of casualties accounted for and unaccounted for will be a shockingly high figure. It has risen to a general mistrust amongst the masses regarding the US and its

<sup>3</sup>Occupation and Other Forms of Administration of Foreign Territory (2012), Expert Meeting Report, International Committee of the Red Cross, March, Geneva, p.7, <https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/publications/icrc-002-4094.pdf>

<sup>4</sup>Occupation and Other Forms of Administration of Foreign Territory (2012), Expert Meeting Report, International Committee of the Red Cross, March, Geneva, p. 11, <https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/publications/icrc-002-4094.pdf>

<sup>5</sup>Hannah Fischer (2014), "A Guide to U.S. Military Casualty Statistics: Operation New Dawn, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Operation Enduring Freedom", Congressional Research Service, 7-5700, February 19, <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RS22452.pdf>

allies' actions, which fastened the withdrawal decision, exacerbated by the rising public opinion against stationing troops in such volatile environments.

Initially, the US government decided to withdraw all ground troops from Afghanistan from December 2014. However, with changing ground realities and new threats to the region that has come in the shape of more radical religious groups strengthening ground, recent decision show 9,800 troops will stay back, which would be withdrawn in two phases by 2016.<sup>6</sup> One by one, most of the allied nations have started pulling out troops from Afghanistan. British troops have already left Afghanistan by the end of October 2014.<sup>7</sup>

The power-sharing National Unity agreement that has been signed in September 2014 brought two rival factions together in forming the present government. The new Afghani President Ashraf Ghani and the Chief Executive Officer, Abdullah Abdullah, Ghani's election rival, and former President Hamid Karzai. Who voluntarily surrendered his office as mandated by the constitution will influence the government's decisions in garnering peace in the country and within the region. Factionalism and ethnic rivalry have already started taking a bitter shape in the government's formation and appointing critical officials in the government. The last and present government has not created an environment of stability in the country, which failed to bring in foreign investments, bringing economic sustenance to the Afghan economy. "The Afghan government has become the world's most sophisticated kleptocracy",<sup>8</sup> and reforming such a structure requires significant political courage and a consensus within all the existing systems of the economy and the government. As stated by an analyst, "Much of the Afghan government has adapted over time to resemble a gigantic vacuum cleaner – inhaling money and resources, moving them through power-brokers in Kabul, who then jettison the money out of the state into overseas banks".<sup>9</sup>

Critical issues that need to be addressed in Afghanistan include electoral reform, dismantling the kleptocracy, enacting business-friendly policies, and improving government competence. Remedial suggestions as provided by analysts recommend the following: Afghanistan ranks 164 of 189 economies for ease of doing business which needs to be significantly bolstered; improving public accountability by the creation of Ombudsman system, where government officials would be held responsible, reducing the already bloated public sector; bring an end to the pay-for-play schemes, providing a severe jolt and reformation to the reigning kleptocracy in all strata of the government; make serious reform measures to reduce electoral fraud

<sup>6</sup> Steve Holland (2014), "Obama plans to end U.S. troop presence in Afghanistan by 2016", Reuters, May 27, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/05/27/us-usa-afghanistan-obama-idUSKBN0E71WQ20140527>

<sup>7</sup> Kay Johnson, (2014), "Britain ends combat role in Afghanistan, last US Marines hand over base", Reuters, October 26, <http://in.reuters.com/article/2014/10/26/afghanistan-troopwithdrawal-idINKBN0IF06F20141026>

<sup>8</sup> Christopher D Kolenda (2014), "Dismantling the World's Top Kleptocracy is a Key Challenge for Afghanistan", *Foreign Policy*, October 20, [http://southasia.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2014/10/20/dismantling\\_the\\_world\\_s\\_top\\_kleptocracy\\_is\\_a\\_key\\_challenge\\_for\\_afghanista](http://southasia.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2014/10/20/dismantling_the_world_s_top_kleptocracy_is_a_key_challenge_for_afghanista)

