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**FUTURE TENSE: LESSONS FROM THE BEST
AND WORST CASES IN AFGHANISTAN
FROM PAKISTAN'S PERSPECTIVE**

by

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March 2017

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AFGHANISTAN FROM PAKISTAN'S PERSPECTIVE**

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ABSTRACT

Broadly, this thesis argues that success in Afghanistan—for Afghans and their neighbors alike—entails establishing state-building measures, supremacy of law and human rights, rapid economic growth, and strong Afghan National Security Forces who can encourage the Afghan public to accept the practices of stable democracy and good neighborly relations.

To fix some of the myriad variables in Afghanistan’s likely state in 2026, which will mark the end of the “transformation decade” following the U.S. withdrawal in 2016, the proposed project installs three hypothetical scenarios: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly. These scenarios do not predict the future in Afghanistan but rather shed light on the factors and variables that will shape the postwar period. Examining such scenarios may allow strategic planners to develop alternative measures for complex situations. Sustained political stability and the will to reform by the Afghan establishment, fortified by consistent international financial and military support for at least 10 to 15 or more years, would likely be the key to success in the Afghanistan end game. Otherwise, Afghanistan will slip back into a situation much like the one that emerged after the Soviet withdrawal—extremism, war, and instability. The scenarios are developed by examining several factors: the criticality of the Afghan issue throughout history; Afghanistan’s indigenous facts and prospects; Pak–Afghan cross-interests and policy dimensions; global war on terror implications; conflicting interests; and regional and extra-regional politics.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ANA	Afghan National Army
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
CARs	Central Asian Republics
COIN	Counterinsurgency
CPEC	China–Pakistan Economic Corridor
CT	Counterterrorism
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Re-integration
DOD	Department of Defense
ECO	Economic Cooperation Organization
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Area of Pakistan
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIRoA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
GWOT	Global War on Terror
IBOs	Intel-based operations
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
LEAs	Law Enforcement Agencies
NAM	Non-aligned Movement
NUML	National University of Modern Languages
OBL	Osama Bin Laden
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
OIC	Organization of the Islamic Conference
RAW	Research and Analysis Wing
SA	South Asia
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SOF	Special Operations Forces
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SPA	Strategic Partnership Agreement

TAPI	Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India
TTP	Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNDOC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
WHAM	Winning Hearts and Minds

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I. INTRODUCTION

When the United States finally leaves Afghanistan, how will it affect South Asia's regional stability in the following decade? On one hand, the following fictional news story does not seem so far-fetched:

DAWN. Monday, October 7, 2026, Islamabad—Yesterday, Taliban fighters attacked a United Nations base near Kabul, Afghanistan. Dozens of improvised five kilometer-range rockets were deployed followed by a surge of suicide bombers, each carrying around 1,000 kilograms of explosives in trucks. Though most of the terrorists were killed in the blasts, those who fled the scene have little to fear from local authorities; the culprits behind the latest sequence of attacks have yet to be identified or arrested.

Yesterday's devastating attack falls on a political anniversary. Exactly 25 years ago, the United States first invaded Afghanistan to overthrow the Taliban. The invasion came in retaliation for the nation harboring Osama Bin Laden after the 9/11 attacks, and as a means to eliminate further terrorist threats to the United States and increase global security. Ten years after the withdrawal of U.S.-led coalition forces, however, the Taliban resurged, gaining control over the majority of Afghan provinces.

Yesterday's assault left unknown numbers of UN peacekeepers dead. States that lost personnel in the attack have formally posed the question on the populace's mind: Will the UN once again react to force with force and allow coalition troops to overthrow the Taliban? Or, will the UN, too, abandon Afghanistan into lawlessness?

Thus far, no law enforcement mechanism has worked to stabilize Afghanistan. Poppy cultivation and drug trafficking flourish while infrastructure and the education system suffer. The country's prospects are bleak. Ever-worsening ethnic/tribal violence has escalated terrorism, destabilizing the entire region and burdening Afghanistan's neighbor, Pakistan. Pakistan's armed forces focus on stanching the violence at great cost to its institutions and to Pakistani society. Once again, thousands of refugees pour into Pakistan, fleeing the Taliban. Turmoil breeds further unrest within Pakistan and beyond, throughout South Asia. Prosperity across the region wanes, and peace seems ever more fragile.

On the other hand, if a few key events unfold differently—or rather, if decisions are promulgated effectively—Afghanistan and Pakistan may both mark a more optimistic anniversary:

DAWN. Monday, October 7, 2026, Islamabad—Today, terrorists claimed responsibility for a minor blast outside the office of a non-governmental organization in the suburbs of Kabul, Afghanistan. No staff or civilian casualties have been reported. Four foreign human rights activists were taken hostage but were quickly freed, unharmed, by the Afghan Special Counter-terrorism Unit. The terrorists involved in the attack have been eliminated.

The successful hostage recovery was championed by the Afghan National Security Forces and local law enforcement agencies, which have systematically and professionally overcome traditional ethnic rivalries in the region. After the successful withdrawal of U.S.-led forces in 2016, and with continuous global assistance—most notably from the United States and Pakistan—today Afghanistan has shown noteworthy growth in law enforcement, education, economy, infrastructure, and legitimate trade enhancement to curb opium production.

This successfully countered attack is evidence of a more-or-less stable Afghanistan. The country's newfound footholds have reduced the risk of spillover terrorism and regional turmoil in neighboring Pakistan.

A positive and enduring outcome in Afghanistan cannot be left to chance or momentum. The question is this: Which current political variables will most impact the future of Afghanistan and its neighbors—particularly Pakistan?

A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

The [United Kingdom (UK)] defense secretary has once admitted that no one can predict what will happen to Afghanistan after British, U.S. and other NATO troops end their frontline role there at the end of 2014, and stressed that only the Afghan people can find a lasting solution to the country's violence, corruption and lawlessness.¹

The Afghan people themselves are essential to their secure future. However, the steps toward a desirable future—from the global view as well as from Pakistan's

¹ Richard Norton and Sam Jones, "Afghanistan's future after NATO troops leave uncertain, admits Hammond," *Guardian*, April 10, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/apr/10/afghanistan-future-uncertain-hammond>.

perspective—begin with proper management of the ongoing situation in Afghanistan. With the withdrawal of U.S.-led forces “slowed” until the end of 2016, there are continually evolving variables that can affect the future prosperity of Afghanistan, regional security, and global terrorism.² Major stakeholders, including India, Pakistan, and Iran, cannot pursue their interests in Afghanistan without considering the actions required for a best-case scenario.

This thesis examines the factors that affect best-case and worst-case scenarios for Afghanistan’s future, particularly regarding such external influences as Pakistan. Specifically, this thesis asks: How can Pakistan best facilitate the future prosperity of Afghanistan while safeguarding its interests in the region?

B. SIGNIFICANCE

آسیا یک پیکر آب و گل است
ملت افغان در آن پیکر دل است
از فساد او فساد آسیا
در گشاد او گشاد آسیا
تا دل آزاد است آزاد است تن
ورنه کابی در ره باد است تن

Asia is a living body, Afghanistan its heart,
In the ruin of the heart lies the ruin of the body
So long as the heart is free, the body remains free
If not, it becomes a straw adrift in the wind.

—Dr. Allama Muhammad Iqbal³

Afghanistan is a land of diversity not only by its ethnic structure and current political map but also by its topography and climate. A landlocked country, Afghanistan

² Greg Jaffe and David Nakamura, “Obama Agrees to Slow U.S. Troop Withdrawal from Afghanistan,” *Washington Post*, March 24, 2015, http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/obama-agrees-to-slow-us-troop-withdrawal-from-afghanistan/2015/03/24/6acd4834-d247-11e4-a62f-ee745911a4ff_story.html?wprss=rss_whitehouse.

³ Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938), also known as Allama Iqbal, after studying in Cambridge, Munich, and Heidelberg became a philosopher, poet, and politician in British India who is widely regarded as having inspired the Pakistan Movement. November 9, his birthday, is celebrated as a national holiday in Pakistan. See <http://www.khaama.com/allama-mohammad-iqbal>.

lies at a critical geographic, strategic, historical, and cultural intersection of the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia; thus, the “literal sense of Iqbal’s poem is as true as the wisdom in his analogy, and today it is borne out by history.”⁴ Afghanistan has tempted invaders who wish to dominate the region, from Alexander the Great, to Tamerlane, to Sir William McNaughton, to Leonid Brezhnev’s Red Army. This has turned Iqbal’s “heart of Asia” into a battleground.

Recently, the energy-rich Caspian basin’s enormous hydrocarbon reserves have furthered the region’s vast economic potential. Both neighboring and distant nations have plunged into a treasure hunt, or what has been referred to as the “New Great Game.” The history of Afghanistan reaches back into centuries—and is full of wars. As Jason Goodwin explains, “This is a region that has swallowed civilizations and sent the sands to seal them up. It has been dug, swindled and coerced, but what can change the fact that its deserts are as dry as ever, its mountains vast, and it is still a long way from the sea?”⁵

“The nation of Afghanistan, however, has never really been a democratic state, and the concept of democracy is foreign one to the Afghan people. Their history is overwhelmingly dominated by examples of autocratic rule of kings, warlords, foreigners, and religious extremists.”⁶ When not fighting against foreign invaders, Afghans turned their weapons inward, and the struggles for domestic dominance were bloody and fierce. It was in a state of near-anarchy after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 that Al-Qaeda strengthened its base in the region alongside the Taliban. The groups posed grave challenges to regional stability and world peace, demonstrated perhaps most shockingly by the coordinated attacks on New York City and Washington, DC, with hijacked commercial airliners on September 11, 2001. In the aftermath of 9/11, Afghanistan’s role in the global political spectrum changed, and it became a high-priority target for major powers around the world. While the Taliban has since been driven from power and Al-

⁴ Hamid Karzai, “Literal Sense of Iqbal’s Poem” (speech, Conference for Afghanistan: Security & Cooperation at the Heart of Asia in Istanbul, November 2, 2011), <http://mfa.gov.af/en/news/4585>.

⁵ Jason Goodwin, “The Playing Fields of Asia,” *The New York Times*, January 9, 2000, <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/01/09/books/the-playing-fields-of-asia.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>.

⁶ Dennis O. Young, “Overcoming the Obstacles to Establishing a Democratic State in Afghanistan,” October 2007, Strategic Studies Institute, <https://www.ciaonet.org/attachments/8996/uploads>.

Qaeda's most prominent leaders have been captured or killed, Afghanistan continues to occupy a sensitive—and precarious—position in global strategic affairs and counter-terrorism efforts.

Enduring success in Afghanistan is mandatory for the United States and the West to maintain their credibility in the global community and, specifically, to ward off reemerging interests in the region from bordering countries Russia and China. Failure in Afghanistan would hand Al-Qaeda a propaganda tool to reconstitute the group's capabilities and reclaim its global profile.⁷ This may further fuel yet another new lethal phenomenon: ISIS. The Central Asian Muslim republics would likely be radicalized by increasing religious extremism, which could further infect Pakistan. A more-or-less permanent “narco-state,” powered by homegrown Taliban and Al-Qaeda elements, could further threaten global security.⁸ Whatever form the next phase of U.S. involvement takes in Afghanistan, the outcome hinges on conditions on the ground—a lesson that Washington learned (or did not learn) the hard way in Iraq.⁹

Owing to the looming fear of a failed Afghan state both regionally and globally, leaving Afghanistan to an undesirable fate is no longer an option. Broadly, this thesis argues that success in Afghanistan—for Afghans and their neighbors alike—entails establishing state-building measures, supremacy of law and human rights, rapid economic growth, and strong Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) who can encourage the Afghan public to accept the practices and preferences of stable democracy and good neighborly relations.

⁷ Hy Rothstein and John Arquilla, *Afghan Endgames: Strategy and Policy Choices for America's Longest War* (Washington, DC, Georgetown University Press: 2012), 97–100.

⁸ *English Oxford Living Dictionaries Online*, s.v. “Narco,” accessed December 19, 2015, http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/american_english/narco--; *The Free Dictionary Online*, s.v. “Narco-state,” accessed December 19, 2015, <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/narco-state>.

⁹ Dov S. Zakheim, *A Vulcan's Tale: How the Bush Administration Mismanaged the Reconstruction of Afghanistan*, (Brookings Institution Press: June 1, 2011), 277–78; Hy Rothstein and John Arquilla, *Afghan Endgames*, 98–99.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, an American essayist, once said, “People only see what they are prepared to see.”¹⁰ An optimistic and lasting outcome in Afghanistan cannot materialize out of thin air. Numerous factors and variables in play today will shape the future of Afghanistan and its neighbors, especially Pakistan. But, to borrow former U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld’s terminology, how can the global community master the many variables and imponderables, both known and unknown?¹¹ This thesis presents three plausible scenarios for Afghanistan’s future: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly. These scenarios do not predict the future in Afghanistan, but rather shed light on the factors and variables that will shape the postwar period. Examining such scenarios may allow strategic planners to develop alternative measures for complex situations—and Afghanistan is clearly a complex situation for all stakeholders. This research offers a promising approach for global powers and policymakers.

C. PROBLEMS AND HYPOTHESES

Afghanistan finds itself at a crossroads. Continued international security and economic assistance for 10 to 15 more years and sustained domestic leadership for reform will enable the country to build on achievements made since 2002 and become a success story in the region. The other option is to see Afghanistan slide back into its difficult past of instability and tension.¹²

Geographically contiguous Pakistan has much in common with Afghanistan in terms of historic, ethno-linguistic, and socio-religious aspects. Pakistan has sacrificed much in the wake of counter-terrorism efforts, and will continue to be directly affected by

¹⁰ “Quotable Quotes,” Goodreads, last modified September 24, 2013, www.goodreads.com/quotes/50328.

¹¹ Rumsfeld made his famous remark—“There are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns, the ones we don’t know we don’t know. And if one looks throughout the history of our country and other free countries, it is the latter category that tend to be the difficult ones”—in the course of a press briefing on February 12, 2002. See <http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=2636>. It came in response to a question about Iraqi links to weapons of mass and terrorist organizations, that is, the justification for armed intervention in Iraq. Supporters and detractors of Rumsfeld alike seized on the “known unknown” comment to support their view of Rumsfeld and his policies. To the extent that strategic scenarios, as a planning tool, serve to move more variables in complex situations from the “unknown” category at least to the “knowable” category, Rumsfeld’s basic point applies to the methodology of the proposed thesis, as well.

¹² Robert I. Rotberg, ed., *Building a New Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press/World Peace Foundation, February 27, 2007), 52.

a deteriorating Afghan security situation. More than any other Afghan neighbors, Pakistan has the most to lose and gain from Afghanistan's next steps. The current situation offers a new opportunity for both countries and their mutual relations. Historically speaking, faith, geographic proximity as well as shared ethnicity, among other common interests are the key contours of Pakistan's approach toward Afghanistan. Since its independence in 1947, Pakistan has sought to maintain pleasant and mutually beneficial relations with Afghanistan; however, "internal and external vested interests," mainly post-Cold War, and cross-border terrorism have prevented their ties to fully develop. Going forward, Pakistan's role will depend largely on the extent to which the Afghans accept their neighbor as a moderator of peace.

At the same time,

Afghanistan's neighbors, including Pakistan, have long exploited its internal fragmentation and intergroup rivalry in order to advance their own strategic interests... At the moment, Afghanistan's neighbors are somewhat neutralized by the presence of American and other allied forces and those of other partners of the coalition against terrorism. But they retain an intrusive capacity because of their proximity; entangled geopolitical and economic considerations both benefit and harm Afghanistan's rebuilding process.¹³

Neighboring countries' policy choices determine future stability, peace, and reconciliation just as much as Afghan groups' choices do. Among the countries that have direct interest in a stable, reconstructed Afghanistan are the Central Asian states, Iran, and Pakistan. India, being a non-bordering country, is seen with the indirect interests limited to trade partnership vis-à-vis encircling Pakistan by subduing its constructive role in Afghanistan. A peaceable and stable Afghan society with working government bodies and a revived economy would largely benefit all of Afghanistan's neighbors. Stabilizing Afghanistan is a multidimensional project that requires constructive contribution from all the stakeholders with the ability to influence its security and internal politics.

After the United States withdraws from Afghanistan, Pakistan foresees a serious security threat, without hoping for any diplomatic or materiel assistance in case of war

¹³ Craig Baxter, ed., *Pakistan on the Brink: Politics, Economics, and Society*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, March 20, 2004), 50.

with India. There is little possibility that any such future Afghan government will remain impartial in such a conflict; instead, it might actively support India against Pakistan. And even more broadly, the bonds forged between India and Iran—or even possibly between the United States and India as they work together in Afghanistan—could well shape the Afghan end game poorly for Pakistan. The strategic, security, political, and economic implications for Pakistan could, in turn, lead to instability in the region and further long-term disruption in Afghanistan.

D. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several factors inform the problems and resolutions in Afghanistan. Among them are the unsettled ethnic situation within the country, the fraught history of Afghanistan as a destination of choice for invaders, regional interests that sometimes compete or conflict in catastrophic ways, and U.S. policy before and during the “longest war,” including the counterinsurgency (COIN) doctrine. These variables inform the hypothesized scenarios in the later part of thesis and, thus, this literature review carefully considers relevant scholarship on each factor.

1. Myth of Conquest in Afghanistan

Professor Toynbee, a British historian (1889–1975), wrote on Afghanistan in his innovative work, *A Study of History*. For an invader, Toynbee explains, “it is easy to get into Afghanistan but very difficult to get out.”¹⁴ The “graveyard of empires” trope may or may not be helpful—or completely accurate—but Toynbee’s warning resonates in the country’s current situation.¹⁵ Hy Rothstein and John Arquilla also endorse Afghanistan’s legacy as the “graveyard of empires,” at least to the extent that its people have become

¹⁴Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History: Vol. 1: Abridgement of Volumes I-VI*, ed. D.C. Somervell (New York: Oxford University Press, December 10, 1987), 415.

¹⁵ The quote refers to a widely circulated (and widely quoted) article—Milton Bearden, “Afghanistan, Graveyard of Empires,” *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2001, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/57411/milton-bearden/afghanistan-graveyard-of-empires?page=show-book>. The image has been dismissed as a cliché by several other scholars of the subject. See, for example, the comments in Barry Neild, “Is Afghanistan Really a ‘Graveyard of the Empires’?” *CNN World*, December 7, 2009, available at: <http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/asiapcf/12/07/afghanistan.graveyard/index.html>.

practiced at enduring regular and irregular warfare in the past three decades.¹⁶ Dmitry Yazov, the former Soviet defense minister who pulled Soviet forces from Afghanistan in 1989, noted of his experience:

We did not try to win. We wanted to help but not everyone accepted our help so we left. ... Moscow badly misjudged struggle for Afghan hearts and minds. ... The main lesson was that the Afghan people did not support the presence of Soviet forces, although they welcomed material help. We were uninvited guests and our presence did not cement society but divided it. ... We did not understand what Islam as a religion was, and who really was in charge of villages, the local Muslims.¹⁷

In this sense, Afghanistan's "curse" has served as a self-fulfilling prophecy in the contemporary context, which puts a special charge to the issues of resolving and restoring Afghanistan.

2. Inside Afghanistan

Any effort to find a solution for the complex Afghan situation must begin by examining Afghanistan's socio-political history. Thomas Barfield, a leading anthropologist and expert on Afghanistan affairs who has studied the Afghan-Pakistan region for more than four decades, demonstrates in his book *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History* how Afghans have endured continuous struggle amid social and political chaos. Some of this chaos was somewhat by design; the only way the Afghans could free their country of the Russians was to make it "ungovernable."¹⁸ After driving out the Russians, however, the Afghans have since been unable to govern themselves.¹⁹ After the expected U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2016, a governing mechanism that lasts for decades cannot be devised without taking into account the shared interests of the Afghan people. Several years of diplomatic talks with the Taliban show that the

¹⁶ Hy Rothstein and John Arquilla, *Afghan Endgames* (2012), xi-xii; Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History* (New Jersey, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 255.

¹⁷ Adam Tanner, "We did not Try to Win: We Wanted to Help but not Everyone Accepted our help so we left," *Reuters*, (Moscow, November 9, 2001); Muhammad Mehboob Qadir, "The End State of U.S. War in Afghanistan-Possibilities and Options," Opinion: *Defence Journal*, September 2002, <http://www.defencejournal.com/2002/sept/endstate.htm>.

¹⁸ Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*, 7.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

political complexity in Afghanistan has even compelled the United States to have discussions with its core enemy there.²⁰

This chaos is exacerbated by Afghanistan's internal ethnic divisions. For instance, Barfield quotes the statement of Pakistani activist Abdul Wali Khan in the 1970s, responding to a question about his loyalty to Pakistan: "I have been Pakistani for thirty years, a Muslim for fourteen hundred years, and a Pashtun (Pathan) for five thousand years."²¹ This statement exemplifies the Pashtuns' constant struggle with their ethnic identity, whether they are in Pakistan or Afghanistan. Though the same can be said for other ethnic minorities, especially in Afghanistan, this sentiment is widely articulated in the Afghanistan–Pakistan region, which holds that Pashtun is not a form of ethnicity but rather a "state of mind" that drives the Pashtuns' code of conduct.

3. Regional Considerations

India, Iran, and Pakistan are pursuing their interests in Afghanistan through their proxies in order to gain trade, political, and economic advantages after the withdrawal of U.S.-led forces in 2016—or at least to secure a better position at the negotiation table.²² India, being interested in the Central Asian states, was already working hard to establish a trade link via Iran and Afghanistan.²³ This move by India served many needs: First, to have land access to Central Asia for economic expansion. Second, India seeks to outflank Pakistan both militarily and economically and prevent Pakistan from achieving strategic depth with a stable Afghanistan. Third, India supports the establishment of any government in Afghanistan that is anti-Pakistan.²⁴ John Arquilla and Hy Rothstein agree

²⁰ Matthew Rosenberg and Alissa J. Rubin, "Taliban Step toward Afghan Peace Talks Is Hailed by U.S.," *New York Times*: June 18, 2013.

²¹ Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*, 21.

²² Tahir Nazir, "Afghanistan's Endgame Is India's Dilemma – Analysis," *Eurasia Review Journal*, January 26, 2013, <http://www.eurasiareview.com/26012013-afghanistans-endgame-is-indias-dilemma-analysis/>.

²³ William Dalrymple, "A Deadliest Triangle: Afghanistan, Pakistan & India," June 25, 2013, http://www.brookings.edu/research/essays/2013/deadly-triangle-afghanistan-pakistan-india-c?cid=gADs_Articles_Search-Articles-DT-US_25451961275&gclid=CJ-38Iv9gbkCFa9_QgodQUgAdA.

²⁴ *Ibid.*; Editorial, "Quarterly Review," *Pakistan Defense Journal*, (Rawalpindi: October–December 1999), 3.

that, whatever comes out of the “Afghan end game,” India’s involvement in Afghanistan will continue this trend, to Pakistan’s detriment.²⁵ Ultimately, Pakistan’s role in Afghanistan will be directly affected by its ability to cultivate a friendly government.

Pakistan’s role in Afghanistan, especially in the postwar period, has been crucial but contentious. It was expected that an indebted Afghan nation would become a protectorate of Pakistan.²⁶ Some even hoped that Afghanistan would eventually confederate with Pakistan.²⁷ While the principal historical cause of the disillusionment between the two states remained due to the unsettled issue of the Durand Line,²⁸ rigidities are also derived from divergent strategies and unlike national ethos.