<sup>9</sup> Christopher D Kolenda (2014), "Dismantling the World's Top Kleptocracy is a Key Challenge for Afghanistan", *Foreign Policy*, October 20, [http://southasia.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2014/10/20/dismantling\\_the\\_world\\_s\\_top\\_kleptocracy\\_is\\_a\\_key\\_challenge\\_for\\_afghanista](http://southasia.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2014/10/20/dismantling_the_world_s_top_kleptocracy_is_a_key_challenge_for_afghanista)

in the forthcoming parliamentary elections in 2015; and the officials in the National Unity Government must initiate critical reform policies than appeasement politics, which would enhance confidence in the general masses, as the government has the potential to balance competing parties and interests; creating an agile synthesis of sensible cooperations that lead to valuable policymaking and execution.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Decision of the US to Pulling out**

Before joining the White House, President Trump believed that the intervention of the United States of America in Afghanistan strategically significant part of South Asia, would not achieve its goals. He felt strongly enough about this assessment that he was willing to align himself with his predecessor Barack Obama's decision to begin a drawdown of US forces from Afghanistan.<sup>11</sup>

Though the US pulling out troops is final, the precise number of soldiers staying behind remains troublesome. There is a divergent view of the US strategic policy within the White House and the Pentagon. However, there is no dearth of consensus regarding the need for sufficient international military presence post-2014 to prevent a Taliban takeover and the collapse of the ANSF. It is not yet clear that except for having counter-terrorism and training roles, the US forces would have any other part in Afghanistan post-2014. The increasing diplomatic presence in Afghanistan also foresees a more prominent US role in Afghanistan's strategic and political stability. The embassy's expansion in Kabul, new consulates in Herat and Mazar-e-Sharif and a new consulate proposed for Herat to ask for more security infrastructure and a more significant diplomatic presence.<sup>12</sup>

It is also understandable that fighting religious extremists or seeking stability in Afghanistan cannot be pursued with positioning troops for military action. The insurgency that has taken deep roots supports religious extremism and vehemently opposes foreign forces' presence and Occupation in Afghani soil.<sup>13</sup> However, each country in the region maintains a different strategic perspective for playing a more prominent role in Afghanistan. The US should encourage governments to create a common ground, facilitate and maintain peace and security in the region by supporting governance with efficacy and providing assistance for building the infrastructure required.

<sup>10</sup>Christopher D Kolenda (2014), "Dismantling the World's Top Kleptocracy is a Key Challenge for Afghanistan", Foreign Policy, October 20, [http://southasia.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2014/10/20/dismantling\\_the\\_world\\_s\\_top\\_kleptocracy\\_is\\_a\\_key\\_challenge\\_for\\_afghanistan](http://southasia.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2014/10/20/dismantling_the_world_s_top_kleptocracy_is_a_key_challenge_for_afghanistan)

<sup>11</sup> IISS (2017), "The Trump Administration's Afghanistan Policy", <https://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-comments/2017/us-afghanistan-policy>

<sup>12</sup>Wilson John (2013), "Future of Afghanistan Post-2014 and Implications for India", Observer Research Foundation (ORF), Issue Brief 57, August, p. 5, [http://orfonline.org/cms/export/orfonline/modules/issuebrief/attachments/ibf\\_1377510555848.pdf](http://orfonline.org/cms/export/orfonline/modules/issuebrief/attachments/ibf_1377510555848.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> "US Policy in Afghanistan" (2009), Watson Institute for International Studies, Brown University, Choices for the 21st Century Education Program, [http://www.choices.edu/resources/documents/afghanistan\\_options\\_09.pdf](http://www.choices.edu/resources/documents/afghanistan_options_09.pdf)



The rate at which Afghani personnel have been withdrawing from the ANSF has been alarming. Out of the current troop level of 352,000, every year, more than 63,000 are either defecting to rebel groups or leaving the ANSF, drastically reducing the force's strength. The ANSF also lacks airpower, fire support and intelligence capabilities, having insufficient access to logistics.<sup>14</sup>

### Role of India and Pakistan

Islamabad has undermined Washington's attempts to negotiate a political settlement with the Taliban, which is seen as critical to securing the ultimate withdrawal of US combat troops; obstructed shipments of military materiel to US and NATO forces by closing its borders to such cargo; Refused to investigate how Osama bin Laden managed to hide in the country for so many years without being detected; pledged to increase purchases of Iranian oil despite international sanctions on Tehran, and allowed Chinese officials to examine the wreckage of a US helicopter that crashed during the raid on the al Qaeda leader's compound in Abbottabad.<sup>15</sup>

The threat is now from the Taliban and Al Qaeda and from ISIS, which has spread its wings in a significant manner in the South Asian region, especially in the Pakistan and Afghanistan regions.