The concept of strategic depth for Pakistan has not just been about acquiring military space; more broadly, Pakistan has sought to undermine “Afghan nationalism” in the form of Pashtunistan. To that extent, Pakistan seems to have achieved its purpose—concerns about the Pashtunistan issue have virtually disappeared, especially after the rise of the Taliban.²⁹ However, authors such as Arquilla and Rothstein argue that Pakistan’s support for Pashtun extremists or insurgents in Afghanistan—given in order to prevent India from generating greater influence inside Afghanistan—could trap Pakistan in war at two fronts.³⁰ Pakistan has become a main stakeholder in the Afghan end game, though not in the role that it might have hoped, which is evident through incidents like the “killing of 24 Pakistani soldiers by NATO forces,” the Osama Bin Laden operation, or the initiation of the Afghanistan peace process without Pakistan’s inclusion.³¹ Likewise,

²⁵ Hy Rothstein and John Arquilla, *Afghan*, 6.

²⁶ *Monthly Journal of the Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses (IDSA)*, Vol. XXIII No. 5, August 1999, 719–747.

²⁷ *Ibid.*; Hy Rothstein and John Arquilla, *Afghan*, 6.

²⁸ “The Durand Line, the western border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, was delineated in 1893 as the boundary between then British India and Afghanistan. The international community recognizes the Durand line as the Pak-Afghan border since the creation of Pakistan in 1947, but successive Afghan rulers have repudiated its legitimacy.” See Tariq Mahmood, “The Durand Line: South Asia’s Next Trouble Spot” (Master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California, 2005).

²⁹ *Monthly Journal of the Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses*, 719–747.

³⁰ Hy Rothstein and John Arquilla, *Afghan*, 6.

³¹ Tahir Nazir, “Afghanistan’s Endgame Is India’s Dilemma— Analysis.”

the unremitting “U.S. and Afghanistan blame game pushed Pakistan into a corner.”³² In the eyes of some policymakers, not letting Pakistan exercise a major role in Afghan affairs was a risk that “might spark an internal social revolution—perhaps the true objective of al-Qaeda’s ‘deep game.’”³³

4. U.S. Involvement

The Global War on Terror (GWOT), particularly in the Afghanistan Theater, has lasted twice as long as World War II. It has cost \$546 billion and 3,083 U.S. and allied soldiers’ lives, not to mention injuries and disabilities or Afghan casualties.³⁴ And yet, for all this expenditure of blood and money, the ultimate aim of the war in Afghanistan may still be out of reach. Dov S. Zakheim, in his book *A Vulcan’s Tale*, states that “the war in Afghanistan will not be lost by the military, but it cannot be won by the military either.”³⁵ The author demonstrates the problems with postwar reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan by comparing them to the U.S. policies that prevailed during the Iraq war. Because Zakheim served as the Pentagon’s comptroller, Department of Defense (DOD) chief financial officer, and coordinator for Afghan civilian reconstruction, he had insight into the running costs in both conflicts and direct access to the most senior policymakers in the DOD and the White House.³⁶ Thus, he provides an insider’s view not only of U.S. and allied strategy in Afghanistan but also of the realities of its implementation. Overall, Zakheim’s account remains useful in explaining the impact the United States’ decisions after 9/11 had on subsequent outcomes in Afghanistan and Iraq.³⁷

John Arquilla and Hy Rothstein have a similar opinion about U.S. policymakers and their negligence toward Afghanistan while Iraq was invaded in 2003: “It became the

³² Ibid.

³³ Hy Rothstein and John Arquilla, *Afghan Endgames*, 7.

³⁴ Iftekhar A. Chowdhury and Shahid J. Burki, “Afghanistan after America: Possible Post-Drawdown Scenarios,” *ISAS Insights*, No. 17, (National University of Singapore, August 8, 2012), <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?lng=en&id=151381>; Erik Brattberg, *Europe, Afghanistan, and The Transatlantic Relationship After 2014*, (Sweden: SIPRI, May 2013), 1.

³⁵ Zakheim, *A Vulcan’s Tale*, 277.

³⁶ Ibid., xi.

³⁷ Ibid., 277.

‘other war’ within policymaking circles and our commitment to this campaign became unclear.”³⁸ Even after 2003, and until today, it has remained a dilemma to develop a consistent and realistic “endgame strategy” for favorable results in a COIN campaign. Rothstein and Arquilla explain:

The striking initial American victory in the fall of 2001, which drove the Taliban and Al-Qaida from power with less than two hundred Special Forces soldiers working with a few thousand friendly tribesmen, was followed by almost nine years of policies and actions on the ground that resulted in deteriorating security conditions. Each new approach taken by the United States and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) allies did little to thwart Al-Qaida and the Taliban.³⁹

Foreign troops were welcomed by the Afghan public as liberators at first, much like the Soviets were in the 1970s. Presently, however, the United States has failed to meet Afghan citizens’ needs—security, economic revival, and normalcy.⁴⁰ This story—ending a military campaign with something less than victory—has some history in the U.S. experience, from Vietnam to Iraq, and now from Afghanistan to ISIS, which occupies great stretches of what used to be “sorted-out” Iraq. Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason note:

Afghanistan is in danger of capsizing in a perfect storm of insurgency that mimics operations and tactics witnessed in Iraq. ... At the operational level, the Taliban is fighting a classic “war of the flea,” while the Coalition continues to fight the war largely according to the Taliban “game plan.” This is resulting in its losing the war in Afghanistan one Pashtun village at a time. ... At the strategic level, the Taliban is fighting a classic “war of the flea,” largely along the same lines used by the mujahedeen twenty years ago against the Soviets, including fighting in villages to deliberately provoke air strikes and collateral damage. They gladly trade the lives of a few dozen guerrilla fighters in order to cost the American forces the permanent loyalty of that village, under the code of Pashtun social behavior called Pashtunwali and its obligation for revenge (Badal), which the U.S. Army does not even begin to understand. The

³⁸ Hy Rothstein and John Arquilla, *Afghan Endgames*, 3.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*, 7–8.

advent of suicide attacks is particularly alarming. The Taliban is getting American forces to do exactly what they want them to do.⁴¹

5. Counterinsurgency

In Afghanistan, the U.S. approach of “leadership decapitation” on an “industrial scale” in the past few years was taken up by the U.S. military commanders—first by General Stanley McChrystal and then David Petraeus. McChrystal and Petraeus both adopted COIN with a fervor that belies their understanding of the tactic, its origins in the colonial wars of the 19th-century great powers, and its tragic legacy for the societies behind all sides of these “small” but brutal wars⁴²—much less its dim prospects for a brighter Afghanistan. Professor Douglas Porch highlights the COIN dilemma that has prevailed over the last two centuries in practices by three great powers, France, Britain, and the United States. Historically, Porch finds, “moral costs” were much higher and longer lasting than the sporadic “ephemeral tactical success” of earlier COIN operations by other names, as in the case of Britain in Ireland from the 1920s onward, or in the 1950s in Algeria.⁴³

Various moral justifications for short-lived tactical achievements or failures—such as the strategic void in the U.S. COIN strategy—were evident in the May 2012 *Decade of War* after-action report, which illustrated undesired outcomes as the result of battle-space owners’ poor management.⁴⁴ To Porch, despite their legitimate justifications, U.S. policies that settled on drone attacks or Special Operations Forces’ (SOFs) operations in the name of COIN formed and spread anti-American sentiments,

⁴¹ Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, “Understanding the Taliban and Insurgency in Afghanistan,” Foreign Policy Research Institute. (Elsevier Limited: winter 2007). 71, 87, <http://www.nps.edu/programs/ccs/docs/pubs/understanding%20the%20taliban%20and%20insurgency%20in%20afghanistan.pdf>.

⁴² Thomas H. Johnson, “The Taliban Insurgency and an Analysis of Shabnamah (Night Letters),” *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 18, September 3, 2007, 340, http://www.nps.edu/programs/ccs/Docs/Pubs/Small_Wars_%20Pub.pdf.

⁴³ Douglas Porch, *Counterinsurgency: Exposing the Myths of the New Way of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 119.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 345; Joint and Coalition Operational Analysis (JCOA), *Decade of War: Enduring Lessons from the Past Decade of Operations*, Volume I, June 15, 2012, 22, <http://blogs.defensenews.com/saxotech-access/pdfs/decade-of-war-lessons-learned.pdf>.

and even roiled the strategic partnership with Pakistan.⁴⁵ In a nutshell, Porch believes the resurgence of the Taliban after their complete defeat by allied forces in 2001 is blowback from the improper execution—and faulty conception—of COIN.

There is no denying the fact that “classic COIN doctrine requires winning the hearts and minds of the ingenious population.”⁴⁶ But, as Porch apprehends, “‘Hearts and minds’ has never been a recipe for lasting stability.”⁴⁷ Rather, “past counterinsurgency campaigns have succeeded not through state-building but by shattering and dividing societies while unsettling civil-military relations.”⁴⁸ In other words, COIN approaches calculated to win the hearts and minds of “foreign folks” unvaryingly depend on “coercion rather than persuasion.”⁴⁹

Since the advent of the new COIN strategy in 2007, though attacks on civilian and security forces have diminished, the “Afghanistan,” conflict was spread to the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) of Pakistan. In 2011, the Taliban insurgency had moved far beyond its traditional stronghold provinces in the south and southeast into the center of Afghanistan.⁵⁰ In 2012, the Taliban was implicated in insurgent activities in almost 80 percent of Afghanistan.⁵¹ Professor Johnson further muses,

While the lack of Afghan state-building and reconstruction and the failure of Kabul to reconcile with the rural Pashtun peoples of the south and east of the country have all been critical factors in the re-emergence of the Taliban, these factors alone do not explain how the Taliban have been able to capture the imagination of large swaths of Pashtun areas with a resonating message of violent extremism. How has the Taliban been able

⁴⁵ Douglas Porch, *Counterinsurgency*, 345.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 188.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, i.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, xii.

⁵⁰ Jayshree Bajoria, “Taliban in Afghanistan,” Council on Foreign Relations, Oct 6, 2011, <http://www.cfr.org/afghanistan/taliban-afghanistan/p10551>.

⁵¹ Shehzad H. Qazi, “The ‘Neo-Taliban’ and Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan,” *Third World Quarterly*, March 31, 2010, 486–487.

to re-emerge when only a few years ago it seemed destined for the trash bin of history?⁵²

COIN is a big part of this development, and it will continue to have ramifications in the Afghan state and society.

E. METHODS AND SOURCES

This thesis examines various variables and factors that will lead to anticipated strategic scenarios. Specifically, it follows the “tracking, analyzing, imaging, deciding and acting” (TAIDA) framework presented by Mats Lindgren and Hans Bandhold in their book, *Scenario Planning: The Link between Future and Strategy*.⁵³ “Tracking” identifies variables and signs of threats and opportunities. “Analyzing” illustrates significances and engenders scenarios. “Imaging” generates options and anticipated results. The “Deciding” phase articulates the information and classifies varieties and strategies. Finally, “Acting” sets up short- and long-term goals, steps to take, and follow-up actions.⁵⁴

This thesis examines some of the myriad variables that will contribute to Afghanistan’s likely state in 2026, at the end of the “transformation decade” following the U.S. withdrawal from—or “consolidation” in—Afghanistan in 2016. To show how these variables will affect the real-life situation, this thesis installs three hypothetical scenarios: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly. These scenarios, all from Pakistan’s perspective, are based on the work of military scholars and journalists including Asad Munir, Iftekhhar A. Chowdhury, Muhammad Khurshid Khan, and Seema Mustafa; as well

⁵² Thomas H. Johnson, “The Taliban Insurgency and an Analysis of Shabnamah,” 318.

⁵³ Mats Lindgren and Hans Bandhold, *Scenario Planning: the Link between Future and Strategy*, second edition (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 39. It also uses Kees Van der Heijden, *Scenarios: The Art of Strategic Conversation*, (UK: John Wiley and Sons, 2005), second edition, esp. 53–55.

⁵⁴ Mats Lindgren and Hans Bandhold, *Scenario Planning*, 39.

as a post-seminar report of National Defence University at Islamabad.⁵⁵ The scenarios explore, broadly, three possible outcomes stemming from the next steps in Afghanistan, from Pakistan’s viewpoint. The scenarios are all informed by the same baseline conditions, which include the following:

- The conflicting interests or opposing strategies of major players in the region (Pakistan, India, Iran, the United States, China, etc.)
- The political/military transition of the Afghan government after the U.S. withdrawal
- The state of terrorism in Afghanistan and the region
- The continued presence of foreign forces
- The state of regional stability
- Regional alliances
- The impact of outstanding regional disputes and politics
- The impact of the unresolved border between Afghanistan and Pakistan (the Durand Line)
- Reconstruction, economic conditions, and trade, particularly as it pertains to Pakistan’s involvement
- The state of security forces (law enforcement agencies including the police, intelligence agencies, and military infrastructure)
- Drug trafficking
- Dependence on foreign aid/support

⁵⁵ Asad Munir (a retired brigadier, who has served at senior intelligence postings in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and FATA areas of Pakistan) “Post Exit-Afghanistan—Pak Scenarios” *The Express Tribune*, November 24, 2012, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/470744/post-exit-af-pak-scenarios/>; Iftekhhar A. Chowdhury and Shahid J. Burki, “Afghanistan after America: Possible Post-Drawdown Scenarios,” (National University of Singapore, 2012); Muhammad Khurshid Khan, “Projected Security Environments of Pakistan in Post-Afghanistan War Scenario,” *IPRI Journal* XI, No. 2 (Summer 2011): 102–121, <http://www.ipripak.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/art5khus11.pdf>; Seema Mustafa, “Post-withdrawal Scenario in Afghanistan,” (*Express Tribune*, May 17, 2013), <http://tribune.com.pk/story/550670/post-withdrawal-scenario-in-afghanistan/>;). Post Seminar Report, “Afghanistan End Game: Quest for Peace and Stability,” Institute for Strategic Studies: Research and Analysis (ISSRA), (Islamabad, National Defense University: June 27, 2012), 15, http://www.ndu.edu.pk/issra/issra_pub/Seminars/PSRAfghanistanSeminar.pdf.

- The Afghans' initiative in taking their country out of darkness
- The Taliban factor, as a matter of culture and governance among Pashtun communities
- The continued role or influence of Al-Qaeda, and now ISIS

The scenarios reflect three different ways the present set of circumstances could unfold in Afghanistan after the 2016 U.S. withdrawal. The Good scenario (less likely), The Bad scenario (most likely), and The Ugly scenario (less likely) are most notably explored from Pakistan's perspective, on the bases of various domestic/local variables and under the broad umbrella of regional and extra-regional factors. The scenarios largely depend upon Afghanistan's political future, economic revival, and self-sustainment—including the ANSF's ability to maintain credibility and deter insurgents, thereby maintaining writ of the Afghan government. The scenarios are developed by examining several factors: the criticality of the Afghan issue throughout history; Afghanistan's indigenous facts and prospects; Pak–Afghan cross-interests and policy dimensions; GWOT implications; conflicting interests; regional and extra-regional politics; and paradigms of profound imperatives, such as the United States', and those presented in the Brookings Institute report, *A Deadliest Triangle: Afghanistan, Pakistan & India*.⁵⁶

Each of the scenarios identifies the implications for Pakistan and determines the actions necessary to steer toward The Good scenario. Better outcomes (The Good scenario) could arise from reconciliation and power sharing if all the actors, including the Taliban and other regional and extra-regional stakeholders, come to a strategic stalemate. Some counter-terrorism (CT) troops will be necessary for moral, materiel, or supervisory support to the ANSF after 2016, until political harmony is achieved through a peaceful process. Once the ANSF can hold on its own against the insurgency, foreign monetary support should continue until there is a sustainable economic revival in Afghanistan, thus allowing the country to gradually reform its institutions and educational setup.

On the other hand, The Bad scenario (and the one currently most likely) has already begun with partial success in the political peace process, and a smooth transition

⁵⁶ William Dalrymple, "A Deadliest Triangle."

after the 2016 withdrawal of U.S. forces. From there, a reasonably legitimate Afghan government was emerged and apparently accepted by most state actors. The Taliban, however, has maintained footprints in the country throughout the partial withdrawal of U.S. forces. After U.S. withdrawal, foreign forces should, refrain from influencing Afghanistan's internal politics in order to avoid further consequences. In this scenario, some steps are taken toward economic revival and partial foreign aid is reimbursed as promised; economic sustainability is foreseeable in the near future.

The Ugly scenario (less likely) would be the consequence of stakeholders handling Afghan affairs inharmoniously—for instance, if a situation arises that compels the United States to completely withdraw forces (“Zero Option”) toward the end of 2016. Despite foreign support, the ANSF will dissolve and the entire security structure will unravel. The Taliban will consequently recapture power; Afghanistan will erupt in complete chaos and civil war; the United States will acknowledge its strategic failure in the complete abandonment of Afghanistan. Of course, no stakeholders want Afghanistan to emerge in this state, regressing to its state in the late '90s.

So the challenge is evident: how all players—especially the United States and Pakistan, prime players and stakeholders should proceed together—to reach The Good scenario, or at least The Bad, and to avoid The Ugly.

Each scenario is tested by examining it against rational and likely outcomes, such as the resurgence of terrorism; economic deprivation in an already fragile economy through any natural disaster or crop failure; and mass corruption or disruption of foreign aid/support. First, it is determined what steps, if any, can be taken now or in the near future to mitigate the effects of such strains on the emergent Afghan state. The analysis then discusses the likelihood of a successful Afghan transition—as measured from Kabul, Islamabad, and Washington.

A variety of sources inform this methodology, including after-action reports, Congressional Review Service (CRS) documents from the United States, declassified material, and government reports or statements from government personnel. Secondary sources include scholarly journals, policy papers, and newspaper articles, as well as

books and resources that discuss the Afghanistan–Pakistan region in general and the 2014–2016 transition, evolving geopolitical scenario, power game, and the future aspects of Afghan transformation after the U.S. withdrawal.

II. BACKGROUND AND REGIONAL ASPECTS

It was in a state of near-anarchy after the Soviet withdrawal, and during civil war, that Al-Qaeda strengthened its base in Afghanistan beside the Taliban. Al-Qaeda's attacks on September 11, 2001, posed further challenges to regional stability and global peace. The British Foreign Secretary described 9/11 while shedding light on the future of Afghanistan, stating, "Few events in global history can have galvanized the international system to action so completely in so short a time."⁵⁷ The terrorists' acts in the United States marked a transition in world affairs as well as a turning point in the modern history of Afghanistan; the terror attacks ascribed Afghanistan an enhanced role in the global political spectrum, and turned into a high-priority issue for major powers around the world. In the aftermath of 9/11, the United States led a far-reaching multinational military and political campaign to root out Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, restore peace and security, and initiate the re-construction process in Afghanistan. While the Taliban has since been driven from power and Al-Qaeda's most prominent leaders have been captured or killed, Afghanistan continues to occupy a sensitive—and precarious—position in global strategic affairs and counter-terrorism efforts. At this juncture, Pakistan has once again become a frontline state by assisting the United States in operations against terrorism.

When the U.S. campaign in Afghanistan was launched more than a decade ago, it apparently intended to overcome three broad challenges: First, to defeat the Taliban and limit Al-Qaeda; second, to bring economic sustainability for lasting reductions in poppy cultivation, production, trafficking, and consumption—considered a major source of revenue for the terrorists; and third, to train Afghan security forces, including police, army, and intelligence, to better deal with the country's long-term threats. Unfortunately, despite the considerable expenditure of time, effort, and resources, these goals seem as elusive today as they did in 2001.

⁵⁷ Jack Straw, "Future of Afghanistan" (British foreign secretary's speech, International Institute of Strategic Studies in London, October 22, 2001), <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2001/oct/22/britainand911.september11>.

Despite billions of dollars in aid, Kabul's inability to deal with its corrupt and inefficient governing structures has landed Afghanistan on spot 166 of 167 in a 2015 transparency survey.⁵⁸ The extreme level of corruption in the country is likely to affect the sustainability of foreign aid assistance for economic growth and the development of sources and rebuilding/construction activities after 2016.⁵⁹ The judicial system's inability to implement the rule of law exacerbates the insurgents' hegemony and state of law and, consequently, embeds Afghanistan in warlordism. The booming drug trade and the influence of drug tycoons on various stakeholders give the lie to all anti-opium pronouncements. Weak institutions continue to plague the fledgling state.

The slow reconstruction process has frustrated all involved. The presence of large numbers of foreign forces antagonizes local populations, and the continued killing of innocent civilians exacerbates tensions. Because donors have been unable to live up to their commitments, significant projects remain incomplete. The coercive strategies of neighboring countries, such as India, Pakistan, and Iran, emphasize short-term and often zero-sum ends rather than an organic regional plan. Law enforcement agencies have been unable to implement the writ of the Afghan government and stop the rapidly deteriorating law-and-order situation, stymying civil development before it can even start.

A. PAKISTAN'S VIEW OF AFGHANISTAN

Pakistan, among all the states in the region, withstands the worst of the ill effects of the Afghan security situation. Historic and geographic contiguity; shared ethno-linguistic ties and cultural; faith and other common interests are the leading "factors driving Pakistan's approach" toward Afghanistan.⁶⁰ The countries' geographic proximity has significant implications for their security and economic prosperity. It is evident from the history that stability in the region remains a condition for Afghanistan's politico-

⁵⁸ In 2015 Transparency International ranked Afghanistan 166th out of 167 countries in its annual Corruption Perceptions Index; Transparency International, "Corruption Perceptions Index 2015," 1 Feb, 2016. <https://www.transparency.org/cpi2014/results>.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Talal Hassan, "Afghanistan Complex Situation and its Implications on Pakistan," (Sweden, Malmö University Electronic Publishing: 2009), <http://dspace.mah.se/bitstream/handle/2043/10761/final%20thesis.pdf>.

economic stability, as Afghanistan lies on a major crossroad between South and Central Asia. In such a sensitive situation, Pakistan's future role is largely dependent on the extent of its acceptance by the Afghans as a moderator of peace.

1. A Friendly Afghanistan: A Strategic Compulsion for Pakistan

"Pakistan's past, present, and future are closely linked with Afghanistan. A peaceful, united, and stable Afghanistan is critical for Pakistan's security and is a top policy objective. At the same time, Pakistan must prevent the opening of another hostile front should Afghanistan emerge as a proxy for India."⁶¹ This section describes the strategic objectives Pakistan seeks in Afghanistan.

a. Security Concerns

The restoration of peace in Afghanistan undeniably has great relevance to Pakistan's strategic interests in the region. India seeks to interrupt Pakistan's friendly ties with Afghanistan and, consequently, to negate any chances of Pakistan gaining strategic depth. To this end, India has always promoted an anti-Pakistan government in Afghanistan, "discrediting Pakistan as a terrorist state," hindering Pakistan's access to Central Asia, and pouring its agents through the western border to instigate insurgency in the Province of Baluchistan, and turbulence in cities like Karachi.⁶²

Pakistan has secured its 2,204-kilometer-long western border with Afghanistan without deploying regular troops, thus has the opportunity to use those troops against any Indian venture on its eastern front, if necessary. Otherwise, committing a sizeable force along this border will significantly drain Pakistan's military. With military and resource capacity in mind, friendly western borders are critical to Pakistan's security, which also requires a pleasant government in Kabul. Furthermore, harmony in Afghanistan is essential to lasting stability in Pakistan, along with many other regional factors, such as

⁶¹ Naveed Mukhtar, "Afghanistan-Alternative Futures and their Implications," Army War College, (Carlisle Barracks PA, 2011), 5, <http://www.dtic.mil/get-tr-doc/pdf?AD=ADA547182>.

⁶² Kamran Yousuf, "Pakistan hands over dossiers against India to UN chief," *The Express Tribune*, October 2, 2015, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/966088/pakistan-hands-over-dossiers-against-india-to-un-chief/>.

bringing calmness in Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan's (TTP) agendas, and weapon flow.⁶³ Pakistan's first concern, therefore, is making sure Afghanistan does not pose a threat; this factor shapes the major contours of Pakistan's foreign policy toward Afghanistan.⁶⁴

b. Strategic Depth

In an interview, Former President General Pervez Musharraf once said, "These are old theories. After India and Pakistan have become nuclear powers, if anyone perceives that one would try to get some strategic gains, it would be a sheer folly. It is not possible now that we will be overrun and will go to Afghanistan for strategic depth."⁶⁵ These remarks reflect a common understanding that Pakistan will displace its strategic assets to Afghanistan if needed, but this may not happen. However, since September 11, the "sacrifice" or loss of strategic depth has become a benchmark in Pakistan's "security doctrine and Kashmir policy." The importance of loss or gain in this area can be understood by reviewing the geneses of strategic depth in last two decades, and the results for Pakistan.

Mirza Aslam Baig and General Zia-ul-Haq, ex-chiefs of the Pakistan Army, are attributed with the invention of the term "strategic depth" in the early 1980s:

Theoretically stated, it was a proactive defensive strategy of securing "Islamic Depth" in the west to counterbalance the conventionally superior "Hindu India" by strengthening diplomatic and military relations with Afghanistan and the Arab world to the extent that in the worst-case scenario of India invading and overrunning Pakistan, the Army High Command could relocate westwards and use Afghanistan as a frontline ally from which to roll back Indian "expansionism."⁶⁶

⁶³ Ghulam Sarwar, "Viable Options to Achieve Peace in Afghanistan," *The Citadel Journal*, no. 2/06 (Pakistan, Quetta, 2006), 35.

⁶⁴ Abdul Sattar, *Afghanistan: Past, Present and Future, From Jihad to Civil War*, (Islamabad: The Institute of Regional Studies, 1997), 462–63.

⁶⁵ Sreeram Sundar Chaulia, "Strategic Depth, Strategic Assets and the Changing Dynamics of Pakistan's Kashmir Game Plan," *Kashmir Herald*, Volume 1, No. 7, December 2001, <http://www.kashmirherald.com/featuredarticle/strategicdepth-prn.html>.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

Conception or level of sway, in Pakistan security doctrine may differ from past to present, but the term still exists for Pakistan.⁶⁷

c. Economic Benefits

Pakistan and Afghanistan rely on each other strategically for lasting economic expansion. Afghanistan, a landlocked country, depends on Pakistan's transit trade route through the sea and direct access to the outside world, whereas Pakistan needs Afghanistan to exploit natural energy and a trade corridor to the noncoastal Central Asian Republics (CARs)—having recently joined the global economic system with a tremendous amount of energy resources (oil and natural gas), Afghanistan offers a gateway to a “new Silk Road.” Both countries could help bringing the CARs out of their “decades of isolation,” while also gaining their own economic benefits. A stable and friendly Afghanistan is needed to actualize the dream of the new Silk Road, and to contribute to Pakistan's vision.⁶⁸ A stable and friendly Afghanistan would also provide the West an opportunity to access more energy resources to meet their future needs rather than relying on control of the “Pakistan–Afghanistan corridor”; “this was probably a far more important strategic role than that Pakistan played during the Cold War years.”⁶⁹

2. Historic Dimensions of Pak–Afghan Relations and Policy Review

Pak–Afghan relations commenced with the chaotic issue of Pashtunistan, when King Mohammed Zahir Shah's government voted against Pakistan in the United Nations after gaining its independence in 1947. This issue remained alive with varied intensity mainly until 1977–78, resulting in border clashes, closure of diplomatic missions, and discontinuation of Afghan transit trade. This last act consequently took Afghanistan enormously close to the Soviets, which later came with grave consequences. The countries' foreign policy dealings may not be a true success story, but they have reached some agreements. Pakistan adopted a defensive policy to ensure a friendly Afghanistan

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ajay Darshan Behera, “Pakistan's Strategic Vision: With and without the Taliban,” *ASIA TIMES*, March 22, 2002, <http://www.atimes.com/ind-pak/DC22Df01.html>.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

for stability on its western border. Despite hiccups, Pakistan resultantly did not face two-front situations during both its wars with India. This achievement may be attributed to the fact that Pakistan's foreign policy toward Afghanistan was not focused entirely on its own internal political dynamics, nor did the sole interest of any external player influence or shape the situation for a greater gain.⁷⁰

During the mid-'70s, both sides came close to reconciling the Durand Line issue. Internal political changes in Afghanistan, however, coupled with Soviet involvement and the infrequent interest of the United States influenced the delicate political arrangement that prevailed in Pakistan. Thus, the policy remained focused on narrow objectives. The goal of attaining "strategic depth" caused much chaos. Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan further altered the dynamics of Pak–Afghan relations. During the Soviet invasion, Pakistan was the primary channel for logistics support to Afghan Mujahedeen (freedom fighters), which became unfavorably vital for Afghanistan.⁷¹ The convergence of interests between Pakistan and the United States helped to contain the Soviet threat and subsequently forced their retreat. After the Soviet withdrawal, Pakistan's sub-imperial agenda in Afghanistan had a vital Saudi connection. Afghanistan became the battleground for a proxy war between Shiite Iran and Sunni Wahhabi Islam, propagated by Saudi Arabia and supported by Pakistan. This proxy war for influence continues today.⁷²

When the Taliban emerged in 1994, Pakistan viewed the Taliban as the only entity in Afghanistan capable of restoring the peace in the wake of the war with Soviets.⁷³ After the Taliban established its government in Kabul in 1996, in order to

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Aabha Dixit, "Conflict Resolution in Afghanistan: Does India have a role to play?" ACDIS Occasional Paper, Program in Arms Control, Disarmament, and International Security, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (December 1997), <http://acdis.illinois.edu/assets/docs/283/ConflictResolutioninAfghanistanDoesIndiahaveaRoletoPlay.pdf>.

⁷² Riffat Hussain, "Pakistan's Relations," *Strategic Studies*, 2002; Abdul Sattar, *Afghanistan: Past, Present and Future*, 462–63.

⁷³ Larry P. Goodson, *Afghanistan's Endless War: State Failure, Regional Politics and the Rise of the Taliban* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 2002), 74.

secure its western borders, Pakistan formally recognized the Taliban; this had many serious future implications for Pakistan.⁷⁴

A new situation emerged after 9/11 and the region's political scene dramatically changed. The Taliban's retreat brought Pakistan's ambitions to an end, and its foreign policy collapsed. When Pakistan's foreign policy in Afghanistan turned out to be counterproductive for its own national security, Pakistan then made a strategic turn. Pakistan had to re-align its policy with the international community to safeguard vital national interests. Influenced by post-9/11 U.S. policies, Pakistan emerged as the front-line state to support the international effort to fight against terrorism in Afghanistan. Pakistan's policy guidelines primarily consisted of ceasing diplomatic relations with the Taliban government; unconditionally supporting U.S. war efforts against Al-Qaeda; and hunting down Al-Qaeda operatives and denying refuge to any of its members.⁷⁵ Post-9/11 Afghanistan has been the cornerstone of Pakistan policies. Indeed, when Pakistan was coerced into joining the U.S.-led coalition against terrorism, Pakistan's then-president, General Pervez Musharraf, insisted that Pakistan's policy toward Afghanistan was being "sacrificed" to such "critical concerns" as the "cause of Kashmir."⁷⁶ On September 19, 2001, he said during his speech on national television, "I have done everything for Afghanistan and the Taliban when the whole world was against them. We are trying our best to come out of this critical situation without any damage to them."⁷⁷

Because of the "buffer status" Afghanistan gained from the "19th-century colonial rivalry between the British and the Czarist empires"—known as the "Great Game"—Afghanistan, while safeguarding its independence, has diligently evaded the temptations of foreign impulses. Pakistan, on the other hand, has remained dependent on external alliances to ensure its security. The dependency in Pakistan's foreign policy thus makes an obvious difference to "Afghanistan's image as a fiercely independent people and

⁷⁴ Abdul Sattar, *Afghanistan: Past, Present and Future*, 462–63.

⁷⁵ Shamshad Ahmad, "Post-9/11 Foreign Policy of Pakistan," *Criterion Quarterly* 1, (2013), <http://www.criterion-quarterly.com/post-911-foreign-policy-of-pakistan/>.

⁷⁶ Pervez Musharraf, "President's Speech to the Nation" (speech, broadcasted on Pakistan Radio and Television, September 19, 2001), <http://www.gritzie.com/Musharraf-address-9-19-01.htm>.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

country.” Pakistan has remained a victim of its geography and incomplete partition since independence. The legacy of Kashmir has always been dominant in its foreign policy. Consequently, jihad, in all its shapes and forms, thrived to its limit and became an instrument of its foreign policy. Alongside Kashmir, Pakistan also suffered due to its strategic location—by being a close ally of the West during every watershed event throughout history, whether supporting the United States against the former USSR in Afghanistan, or being a front-line adversary against terrorists in the Global War on Terror.

Pakistan’s present policy regarding Afghanistan has earned a place for the country in the League of Nations, especially with the United States. Pakistan’s political and economic gains in Afghanistan, however, remain unfocused; thus, Pakistan has continued to fall short of its objectives. Afghanistan has since returned to the mainstream of the international system, but both Pakistan and Afghanistan must still regenerate their bilateral relations with cautious optimism.⁷⁸

In the context of its transitioning relationship with Afghanistan, Pakistan’s national vital interests are, in sum, to attain: (1) a stable, peaceful, and prosperous Afghanistan; (2) a friendly government in Afghanistan; (3) Indian influence in Afghanistan that is limited to the economy and development; and (4) accessibility to energy corridors in the CARs.

B. REGIONAL GEOPOLITICAL MATRIX AND DIVERGENT STRATEGIES

The global and regional environment of the Central, Southern, and South East Asian regions has transformed drastically after both the demise of Soviet Union and the events of 9/11. Broadly, geo-economics have taken precedence over geo-political or military objectives, especially after the independence of the Central Asian States upon the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Economically, this region has emerged far ahead of the Middle East in terms of potential oil and gas reserves, as well as agricultural capacity.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Riffat Hussain, “Pakistan’s Relations,” *Strategic Studies*.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

Therefore, the new “Great Game” is to gain access to the wealth of the region through plans off Hindu Kush on ancient precedence. With the emergence of a new “Great Game,” Afghanistan became the linchpin.

Yet another shift occurred after 9/11 and the subsequent Afghan invasion, merging the geo-economic matrix with the security-borne milieu. This latest transformation has posed new challenges and threats to the region’s developing countries. The game is not restricted to limited powers, as it has been in the past, but has instead become a free-for-all.⁸⁰ Having been exposed to geo-economic factors vis-à-vis the geo-political transformation, the interests of various regional and extra-regional players have come to the forefront. Any influence inside Afghanistan by the external players directly or indirectly implicates Pakistan’s economic and security concerns. The new Great Game consists of several regional and extra-regional powers with various geopolitical stakes, such as Russia, China, the United States, Iran, India, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey.

1. India versus Pakistan

Heading toward the “Afghan end-game” with the withdrawal of U.S. troops in 2016, predominant regional players—such as India, Iran, and Pakistan—are further shoring up for their interests in Afghanistan and the region through their proxies in order to gain trade, political, and economic advantages and to hold a better position at the negotiation table.⁸¹ Historical rivals India and Pakistan have both pursued their respective “geopolitical, defense, and economic interests” in Afghanistan to thwart the other’s advantage.⁸² India has been hard at work to build a trade link via Iran and Afghanistan. This link has many advantages for India: one, land access to Central Asia; two, to outflank Pakistan militarily and economically and prevent Pakistan from achieving strategic depth in a stable Afghanistan; and three, to support the establishment

⁸⁰ Musa Khan Jalalzai, *The Pipeline War in Afghanistan* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2003), 131–134.

⁸¹ Tahir Nazir, “Afghanistan’s Endgame Is India’s Dilemma – Analysis.”

⁸² Larry Hanauer and Peter Chalk, “India’s and Pakistan’s Strategies in Afghanistan: Implications for the United States and the Region,” RAND Centre of Asia Pacific Policy (Santa Monica, 2012), iii, http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional_papers/2012/RAND_OP387.pdf.

of any government in Afghanistan that is anti-Pakistan.⁸³ John Arquilla and Hy Rothstein's view supplements this argument—they describe Pakistan as the only direct subject of the “Afghan end game” after Afghanistan itself; India's involvement with the aforementioned intents and the future friendliness of Afghanistan will directly determine Pakistan's ability to cultivate and secure its interests.⁸⁴ In other words, Pakistan's loss is India's gain; this rivalry obscures the two country's efforts—as well as any other countries' efforts—to place Afghanistan on a sustainable path toward political stability, economic growth, and regional integration.”⁸⁵

a. India's Increasing Influence in Afghanistan

India has predominantly pursued such objectives in Afghanistan as (1) preventing anti-India terrorism; (2) undermining Pakistani and Taliban influence; (3) increasing access to Central Asia; and (4) projecting power and establishing global interests by adopting strategies, e.g., increasing development aid, supporting anti-Taliban factions (Northern Alliance), regionalizing solutions to the “Afghan end game” in terms of security and stability, and projecting power through military assistance.⁸⁶ Generally, India's main policy in Afghanistan, and beyond to the CARs, is driven by the country's interest to counter Pakistan. India has thus “has worked hard to win the confidence of the post-Taliban government in Kabul.”⁸⁷ India has spent more than \$2 billion on development projects and other military assistance for the expansion of strong diplomatic and trade ties with Kabul.⁸⁸ During this time, India has strongly endeavored to provide Afghanistan an alternate economic route that secures India's economic interests while depleting any future economic gains for Pakistan.

⁸³ Editorial, “Quarterly Review,” *Pakistan Defense Journal*, 3.

⁸⁴ Hy Rothstein and John Arquilla, *Afghan*, 6.

⁸⁵ Larry Hanauer and Peter Chalk, “India's and Pakistan,” iii.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 11–22.

⁸⁷ Asma Shakir Khawaja, “Pakistan and the ‘New Great Game,’” Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI) Paper 5, April 2003, http://ipripak.org/papers/pakandnewgame.shtml#_ftn86.

⁸⁸ Brajesh Upadhyay, “Pakistani fears over India Afghan role ‘not groundless,’” *BBC News*, (Washington, August 7, 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-23598521>).

For example, India spent approximately \$135 million by 2009 to construct a 135-mile highway, Delaram-Zaranj/Route 606, linking Iran's border to the Kandahar–Herat Highway.⁸⁹ Most recently, India conceived an \$85 million plan to develop Chabahar Port by converting berths into container terminals that could be leased for at least two berths for 10 years.⁹⁰ India has exploited prevalent “international anti-terrorism sentiments” to its advantage. Pakistan, logically, does not oppose India's developmental assistance in Afghanistan; however, any other endeavor for marginalizing Pakistan's security interests might jeopardize Pakistan's approach to the “Afghan end-game.” U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel's remarks, while delivering a speech at Oklahoma's Cameron University in 2011, augment the argument here: “India for some time has always used Afghanistan as a second front, and India has over the years financed problems for Pakistan on that side of the border.”⁹¹

Once Hamid Karzai gained power, India's involvement in Afghanistan increased. Opening consulates under the “development” umbrella—specifically in border regions such as Jalalabad, Kandahar, Mazar-e-Sharif, and Herat—was a step in the same direction. After returning from a regional trip, U.S. Special Envoy James Dobbins described apprehension: “Pakistan's concerns over India's presence in Afghanistan are exaggerated but not groundless.”⁹² Therefore, it may not be baseless to say that India is using tactics to exert pressure on Pakistan by making its western border unsafe—the goal, then, is to give Pakistan no other choice than to compromise on its principled stand on Kashmir. India played a similar coercive maneuver in the 1971 crisis that resulted in the Indo–Pak war and separation of East Pakistan (present Bangladesh) from the West.⁹³ Recently, Pakistan has submitted a dossier of evidence to the UN secretary general

⁸⁹ “Route 606 (Afghanistan),” World eBook Library, Academic Research Database of Portable eBooks, <http://www.worldlibrary.in/article/whebn0027627243/route%20606%20%28afghanistan%29>.

⁹⁰ Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, “India and Iran trying to seal Chabahar Port Deal by January,” *The Economic Times*, Dec 17, 2015, http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-12-17/news/69119386_1_chabahar-port-southeastern-iran-shipping-minister-nitin-gadkari.

⁹¹ “India Financed Problems for Pakistan in Afghanistan: Hagel,” *The Times of India*, February 26, 2013, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/India-financed-problems-for-Pak-in-Afghanistan-says-US-defence-secretary-nominee-Chuck-Hagel/articleshow/18694475.cms>.

⁹² Brajesh Upadhyay “Pakistani fears over India Afghan role.”

⁹³ Ghulam Sarwar, “Viable Options to Achieve Peace in Afghanistan,” 36.

regarding India's destructive involvement inside Pakistan through its Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), a spy agency of India.⁹⁴

b. Pakistan's Response

To quell political, economic, and security-related anxieties, Pakistan has several objectives for its relationships with Afghanistan: blocking threatening interests from other states, such as India; preventing encirclement and maintaining strategic depth; averting Afghan claims in the Pashtunistan or Durand Line issue; and building economic relations with the CARs through Afghanistan.⁹⁵ To achieve these objectives, Pakistan has pursued various strategies. For instance, Pakistan might have kept proxy tools alive to thwart India's influence. Pakistan has also worked to make itself indispensable to the Afghan reconciliation process, offering development aid and trade, keeping check on Afghanistan's regional integration, and securing the energy and economic corridor that connects Pakistan and the CARs through Afghanistan. Pakistan has also made itself a frontline United States ally, which pressures Washington to protect Pakistan's interests in the region.⁹⁶

While many commentators agree that President Musharraf held a strong stance against Al-Qaeda, but the members of the Pakistani Security setup demonstrated some sympathy toward the Taliban, possibly due to previous affiliations as well as significant capital invested in helping the group prior to 9/11. They were concerned that if the pro-Pakistan Taliban failed, as the Taliban did after the U.S. invasion, then the next ruling government in Afghanistan may take a pro-India stance, which could have serious negative repercussions for Pakistan. These concerns were realistic as Karzai's government permitted India to construct a number of consulates in Afghanistan along the Pakistan border, and has shown signs of discomfort with Pakistan despite the fact that Pakistan is fully contributing support after the Bone process. Any such sign of the Afghan government's favoritism toward India causes worries for Pakistan. Pakistan also

⁹⁴ Kamran Yousuf, "Pakistan hands over dossiers against India to UN chief."

⁹⁵ Larry Hanauer and Peter Chalk, "India's and Pakistan," 25–28.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 28–32.

has future security concerns on the horizon. One of these concerns is a possible disproportionate percentage of non-Pashtuns/Tajiks/Northern Alliance affiliates dominating the ANSF officers' cadre, especially with respect to those trained in India who may carry anti-Pakistan sentiments. For this reason, Pakistan's security setup tends to support Pashtun factions in Afghanistan to avoid losing ground in an unfavorable post-2016 scenario; this would make sure Pakistan is still able to harvest a pro-Pakistan regime, or otherwise the Taliban could unshackle the Pashtunistan issue or likely to support Pakistani Taliban, who are anti-Pakistan.

2. Russo–Indo–Iran Nexus

Simultaneously, other regional players have their own issues to consider. Russia desires influence in Afghanistan in order to keep itself a regional power, to lure Iran into providing sustained supplies to the Northern Alliance, and to retain economic hold over the CARs.⁹⁷ India is also a part of this nexus; however, India's current focus is to enhance strategic ties with the United States, to, in turn, strengthen its greater ambitions against China—much like Pakistan's recent efforts to strengthen ties with Russia.⁹⁸ Since Iran has always supported the United States' effort to contain the Taliban (also supported by Saudi Arabia and Pakistan), Iran extended all-out support to the Northern Alliance to oppose the Taliban, while also aiming to bring together the Shiites in Afghanistan. However, the capture of two Iranian aircraft—loaded with arms, ammunition, and 35 trucks along with their Iranian drivers from Mazar-e-Sharif—on August 8, 1998 sufficiently exposed Iranian military involvement in Northern Afghanistan.⁹⁹

The Soviet Union's disintegration at the end of the Cold War and the emergence of the CARs—rich in mineral resources—rekindled the West's interests in this region. Russia, India, and Iran then realized that the economic linkage of the peaceful CARs with the United States/the West through Afghanistan and Pakistan would be a serious threat to

⁹⁷ Editorial, "Quarterly Review," *Pakistan Defense Journal*, (Rawalpindi: October–December 2003), 3.

⁹⁸ Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Pakistan, Russia to Enhance Cooperation," *DAWN*, October 22, 2014, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1139575>.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

their economic interests in the region, and could leave them vulnerable to Islamic influence. The Russo–Indo–Iran nexus was thus established to keep Afghanistan unbalanced. All three countries supported the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan financially and militarily in order to create imbalance in the stability equation among Pakistan and the regional or extra-regional players.¹⁰⁰

Iran’s active influence remained significant in Afghanistan. The Iranian Republican Guard provided the first resistance to the Soviet invasion when they crossed the border into Afghanistan to support the anti-communist Mujahedeen. Their goal was to improve stability on Afghanistan’s borders while reducing the influence of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. “Iran’s Afghanistan policy is largely motivated by sectarian ties to Afghanistan’s Shia minority.”¹⁰¹ General McChrystal also endorsed the continued Iranian involvement as a way “to keep the pot boiling”; in his 2009 report, he explains, “Iran plays an ambiguous role in Afghanistan, providing developmental assistance and political support to GIROA while the Iranian Quds Force is reportedly training fighters for certain Taliban groups and providing other forms of military assistance to insurgents.”¹⁰²

3. Russia, China, and Pakistan as an Emergent Block

China and Russia both possess the capacity to ally against any other set of powers in the future; however, Pakistan has yet to fully stabilize or secure its interests in the region—if India attains a strategic alliance with the United States against China, it would of course be to Pakistan’s disadvantage. For the United States, the U.S.–Pakistan versus U.S.–India allegiance poses a difficult conundrum. Pakistan may find a strategic gap to secure an alliance with Russia and further strengthen ties with China. Pakistan’s most recent endeavors to enhance ties with Russia induced possibly the first-ever visit of

¹⁰⁰ Kenneth Katzman, “Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance,” (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2013), 7,

¹⁰¹ ICG, *Afghanistan: The problem of Pashtun Alienation*, Asia Report N°62 (Kabul/Brussels, August 5, 2003), 24, available at <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?ots591=0c54e3b3-1e9c-be1e-2c24-a6a8c7060233&lng=en&id=28376>.

¹⁰² Stanley McChrystal, “Commander’s Initial Assessment Report of the Situation in Afghanistan,” ISAF Headquarters, Kabul, *Washington Post*: August 30, 2009, http://media.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/documents/Assessment_Redacted_092109.pdf.

Russian navy ships to Pakistani ports. This only happened after the U.S. president's visit to India in 2014, and the signing of strategic agreements including a civil nuclear deal, which poured salt into Pakistan's old wounds of "been left alone." These frustrations have compelled Pakistan to realign itself in the international game of geopolitics to secure its survival.