The United States' principal interest in Afghanistan is to prevent the state from becoming a terrorist haven. Operationally, this approach has attempted to avoid state stoppage from transversely structure a lawful Afghan state apparatus, training the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), catalysing development, and dismantling al-Qaeda.<sup>16</sup>

India and Pakistan have extremely incongruent goals for Afghanistan, thus undertaking very different policy approaches there. Delhi has striven to bolster Kabul's government and integrate Afghanistan into a broader regional, economic and political structure. It has not been done out of any sense of altruism. By strengthening Afghanistan, India advances its national security objectives – namely, eliminating a critical haven for terrorists who have attacked India in the past and continue plotting to do further harm in the future, projecting power throughout South Asia (countering the expansionist role of China), and gaining access to Central Asian trade and energy resources. Although Delhi's goals for Afghanistan indeed involve minimising Islamabad's influence in the country, Indian policy towards Afghanistan endeavours primarily to advance India's broader domestic and regional interests independently of its rivalry with Islamabad, Pakistan.

<sup>14</sup>Frederic Grare (2014), "Afghanistan Post-2014: Scenarios and Consequences", Policy Brief, Transatlantic Security Debate Series, February, German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF)&The Foundation for Strategic Research, Paris, [http://www.frstrategie.org/barreCompetences/approchesRegionales/doc/Grare\\_AfghanistanPost2014\\_Feb14.pdf](http://www.frstrategie.org/barreCompetences/approchesRegionales/doc/Grare_AfghanistanPost2014_Feb14.pdf)

<sup>15</sup>Larry Hanauer and Peter Chalk (2012), India's and Pakistan's Strategies in Afghanistan: Implications for the United States and the Region, RAND Corporation, Pittsburgh, [http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional\\_papers/2012/RAND\\_OP387.sum.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional_papers/2012/RAND_OP387.sum.pdf)

<sup>16</sup>Kenneth Katzman, "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy," Congressional Research Service, June 25, 2013, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL30588.pdf>.

In contrast, Pakistan's goals for Afghanistan are essentially India-centric. Islamabad tries to find a weak Kabul government dominated by a pliable, supportive Taliban to maintain "strategic depth" against an Indian invasion, guarantee haven for anti-Indian proxies, undermine Delhi's influence in Afghanistan. To prevent Indian power projection in the broader South/Central Asia region and hinder India's ability to support separatists in the Pakistani province of Balochistan. In Islamabad's Afghanistan calculus, protecting Pakistan against Indian encroachment takes priority over pursuing Pakistan's broader geopolitical and economic goals. Part of this strategic orientation is the pre-eminent decision-making role by the Pakistani military, which emphasises security matters over virtually all other foreign policy elements. As long as India is viewed as an existential threat and the military plays a vital character in setting Pakistani policy, it is unlikely that there will be an elementary shift in the policy bias.

As Grace has stated, "Pakistan is by far the most active regional player in Afghanistan and the one whose policies are likely to have the most destabilising impact. Pakistan's primary objectives have not changed in Afghanistan. It is still pursuing the 1980s-era policy of preventing Afghan refugee involvement in Pakistani politics while promoting a "friendly" and "pliant" government in Kabul to diminish Indian influence there. Support to the successive insurgencies in the country has so far been its favourite instrument"<sup>17</sup>. However, there has been a change of stand, primarily when home-based domestic terrorists and insurgent groups have targeted government and military institutions. They have created a significant faction of the military and the intelligence institutions, forcing them to rethink their strategy and future policymaking regarding the 'proxy war' that they had supported all through against India and Afghanistan.