4. Saudi Arabia and Pakistan

The role of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan together also remained crucial in Afghanistan. Saudi Arabia mainly helped the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan against the Soviets by providing them financial and arms support. Pakistan was the conduit used by both Saudi Arabia and the United States to fight an unconventional war in Afghanistan. Both countries pursued their respective agendas in Afghanistan. Saudi Arabia, being a Sunni kingdom, primarily facilitated the Taliban for its ability to counter the sway of a Shia Iran. Pakistan, however, had more geo-strategic interests. For having strong cultural, religious, and historical ties with the Afghan people, Pakistan inherently influenced Afghan developments and desired a pro-Pakistan government in Afghanistan to check India and Iran's influence in the region: "Islamabad's perceived need for a stable western border, the acquisition of strategic depth against India, and the prospect of using Afghanistan as a gateway to Central Asian markets sharpened its resolve to support the Taliban despite heavy political, diplomatic and economic costs."¹⁰³

Saudi Arabia's role is well explained in the words of Ahmed Rashid:

The Saudis have never developed a clear foreign policy toward Afghanistan and Central Asia, an omission the United States and other Western nations find deeply frustrating. But because they depend on Saudi oil, arms contracts, and goodwill, the Western nations, and in particular the United States, have refused to exert real pressure on Saudi Arabia to change its policies.¹⁰⁴

The Taliban thus continued their association with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.

¹⁰³ ICG, *Afghanistan: The problem of Pashtun Alienation*, 22.

¹⁰⁴ Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*, (Penguin Books: December 31, 2002), 225.

5. Conflict between the United States, Russia, and China

The bigger participants of the New Great Game—the United States, Russia, and China—developed conflict while using Afghanistan as a buffer state to fulfill their national objectives, described in further detail in this section.

a. U.S./NATO Presence in the Region

After achieving the 2001 invasion's broad objectives, the prolonged presence of U.S. and NATO forces on Afghan soil put the United States at a disadvantage for pursuing its interests in the South Asian region—for example, to reach out to the energy-enriched CARs and Caspian Basin, to keep check on a re-energized Russia, and to contain an emergent China.¹⁰⁵ The region's growing economies and the GWOT's fight to stop the spread of religious fundamentalism have enhanced the region's significance. The United States has therefore become deeply involved in the region on diplomatic, economic, and military fronts. The objective of the 2001 U.S. intervention to overthrow the Taliban—the launch of Operation Enduring Freedom—was twofold: First, “to punish the perpetrators of 9/11 and the government that provided them with sanctuary;” second, “to create a moderate government in Afghanistan” that could contain the spillover of terrorism and secure access to the CARs' energy resources. It is also perceived that before start of the Taliban regime in 1996, the “U.S. was backing a plan for gas and oil pipelines from Turkmenistan across Afghanistan towards markets in Pakistan, and beyond.”¹⁰⁶ When Kabul fell to the Taliban, Unocal—the favored U.S. bidder for the pipeline—said that “it would make the pipeline project easier to implement”; however, because the Taliban did not have the control over northern Afghanistan until then, the

¹⁰⁵ Barry Grey, “New Caspian Oil Interests Fuel U.S. War drive Against Iraq,” *DNI-News Digest* (Nov 16, 1998), <http://d-n-i.abdolian.com/news/dnd/98/11/16%20Nov%201998%20to%2017%20Nov%201998.htm>; Robert W Radtke, “China's ‘Peaceful Rise’ Overshadowing U.S. Influence in Asia,” Asia Society, originally published in *Christian Science Monitor* (December 8, 2003), <http://asiasociety.org/policy/strategic-challenges/us-asia/chinas-peaceful-rise-overshadowing-us-influence-asia>; Matthew Rosenberg, “Karzai Says U.S. Bases Can Stay, Raising Some Eyebrows in West,” *New York Times* (May 9, 2013), http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/10/world/asia/karzai-says-us-can-keep-afghan-bases-after-2014.html?_r=3&.

¹⁰⁶ David Loyn, *Butcher & Bolt: Two Hundred Years of Foreign Failure in Afghanistan*, (Great Britain; Hutchinson, 2008), 254.

talks between Unocal and the Taliban never materialized.¹⁰⁷ Hence, “the agenda of securing access to the energy resources of CARs was already in the cards, though not publicly declared.”¹⁰⁸

The United States is presently the on-scene commander in South Asian region, but the complexity of regional issues and divergent interests of regional and extra regional players is making it difficult for the United States to get the regional powers to orchestrate peaceful resolutions toward its end goals. At the same time, Russia and China, being the major state actors in the region, are adversely affected as well.

b. Russia’s Interests

Ever-changing global and regional settings have compelled Russia to reshape its regional policies, especially in the context of Afghanistan. Russia’s interests in the region in general, and in Afghanistan in particular, are (1) to maintain its status as a regional power; (2) to maintain its hold over the CARs and to prevent detrimental nationalist movements in these states; (3) to keep conditions unstable in Afghanistan—a stable Afghanistan would prevent the CARs from making a trade and energy link to the Arabian Sea, which would benefit the West—and to work with Iran to oversee the westward flow of hydrocarbon resources through the Caspian Sea and Central Asia; and (4) to retain influence in Afghanistan by supporting anti-Taliban factions—Northern Alliance leaders, mostly Tajiks and Uzbeks, that could help improve Russia’s image among the CARs as a compassionate power and also to protect the CARs from religious extremism flowing from Afghanistan.¹⁰⁹

c. China’s Interests

Although China shares only a small mountainous border with Afghanistan—the Wakhan Corridor, which is virtually impassable and barely inhabited—but it has

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 255.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Marvin G. Weinbaum, *Afghanistan and its Neighbors, an Ever Dangerous Neighborhood*, Special Report (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, June 2006), <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/resources/sr162.pdf>; Editorial, “Quarterly Review,” *Pakistan Defense Journal*, (Rawalpindi: July–September 2000), 23–24.

increased its involvement in South Asian region primarily for Afghan minerals and other resources, and to avoid “encirclement” by India.¹¹⁰ The large U.S./NATO military presence right at its doorstep poses additional security concerns to China. During the past few years, China has significantly invested in Afghan reconstruction and infrastructure development for mineral extraction; this has also served to nurture a China-friendly Afghan population and improve relations with the Afghan government. The effects of religious fundamentalism, which spread from Afghanistan to the Muslim-dominated southwest Xinxiang province, is also viewed as “a threat to China’s stability;” it was at one point believed that China’s Muslim population was trying to mount an insurgency, and received training from Taliban sanctuaries in Afghanistan.¹¹¹ To assuage economic and security concerns in the region, China has invested in Pakistan over the decades in the shape of mega-projects, e.g., the Gwadar deep sea port, coastal highway, and the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to gain quick access to warm waters and to keep Pakistan as a supporting stability force in China’s Xinxiang province. China’s economically “peaceful rise” and the progressive efficacy of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which can collaborate with other countries to form an alliance in parallel to NATO, increases concerns for the United States in the region.¹¹²

6. Pakistan among All Players

Pakistan’s 2001 policy decision to ally with global and U.S. powers gradually directed the war onto Pakistani soil. The United States kept the pressure on Pakistan to “do more” against Al-Qaeda and Afghan Taliban leaders hiding in Pakistan.¹¹³ Pakistan’s policy decisions and their implications (such as the Lal Masjid incident and military operations in FATA) caused anti-U.S. sentiments among the public. Radical sympathizers, powered by religiously exploited radical groups, formed Tehrik-e-Taliban

¹¹⁰ Kenneth Katzman, “Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance,” 55.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 44; Francesco Sisci, “Stability and Instability beyond Afghanistan,” *Asia Times*, Dec 15, 2001, <http://www.atimes.com/c-asia/CL15Ag02.html>.

¹¹² Robert W Radtke, “China’s ‘Peaceful Rise’ Overshadowing U.S. Influence in Asia,” 44.

¹¹³ Ashutosh Misra, “George Bush Puts Pakistan and Pervez Musharraf Out in the Cold,” Institute for Defense Studies & Analyses, March 11, 2006, http://www.idsa.in/idsastrategiccomments/GeorgeBushPutsPakistanandPervezMusharrafOutintheCold_AMisra_110306.

Pakistan (TTP). With the TTP working against the Pakistani military and its innocent people, Pakistan's prime focus turned to internal law and order; Pakistan became increasingly concerned about its future security, especially with respect to the Pashtunistan or Durand Line issue, which could leave them open to foreign exploitation after 2016.

Throughout the decade-long GWOT, Pakistan pursued policy against terrorism at a very high cost. Pakistan has sustained losses and casualties during the "other's war," far exceeding what any other country has suffered. According to South Asia Terrorism Portal's most recent data sheet, Pakistan suffered 59,925 terrorism-related fatalities between 2003 and 2016; this figure includes 20,933 civilian and 6,412 security forces personnel casualties, while 32,580 terrorists/insurgents have also been eliminated.¹¹⁴ Since 2013, over 9,500 terror-related incidents have taken place in Pakistan, destroying more than 700 schools in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province, thus depriving at least 100,000 children of education and bearing roughly \$68 billion (U.S.) in overall costs of war.¹¹⁵ Despite these losses, Pakistan is still determined to persevere its policy against the radicals; however, "doing more" to align with U.S. and Western allies could further elevate its domestic issues and harm its future interests in Afghanistan.

¹¹⁴ "Fatalities in Terrorist Violence in Pakistan 2003–2016," South Asia Terrorism Portal, Pakistan Data Sheet, February 7, 2016, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/database/casualties.htm>.

¹¹⁵ "Pakistan Assessment 2013," South Asia Terrorism Portal, March 2013, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/index.htm>;

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III. FACTORS/VARIABLES, THREATS, AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR POST-U.S. WITHDRAWAL SCENARIOS

Together, various stagnant factors have crafted the Afghan imbroglio throughout the GWOT. Dynamic (or kinetic) factors, however, have equal implications for the post-U.S. withdrawal scenario in Afghanistan. These factors and variables will ultimately set the stage for the “transformation decade” after 2016.

A. CONSTANT DYNAMICS/INHERENT FACTORS

The factors and variables discussed in this section are ever-present in Afghanistan’s demography. They have shaped Afghan history to this point, and will continue to shape its future.

1. Geostrategic and Geopolitical Connotations

Afghanistan’s geostrategic position impacts world powers’ interests in the region, and consequently their geopolitical strategies. Its proximity to the CARs—rich with resources—to Iran—having enmity toward the West—to China—an emergent economic power—and to Pakistan—the only Muslim country with nuclear power—makes Afghanistan a conducive jump-off base for asserting influence in the region. These inherent geographic qualities will cause similar consequences in the future, and will continue to keep Afghanistan a place of conflict as world powers police the region. Had Afghanistan been located where, say, the Maldives are, it might have been a most peaceful country.

2. Socio-political Factors

Afghanistan’s social demography may prevent the country from ever transforming into a sophisticated political entity. The country’s varied ethnicities, coupled with the overall geopolitical environment, have prevented it from attaining even the semblance of a modern state. The overwhelming conflicts in Afghanistan have considerably altered the balance of social and political forces in its society, and have prevented the country from resolving traditional divisions. Afghanistan’s socio-political

environment is complex and unique—it cannot be compared to any other models that may otherwise help inform an optimal strategic solution. The complex traits of Afghan society discussed in this section have affected—and will continue to affect—Afghanistan’s historic formulation and confound policymakers.

a. *Diversity and Psycho-social Context*

Afghanistan’s demographic heterogeneity has resulted in cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and political diversity. As a result, the Afghan people are more faithful to their individual groups and have less Afghan nationalism, making them prone to inter-group rivalries and avoidance of state authority. “Linguistic diversity” also elevates feelings of “individualism and separatism” among the people.¹¹⁶ In the recent past, yet another dimension of diversity has been introduced—ideological diversity among the fundamentalist Taliban, moderate Muslims, and communism-influenced population of the northern zones.¹¹⁷

b. *Pashtunwali*

The interplay of geographic, historic, and sociological peculiarities of Afghan society has resulted in a unique Afghan psychological profile. Afghanistan is a traditional tribal society in which all norms, values, and traditions fall within a comprehensive system of values called *Pashtunwali*, i.e., the code of conduct practiced primarily by the dominant Pashtun tribes.¹¹⁸ *Pashtunwali* plays a prominent role in conflict management through philosophies like *nang* (honor), *Badal* (revenge), *Melmastia* (hospitality), and *Nanawatai* (refuge).¹¹⁹ In addition to these *Pashtunwali* essentials, the Pashtuns believe

¹¹⁶ Dennis O. Young, “Overcoming the Obstacles to Establishing a Democratic State in Afghanistan.”

¹¹⁷ Husain Haqqani, “Afghanistan’s Islamist Groups,” *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* Vol. 5, (Hudson Institute: May 23, 2007), <http://www.currenttrends.org/research/detail/afghanistans-islamist-groups>.

¹¹⁸ Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*, 25.

¹¹⁹ Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, “No Sign Until the Burst of Fire: Understanding the Pakistan-Afghanistan Frontier,” *International Security*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (Spring 2008), 61–64. http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/files/IS3204_pp041-077_Johnson_Mason.pdf.

that they only fight for three things to maintain their honor: *zar* (gold), *zan* (women), and *zamin* (land).¹²⁰

The Taliban regime did not give up Osama Bin Laden to the United States in 2001 due to the code of hospitality, which forbids Afghans from “handing over their guests to their enemies, even if it means sacrificing their own lives.”¹²¹ *Pashtunwali*—symbolizing their personal bravery, honor, and revenge—remains integral in their fight against any adversary. The tradition of uniting around ethnic, religious, and tribal leaders against a common enemy helps them sustain any long-drawn struggle. As Johnson and Mason explains: “Pashtuns believe that their social code produces men, who are superior to those produced under the Western model, and they have no desire to have a new social system imposed on them by outsiders”; one could believe that nobody other than the Afghans themselves can devise a sustaining governing mechanism.¹²²

c. A Fiercely Independent Nature

In the complex federation of Afghan people, clans, or tribes, opposing outsiders have always been challenging for the rulers.¹²³ Sir John Lawrence, viceroy of India (1864–69) said, “The Afghans will put up with poverty and even insecurity of life but will never tolerate being ruled by foreigners.”¹²⁴ Afghans resist accepting centralized control or a central figure as their leader. As Johnson explains, their loyalties always start with individuals, followed by family, extended family, clan, tribe, ethnic group, and last of all, the nation.¹²⁵

Social control is exercised very strictly in regard to strong religious beliefs and social relations established by kinship. The men control the women, the seniors control the juniors, and this forms the basis of the Afghan family. The families are extended into

¹²⁰ Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*, 185.

¹²¹ David Loyn, *Butcher & Bolt*, 266.

¹²² Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, “No Sign until the Burst of Fire,” 61.

¹²³ Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*, 77–82.

¹²⁴ Reginald Bosworth Smith, *Life of Lord Lawrence*, Volume 1 (London, Smith Elder & Co, 1883), 499.

¹²⁵ Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, “No Sign until the Burst of Fire,” 51.

Qawm/Tribe, and so a system or network is established. This network is usually headed by a Khan. The bond of tribe, family, and faction is always followed more strongly than the bond of nation. This hierarchy of loyalties—which is less understood by the outside world—prevents Afghanistan from integrating into a nation state with a central authority.

d. A Tribal Nature

Historically complex Afghan ethnicity, coupled with other factors such as tribalism and a distinct Jirga system, broadly dictates the efficacy of governance over the Afghan people.¹²⁶ The country's tribal nature incurs an ancient cultural process, which makes the Afghans antagonistic to external meddling—another sign that solutions must come from the Afghans themselves.

In the complex mixture of various ethnic and ideological groups, no single tribe or clan can enforce its own will over another. The Soviets thus failed to centralize Afghanistan, despite their great military might. The non-Pashtun minorities similarly battled Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's efforts. Each ethnic or tribal entity—whether in majority or minority—possesses the capacity to collectively derail stabilization or democratization efforts in a post-2016 situation.¹²⁷

e. Ethnic Rivalries

Afghanistan's diverse society—with various ethnic groups all with multicultural differences—results in a nation rife with sub-groups that must protect their respective independence. Even Kabul cannot subject the groups, such as Pashtuns, to state authority due to their local customs and traditions.¹²⁸ This makes the country vulnerable and prevents it from becoming a strong politico-military entity. Barfield compares the Afghan social setup to an “egalitarian lineage system”—“me against my brother, me and my brother against cousins, and all three of us against the world.”¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*, 1–65.

¹²⁷ Ghulam Sarwar, “Viable Options to achieve Peace in Afghanistan,” 37.

¹²⁸ Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, “No Sign Until the Burst of Fire,” 52.

¹²⁹ Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*, 78.

f. Warfare Skills

Historically, Afghanistan has used “mobility” as its defense. Because lands empty of resources must traverse difficult terrain, Afghanistan does not need to worry about invaders; Afghans also are masters in techniques like the ambush, suited for their terrain.¹³⁰ Alexander the Great faced these problems in the 4th century B.C. while fighting with mountainous tribes in Kunar Valley, similar to what coalition forces are facing now; in Alexander the Great’s time, however, the Afghans used boulders and stones to defend themselves, and now they use rockets.¹³¹

Afghanistan’s best warfare asset, which has earned the country the title “graveyard of empires,” is its endurance to sustain conflicts; as the saying goes, “You have time, we have watches.” Afghan society’s aptitude for rebellion could lead to an unwanted outcome in a post-2016 scenario.

g. The Pashtun Domination and Power Base

At about 42 percent, Pashtuns are generally seen as the ruling elites and have dominated over the other races in Afghanistan since the 18th century.¹³² The power-base has remained within Pashtuns and within Pashtun ethnic groups in Durranis. Though the majority of the Taliban comprises Pashtuns, the group has actually defamed Pashtuns after experiencing their ruthless autocratic rule between the 1990s and the U.S. invasion in 2001. Despite their power hegemony, it might be difficult to overlook the Pashtuns coercive abilities if not involved or subjugated in a post-2016 scenario.

B. DYNAMIC VARIABLES / FACTORS

Kinetic factors may play to our advantage as we seek a desired result at the end of the post-2016 transformation decade in Afghanistan.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 68–69.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² “Country Profile: Afghanistan,” (Library of Congress: Aug. 2008); Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History* (2010), 90–93.

1. Internal Underlying Factors

The following fundamental factors are a few internal baselines of Afghanistan, which might directly affect the outcomes one way or the other in post withdrawal period including institutional, social, economic, security, etc.

a. Weak Institutions, Poverty, and Weak Education System

Over three continuous decades of war, Afghanistan has become known globally as underdeveloped, poor, corrupt, radicalized, and an institutionally weak state. In the 2015 United Nation Human Development Index,¹³³ Afghanistan stands in one of the lowest categories, at 171 out of 188 countries, though this has improved since 1990.¹³⁴ Despite having received billions of dollars in aid during the last decade or so, Afghanistan is still unable to develop; 36 percent of its population still lives below the poverty line.¹³⁵

Poverty in Afghanistan is a serious problem; most citizens have not benefited from aid contributions and still suffer financially. When a foreign projects company in Afghanistan increased its pay from \$5 to \$6 a day, for instance, many teachers quit their jobs at schools to join the labor force.¹³⁶ This shows two things: first, people are so poor that they are willing to abandon their professions, and second, economic policies have been badly managed by world powers, resulting in further institutional instability. Moreover, the absence of basic facilities—like electricity, housing, healthcare, transportation, and quality schools—makes institutional reform difficult, even with the help of foreign activists. Because Afghanistan is such a poorly developed nation, a

¹³³ The Human Development Index is a tool used by the United Nations for measuring wellbeing, compositely measure three scopes of human development—health, education and income. (Available online)

¹³⁴ UN Human Development Report 2015, “Work for Human Development,” 214, http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2015_human_development_report.pdf.

¹³⁵ “The World Fact Book,” CIA Library, FY 08/09, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2046.html>.

¹³⁶ Rajiv Chandrasekaran, *Little America: The War within the War for Afghanistan* (New York, Vintage: Reprint edition, March 12, 2013), 203–04.

significant amount of effort, time, and long-term commitment will be needed to build it into a country capable of self-sustainment.

b. Complex Governance/Political Stability

Bad governance also plays a vital role in Afghanistan's instability. Because the country is split into tribal regions with each having its own "cultures, norms, and systems of governance," thus making extremely difficult for the government to exercise its centralized control. In order to "rule the complex confederation of tribes and avoid any confrontation," Ibn Khaldun suggests a government must be able to "command obedience (even if by using force), collect taxes, administer justice, and handle all external political relations."¹³⁷ It was expected that Karzai, being a Pashtun, would be able to exercise control over the Pashtun tribes. However, his power remained partial; many often referred to him mockingly as the "mayor of Kabul" because his real influence seemed restricted to the capital.

Part of the problem owes to the lingering view of the Taliban. What strikes many outside observers as harsh penalties resonated among locals as swift justice—in stark contrast to the general lawlessness that had prevailed before. "Brutal, conservative and repressive the Taliban may have been, but the West ignored their significant popularity in parts of Afghanistan" in terms of their governance over a complex tribal society.¹³⁸

Traditionally, Afghans do not trust each other when it comes to sharing power.¹³⁹ Their political loyalties focus more on a family-oriented socio-economic structure than on any national theme. In addition, the Afghan government seems lacking in political will to enforce law and order in the country or defeat the Taliban forcefully.¹⁴⁰ In the coming decade, the validity of the Afghan government throughout the country should remain a

¹³⁷ Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) was an Arab Muslim historiographer and historian, to be among the founding fathers of modern historiography, sociology and economics. He is best known for his book *The Muqaddimah*; Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*, 81.

¹³⁸ David Loyn, *Butcher & Bolt*, 271.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 271–272.

¹⁴⁰ Moh Sayed Madadi, "Afghanistan's Missing Political Will," *Foreign Policy Journal: The South Asia Channel*, August 18, 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/08/18/afghanistans-missing-political-will/>.

concern; in its current void of legal authority, there are many areas in Afghanistan under Taliban rule. In order to deal with the current state of insurgency, the government must be able to implement state laws, effective local Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs), and a speedy judicial system.

Deep-rooted corruption is also a significant problem that is eroding the legitimacy of the Afghan government. The low salaries given to government officials aggravate the tendency toward corruption; the fact is that ex-President Karzai himself had been accused of engaging in and sanctioning corruption during his tenure. A report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) claims that “in 2009, Afghan citizens had to pay approximately US\$ 2.5 billion in bribes, which is equivalent to 23 per cent of the country’s [gross domestic product (GDP)].”¹⁴¹ The head of the UNODC claims that “corruption is the biggest impediment to improving security, development and governance in Afghanistan. It is also enabling other forms of crime, like drug trafficking and terrorism.”¹⁴²

Corruption in Afghanistan is formed by several factors:

- low public-sector salaries
- discretionary power of public administration
- weak legal, legislative, and regulatory frameworks
- dysfunctional justice sector and insufficient law enforcement
- the narco-economy
- limited oversight of the central government over sub-national administration
- an unprecedented amount of international assistance

141 “Corruption in Afghanistan: Bribery as Reported by the Victims,” United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC), January 2010, <http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Afghanistan/Afghanistan-corruption-survey2010-Eng.pdf>. .

142 “Corruption wide spread in Afghanistan, UNODC survey says,” Analysis on UNODC Report, 19 Jan 2010, <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2010/January/corruption-widespread-in-afghanistan-unodc-survey-says.html>.