Officially, Pakistan fears collusion between the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban and wants to prevent the two groups from joining hands against the Pakistani state. For that reason, it wants to preserve friendly relations with the Afghan Taliban and is reluctant to assault their sanctuaries. At the same time, it is actively trying to promote the Taliban's inclusion as a significant player in Afghan politics. A frustrated Taliban in Kabul, playing on ethnic Pashtun sentiments, could join hands with the Pakistani Taliban against Islamabad to create a more limited and ideological version of Pashtunistan. For Islamabad, the pursuit of a low-intensity conflict in Afghanistan guarantees that the Afghan Taliban will not get involved in Pakistani politics. In such a context, the idea that a stable Afghanistan is more important to Pakistan than Afghanistan's other neighbours is objectively debatable.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup>Frederic Grare (2014), "Afghanistan Post-2014: Scenarios and Consequences", Policy Brief, Transatlantic Security Debate Series, February, German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) & The Foundation for Strategic Research, Paris, [http://www.frstrategie.org/barreCompetences/approchesRegionales/doc/Grare\\_AfghanistanPost2014\\_Feb14.pdf](http://www.frstrategie.org/barreCompetences/approchesRegionales/doc/Grare_AfghanistanPost2014_Feb14.pdf)

<sup>18</sup>Frederic Grare (2014), "Afghanistan Post-2014: Scenarios and Consequences", Policy Brief, Transatlantic Security Debate Series, February, German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) & The Foundation for Strategic Research, Paris, [http://www.frstrategie.org/barreCompetences/approchesRegionales/doc/Grare\\_AfghanistanPost2014\\_Feb14.pdf](http://www.frstrategie.org/barreCompetences/approchesRegionales/doc/Grare_AfghanistanPost2014_Feb14.pdf)

There is also a fear amongst the Pakistani policymakers about strategic manipulation by Afghan or Indian intelligence agencies. This fear is likely to be strengthened more if relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan continue to deteriorate. The asymmetry between Afghan and Pakistani conventional forces and the Afghan side's feeling that the war on terrorism is conducted exclusively on Afghan soil and at the sole expense of Afghanistan could be a compelling argument for Kabul to play on Pakistan's vulnerability TTP. Though such a fear is not central in the policymaking mechanism, the possibility that Afghanistan and India may use their proxies against Pakistan is central to Islamabad's perception of the issue.<sup>19</sup>

Though analysts have feared that with the withdrawal of US troops, there might be an interstate conflict between Pakistan and Afghanistan, with the changing dynamics on regional politics and the entry of new non-state actors like the IS (Islamic State), any such conflict seems a distant probability. Instead the presence of a residual US troops might act as a deterrent for an immediate change in governance, but neither will it be able to assure the government's longevity, nor could it restrict the rising Islamic radicalism that has taken over countries like Iraq and Syria.

A functional political system cannot guarantee stability, especially in an ethnic and religiously volatile country like Afghanistan, but a dysfunctional one will precipitate chaos. In that area of confidence-building, even Pakistan cannot promise to be a model country, being embroiled in constant strife between the military and the civilian rule, rising ethnic, tribal and factional politics, the strongholds of the TTP (Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan), the Haqqani faction. Also, many other anti-state and terrorist/insurgent groups and mala fide policies of the government promote or abet terrorism in any form. India instead can take an active role in promoting itself to be a model nation to be imbibed, especially with its multi-lingual, multi-religious, stable democratic structure providing a national cohesion in a federal system, which could provide, a basis for a long term stable political structure for Afghanistan.

Growing Chinese interest in South Asia and its potential role in Afghanistan can be analysed by its investments, energy sources in Iran and Central Asia and its relationship with Pakistan. In recent years, China's involvement in Nepal, Bangladesh, Maldives and Sri Lanka is a clear indication of its growing interest and influence in India's immediate neighbourhood. China's presence in Afghanistan is driven by its concerns regarding strategic balance in the region, given Pakistan's alliance.

As analysts have pointed out, the fallout of the US drawdown will be significant for India. The following implications are the most obvious:

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<sup>19</sup> Frederic Grare (2014), "Afghanistan Post-2014: Scenarios and Consequences", Policy Brief, Transatlantic Security Debate Series, February, German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) & The Foundation for Strategic Research, Paris, [http://www.frstrategie.org/barreCompetences/approchesRegionales/doc/Grare\\_AfghanistanPost2014\\_Feb14.pdf](http://www.frstrategie.org/barreCompetences/approchesRegionales/doc/Grare_AfghanistanPost2014_Feb14.pdf)



- a)Pakistan's expanded role,
- b)Revival of trans-national terrorist activities,
- c)Spread of Salafi ideology and groups,
- d)Restrictions on energy security, and
- e)Drug trafficking.<sup>20</sup>

Terrorist groups inimical to India have seriously challenged the Indian governance mechanism in Jammu and Kashmir and Central, Eastern and North-Eastern India. They have also started using Indian territory to threaten other South Asian neighbours like Nepal and Bangladesh. If the rise of Taliban and other radical Islamic groups occurs with US troops' withdrawal, galvanising such terrorist groups would become an easy task. Pakistan letting go of its waging proxy wars on its neighbours seems to be a distant dream. With the threat of IS and other radical extremist groups uprooting the entire governing and security structure in Central and the Middle East, the West will undoubtedly re-focus its attention, leaving Pakistan to have ample freedom to nurture its anti-Indian policies. It can be easily foreseen that with the withdrawal of US troops in Afghanistan, there will be a significant revival of terrorist activities within India.

As pointed out by analysts, "the Taliban's continuing presence in South-east and eastern parts of Afghanistan and the alliances it has with the Haqqani network and Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan amplify the threat of radicalism in Pakistan, and the region as a whole. The Taliban and its allies can launch attacks in India or on Indian interests in the region and spearhead the growth of Salafism in the sub-continent. Significant fallout of the Salafi expansion is evident in the sectarian bloodletting in Pakistan. The Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan will be even more dangerous than the situation in 1996-2001 primarily because of the growing presence and influence of radical groups, especially Salafi, in Pakistan".<sup>21</sup>

It has also been stated that "India's energy security needs are inexorably tied to Iran and Central Asia. It is amply reflected in India's substantial investments in the region, be it the Chabahar port in Iran or the oil fields in Central Asia. India's public sector energy company, ONGC Videsh (Oil and Natural Gas Corporation), already has a 15 per cent ownership stake in Kazakhstan's Alibekmola oil field and has announced a \$1.5 billion investment in the joint Russian-Kazakh Kurmangazy oil field in the Caspian Sea. The company has also acquired a 25 per cent stake in Kazakhstan's Satpayev offshore exploration block, estimated to be for \$5 billion. The block has potential reserves of 1.8 million barrels and is expected to be operational by 2020. Kazakhstan is set to turn out to be one of the top ten oil producers by 2025 in the globe. ONGC, in the last

<sup>20</sup>Wilson John (2013), "Future of Afghanistan Post-2014 and Implications for India", ORF Issue Brief 57, August, [http://orfonline.org/cms/export/orfonline/modules/issuebrief/attachments/ibf\\_1377510555848.pdf](http://orfonline.org/cms/export/orfonline/modules/issuebrief/attachments/ibf_1377510555848.pdf)

<sup>21</sup>Wilson John (2013), "Future of Afghanistan Post-2014 and Implications for India", ORF Issue Brief 57, August, [http://orfonline.org/cms/export/orfonline/modules/issuebrief/attachments/ibf\\_1377510555848.pdf](http://orfonline.org/cms/export/orfonline/modules/issuebrief/attachments/ibf_1377510555848.pdf)

few years, has bought stakes of over \$7 billion in some of the top oil companies in the region at (8.4 per cent stake in Conoco Phillips oilfield at \$5 billion and \$2.1 billion stakes in Imperial Energy Co.). Progress on the proposed 2,000km Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) or Trans-Afghan gas pipeline has been impeded by surging violence in Afghanistan and Pakistan's Balochistan".<sup>22</sup>

India has three critical challenges in Afghanistan shortly. The first is to ensure Afghanistan's sovereignty and integrity by strengthening institutions, civilian and military, and facilitating a smoother political transition. Secondly, it prevents militant groups and external forces, including Pakistan, from subverting its progress towards stability. The third is to integrate Afghanistan into the regional economic framework for sustainable economic development.