- tribal and regional leaders out of the central government's control¹⁴³

Above all, there is an absence of any viable accountability framework. To seek a stable and self-reliant Afghanistan in the future, corruption must decrease. Fighting corruption requires a formidable governance system, accountability and legal frameworks, and economic stability.¹⁴⁴ The desired governance system may not happen in the near future, yet it ultimately demands long-term commitment and constructive efforts by all stakeholders in structuring the state and government to overcome the problem.

c. Justice System

A viable justice system is the backbone of any coherent society or state. Considering Afghanistan's complex society, most Afghans adhere to the local *Jirga* system to resolve their issues, wherein justice is done through their customs instead of any constitution. Judicial institutions, if there were any, have further weakened during the last decade of war, during which warlordism has strengthened. The lack of a justice system has greatly played in destabilizing Afghanistan as a state. The courts that currently exist are unviable, and the few that are operational are shorthanded. The Afghan people, thus, have lost assurance in the formal justice system, a situation that seems to give impunity to cheats, criminals, and corruption. In order to enforce the government's authority, maintain law and order, and bring the Afghan people under a centralized national umbrella, judicial reforms are mandatory. Future perspectives in Afghanistan depend on a workable judicial system that enforces a centralized government framework.

d. Opium Growth and Drug Business

Poppy cultivation in Afghanistan has affected the country, its neighbours, and the rest of the drug-seeking world. Before 2001, the Taliban themselves somewhat repressed opium production; but contrarily, the current Taliban insurgency, however, "relies on opium revenues to purchase weapons, train its members, and buy support," as they are

¹⁴³ "Report on Progress toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan," June 2008, Report to Congress in accordance with the 2008 National Defense Authorization Act (Section 1230, Public Law 110-181), http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2008/afghan-security-stability_0806-02.htm.

¹⁴⁴ William Maley, *The Afghanistan wars*. (London: Oxford, 2002), 321.

not left with any other method or foreign support for generating the revenue.¹⁴⁵ In 2001, Afghanistan produced only 11 percent of the world's opium; today it produces around 93 percent of the global crop, and the drug trade accounts for a fair amount of Afghanistan's GDP.¹⁴⁶ This increase happened solely because there are no other options for revenue generation in Afghanistan both for public sector or even the insurgents. Due to nonexistence of adequate alternatives for earning, the most of Afghan farmers resorted to poppy cultivation, and thus the problem got worse. Institutional weakness has not considerably improved over the last decade. Because the root causes of institutional weakness were never identified when the conflict began, it is now worse than ever. Without strong economic reform including opening of new avenues for revenue generation, and proper legislation to curb the opium growth, this issue will only get worse after the 2016 withdrawal.

e. Dependency on International Donors for Economic Revival/Stability

According to the World Bank, "Afghanistan's biggest economic challenge is finding sustainable sources of growth," implying that the country will remain vulnerable if in an unstable government persists.¹⁴⁷ The World Bank further assesses that 80 percent–90 percent of Afghan economic activities are illegal, mostly as a result of opium production. Rest of economic activity is generated through international military and developmental aid and spending in the country by foreign troops, which was roughly \$15.7 billion through 2010.¹⁴⁸ The United States has so far endured the most of war costs, contributing approximately \$3.7 trillion, including financial aid for the running of the Afghan government and military.¹⁴⁹ In a 2012 Chicago conference, NATO countries guaranteed the Afghan military \$4.1 billion in aid after withdrawal; in the same year in

¹⁴⁵ Riaz Haq, "Taliban Insurgency Funded by Poppy and Marble," July 27, 2008, <http://www.riazhaq.com/2008/07/taliban-insurgency-funded-by-poppy-and.html>.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ "Afghanistan: Country at a Glance," The World Bank, 2013, 3, http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2014/06/18/000456286_20140618113748/Rendered/PDF/ACS82280WP0v2000Box385214B00PUBLIC0.pdf.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 4.

¹⁴⁹ Daniel Trotta, "US Cost of War at Least \$3.7 Trillion and Counting," *Reuters*, Jun 29, 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/06/29/us-usa-war-idUSTRE75S25320110629>.

Tokyo, donors led by the United States, Japan, Germany, and the UK committed \$16 billion to civilian sectors in Afghanistan.¹⁵⁰

Afghanistan's current economy is donor-driven, with large economic deficit being balanced through huge aid influx from bilateral and multilateral donors.¹⁵¹ The Afghan government will need roughly \$4 billion for its security after 2016.¹⁵² In order to sustain the ANSF, the country will largely be dependent on external financial support; if foreign aid is not available, Afghanistan will eventually have to reduce the strength of its forces.¹⁵³ When financial assistance stops or is even reduced, there will be further economic repercussions, especially in the absence of trade and industry. The Afghan regime, in the long-term, will need to exploit its rare earth minerals reserves—or possibility of getting benefits from un-taping of CARs rich oil reserves once trading through its territory—but in the short-term it must economically empower its local communities and industries in order to address the concern to some extent.¹⁵⁴

f. The Taliban Factor

The Taliban has played a significant role in Afghan affairs over last two decades, and will be the deciding element in the outlook for a stable Afghanistan post-2016. The Taliban is as steadfast as ever, and retain its “cohesive force.” Despite withstanding the long war on terror, it again has stretched its influence in the majority of provinces all over the country. World powers have realized that there is no military solution to a “war of ideas,” and so have resorted to seeking a political solution as an exit strategy. However, history shows that the Taliban will continue to reemerge after this type of conflict. Table 1 explores the factors that led to the Taliban's emergence after the Soviet

¹⁵⁰ Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury and Shahid Javed Burki, “Afghanistan after America,” (2012).

¹⁵¹ “Essential Facts on Economic Performance and Investment in Afghanistan,” Afghanistan Investment Support Agency, March 2012, <http://www.aisa.org.af/Content/Media/Documents/economy-fact-english711201413422838553325325.pdf>.

¹⁵² Dion Nissenbaum, “U.S. Pledges to Seek Extra Spending for Afghan Military Forces,” *The Wall Street Journal*, March 23, 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/on-visit-to-u-s-afghan-president-thanks-american-troops-1427123374>.

¹⁵³ Post Seminar Report, “Afghanistan End Game.”

¹⁵⁴ Brig Sheikh Ghulam Jilani, “Afghanistan Post 2014: Imperatives, Drivers and Scenarios,” *The Citadel Journal*, no. 2/14 (Pakistan, Quetta, 2014), 35–36.

withdrawal, how those same factors have affected the current state of affairs, and how they are likely to affect the post-2016 withdrawal era.

Table 1. Possibilities of Taliban Reemergence

Key Enablers	Factors Leading to the Taliban's Emergence after Soviet Withdrawal	Taliban's Re-emergence/Present State of Affairs (Prior to U.S. Withdrawal)	Implications for the Future
Ideology	Young graduates of madrassas, disenchanted from Mujahedeen in the '90s, formed "Taliban," an Arabic term that refers to students of the Islamic faith who suddenly rise and became volatiles. They gradually developed a rogue/extremist interpretation of Islam. ¹⁵⁵	The Taliban re-emerged in Afghanistan by declaring Jihad against invading forces. Their selling substance is still to impose an orthodox version of Islamic law in Afghanistan, to spread hatred for the United States, and to create fear through terrorism.	Although the Taliban would lose their standpoint of Jihad after U.S. withdrawal; however, they would likely to continue with their political cum religious hegemonic designs owing to the strength they have gained so far, in case if political instability and fragile security situation in Afghanistan keep existed.
Abandonment by World Community	Afghanistan became an orphaned issue for the world after the defeat of communism. The United States, which helped Pakistan through Saudi Arabia fight religious narrative against the Soviets, were left alone. No social or structural development was offered to the Afghans, who then welcomed militancy replacing militancy. ¹⁵⁶	In 2003, the United States shifted its focus with beginning of its military intervention in Iraq. ¹⁵⁷ However, decline in American interest in the region is less likely at the moment.	The United States might continue helping the Afghan government for several years after its withdrawal due to its objectives in the region; however, the situation otherwise may prove fragile due to various stagnant and dynamic factors mentioned in this chapter. Ultimately, it is better sooner than later for the Afghans themselves who have to shoulder the responsibility sooner than later of taking their country ahead.
Conflicting Regional Interests	All the neighboring countries supported warring factions that represented their respective ideologies over last two decades. The	The Taliban resurged due to the poor conduct of invading forces in Afghanistan after the initial victory. All neighboring	Conflicting interests inside Afghanistan of neighboring, regional and extra regional countries are likely to continue as discussed in

¹⁵⁵ Kamal Matinuddin, *The Taliban Phenomenon, Afghanistan 1994–1997*, (Oxford University Press: Feb, 11, 1999), 25–26.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 37–38.

¹⁵⁷ Griff Witte, "Afghanistan War: 2001–2014," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Last Updated: October 14, 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Afghanistan-War>.

Key Enablers	Factors Leading to the Taliban's Emergence after Soviet Withdrawal	Taliban's Re-emergence/Present State of Affairs (Prior to U.S. Withdrawal)	Implications for the Future
	<p>United States, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia were in favor of the Taliban; however, other countries became opposed to them.¹⁵⁸</p>	<p>countries, as well as the regional and extra-regional countries, continued playing their opposing strategies in the weak politico-military situation, and thus the Taliban reemerged.</p>	<p>chapter II. For Russia, it would like an unstable Afghanistan through the Taliban or any other faction so as it keep avoiding other powers to materialize energy corridor through Afghanistan to CARs but not allowing repercussions inside Russia's sphere. For India, it would like to keep using Afghanistan against Pakistan at all costs, either by installing anti Pakistan govt. of non-Pashtuns in Afghanistan or by trying to materialize Energy Corridor dream to its interest through Iran. Contrarily, for Pakistan only a stable and prosperous Afghan state suits the most owing to its security and economic compulsions; besides, it would also wish to have a friendly govt. possibly of Pashtuns(not the Taliban) in Afghanistan or at least a government not serving only the India's interest in the region or let using its soil against Pakistan. For China, it would also likely to favor for a peaceful Afghanistan-good for its bordering region with more economic avenues. Iran and Saudi Arabia would likely to peruse their respective religious motives. Similarly, other regional and world powers would peruse their own interests. Ultimately, the Taliban again in the power would not be the wish, option or a solution</p>

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

Key Enablers	Factors Leading to the Taliban’s Emergence after Soviet Withdrawal	Taliban’s Re-emergence/Present State of Affairs (Prior to U.S. Withdrawal)	Implications for the Future
			for the powers.
Internal Dimension/ Political Causes	Out of a culture of crime and violence, as well as unemployment, the Taliban emerged—they were volatile, desperate with an Islamic fundamentalist agenda, and sought a violent solution to Afghanistan’s problems.	Increased armed struggle is dependent on failure to establish a viable political setup with equal ethnic representation. The United States failed to form such a judicious representation, thus the majority—Pashtuns—remained erected.	The current power-sharing formula in the Afghan government is proving to be productive. However, considering the Afghans’ psychosocial profile with their unique tribal nature, and where the Pashtun dominate the power base, coupled with their long ethnic rivalries and fiercely independent nature, this may not last in the future.
Post-Withdrawal Turmoil /Political Vacuum	Post-Soviet turmoil and the subsequent political vacuum led Afghan people to embrace any change, by any means. After the fall of Najibullah’s government, the Afghan contenders mutually agreed on a power sharing formula with the “Peshawar Accord.” But nothing succeeded, and no single figure appeared capable of bringing order to Afghanistan. Thus, by 1993, Afghanistan was virtually at the verge of disintegration where national stakes were overwhelmed by egos and vested interests. The situation was therefore ripe for emergence of any force that could hold the strings together. ¹⁵⁹	The Taliban, despite all pitfalls associated with their name, became quickly known among locals for swift justice. Loyn comments: “Brutal, conservative and repressive the Taliban may have been, but the West ignored their significant popularity in parts of Afghanistan.” ¹⁶⁰ After their defeat, they might have been resolved through peace talks and addressing their political concerns. ¹⁶¹	For the Afghan people, the future likely looks comparable to what happened after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989; however, this time the Afghans, themselves need to reject any violent faction through political consolidation, otherwise any other foreign country may not intervene to help them.
Reaction to Anarchy	“The Taliban movement started as a politico-religious force, to the oppression of the local	U.S. forces’ deployment remained restricted to urban areas. Moreover, The United States supported	Internal law and order never improved, especially in areas outside urban cities. Efficacy of the ANSF

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 39–41.

¹⁶⁰ David Loyn, *Butcher & Bolt*, 271.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 272.

Key Enablers	Factors Leading to the Taliban's Emergence after Soviet Withdrawal	Taliban's Re-emergence/Present State of Affairs (Prior to U.S. Withdrawal)	Implications for the Future
	governor. They forced the surrender of dozens of local Pashtun leaders.” ¹⁶² Acts of brutality and denial of basic human rights were not challenged by most Afghans owing to lack of education and political awareness, and above all non-existence of an alternative. ¹⁶³	certain unpopular warlords and failed to disarm other warlords and tribal chiefs, which barred the establishment of a cohesive national army. Atrocities were carried out by the Northern Alliance, strengthening the Taliban's narrative.	coupled with a viable justice system and stable central government, would reduce the state of anarchy, thus facilitating involuntary rejection of any fierce faction by the public.
Ethnic/Cultural Orientation	Afghanistan remained entangled in ethnic divide and resulting clashes for centuries. In post-Soviet period, the Taliban emerged as the strongest Pashtun outfit and gained the support of the majority of Pashtuns. ¹⁶⁴	In the early 2000s, the Pashtun cultural ethos was exploited by Al-Qaeda who was sure that they would not be handed over to an external force. ¹⁶⁵ Ethnic orientation is another dimension strengthened by a particular fraction.	In Afghan culture and ethnic-based society, sub-nationalism would remain on the priority against nationalism.
Economic Deprivation	Billions of dollars received during the Afghan–Soviet war were spent by the warlords on building personal armies. The common Afghans lost faith in existing leadership and readily embraced the new force. ¹⁶⁶	The same happened during the U.S.–Afghan war. Unable to kick-start a stable economy and reduce poverty, the Norco-economy kept flourishing, which became a prime source of revenue for the Taliban to grow. ¹⁶⁷	Presently, the Afghan economy is foreign-aid driven. The ANSF, its primary means for stability after U.S. withdrawal, depends on risky foreign funding. If foreign aid stops or is unable to achieve economic reforms, the ANSF would itself become vulnerable and the Taliban would be strengthened.
Consonance with Afghan Social Fabric	The Taliban used the concept of “Shura,” which resembles the centuries-old Jirga system, and	After U.S. occupation, a non-population centric approach was adopted. ¹⁶⁸	In the undereducated Afghan society, any approach that is contrary to their customs and traditions

¹⁶² Kamal Matinuddin, *The Taliban Phenomenon*, 25–26.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 39–41.

¹⁶⁵ David Loyn, *Butcher & Bolt*, 266.

¹⁶⁶ Noor ul Haq, “Afghanistan Future,” *Pakistan Observer*, October 5, 2012, <http://www3.pakobserver.net/201210/06/detailnews.asp?id=176846>.

¹⁶⁷ *Norco-economy* is indicative of economy that is primarily based on illegal means, in which revenues are mostly generated through trade of narcotics. This term is frequently used to refer Afghanistan's economy that bases mostly on cultivation and trading of poppy.

¹⁶⁸ Hy Rothstein and John Arquilla, *Afghan Endgames*, 3–4.

Key Enablers	Factors Leading to the Taliban’s Emergence after Soviet Withdrawal	Taliban’s Re-emergence/Present State of Affairs (Prior to U.S. Withdrawal)	Implications for the Future
	governance with local traditions, which formed an attractive narrative for the Afghan people to accept.	Despite billions of dollars in aid, U.S. COIN could not enforce a WHAM strategy, providing space for the Taliban to grow in strength as well as spatially.	will be counterproductive, and will drive them to other models that behave closer to their customs and traditions.

2. External Factors

This section describes the kinetic factors of external influence. Afghanistan’s post-2016 “transformation decade” will depend upon how these variables play out.

a. Long-term U.S. Objectives in South Asia

U.S. global security interventions in Afghanistan—which lacked strategic or long-term foresight—implicated the United States and various other regions.¹⁶⁹ Despite Obama’s recent withdrawal plan, seeking to draw down U.S. forces to bare embassy level by 2016, there will still be a U.S. presence in the region for the foreseeable future.¹⁷⁰ It is thus vital to account for the United States’ long-term goals in South Asia. “The long term objectives of U.S. are: the energy deposits, containment of China, encirclement of Iran or keeping an eye on Paki nukes. Considering all that, it seems as if the U.S. is thinking of keeping Afghanistan as a foothold and is looking for a long haul whereby it would maintain and increase its influence not only on Iran, Pakistan and China but also the CARs.”¹⁷¹ Because of long-term U.S. plans, Pakistan believes the United States is going to stay in the region for a considerable amount of time, and will ultimately continue to influence regional politics. As a strategic imperative, the United States must keep boots on the ground at some of its bases in Afghanistan after the 2016 transition. The United States desires to keep nine military bases in Afghanistan after the withdrawal, especially

¹⁶⁹ Hew Strachan, “Making Strategy: Civil- Military Relations after Iraq,” *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, Volume 48, Issue 3, 2006, 59–70.

¹⁷⁰ Luis Ramirez, “Obama Announces Afghanistan Withdrawal Plan,” *Voice of America*, May 27, 2014.

¹⁷¹ Post Seminar Report, “Afghanistan End Game.”

in areas bordering Iran, China, and Pakistan—in Kabul, Bagram, Mazar, Jalalabad, Gardez, Kandahar, Helmand, Shindand, and Herat. This plan is an indication of the United States’ long-term objectives in the region.¹⁷²

b. Transition

With the declaration of withdrawal in 2011, the U.S. administration has actually signaled an end to nation-building efforts in Afghanistan.¹⁷³ The U.S. president stated, “We will not try to make Afghanistan a perfect place,” clearly indicating the United States’ intent in the recent timeframe.¹⁷⁴ Consequently, U.S. strategy has seemed to have deviated, gradually but steadily, from its core methodology of COIN or counterterrorism and reinforcing the alternatives through effective governance and economic growth. However, the death of Al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden provided the United States a reason to proclaim success, having isolated Al-Qaeda and broken the Taliban’s momentum. In the first quarter of 2013, ISAF forces were able to hand over around 22 percent of their military facilities to the ANSF, which was forward momentum toward a complete transition by the end of 2016.¹⁷⁵ It could now rightly be anticipated that the United States has broadly accomplished its mission and “the stage is set” for handing over the helm of affairs to Afghan establishment, during which Kabul would function as a nucleus for grand reconciliation among the Afghans. It is yet a challenging task; however, to achieve a smooth transition that satisfies the Afghans—in order to do so, there must be an established and legitimate Afghan government, political stability, taking control by the ANSF, solid institutions, economic revival, and regional stability.

Some indicators demonstrating that the post-transition withdrawal is still uncertain include the following:

¹⁷² Matthew Rosenberg, “Karzai Says U.S. Bases Can Stay, Raising Some Eyebrows in West,” (*New York Times*, 2013).

¹⁷³ Mark Landler and Helene Cooperus, “Obama Will Speed Pullout from War in Afghanistan,” *The New York Times*, June 22, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/23/world/asia/23prexy.html?pagewanted=all>.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ Jim White, “‘Progress’ Report: ANSF Abandoning over One Third of ISAF Facilities,” *Empty Wheel*, August 1, 2013, <http://www.emptywheel.net/2013/08/01/progress-report-ansf-abandoning-over-one-third-of-isaf-facilities/>.

- Shortfall in coalition training personnel.
- Afghan government's limited financial resources.
- Lack of a "self-sustaining foundation for generating jobs and revenue that will reduce dependence on international assistance."¹⁷⁶
- Lack of motivation—up to 30-percent deserters per annum in the ANSF.¹⁷⁷ Other major reasons for desertions include stoppage of leave while being deployed in combat zones for months; heavy casualties in the recent past; the pay collection issues, etc.¹⁷⁸
- Afghan National Army's (ANA) dependence on international assistance.¹⁷⁹
- Taliban capacity to re-emerge versus the ANSF's capacity to amicably handle the mess.
- Increased Indian intervention inside Afghanistan and covert operations inside Pakistan.
- Economic sustainability by creating alternatives if foreign aid ceases and attracting foreign direct investments (FDI).

c. *Presence of U.S. Forces / Foreign Troops in Afghanistan*

Despite a huge debate over the zero option, President Obama has declared the gradual force drawdown after 2016. U.S. presence in Afghanistan is seen critically by all players.¹⁸⁰ Because of the fragile internal security dynamics in Afghanistan, however, a continued U.S. presence post-2016 is preferred by most neighboring countries, and is in the Afghans' best interest. On the other hand, the presence of foreign boots on

¹⁷⁶ Richard L. Armitage and Samuel R. Berger, *U.S. Strategy for Pakistan and Afghanistan*, Independent Task Force Report No. 65 (New York, Council on Foreign Relations: 2010), <https://www.scribd.com/document/45268852/U-S-Strategy-for-Pakistan-and-Afghanistan>.

¹⁷⁷ Lt. Gen. William B. Caldwell, interview to *The World Post*, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/06/06/obama-afghanistan-war-exit-strategy-afghan-troops_n_872119.html.

¹⁷⁸ Joseph Goldstein, "Afghan Security Forces Struggle Just to Maintain Stalemate," *The New York Times*, July 22, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/23/world/asia/afghan-security-forces-struggle-just-to-maintain-stalemate.html?_r=0.

¹⁷⁹ Dion Nissenbaum, "U.S. Pledges to Seek Extra Spending for Afghan Military Forces."

¹⁸⁰ Yaroslav Trofimov, "U.S. Hardens Threat to Leave Afghanistan With No Troops," *The Wall Street Journal* (Kabul: November 25, 2013), <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702303281504579219790445248788>.

Afghanistan soil (seen as invaders) will still fuel the Taliban's religious legitimacy, having declared Jihad against them. After 2016, a number of allied troops will be a necessary stabilizing factor with respect to fragile security situation—especially considering the ANSF's ability to take control of the entire country while fueling the Taliban's cause. The continued presence will also help fuel the regrowth of Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, or their further expansion to other countries aligned with ISIS. On the other hand, regional countries especially Iran, China, or Russia would still have security concerns over the U.S. policy of pre-emption for having an easy launching pad inside Afghanistan to pour in more troops if needed.

d. The Pakistan Factor

Pakistan remains pivotal in shaping the future course of stability in Afghanistan and the region. Pakistan's grave security concerns regarding India's increased role in Afghanistan and cross-border terrorism have caused the threat spectrum to increase; Pakistan's entire western border, including tribal areas and the provinces of Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, is considered vulnerable. It is in Pakistan's best interest to have a peaceful, friendly, and stable Afghanistan. A stable Afghanistan would only be possible with a long-term, inclusive government in Kabul that gives a fair share of power to all factions of the society, avoiding biases toward Pakistan. This scenario also would lead to the return of millions of Afghan refugees currently residing in Pakistan, and would open economic opportunities within the CARs' energy corridor. Other issues between Pakistan and Afghanistan—such as the Durand Line, Pashtunistan, drug trafficking, and illicit trade—may also be resolved in the presence of a strong and stable Afghan government. Pakistan, therefore, ought to enhance mutual strategic, security, and economic relations.