There is an appreciation in Indian policymaking circles of India's rising capabilities and the need for an effective Afghanistan policy. For many in the Indian strategic community, Afghanistan is a test case for India as a regional and global power on the ascendant. In the ultimate analysis, India's strategic capacity to deal with instability in its backyard will determine India's rise as a worldwide power of significant import. And so, an Indian disappointment in Afghanistan is not an alternative. India has a range of concerns in Afghanistan that it would like to converse and enhance. Apart from countering Pakistan, these include Islamist extremism, Afghanistan as a gateway to the energy-rich and strategically important Central Asian region, and asserting its regional predominance. Yet, the most significant goal for New Delhi remains one of ensuring that Pakistan does not regain its central role in Afghan state structures. Pakistan's last time was dictating terms in Afghanistan was in the 1990s, and Indian security interests suffered unprecedented. Notwithstanding, India was a weaker state, marginal in the strategic equations of major global powers, and so could be easily ignored. Today India is widely viewed as a rising global power with many more cards to play in Afghanistan than before.<sup>23</sup>

In a nutshell, Kabul would likely welcome some degree of increased Indian involvement in its reconstruction and security. Additionally, should a government emerge in Kabul dominated by the Taliban or strongly influenced by Islamabad, it would almost undoubtedly look to reverse its relations with Delhi. It necessarily means that an integral component of any Indian effort to increase its involvement in Afghanistan must include a willingness to maintain Afghanistan's commitments post-United State withdrawal of troops. Not only does New Delhi have more to offer the broader South and Central Asian areas than Islamabad; Indian aid to Afghan Security Forces, combined with a gradually more dynamic Indian role in the economic and commercial development of Afghanistan, offers the best hope for entrenching— and even advancing— US achievements in that part of the globe. In Afghanistan, New Delhi is in a position to encourage political

<sup>22</sup>Wilson John (2013), "Future of Afghanistan Post-2014 and Implications for India", ORF Issue Brief 57, August, [http://orfonline.org/cms/export/orfonline/modules/issuebrief/attachments/ibf\\_1377510555848.pdf](http://orfonline.org/cms/export/orfonline/modules/issuebrief/attachments/ibf_1377510555848.pdf)

<sup>23</sup>Harsh V. Pant (2012), "India in Afghanistan: A Rising Power or a Hesitant Power?", CIPSS Speaker Series on International Security and Economy, McGill University, April, [http://cepsi-cipss.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Harsh\\_Pant\\_wkg\\_paper.pdf](http://cepsi-cipss.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Harsh_Pant_wkg_paper.pdf)

steadiness, boost trade, foster development, contribute to security-sector capacity-building, and— perhaps most significantly of all— counter the terrorist groups that directly threaten the vital interests of both India and the United States. In helping bring more excellent stability to Afghanistan, India would increase its own physical and economic security while preserving and furthering Washington's contributions to Afghanistan's reconstruction. The United States construct to draw down its combat forces from Afghanistan; therefore, it should encourage India to fill the potential security vacuum by adopting an increasingly assertive political, economic, and security strategy. It includes providing additional military training and possibly deploying Indian troops, which would be one of the principal agendas during the US President visiting India during January 2015.<sup>24</sup>

None of the critical variables — the readiness of the ANSF, Pakistan's policies, the US role, or the dysfunctional character of the Afghan political system — is likely to change other than at the margins. Any symptomatic changes are not going to bring in any long term changes in the region. Changes that are brought by the Afghani political and economic base only will have a long-lasting effect. Some analysts have predicted that the Taliban will lose enthusiasm for the war after international forces withdraw. But most locations in Afghanistan indicate a trend of worsening security as foreign troops depart. The animosity between Afghanistan and Pakistan also seems likely to drive the conflict forward, especially in border provinces such as Kandahar and Kunar, where insurgents enjoy access to safe havens, and where Afghan officials may be tempted to retaliate in kind, with direct actions against insurgents inside Pakistan or by supporting anti-Pakistan militant groups. A senior Afghan leader has been rightly pointed out that "Afghanistan is a country where you should never make a prediction...anything can happen".<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup>Larry Hanauer and Peter Chalk (2012), "India's and Pakistan's Strategies in Afghanistan: Implications for the United States and the Region", Center For Asia Pacific Policy, Occasional Paper, RAND Corporation, [http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional\\_papers/2012/RAND\\_OP387.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional_papers/2012/RAND_OP387.pdf)

<sup>25</sup>Afghanistan's Insurgency after the Transition (2014), International Crisis Group, Asia Report N°256, 12 May, Brussels, p. 44