On the other hand, external factors in their turn also may compel Pakistan to pursue a more defensive approach toward stability.¹⁸¹ Incidents like the Peshawar Army Public School incident—when innocent schoolchildren were killed brutally through a

¹⁸¹ Muhammad Emad, "Afghanistan – Post 2014," *The Citadel Journal*, no. 2/13 (Pakistan, Quetta, 2013), 43.

planned terrorist attack executed from inside Afghanistan by Mullah Fazlullah and other affiliates—raise questions about Afghanistan’s ability to cure its own problems before they can ask the same from Pakistan.

e. UN Peace Keeping

Although the UN has made efforts to play an active role in the political stabilization of Afghanistan, those efforts have been fruitless. Various efforts over the period of the international organization with the support of all major powers of the world include:

- United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)
- Employing UN Special envoys to Afghanistan
- United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR)
- Disarmament, Demobilization and Re-integration (DDR)

Despite sincere intentions and best efforts, the UN has failed to make a mark on the Afghan political horizon. That is why Afghanistan’s political shape has remained mostly in the hands of the occupation forces, with UN being relegated to a subsidiary role. To be sure, all major powers—including the Soviets and the United States—have tried incursion methods of influence, whereas other regional countries—Pakistan, Iran, India, Saudi Arabia, etc.—have tried covert methods of influencing Afghanistan’s internal dynamics; it is likely that any other country’s effort in the region—with whatever method—will also fail. Looking toward the 2026 news scenarios introduced at the beginning of this thesis, UN forces might be needed if the fragile Afghanistan situation becomes too much for the ANSF to handle after U.S. withdrawal in 2016.

IV. POST-WITHDRAWAL SCENARIOS

Brig (Retd) Said Nazir Mohmand notes, “Afghanistan is like a hot potato at this point in time. The international community cannot hold it, the regional players cannot swallow it and the inland ethnic groups cannot digest it singularly.”¹⁸² Had the collective endeavours for a smooth political transition enacted in 2014 been introduced earlier, the situation might have been totally different. U.S. President Barack Obama once rightly highlighted: “Afghanistan is not lost, but for several years it has moved backward. There is no imminent threat of the government being overthrown, but the Taliban has gained momentum. Al Qaeda has not re-emerged in Afghanistan in the same numbers as before 9/11, but they retain their safe-havens along the border.”¹⁸³

The possible post-U.S. withdrawal scenarios described in this chapter are based on the factors discussed in the previous chapters. Whichever scenario prevails, these factors will play a critical role in defining the future for Afghanistan and the region. The likely future scenarios are broadly categorized as The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly; each is built upon certain assumptions to address uncertainties and their consequent implications.

A. THE GOOD

Afghanistan, like any other nation, could emerge from the recent chaos as a prosperous country. But the best outcome demands rigorous commitment by all stakeholders, whether they are the Afghans themselves or neighboring countries, regional or global players.

¹⁸² Said Nazir Mohmand, “777 Solutions to Afghanistan,” *Zameer 36, Global Issues and World Politics*, Posted by Faheem Belharvi, December 24, 2012, <http://zameer36.com/777-solution-to-afghanistan/>.

¹⁸³ Brian Montopoli, “Obama Lays out New Afghanistan Strategy,” *CBS NEWS*, December 1, 2009, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/obama-lays-out-new-afghanistan-strategy/>.

1. Key Imperatives of the Good Scenario

The Good scenario involves a whole-of-nation approach in which all Afghans cooperate. This cooperation would lead to institutional reforms that improve the educational and justice systems, bureaucracy, and the economy, and reduce poverty and mass corruption. This scenario also involves strengthening the ANSF, which must be capable of countering both internal and external threats. This scenario includes the baseline assumptions discussed in the following subsections.

a. Political

A bright future for the Afghan nation must involve political reconciliation among its various ethnicities, groups, or tribes. This reconciliation is the only means of diminishing the underlying inherent factors (discussed in previous chapters) that have hindered prosperity in the past. Political reconciliation includes:

A Viable Power-Sharing Formula. Afghanistan needs a viable, all-encompassing power-sharing formula that caters to all factions, but particularly the majority faction, the Pashtuns. Although the present Afghan government somewhat represents the various groups, it still needs a long-term power-sharing plan that is proportionate to the respective groups' populations.

Integration of Dissident Factions. The Taliban and other factions that are currently treated as enemies have to be integrated in the polity of the country. Incentives may have to be offered to these groups in the form of economic benefits and/or representation in the government and political offices and the military. Lack of political integration may lead to a civil war.

Non-Interference of Neighboring Countries. A politically stable country with a self-sustaining economy and a strong military must prevent outside countries from having unlimited involvement in domestic affairs. For Afghanistan to achieve this, it needs a strong national will and leadership. It also requires a viable diplomacy policy that allows the Afghan government to successfully engage neighboring countries—such as the CARs, Iran, Pakistan, India, and China—to its benefit. For instance, Afghanistan will

want to continue a constructive relationship with India, but must not allow India's unlimited involvement in domestic affairs.

b. Economic

Foreign Direct Investment. Mineral/resource-rich Afghanistan has huge investment potential, estimated at \$1 trillion.¹⁸⁴ Creating an economic interest for all stakeholders can be a major stabilizing factor for the country.

Sustainable Economy. Afghanistan needs almost \$10 billion a year through 2025 for both security and development.¹⁸⁵ If the country institutes long-term, sustainable economic policies, however, Afghan dependency on foreign aid/resources will reduce after the drawdown of foreign forces. The agriculture sector “accounts for up to 40 percent of Afghanistan’s gross domestic product,” and is “critical to Afghanistan’s food security and a driver of economic growth.”¹⁸⁶ So in addition to foreign aid, it will remain important to promote the agricultural sector and economic and trade zones, which may help rid the country of its narco-economy.

c. Security

U.S. Drawdown in 2016 and Residual Forces. On one hand, the drawdown may reduce the Taliban’s power. On the other hand, it may put the ANSF at the Taliban’s mercy, paving the way for another civil war. With this in mind, it is in the best interest of both the United States and the Afghan government to ensure residual U.S. forces are in place for the foreseeable future. Residual forces will help control the Taliban and safeguard U.S. interests.

¹⁸⁴ James Risen, “U.S. identifies Vast Mineral Riches in Afghanistan,” *The New York Times*, June 13, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/14/world/asia/14minerals.html>.

¹⁸⁵ Anthony H. Cordesman, “The Afghan War in 2013: Meeting the Challenges of Transition,” Volume II, Report on Afghan Economics and outside Aid, *CSIS*, May 2013, 158, https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/130327_afghan_war_in_2013_vol_II.pdf.

¹⁸⁶ “Afghanistan: Agriculture,” *U.S. AID from the American People*, The U.S. Agency for International Development: December 5, 2016), <https://www.usaid.gov/afghanistan/agriculture>.

Capacity Building of the ANSF. To maintain peace and stability, a well-trained and equipped ANSF is crucial. However, this will require continuous foreign aid and equipment, and keeping ethnic/sectarian considerations as well as adopting a qualitative training regime for ANSF. A capable ANSF will also enhance the central government's legitimacy and authority throughout the country and supply the means to deal with the Taliban amicably.

2. Outlooks of the Good Scenario: A Secure and Stable Afghanistan

This scenario is based on the assumption of a successfully negotiated long-term power-sharing formula. Core issues concerning security, peace, and economic and political reforms have not yet been addressed. Recognition of the Taliban's inclusion in peace talks, however, indicates that a stable Afghanistan is a possible, though distant, scenario within the next decade.¹⁸⁷

a. Likely Environment

- The United States, along with other coalition partners, would remain committed to providing military assistance (residual forces) and economic assistance for the ANSF and wider economic revival through 2025.
- The United States/NATO/ISAF would keep their role limited to nation building/assistance.
- Major policy changes would occur. A reconciliation policy would replace the current confrontation policy; political forces would put forth a major effort to use the military only to assist the political process.
- Compound governance would validate political stability. Afghan groups may reconcile further with each other and support the coalition government.
- The role of extremist elements would be considerably reduced and warlords would be absorbed into mainstream politics after having been disarmed.
- The Taliban would remain uninvolved amid residual U.S. presence.

¹⁸⁷ In 2015, Pakistan held peace talks between the Afghan government and Afghan representatives in Islamabad.

- The ANSF would emerge as a potent/capable force post-national consensus and declined insurgency.
- With improvement in internal security, projects involving oil and mineral resources would be initiated, including oil and gas pipeline projects.
- Economic revival would be accomplished through agricultural reforms and FDI, especially by China.
- Afghanistan would emerge as an energy corridor for the resource-rich CARs and would accrue great economic benefits.
- Fast-paced development and economic recovery would create an economic stake for all factions, thereby reducing militancy.
- Bilateral relations based on non-interference between Pakistan and Afghanistan would improve.

b. Uncertainties

- Future U.S. objectives and strategy remain uncertain, and a point of contention among Afghans.
- Regional consensus remains uncertain due to divergent political and economic interests.
- Absolute peace remains uncertain due to Al-Qaeda and narcotics mafias.
- It is uncertain if this scenario would serve the interests of India, Iran, and Russia more favorably than Pakistan.

c. Implications for Pakistan

The Good scenario would return peace and stability to the region; a harmonious culmination of Afghanistan end game would bring several benefits for Pakistan.

- Pakistan would have relatively safe western borders, which would somewhat (though not completely) relieve the armed forces of their current strain under a two-front commitment.
- Pakistan would be able to eliminate Pakistan-based terrorists and local insurgents by improved security measures on Pakistan's western borders with Afghanistan.
- Both Afghanistan and Pakistan may reach an agreement to recognize the Durand Line as an international border, or to work under mutual standard

operation procedures (SOPs) at the border. This would also reduce cross-border smuggling, terrorism, and similar concerns.

- The role of extremist elements would be marginalized in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. This would contribute positively toward regional security and stability and provide the right environment for economic activity.
- Pakistan would be able to engage in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. ISAF's presence would be beneficial for Pakistan's interests during this period.
- A national government consensus between the Pashtun/Taliban is likely to reduce Indian influence over Kabul; however, Indian economic/military aid will help maintain friendly ties.
- As a result of China's presence in major Afghan investments, India's influence would become limited. India may not be able, then, to influence Pakistan's domestic affairs, as in conflicts such as the Baluchistan uprising.
- Repatriation of some 1.6 million registered and 1.4 million unregistered Afghan refugees currently residing in Pakistan would reduce its economic burden.¹⁸⁸
- Pakistan could accomplish its long-desired geo-economic goals through establishing trade and energy corridor to CARs. In addition, the Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India (TAPI) gas pipeline project could also prove helpful in addressing Pakistan's energy catastrophe.
- Pakistan is likely to benefit economically from the Afghan energy corridor and Afghan transit trade.

d. Implications for the Region and the World

- A negotiated, peaceful resolution of the Afghan conflict would be the best outcome—a win-win scenario for all stakeholders. A stable environment will give a tremendous boost to economic activities and energy transportation in the region, leading to durable peace.

¹⁸⁸ Azhar Khan, "Govt. to register 1.4 Million Afghan Refugees," *ARY News*, (Islamabad: March 11, 2015), <https://arynews.tv/en/govt-register-1-4-million-afghan-refugees/>.

- Vision of “New Silk Road,” creating trade and energy corridor from CARs to Middle East through Afghanistan, might float an opportunity for bigger strategic convergence in South Asia.¹⁸⁹
- Afghanistan can be integrated into the larger world and region more effectively as a useful member, which will diminish Al-Qaeda’s threat.

3. Sustainable Democracy with Broad-based Government

Progressive democracy¹⁹⁰ is the most desirable state for the United States and its allies. A stable, progressive, and democratic Afghanistan with a unified government—having requisite representation of all the factions and tribes, including the Taliban—is in the mutual interest of all stakeholders; however, in order to implement and mature, it will require relentless and open-minded policies in all spheres. The political setup could predicate a weak central government and strong local governments—the federal government would control law and order, economic policy, and foreign policy, delegating the remainder of power to local governments. Increased devolution of power further strengthens the confederacy.¹⁹¹

a. Likely Environment

- A maintainable governing body with the requisite amount of authority would be ensured before exit.
- Afghanistan’s economy would require maintenance and support from modern and developed nations for at least 10 years.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ Ishtiaq Ahmad, “Pakistan’s ‘Regional Pivot’ and the Endgame in Afghanistan,” *IPRI Journal* XIII, No. 2, (NDU: Islamabad, summer 2013), 20, <http://www.ndu.edu.pk/afwc/pub/OPINION-Vol.1-No.2-Dec.pdf>.

¹⁹⁰ “Progressive democracy means responding well to the needs of all people while working to preserve the values of life, freedom, security, justice, health, education, prosperity, a sustainable environment, and peace.” See Sanderson Beck, *Progressive Democracy: How Wise Love Can Produce Prosperity, Justice and Peace*, (Santa Barbara: World Peace Communications, July 2011), <http://www.san.beck.org/ProgressiveDemocracy.html>.

¹⁹¹ Asad Munir, “Post Exit-Afghanistan – Pak Scenarios;” Naveed Mukhtar (Lieutenant General Naveed Mukhtar is a Three Star rank Pakistan Army General and he is the current Commander of 5 Corps at Karachi), “Afghanistan: Alternative Futures and Their Implications,” *Parameters*, Vol. 41, No. 2, Summer 2011, <http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/parameters/articles/2011summer/mukhtar.pdf>.

¹⁹² Anthony H. Cordesman, “The Afghan War in 2013.”

- The regional players would be satisfied with the arrangements and engaged through constructive diplomacy.
- Before U.S. withdrawal, ANSF would be stable enough to establish the writ of the government.
- The highest priority would be given to social sectors like education, health, and human resources, including female empowerment.
- After the U.S. withdrawal, sustained economic growth and effective local revival would be able to diminish the root causes of insurgency.

b. Major Impediments

- The triumph of this scenario depends on firm and long-term assurance from the worldwide community, which is still lacking.
- Afghanistan's history, internal disputes between ethnic groups and internal discontent do not favour this type of setting.
- The present established capacity of the Afghan government is still below the desired standard needed to support this scenario.
- Suitable and competent leadership, which is a prerequisite for a stable government, is only somewhat addressed at the present; the current government needs commitment to at least make it through the transformation decade while political consolidation becomes achievable.

4. Probability of Scenario

Though complex, this scenario is considered as the most ideal and optimistic, and represents the ultimate aim for all stakeholders—especially Pakistan. In fact, this scenario is less likely to achieve complete success. Table 2 shows a breakdown of the factors, with relative values, concluding that this scenario is 37 percent likely.

Table 2. Probability Table—The Good Scenario

S. No.	Factors/Imperatives	Value	Remarks/Subject to
1.	Geostrategic and geopolitical inference	0	
2.	Psycho-social environs in Afghanistan (socio-political factor)	0	
3.	Afghanistan society (socio-political factor)	0	
4.	Weak institutions, poverty, and weak education system (internal)	0	
5.	Compounded governance/political stability (internal)	0.5	If power-sharing formula is validated/strengthened
6.	Corruption (internal)	0	
7.	Justice system (internal)	0	
8.	Opium growth and drug business (internal)	0	
9.	Afghan dependency on foreign resources (internal)	0.5	
10.	Policy of reconciliation replaces policy of confrontation/integration of dissident factions (internal)	0.5	If power-sharing formula is validated/strengthened
11.	Extremist elements/Taliban factor/war lords' dominance reduces considerably (internal)	0.5	If peace talks are held judiciously and succeed
12.	Taliban stays out on pretext of U.S. residual presence	0	
13.	Efficacy of ANSF in future and military situation (internal)	0.5	
14.	Internal stability vis-à-vis economic revival through FDI, especially by China and energy corridor process	0.5	Only accomplished with die-hard commitment of the Afghan government and people
15.	U.S. and international donors' commitment for aid until economic revival/stability	0.5	Wishful
16.	U.S./NATO/ISAF keep their role limited to nation building/assistance	1	Still depends on long-term interests of U.S. in the region
17.	U.S. long-term objectives in South Asia (external)	0	
18.	Transition (external)	1	
19.	U.S. policies and COIN vis-à-vis future stability in Afghanistan (external)	0.5	Effects of U.S. policies in last decade
20.	Presence of U.S. forces/Foreign troops in Afghanistan (external)	1	
21.	Pakistan factor/bilateral relations based on non-interference (external)	0.5	Wishful; subject to non-involvement of India in Afghan affairs
22.	Outsiders' play (external)	0	Divergent strategies would keep going as long historic legacy
23.	UN peace keeping (external)	1	
Total		8.5/23	37-percent Probability

Complete nullifying factor = 1 Mark

Half nullifying factor = 0.5 Mark

Unable to nullify factor = 0

B. THE BAD

The Bad scenario is the most realistic one based on the current environment. Afghanistan's overall future political and security landscape must take regional players' perceptions into account—and the regional players have strong apprehensions regarding residual U.S. bases in Afghanistan beyond 2016, especially now that the United States' major purpose, defeating al-Qaeda, has already been achieved. Mehmood Shah writes that “the presence of U.S. bases will not only remain unacceptable to many Afghans; Russia, China, the Central Asian republics, Iran, Pakistan, and possibly India too may have reservations regarding American presence in this region.”¹⁹³

Several factors that may emerge after the withdrawal period will affect this scenario: (1) U.S. negotiations to make the Taliban part of the Afghan government, (2) an intra-Afghan dialogue, supported by Pakistan, and (3) (the most likely factor) continuing negotiations and posturing along with use of force.¹⁹⁴ Considering these factors, the most likely scenario expected to unfold during the post-withdrawal period features a multi-party government, like the current setup, but with more transparent governance; Taliban support in their traditional areas, but relatively contained due to more proficient Afghan security forces; and, overall, a similar scenario as the current status quo, but slightly improved. “The Taliban are not likely to accept a U.S. presence on Afghan soil even if all other issues are amicably resolved between the two sides.”¹⁹⁵ Regional powers like Russia and China may also strongly object to the residual U.S. bases, and the Northern Alliance may not accept the Taliban into the sustaining government. Due to the U.S. drawdown, Afghan citizens will have less confidence in the central government's ability to establish its writ in the countryside.

If reconciliation with the Taliban succeeds, the Taliban will have its share in Afghan governance—a short term success. If the Taliban is not included in the

¹⁹³ Mehmood Shah, “Afghanistan beyond 2014,” *The Dawn*, Feb 1, 2013, <http://dawn.com/2013/02/01/afghanistan-beyond-2014/>.

¹⁹⁴ J. Vowell, “After 2014: The U.S./NATO Missions in Afghanistan,” *e-International Relations*, Dec 17, 2012, <http://www.e-ir.info/2012/12/17/after-2014-the-u-s-nato-missions-in-afghanistan/>.

¹⁹⁵ Mehmood Shah, “Afghanistan beyond 2014.”

government, however, the group may choose to further recruit throughout the world, gathering strength and threatening global security. To prevent this eventuality, the Taliban's concerns must be addressed. With the current state of affairs, the likely outcomes of this scenario (along with its uncertainties and implications) are outlined in the following subsections.

1. Outline of Scenario/Likely Environment

- This status-quo scenario would result in comparatively controlled instability in which reconciliation between all the factions/tribes and internal stakeholders remains vague.
- Trends of corruption, bad governance, and nepotism would continue.
- Insurgency would continue under a slow and uneasy reconciliation process.
- The United States would maintain residual forces in order to train the ANSF.
- The ANSF would continue its slow growth and remain heavily dependent on U.S. and foreign forces for financial aid, sustenance, and training in order to independently deal with radicals.
- The Taliban's major ingresses would be generally halted due to the presence of residual U.S. forces and a comparatively strengthened ANSF (in due course).
- India would maintain influence through heavy investment and friendly relations with the Northern Alliance.

2. Uncertainties

- U.S. interests and future strategy in the region remain uncertain; however, the United States is likely to maintain a footprint in light of the fragile security environment and Afghanistan's economic potential.
- Regional consensus is uncertain due to regional players' divergent interests.
- In light of its present quality, the capability and credibility of the Afghan security apparatus in the immediate and near future will remain uncertain.
- In light of its reputation, the Taliban's future behavior remains uncertain.

3. Implications for Pakistan

- Presently, Pakistan has improved relations with the current central Afghan government; however, the common phenomenon like convincing Afghans of Pakistan's sincerity would remain a challenge.
- The Afghan government and institutions (such as the intelligence agency) would continue to blame Pakistan for their inadequacies.
- Pakistan may further engage itself in the reconstruction process in order to achieve its geo-economic interests.
- If Pakistan's relationship with Afghanistan does not somehow improve, it may create a dilemma for Pakistan, which is no longer able to support the Taliban due to its geo-political situation and domestic security and political objectives.
- Gradually increasing stability inside Afghanistan would enable the return of millions of Afghan refugees from Pakistan, thus reducing Pakistan's social and economic burden. Repatriation of refugees may not be possible, however, for some time still, and the burden on Pakistan will continue.
- Pakistan's recent Operation Zarb-e-Azb¹⁹⁶ against TTP and other extremist groups would leave a strong message for the Afghan security apparatus to similarly tackle their side of the battle—to reconcile with the Taliban if possible or deal them tactfully with a whole-nation-approach coupled with Intel based operations (IBOs) through ANSF.
- India would continue to interfere in Afghanistan's affairs beyond reconstruction, exploiting any opportunity to further strengthen the non-Pashtun groups, thus requiring Pakistan to keep taking countermeasures.
- Because of India's exaggerated presence inside Afghanistan, India's sponsored unrest in Baluchistan would continue.
- Stability and peace on Pakistan's western border would remain a challenge.
- Pakistan would have to make every effort to play a constructive role in order to prevent this scenario from turning into The Ugly scenario.

¹⁹⁶ Zarb-e-Azb (ضربِ عضب) is an Urdu word meaning to chop/cut by one of the personnel swords of Prophet Muhammad PBUH. This Operation is a joint military action being carried out by the Pakistan Armed Forces and LEAs against various terrorist/militant groups operating in Pakistan including the TTP, Lashkar-e-Jangvi, Al-Qaeda, Haqqani network, etc. It was launched in mid-2014.

4. Implications for Afghanistan, the Region, and the World

- The presence of U.S. forces (or partial withdrawal) would benefit the ANSF in terms of training, expertise, and security/logistic assistance, but would not eliminate the threat of the Taliban altogether, which will continue “to fight against the infidels.”
- There is a chance that the quest for power between different Taliban factions and ISIS may erupt, thus weakening their strength. This may provide an opportunity for the central government in Kabul and the United States to take control from the Taliban.
- Afghanistan’s developmental and reconstruction pace would remain slow, meaning that the economic development needed to secure insurgent factions would cause continued dependence on external aid.
- Afghanistan’s progress toward becoming an “energy corridor” would remain relatively slow.
- Religious extremism in Afghanistan and Pakistan would be further marginalized, ensuring effective control over drug trafficking and smuggling.
- Despite regional countries’ (Iran, China, and Russia) concerns, continued U.S. presence in the region would contribute positively toward regional stability and provide an environment conducive to large-scale economic activity, including the long-awaited TAP pipeline project in the semi-near future.
- Although it may be detrimental to the economic interests of both Iran and Russia, and although it may add to Iran’s security concerns, this scenario would address some of both countries’ concerns that are borne of an unstable Afghanistan, e.g., regional instability, spread of religious extremism, etc.
- In the mid-future, the overall economic boost would create a financially viable environment for the Central Asian states in particular, but also for Russia and other regional countries in general.
- Economically stable countries like China and India would maintain effective influence over the government through the use of aid/military training.

Presently, there are no serious efforts to reconcile the Taliban with the mainstream, which is necessary for long-term prosperity. The Taliban may resurge when

U.S. forces begin to withdraw in 2016, as they did in 2014. All the stakeholders including the United States must understand the implications of *fight and talks* and *talks while leaving*. At the time of withdrawal from Afghanistan, to promote reconciling process with the Taliban would tend to support Taliban’s winning strategy: “*Ok you are leaving, we can talk,*” which then might happen on their terms.

5. Probability of Scenario

This scenario is considered the most realistic and therefore the most likely.

Table 3. Probability Table—The Bad Scenario

S. No.	Factors/Imperatives	Value	Remarks/Subject to
1.	Geostrategic and geopolitical inference	0	
2.	Psycho-social environs in Afghanistan (socio-political factor)	0	
3.	Afghanistan society (socio-political factor)	0	
4.	Weak institutions, poverty, and weak education system (internal)	0.5	If the power-sharing formula is validated/strengthened
5.	Compounded governance/political stability (internal)	0	
6.	Corruption (internal)	0	
7.	Justice system (internal)	0	
8.	Opium growth and drug business (internal)	1	
9.	Afghan dependency on foreign resources (internal)	0.5	If the power-sharing formula is validated/strengthened
10.	Policy of reconciliation replaces policy of confrontation/integration of dissident factions (internal)	0.5	If peace talks are held judiciously and succeed
11.	Extremist elements/Taliban factor/war lords’ dominance reduces considerably (internal)	0.5	
12.	Taliban stays out on pretext of U.S. residual presence	0.5	Only accomplished with die-hard commitment of the Afghan government and people
13.	Efficacy of ANSF in future and military situation (internal)	0.5	Dependent on fulfilled commitment of international donors
14.	Internal stability vis-à-vis economic revival through FDI, especially by China and energy corridor process	1	Still depends on long-term U.S. interests in the region
15.	U.S. and international donors’ commitment for aid until economic revival/stability	0	
16.	U.S./NATO/ISAF keep their role limited to nation building/assistance	1	
17.	U.S. long-term objectives in South Asia (external)	0.5	Effects of U.S. policies driven in last decade
18.	Transition (external)	1	
19.	U.S. policies and COIN vis-à-vis future	0.5	Wishful; subject to non-involvement of

S. No.	Factors/Imperatives	Value	Remarks/Subject to
	stability in Afghanistan (external)		India in Afghan affairs
20.	Presence of U.S. forces/Foreign troops in Afghanistan (external)	1	
21.	Pakistan factor/bilateral relations based on non-interference (external)	1	
22.	Outsiders' play (external)	0	Divergent strategies continue as a long historic legacy
23.	UN peace keeping (external)	1	
Total		11/23	48-percent Probability

Complete nullifying factor = 1 Mark

Half nullifying factor = 0.5 Mark

Unable to nullify factor = 0

C. THE UGLY

Feuding warlords. Dwindling aid channels. A crumbling economy. A pending food shortage. Internally and externally displaced people. A flourishing poppy trade. This is how Afghanistan will be described if events unfold against the desires of all stakeholders, including Pakistan and Afghanistan itself. Since 2001, Afghanistan has seen more failures than achievements, mostly due to factors beyond the control of the current government in Kabul, rooted in the country's long history of civil strife. The biggest threat in the post-U.S. withdrawal period comes from the regional warlords who still not only exert great influence in their respective areas of control but also have strengthened more in the past few years. In The Ugly scenario, other assumptions may include the insurgency may continue; a civil war may erupt throughout the country; the central government may be too weak to fight against the regional warlords; and the constitution, which bestows vast power to the central government, may be diluted—divergent interests among ethnic groups and outside powers may also hinder an amicable solution. At worst, some radical faction such as the Taliban succeeds to power.¹⁹⁷

Amid such persistent turmoil, the Taliban can and will emerge as an alternative power structure by taking more than 80 percent–90 percent of Afghanistan's territory in various parts of the country. Though it would currently be difficult for the Taliban to take

¹⁹⁷ Noor ul Haq, "Afghanistan Future;" Naveed Mukhtar, "Afghanistan: Alternative Futures and Their Implications."

and hold Kabul, given the combined strength of Afghan and American security forces, after 2016 the circumstances could lead to turmoil if not dealt with politically.¹⁹⁸ Foreseeing its vulnerabilities, the Afghan government has already sought to keep a larger residual U.S. force than the Obama administration wanted to maintain, consequently postponing withdrawal until 2016.¹⁹⁹ This step shows that Afghanistan is still insecure—that it must rely on foreign forces instead of emphasizing its self-reliance, training more local troops, enacting a free and fair political transformation, reconciling with all stakeholders to include the Taliban, state building, making trade partnerships, installing more physical infrastructures, and building more universities and colleges.

The Ugly scenario is the most unfavorable scenario. It would have the most negative effects for all stakeholders, including Pakistan, due to the implications for the economy, national integration, internal security, foreign policy, and national development. Afghanistan's internal instability—desperately in need of peace and security—would badly affect trade and economic activities in the region, and would be a detriment to the interests of the United States and the West. This scenario would be the result of foreign powers' continued support of warring factions, and of other foreign powers' desire to maintain the status quo. However, this scenario, which until recently was assessed as the most probable future scenario, is now becoming less likely. With residual forces likely to work against terrorism in Afghanistan—and with the Taliban considered a party to global terrorism—it is clear that the present situation is heading toward minimizing the Taliban.

1. Outline of the Scenario/Likely Environment

In this scenario, all foreign forces—compelled by economic considerations, military casualties, and intense public pressure—leave Afghanistan, creating a state of turmoil/chaos like that of 1989 after the withdrawal of Russian forces. The reconciliation

¹⁹⁸ Arabinda Acharya and Antara Desai, "Afghanistan's Post-2014 Futures?" *Global Brief: World Affairs in 21st Century*, October 3, 2012), <http://globalbrief.ca/blog/2012/10/03/afghanistans-post-2014-futures/>.

¹⁹⁹ Matthew Rosenberg, "Karzai Says U.S. Bases Can Stay, Raising Some Eyebrows in West," (*New York Times*, 2013).

process has completely failed, the current government system has broken down due to its unjust non-inclusiveness, and the repercussions of the U.S. withdrawal have renewed insurgents' vigour. This situation is favorable to Russia, India, China, and Iran. Though this outlook is pessimistic, it cannot yet be ruled out.

The Ugly scenario is the worst-case scenario for Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the region. Under this scenario, civil war is a distinct possibility. The Afghan government could fail to exercise its complete authority across the country; fail to guarantee safety and security of Afghan people because of much weakened ANSF; fail to maintain law and order; and see most institutions collapse due to corruption and lack of financial support. "Fighting spreads to most parts of Afghanistan as the insurgents strive to institute local governance against a corrupt and ineffectual central authority."²⁰⁰

- Due to public pressure in EU countries and the United States, combined with a prolonged, fruitless war, the coalition forces would decide to pull out, thus creating a power vacuum. However, this depends on the presence of residual U.S. forces.
- The power vacuum would create chaos, endangering the fragile regime, increasing warlordism, and creating open-ended Taliban power and extremism around the world. Afghanistan would become an even bigger threat to global security.
- Due to failed peace talks and continued U.S. presence, the Taliban would gain renewed vigour.
- The United States would be able to establish a heavy residual force after 2016, set up either by negotiations or through the UN.
- The reconciliation process would fail completely, with dissident elements left out of power.
- The ANSF would become fragmented and join with various ethnic affiliations.
- Civil war would intensify with stronger insurgency, causing the region to become more insecure.
- The narcotics trade would boom.

²⁰⁰ Naveed Mukhtar , "Afghanistan: Alternative Futures and Their Implications."

- An influx of refugees would flee to neighboring countries.

2. Uncertainties

- U.S. intentions concerning anti-terror policy are uncertain, but likely to shift toward the Middle East, or even to Pakistan, on the pretext of nuclear outreach.
- Pakistan's influence over the Taliban is uncertain but will face suspicion among the global community.
- The extent to which regional players will seek to safeguard their national interests is uncertain.

3. Implications for Pakistan

- Civil war in Afghanistan would cause serious security concerns for Pakistan.
- Russia, India, and Iran would exploit the situation to their favor. They would continue to support the Northern Alliance and other non-Pashtun parties against Pakistani-supported, Pashtun-dominated political parties.
- Pakistan could be labeled a major co-conspirator of terrorism and solely responsible for unrest in Afghanistan.
- FATA would become entangled in a new series of violence.
- Pakistan may face increased drone attacks, or even surgical strikes, by the United States on the pretext of abetting terrorism. Such strikes may also be aimed to neutralize Pakistan's nuclear arsenal.
- The situation would pose a serious blow to Pakistan's economic interests.²⁰¹
- Terrorist activity in India may result in general mobilization, further straining Pakistan militarily.
- The insecure western border would create a two-front dilemma for Pakistan.

²⁰¹ Muhammad Khurshid Khan, "Projected Security Environments of Pakistan in Post-Afghanistan War Scenario," (Summer 2011), 102–121.

- TTP would pose more challenges to the Pakistani government, posing a bigger threat to regional security as well.²⁰²
- Baluchistan may receive renewed insurgency strength under international arrangements.
- The influx of refugees would further deteriorate economic conditions in Pakistan.²⁰³

4. Afghanistan under UN Peace-Keeping Mission

With the threat of extreme consequences should The Ugly scenario ensue, and in order to save face, foreign players could choose to unanimously pass a resolution that sends a UN peace-keeping force to Afghanistan. The likely environment would continue as follows.

a. Likely Environment

- The United States, under immense pressure from NATO and its own public, would pull troops from Afghanistan, citing increased casualties on both sides and prolonged conflict without any worthwhile results.
- Major policy changes would occur as the United States and NATO forces leave Afghanistan.
- The UN resolution would employ a multinational peace-keeping force with the clear mandate to bring peace and end civil turmoil.
- The majority of warlords, the Afghan government, neighboring countries, and other major players would accept the UN mandate, and be either forced or willing to cooperate.
- In the absence of NATO troops, Russian, Indian, and Iranian involvement would increasingly threaten internal stability in Afghanistan.
- UN forces would stop hunting down Al Qaeda or the Taliban.
- The scenario would play out against U.S. interests, as they would be forced to stop targeting Al Qaeda and the Taliban, and would not be permitted to interfere in Afghanistan.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

b. Uncertainties

Although The Ugly scenario's best option is to hand over affairs to a UN peace-keeping force; however, the dilemma may arise that troop-contributing states to the UN peace keeping force would might or might not be acceptable to Afghanistan and its neighboring countries.

c. Implications for Pakistan

- Relative peace in Afghanistan would bring reciprocating peace in Pakistani areas that border Afghanistan.
- Pakistan might restore its image in the eyes of the Afghans, as well as the world at large, by taking part in reconstruction efforts.
- Pakistan could serve as a base for the UN mission, since logistics will likely need to flow through Pakistan.

Contrarily, if the UN peace-keeping force comprises countries like India, Pakistan would strongly resist that force and anarchy could ensue.

5. Probability of Scenario

This scenario is considered the most dangerous, undesirable, and unlikely. As shown in Table 4, there is a 9-percent probability of The Ugly scenario coming to fruition.

Table 4. Probability Table—The Ugly Scenario

S. No.	Factors/Imperatives	Value	Remarks/Subject to
1.	Geostrategic and geopolitical inference	0	
2.	Psycho-social environs in Afghanistan (socio-political factor)	0	
3.	Afghanistan society (socio-political factor)	0	
4.	Weak institutions, poverty, and weak education system (internal)	0	
5.	Compounded governance/political stability (internal)	0	
6.	Corruption (internal)	0	
7.	Justice system (internal)	0	
8.	Opium growth and drug business (internal)	0	
9.	Afghan dependency on foreign resources (internal)	0	
10.	Policy of reconciliation replaces policy of confrontation/integration of dissident factions (internal)	0	
11.	Extremist elements/Taliban factor/war lords' dominance reduces considerably (internal)	0	ANSF is fragmented
12.	Taliban stays out on pretext of U.S. residual presence	0	
13.	Efficacy of ANSF in future and military situation (internal)	0	
14.	Internal stability vis-à-vis economic revival through FDI, especially by China and energy corridor process	0	
15.	U.S. and international donors' commitment for aid until economic revival/stability	1	Still depends on long-term U.S. interests in the region
16.	U.S./NATO/ISAF keep their role limited to nation building/assistance	0	
17.	U.S. long-term objectives in South Asia (external)	1	
18.	Transition (external)	0	
19.	U.S. policies and COIN vis-à-vis future stability in Afghanistan (external)	0	
20.	Presence of U.S. forces/Foreign troops in Afghanistan (external)	0	
21.	Pakistan factor/bilateral relations based on non-interference (external)	0	
22.	Outsiders' play (external)	0	
23.	UN peace keeping (external)	0	
Total		2/23	9-percent Probability

Complete nullifying factor = 1 Mark

Half nullifying factor = 0.5 Mark

Unable to nullify factor = 0

6. Comparative Analysis

Table 5 provides a comparative analysis of the three scenarios.

Table 5. Probability Table—Comparative Analysis

Scenarios	<i>The Good</i>	<i>The Bad</i>	<i>The Ugly</i>
Desirability	Essential	Better than nothing	Least desirable
Probability	Less likely but possible	Most likely	Cannot be ruled out
Benefit	Win-win situation	Sustainable	None

V. ANALYSIS AND WAY FORWARD

The Afghan end game and regional stability in South Asia are directly related to global peace. The situation requires an approach that unifies international and regional players as well as the Afghans themselves. This chapter discusses relevant conclusions drawn from the previous chapters and provides a broad strategic synopsis for the Afghanistan crisis.

ISAF and ANSF were unable to defeat the Taliban by December 2014, when U.S.-led forces were originally postured to withdraw; neither is it likely to make any considerable difference before the end of 2016. Predictably, the Taliban has become more assertive in the regions where U.S. forces have vacated, such as the Wardak province in the east. When the United States vacated Combat Post Conlon, it left the Afghan government and troops in control. Within weeks, Afghan forces were severely restricted by the insurgents. Although the ANSF is now more trained and equipped, it may still not be able to control Afghanistan's vast territory after 2016. The ANSF still needs military assistance from willing countries, such as the United States—even after the security agreement expires—Pakistan, or, at worst, the UN. The Karzai government tried to make a military agreement with India, but India was not willing to out-rightly sign a pact for Indian military presence in Afghanistan, save for training assistance to the Afghan troops and rebuilding measures after 2016; India does not want to fight someone else's war in a country that could make India vulnerable to terrorism.²⁰⁴ Despite all endeavors to strengthen the ANSF, if the Taliban has succeeded in pushing the world's most powerful militaries to withdraw, the Afghan army is unlikely to stand in their way. "This is the fourth time in 150 years of Afghanistan's turbulent history that the country is recreating the state military following its total disintegration caused by foreign invasions or civil wars."²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ Seema Mustafa, "Post-withdrawal scenario in Afghanistan."

²⁰⁵ Ali A Jalali. "Rebuilding Afghanistan's National Army," *Parameters* 32, no 2: Autumn 2002, 72, <http://search.proquest.com/openview/b8714a579afd0472719df5716ee4abcb/1?pq-origsite=gscholar>.

The Afghan establishment seems much dependent on foreign troops, in some number, for its security. Whenever these foreign troops do leave, chaos will ensue unless the Taliban—which has at least better “authority to control” the complex Afghan nation through their religious beliefs—is included in the political process. Otherwise, the ANSF would need to become powerful enough to enforce state legitimacy across the country. The only option for Afghanistan’s long-term prosperity is to bring the Taliban into the mainstream political process; Pakistan advocates this approach. The process must furthermore be Afghan-led and inclusive of all stakeholders, e.g., the Afghan government, Pakistan, the United States, and Afghan political parties. Pakistan’s role must be limited to facilitation only.²⁰⁶ The process of reconciliation is generally favored by at least two important stakeholders—Pakistan and the United States—who understand that long-term positive results will come from talking to the Taliban rather than isolating them. Iran and India, on the other hand, would probably be unhappy if this option were exercised.²⁰⁷

If reconciliation does not occur with the Taliban, the situation is likely to be more dangerous for Pakistan. Under such circumstances, the resistance of the Taliban against a weak Afghan national government—overseen by the United States—will divide Afghanistan and will keep the area hostile. The spillover of insurgency and influx of refugees into Pakistan’s tribal areas will reemerge, and the issue will remain unresolved.²⁰⁸ Few pertinent geo-strategic compulsions or the study points about the internal as well as external aspects of Afghanistan are discussed in the next section.

A. ANALYSIS

1. Transition upon Withdrawal

As international security interests compete and evolve, the transition in Afghanistan will depend on the development of its government and security forces, negotiations, and the country’s value to and commitment from the United States. Success

²⁰⁶ Chowdhury and Burki, “Afghanistan after America: Possible Post-Drawdown Scenarios.”

²⁰⁷ Seema Mustafa, “Post-withdrawal scenario in Afghanistan.”

²⁰⁸ Post Seminar Report, “Afghanistan End Game.”

will be determined by how events transpire rather than a set of specific, predetermined goals. One thing is certain: no one will get what he or she wants from this war, and compromise is necessary for peace. Therefore, Afghanistan's goal should remain focused on training and organizing the Afghan army, developing a strong central government that is capable of enforcing laws, and retaining the goodwill of the United States and the West in general. Similarly, the threat of extra-territorial terrorism will likely force Afghanistan to depend upon international security arrangements; the continued presence of ISAF and the United States will likely remain a security requirement. Other regional players, however (such as China, Russia, and Iran) may feel threatened by continued U.S. presence in the region, which endangers their vital trade interests. The emerging Afghan government must consider the complex sensitivities, motives, and interests that will affect national integration and stability.

2. Long-term Commitment of International Players

Each previously mentioned challenge in this thesis requires a comprehensive *strategy and long-term commitment*. The Afghans themselves must establish security and rule of law throughout the country, but they will require “financial assistance and political support from the international community” for at least the next decade, allowing time for the Afghan economy to grow.²⁰⁹ There is no denying the Pakistan's strategic role in post-2016 Afghanistan, as emphasized by the EU and other world players; Pakistan could play a vital role during the transition and economic rehabilitation, and in broader counter-terrorism terms as well.²¹⁰ Afghanistan must further engage regional players such as Pakistan and the CARs for broader regional, economic, and political stability, trade, intelligence sharing, and institution development during the “transformation decade.”

Additionally, permanent peace also depends upon regional cooperation among Iran, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan, and the United States and Russia's non-interference at the

²⁰⁹ Eric C. Martin, *International Journal on World Peace* 25, no. 1 (2008): 89–93, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20752818>.

²¹⁰ Erik Brattberg, *Europe, Afghanistan and The Transatlantic Relationship After 2014*, 15–16.

international level. The problems in Afghanistan have been compounded by the interference of the neighboring states, namely, India, Iran, Tajikistan, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan, which shows how deeply involved regional powers are in the situation.²¹¹

At the domestic level, the lasting peace in Afghanistan calls for a long-term power-sharing arrangement among different ethnic and religious groups.²¹² Regrettably, Afghan society is too polarized and fragmented to embark on an effective peace process alone. Nor is there any other single country in the region in a position to mediate the warring factions. Though there is some stability at present, it is fragile and could deteriorate at any moment. A neutral, impartial, and commonly accepted forum, such as the UN, is needed to broker peace among the Afghans and to persuade them to honor peace pledges and settle their differences. The Afghans have two choices moving forward: a peace settlement through a political process, or the risk of their country disintegrating.²¹³

However, only a solution that is fully supported by Pakistan and Iran can bring peace and stability to war-torn Afghanistan. It is unfortunate that the two countries have been reluctant to discuss or agree upon a path toward resolution. Each country has its own clear objectives, hoping that a turn of events might fulfill those objectives. It is high time that Pakistan and Iran put their cards on the table and discuss frankly what they want, and how they can help Afghanistan. Afghan leaders have shown time and again their inability to strike a compromise. It is possible that a combined, friendly push from Pakistan and Iran could lead the Afghans toward comprehensive, long-term settlement.²¹⁴

²¹¹ Ghulam Sarwar, "Viable Options to achieve Peace in Afghanistan," 38.

²¹² International Conference Proceedings, "US Exit from Afghanistan: Challenges and Options beyond 2014," National University of Modern Languages (NUML), Department of International Relations, Peace and Conflict Studies, (Islamabad, March 6–7, 2013), 19, <http://www.numl.edu.pk/docs/PROCEEDINGS%20-%20last%20final.doc>.

²¹³ Ghulam Sarwar, "Viable Options to achieve Peace in Afghanistan," 44.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 45–46.

3. Strategic Equation in South Asia

The regional stability in South Asia is strongly linked with strategic balance—or imbalance—between India and Pakistan. India’s interests and interference in Afghanistan complicates the region’s strategic equation. General Stanley McChrystal notes:

While India’s activities largely benefit the Afghan people, increasing Indian influence in Afghanistan is likely to exacerbate regional tensions and encourage Pakistani countermeasures in Afghanistan or India.²¹⁵

In other words, increased Indian influence in Afghanistan outside the realm of development creates security apprehensions for other neighboring countries like Pakistan, and exacerbates regional tensions.

Instability in Afghanistan would implicate the entire region. If India continues to push for policy that negatively affects Pakistan, India will receive only short-term gains. Whether India completely stamps Pakistan off the world map (which is not possible considering Pakistan’s military strength) or simply inflicts minor setbacks, regional instability will suffer in the short-term, and India will suffer in the long-term—After 2016, India would be more vulnerable to Bombay attacks like incidents from spillover insurgency or Jihadists from Afghanistan.

Different countries in South Asia have interpreted the United States’ future intentions in different ways, thus complicating the overall security situation. Internal and external stakeholders are divided into pro- and anti-U.S. groups, working to secure individual and group interests. Taking our cue from similar historical power struggles, the resultant vacuums, and subsequent power efforts, it is likely that another power struggle among the United States and other key regional stakeholders will ensue after the 2016 drawdown.

In short, each player is reaching toward different goals, using non-coherent strategies. They are primarily unable to reach common ground because of their domestically driven politics. Pakistan has logical security concerns about increased

²¹⁵ Stanley McChrystal, “Commander’s Initial Assessment Report of the Situation in Afghanistan,” ISAF Headquarters, Kabul, Afghanistan, (Washington Post: August 30, 2009). http://media.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/documents/Assessment_Redacted_092109.pdf.

Indian involvement in Afghan politics. India strives for a non-Pashtun government preferably Northern Alliance to marginalize Pakistan influence, also supplemented by Iran's views for supporting Northern Alliance to elevate Shiite minority in Afghanistan. Russia also aligns with India and Iran's agenda, like in the '70s when they supported the Northern Alliance in order to keep the CARs out of others' influence, defend against extremism spillover, and prevent the United States from reaching in from the Pakistan–Afghan corridor. The South Asian pot will similarly remain boiling during Afghanistan's transformation, affecting the pace of development.

4. Future Influences

Following the withdrawal of U.S. and NATO troops from Afghanistan in 2016, countries in this region are likely to see a major shift in political alliances, and the influence of power players in the region is likely to change owing to present and pressing geo-political and economic realities.

Maleeha Lodhi, Pakistan's permanent representative to the UN, rightly highlighted:

America's "Pivot" is consequential to Pakistan's security challenges. The pivot is widely seen here, as aimed to contain China's rise, even as America simultaneously pursues economic engagement with Beijing. If this policy involves an endeavor to build India as a counterweight to China, this will have implications for South Asian stability. U.S. plans to supply India advanced weaponry and technology will accentuate the growing conventional and strategic asymmetry between Pakistan and India and further undermine the delicate regional equilibrium.²¹⁶

This situation has led Pakistan to pursue relationships with other power states, like Russia—shown by the Russian defense minister's visit to Pakistan last year, and economic agreements between the two countries.²¹⁷

²¹⁶ Maleeha Lodhi, "Pakistan's security challenges," Spearhead Research: December 9, 2014, http://spearheadresearch.org/SR_CMS/index.php/interaffairspolitics/pakistans-security-challenges.

²¹⁷ Mateen Haider, "Pakistan, Russia Sign Landmark Defence Deal," DAWN, Aug 20, 2015, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1201473>.

The SCO is pivotal in the emerging multipolar world. With Russia and China as core members, this organization will play an important role in fortifying the foundations of the world order. As a regional body, the SCO is likely to act as a counter-weight to NATO. Pakistan’s relations with both Russia and China will determine not only the regional strategic scenario, but also Pakistan’s national interests in the region. In this context, Pakistan’s bid for permanent membership in the SCO would be a major step toward a proactive and extended role in the region.

Under all these emergent circumstances, there are apprehensions about post-2016 power asymmetry at both the global and regional levels. Each player’s agenda and interests will affect regional stability. Leading U.S. and Western maritime coalitions in the Gulf of Oman and Aden, as a “show of force,” may minimize or relocate to the Asian Pacific, as per the United States’ Asia Rebalancing Strategy. Another hypothesis is that the United States, with no further interest left in Pakistan, may turn toward India for future strategic partnership against China. If the United States, NATO, and India emerge together, then an alliance between China, Russia, and Pakistan may form. The possible strategic partnerships affecting South Asia are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Prospects of Future Alliances

Possible—Nexus	Probability	Remarks
U.S.–Pakistan–Afghanistan	Likely (50/50)	Most desired to stabilize Afghanistan in the long run.
Russia–India–Afghanistan	Less likely (30/70)	If the United States aligns with India, then it may be possible.
India–Iran–Afghanistan	Likely at regional level (50/50)	It is the desire of India, but depends upon Afghanistan, if its people decide to exclude Pakistan from their affairs.
India–U.S.–Afghanistan	Likely, but at a later time (30/70)	It might occur once the United States is fully aligned with India. But it will pose a tangible threat to Pakistan’s security.
Pakistan–Iran–Afghanistan	Less likely (30/70)	Both Iran and India have Pakistan as an economic rival in Afghanistan. But it is a good proposition for Pakistan.

In order to work toward The Good scenario, it is necessary to plan where and how efforts will be applied during and after the transition. As the U.S. commander in Afghanistan reminded us in 2009, it is never too late to pursue a “Winning Hearts and Minds Strategy.”²¹⁸ For a smooth withdrawal from Afghanistan, earnest endeavors must target the root causes of the growing Afghan insurgency, global terrorism, and regional instability—notably, poverty and privation and their “collateral damage”—which make the people vulnerable to exploitation by extremist organizations.

To improve upon the most likely future scenario (The Bad), it is imperative to quantify, prioritize, and finally deal with problems zealously. Afghanistan today faces four major problems, which all players—including Pakistan—should strive to help solve ideological problems, political problems, economic problems, and military deficits. If we had learned from the example of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989, the Osama Bin Laden factor may not have developed a decade later. Broadly, state-building measures, established supremacy of law and human rights, rapid economic growth, strong Afghan National Security Forces, and the “ruling over hearts and minds” concept are a few of the bottom-line objectives; if not achieved in the post-2016 transformation decade, the devastating fictional scenario described in the introduction of this thesis could become a reality.

5. Reciprocal Efforts from Pakistan and Afghanistan

Pakistan and Afghanistan both have several policy options moving forward. In the past, Afghan regimes have pursued unfriendly policies toward Pakistan; however, current circumstances call for pragmatic cordiality over the next decade. Pakistan must ensure constructive engagement at all levels in order to enhance Pakistan’s leverage and promote its self-interest in Afghan affairs. However, Pakistan needs to avoid past pitfalls and abstain from picking favorites. Similarly, policy formulation must be informed by Afghanologists, sociologists, and anthropologists to ensure a constructive approach toward peace and long-term solidarity in Afghanistan. At the same time, as Pakistan will

²¹⁸ Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*, 1–65; Kristi Keck, “U.S. must win Afghan hearts and minds, commander says,” (*CNN Politics.com*, September 28, 2009), http://www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/09/28/afghanistan.obama/index.html?_s=PM.

prominently bear the effects of the war in Afghanistan, international players and the Afghans themselves must involve Pakistan in major strategic agreements, including peace talks with the Taliban. The following subsections outline the necessary steps for bilateral, mutual dialogues between Pakistan and Afghanistan, with a focus on Pakistan's contributions.

a. Mutual Trust Building

Mutual trust building is the key to affecting harmony and stability between Pakistan and Afghanistan after U.S. withdrawal. Both countries desperately need to sincerely build and strengthen mutual ties. To build trust, both countries must interact more frequently at all levels. Trust can only be gained through good foreign policy and positive diplomacy from both sides.

b. Strategic Partnership Agreement and Treaty of Friendship

Pakistan and Afghanistan need to revive their bilateral relations by exploring common grounds and new prospects. To start, they should initiate a bilateral “treaty of friendship and cooperation.” The treaty should require comprehensive engagements, such as economic cooperation, mutual sports and cultural ventures, crossover visits, military assistance, and exchange of educational expertise. Subsequently, Pakistan should work to solidify a strategic partnership agreement (SPA) with Afghanistan that would provide a framework for mutual relations in various fields. Afghanistan has already signed SPAs with the United States and India. Doing so with Pakistan would increase person-to-person interaction by initiating job training exchange programs in the education field, organizing combined cultural activities, and extending assistance in Afghan reconstruction by providing technical expertise in agricultural and IT departments.

c. Inter-Afghanistan–Pakistan Sports Activities

In pursuance of the aforementioned treaty of friendship and SPA, inter-country sports activities are a quick means for positive social interaction. Sports, in addition to being healthy activities, can also create diplomacy—they can serve as a confidence-building measure to improve bilateral relations. Indo–Pak cricket is an example of this

diplomatic tool's ability to ease inter-state tensions. Sports activities like cricket and football may help normalize social contact between the two countries and create a lively atmosphere in the Afghan public that may otherwise distrust Pakistanis.

d. Outstanding Issue Resolution

To bring stability to the region, both Afghanistan and Pakistan must resolve their existing issues, such as the Durand Line dispute. The Durand Line has been a constant obstacle in Pak–Afghan relations, and its resolution could help curtail cross-border terrorism and other illegal activities. Pakistan should involve the international community to resolve the issue once and for all, as it will only aggravate the future security situation. Due to domestic political compulsions and other factors—such as India's influence in Afghanistan—the Durand Line issue cannot be settled in the current political environment; however, it may be resolved through gradual improvement in cross-border checking mechanisms or SOPs, immigration formalities, taxation, or other methods. By mutually agreeing to a security arrangement at the border area, both countries would directly benefit from improved trust and confidence.

e. Close Coordination between Security Forces

In the recent past, minor border violations have been a source of conflict between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The countries should establish a joint committee/monitoring team to observe crossover incidents and avoid any further conflict. Because both countries are enduring a similar internal security situation regarding terrorism, they must collaborate closely to fight a common enemy. Pakistan must continue Operation Zarb-e-Azb in its FATA areas with a whole-of-nation approach until the country is free of terrorism and has set a policy to “Clear, Hold, Build and Transfer” in order to deal with terrorism's effects. The ANSF can conduct similar operations on the Afghanistan side. Although the ANSF may require help from U.S. forces at first, they would also have to be actively engaged for cooperation with Pakistan after U.S. withdrawal.

f. Curbing Terrorism/Militancy through Economic Cooperation

Peace attracts investments; however, investments and economic endeavors alone do not bring about peace. Both Pakistan and Afghanistan may not sustain any long-term economic activity, as both faces the same set of security challenges regarding militancy. It is appropriate for the two countries to cooperate and try to get willing factions/the Taliban on their side and in the mainstream. This will increase the willing factions' stake in governmental affairs by giving them a share of the economic routes passing through the areas they occupy. For instance, in Pakistan, all energy/economic corridors generally pass through disturbed areas of Baluchistan and FATA. The respective governments must give royalties to the locals for any resources—such as gas and oil—that are extracted from their land. This will make them an active element in society and a governmental stakeholder.

6. Future Methodology/Efforts Required by Pakistan

The internal and external situation in Afghanistan after U.S. withdrawal will depend entirely on the prevailing environment. There are innumerable opportunities for Pakistan, which, if assessed and capitalized on properly, can greatly support Pakistan's policy objectives. To further safeguard its national interests and ensure its own security/stability (in terms of mitigating the de-stabilizing effect on its western frontier in KPK and Baluchistan) Pakistan alone needs to articulate comprehensive policy measures. Pakistan should remain effectively engaged with the present Afghan government, and should take apt measures to create an environment that will help stabilize Afghanistan in the long-term. Some contours of the recommended policy are summarized as follows.²¹⁹

a. At the Global/Regional Level

- Pakistan must argue its case to the world community on the diplomatic front. Pakistan must help international players realize that Pakistan is the country that can be most influential in Afghan affairs, and therefore should not be excluded from the peace process as it has been in the past. To

²¹⁹Ruth Rene, *Afghanistan in 2010: A Survey of the Afghan People*, The Asia Foundation Report (Kabul, AINA Media: 2010), <https://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/Afghanistanin2010survey.pdf>.

facilitate this, Pakistan must establish close ties with all stakeholders involved in the Afghan matrix.

- Pakistan should not avoid marginalizing other stakeholders' desires. Pakistan must endeavor to supplement rather than substitute its ties with any single state. Pakistan ought to find balance between alliances with the United States and China, and with Russia if deemed necessary.
- To mitigate distrust between Pakistan and the United States, both countries should build trust and communication through formal channels, avoiding the media—coercive diplomacy through the media is not a viable way forward.
- To remain relevant and avoid isolation in the region, Pakistan must build closer ties with Russia, perhaps with help from China, and realign its foreign policy with Iran.
- The Durand Line dispute, though still a low-key affair, may escalate in the future. Because Pakistan has suffered the worst effects of the war in Afghanistan and yet has still remained a U.S. ally in the GWOT, the United States must convince Afghanistan to accept the Durand Line as an international border.
- To enhance its credibility, Pakistan should involve other countries like Turkey and Saudi Arabia in security pacts with Afghanistan.
- Because Pakistan has tremendous economic potential, Pakistan should involve China in its economic endeavors, such as projects like CPEC. For example, development of communication infrastructure—such as a railway link from Pakistan to the CARs that travel through Afghanistan—or investment from China in the TAPI pipeline project.
- Pakistan can serve as an energy corridor through the CARs, which will help bring peace and prosperity to the region and an economic lift for Pakistan.
- Pakistan must intensify cooperation under the OIC, Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), SCO, UN, Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation, and SAARC. Pakistan must keep interacting with all regional countries including through new forums to safeguard its interests in the region.
- The increased number of Indian consulates along Pakistan's western border is a constant annoyance for Pakistan, especially with concrete evidence of Indian involvement in Baluchistan. Pakistan—in addition to seeking closure of these consulates with Afghanistan—may find it fruitful

to raise the issue at an international forum. If proof of Indian involvement in Baluchistan is shared with the UN and other international forums in which Pakistan is a member, it could be more rigorously pursued.

- Clear and strong policies should be devised to deal with ISIS, though it has yet to pose a credible threat to South Asia. Saudi Arabia recently led an Islamic country coalition against terrorism; though it has yet to prove its worth, it could certainly improve the overall image of Muslims and Islam as a religion of peace.

b. At the National/Government Level

Pakistan's efforts at the international and regional levels can only prevail if similar efforts are executed at the national level with a whole-of-nation approach.

(1) Policy of Constructive Bilateral Engagement

Pakistan must continue to pursue measures for better cooperation at all levels to protect its lasting interests in Afghanistan. Such measures may include:

- Pakistan must determine how involved it should be inside Afghanistan. In the past, the ambitious though misplaced desire for geographical depth through manipulation of Afghan politics has had poor results. Pakistan's efforts should be directed toward developing a stable Afghanistan, without the impression of being a power broker in Afghanistan.
- Pakistan will be the single greatest benefactor from stability in Afghanistan. Pakistan should therefore distance itself from Afghanistan's internal polity. A *policy of non-interference* may prove more productive for Pakistan to ensure lasting strategic benefits. Pakistan should keep helping the Afghan government conduct peace talks with the Taliban.
- It is common belief that Afghanistan will be stifled if Torkham and Chaman are closed for one day. This may be tactically effective; however, regional competitors are ready to cash in on any such venture by Pakistan. If Pakistan is looking at Central Asia via Afghanistan, then the new definition of cooperation should be on the basis of economic (rather than political) inter-dependence, since, presently, Afghanistan is viewed as merely a dependent country.
- Influence in Afghanistan, presently, is gauged in terms of economic assistance provided by a country. India is aware of this, and has gained sufficient space in Kabul. To compete for national interests, Pakistan has to invest heavily in Afghanistan at the government level. Pakistani

investors must also be encouraged to invest in development projects in Afghanistan.

- Pakistan should help Afghanistan develop smoothly functioning government infrastructure and create suitable economic conditions for achieving long-term stability after U.S. withdrawal.
- Pakistan must continue to provide assistance to Afghanistan on various projects. The projects, once announced, must be completed on time.
- Pakistan may provide support for all potential departments, e.g., security/defence sectors, banking, healthcare, education, trade, and industry.
- Any belligerent-sounding Afghan speech-making like the one seen in President Ashraf Ghani's address during the recent 6th *Heart of Asia Conference* in Amritsar must be taken positively and overreaction should be avoided to strengthen bilateral relations.
- Keeping in view Afghan sociology, experts on Afghan affairs and think tanks might profitably be involved to formulate a long-term foreign policy for Afghanistan.
- Close trade ties can be established by offering a free trade agreement or enhanced concessions in Afghan transit trade, and by developing an effective market for Pakistani goods.
- To recapture the Afghan market, Pakistan should schedule exclusive exhibition of construction materials, food items, light engineering goods, and medicines in Afghanistan; representatives from major chambers of commerce and industry should visit Afghanistan every year, and customs procedures may be made more convenient for imports/exports with Afghanistan.
- Pakistan must help Afghanistan create the much-desired energy corridor. This is not only important for economic uplift in the region, but also for creating an economic stake for all factions. Eventually, Pakistan will greatly benefit from the proposed corridor.
- Effective utilization of the energy conduit offered by Afghanistan for carrying Central Asian hydrocarbons to warm waters in the Arabian Sea, through Gwadar Port.
- In order to attract the CARs for trade, Pakistan should develop requisite infrastructure inside Afghanistan. Some steps to this end have been taken but the Indian-built Delaram-Zaranj Highway has directly challenged the

prospects of Pakistan's trade with the CARs. It is important that, instead of falling back on the old rhetoric and blaming India, Pakistan should pursue development of suitable communication infrastructure inside Afghanistan. Construction of a railway line linking Landi Kotal and Central Asia should be a priority.

- Some Afghan ethnic groups harbor hostility toward Pakistan, largely because of its role in the '90s. Taking its lead from Indian relations with different ethnic groups, Pakistan should also establish renewed relations and maintain close/constructive ties with other ethnic groups in the country, especially the Tajiks and Hazaras. Overreaction by Afghan leaders must be avoided. Disputes in bilateral relations should be resolved through dialogue and negotiations.
- Pakistan should continue to support any means that lead to settlement of the war through negotiations. Pakistan should not support any single group or groups, or play favorites. It must urge all those concerned to join the reconciliation process. Pakistan has just as much to gain from a peaceful, self-ruled Afghanistan as it has lost from a turbulent neighbor.
- Rather than generalized statements, Pakistan needs to confront the Afghan authorities with facts and figures about Indian diplomats' anti-Pakistan activities.
- To minimize the economic burden and resolve socio-political problems, Afghan refugees currently residing in Pakistan must be repatriated. The government should pursue an agreement with Afghanistan before the complete withdrawal of U.S. troops for repatriation of refugees. This can only be achieved through constructive engagement with all factions to ensure peace; help from the United States and UN is also needed to ensure a guaranteed repatriation and to avoid another wave of refugees should The Bad scenario play out.
- The Afghan government has the liberty to improve its relations with India; however, the Afghan government needs to prevent India from using Afghan land for anti-Pakistan activities.

c. Pakistan's Measures at the Armed Forces Level

Pakistan's strong armed forces must also play a role in the whole-of-government approach.

- *Effective Border Management.* In addition to constructive engagement with Afghanistan, Pakistan's armed forces must maintain security along the western border until the environment in Afghanistan is safe. The armed forces must be ready to tackle any spillover effect while the United

States withdraws from the region, and for another four to five years after. Moreover, efforts should be made for closer cooperation and coordination with the ANA to formulate a comprehensive border management plan.

- *Training/Assistance to the ANSF.* It is in Pakistan's long-term interests to constructively engage with the ANSF, play an active role in its capacity building, and foster friendly/long-lasting ties to help ensure permanent peace in Afghanistan. The assistance may take the following forms:
- At present, the ANSF is being trained by a host of countries, including India. Despite Pakistan's offers, the Afghan government has not agreed to send troops for training in Pakistan, apparently due to Indian pressure. Pakistan should actively push the current government to send more troops to Pakistan for training, especially to send officers and cadets to the Pakistan Military Academy. In this regard, the provision of better facilities may soften Afghanistan's stance.
- Efforts may be made for joint military exercises on a regular basis.
- Most importantly, Pakistan should provide critical military equipment and munitions at competitive prices or as aid.
- Joint operation centers along the border should be increased for better coordination.
- Pakistan may continue intelligence interaction with the National Directorate of Security at the highest level. A number of wrong perceptions can be corrected through dialogue.
- In order to curb the cross-border infiltration and to end the blame game, Pakistan should emphasize joint monitoring of the border by combined teams of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and NATO forces.

d. *Pakistan's Measures in the Social Sector*

Pakistan must make an effort to maintain and further enhance existing social and cultural ties, which can ultimately strengthen both countries.

- *Assistance in Reform and Capacity Building.* Pakistan must offer assistance in bringing reforms and capacity building for social development. Such areas as crossover training and sharing of skilled human resource and expertise may be exploited in this regard.²²⁰

²²⁰ Afifa Kiran, 'Indian Quest for Strategic ingress in Afghanistan and its Implications for Pakistan,' ISSRA Papers (NDU: Islamabad, 2009), http://ndu.edu.pk/issra/issra_pub/articles/issra-paper/issra-paper-vol-i-2009/02-indian-quest-for-strategic-ingress-in-afghanistan.pdf.

- *Winning Hearts and Minds.* Deployment of Pakistani doctors, teachers, technicians, and social workers can have deep effects on Afghan society. The Pakistani government should encourage the private sector to fill vacancies and scholarships in public sector colleges and universities in order to bring the two countries closer.
- *Increase in Imports.* “Afghanistan’s population is heavily dependent upon Pakistan for the import of wheat, rice, and grains”; Pakistan must adopt a viable government policy to exploit such economic leverages in Afghanistan.²²¹
- *Media.* No media cooperation currently exists between Pakistan and Afghanistan, regardless of the impact of Afghanistan’s affairs on Pakistan. India, however, has reasonable representation in Afghan print and electronic media. Comprehensive media policy backed by proactive foreign policy toward Afghanistan would change the local and regional approaches/public opinion in favor of Pakistan dramatically. Pakistan should take immediate steps to provide assistance in training and combined production of programs to Afghan private television channels. The popularity of Geo and AVT Khyber in Afghanistan may be exploited to give Pakistan’s official stance on contemporary issues.

e. Stability on the Homefront

External challenges cannot be faced until our own house is in order. Pakistan must achieve political stability and must uproot extremism and violence, in any form. This would also help Pakistan attain foreign direct investment. Pakistan must therefore reach out to all stakeholders in this regard. The following priorities may help it do so:

- *Eliminate Terror Bases.* In addition to Operation Zarb-e-Azb, Pakistan must eliminate the existential threat from terrorists based in various parts of the country, particularly FATA. This will not only satisfy the world community, but will have self-preservation effects.
- *Put FATA in the Mainstream.* FATA will remain central in any Afghan policy due to its geographical contiguity with Afghanistan. FATA has long remained detached and neglected from mainstream Pakistan. A comprehensive strategy has to be followed to bring FATA into the mainstream by making it part of KPA Province; these efforts go hand-in-hand with bringing administrative reforms to establish the writ of the state and address its vulnerabilities.

²²¹ Afifa Kiran, ‘Indian Quest for Strategic ingress in Afghanistan.’

- *Control of Smuggling.* Pakistan is the single largest trade partner of Afghanistan,²²² yet, due to smuggling, the local market remains under pressure and the government loses revenue. Pakistan must make mutual arrangements regarding control of informal trade with Afghanistan.
- *Control of Narcotics.* Opium production in Afghanistan, especially after the Soviet invasion, has adversely affected Pakistan. Pakistan should enforce strict border control mechanisms to stop the flow of drugs and it is not helping Afghanistan in this regard.

7. Future Methodology/Efforts Required by Afghans Themselves

Despite its historic over-dependence on external recognition and support, the future of the Afghan State will depend on its successful internal transformation. All players, including neighbors, may lose their desire to help after U.S. withdrawal. To survive on their own, the Afghans must set progressive goals for their future prosperity. Some pertinent points, described in the following subsections, will aid their efforts.

a. A Stable Afghan Government

Several factors demand that the Afghan government in Kabul act with greater farsightedness and wisdom: the need to shun or isolate the Taliban, the need to attain economic aid for reconstruction, the ongoing war on terrorism, and the prospects of acting as a trade conduit between the CARs and the rest of the world. A stable government is necessary before progressive reconstruction can begin. At present, the main policy objective for all players and stakeholders should be to make the Afghan government capable of surviving the U.S. withdrawal. “Strategy should differentiate three areas and allocate resources accordingly: strategic cities and transportation routes that must be under total Afghan/alliance control; buffers around strategic areas, where NATO and the Afghan Army would focus their struggle against insurgents; and opposition territory, where NATO and Afghan forces would not expend effort or

²²² Saad Shabbir and Vaqar Ahmed, “Afghanistan-Pakistan: Trade & Investment Roadmap,” *Criterion Quarterly*, Vol 10, No 2, May 26, 2015, <http://www.criterion-quarterly.com/afghanistan-pakistan-trade-investment-roadmap/>.

resources.”²²³ Above all, every constitutional and non-governmental activity in Afghanistan is to be owned by the government, the Afghan people, and all political parties.

b. Reconciliation through a Legitimate Central Government

To establish legitimacy and rule of law, the government needs: sincere reconciliation; proportionate participation of all provinces, ethnicities, and tribes; and representation of minorities and women. These factors would also help bring all groups and war lords to a unified platform. It would further assist in demilitarisation of private armies and minimize chances of developing states within the state. Only then will the stage be set for proper/constructive legislation and political consolidation.

c. Reconciliation through Counter-Terrorism

The remnants of the Taliban must be involved in the state structure, as their continued demonization will be counterproductive for sociological reasons. Through meaningful reconciliation with the Taliban and other factions, a democratic government may form a strong center. The Taliban may be classified into categories, as the entire Pashtun population cannot be branded as Taliban, and all Taliban are not Al-Qaeda operatives with a global agenda. Constructive engagement might thus be successful. Help may come from religious establishments in Pakistan or from similar schools of thought elsewhere.

d. Less Foreign Involvement

The Afghan government must quickly undertake such steps that can improve its sway across the country and lessen reliance on foreign presence —either through ANSF actions, or through visible rehabilitation projects. When the Taliban raises concerns about foreign occupation in Afghanistan, the concerns can be countered only if the government is more capable of functioning on its own rather than always relying on foreign

²²³ Gilles Dorransoro, “Focus and Exit: An Alternative Strategy for the Afghan War,” *CARNEGIE Endowment for International Peace*, January 2009, http://carnegieendowment.org/files/afghan_war-strategy.pdf.

assistance. If the Afghan people want a lasting change to make Afghanistan a thriving country, they ought to rely on their own energies for rebuilding their country. The international community must help the transition in taking this responsibility. On the other hand, all countries bordering Afghanistan should at least be taken into confidence, especially for security-related issues, to achieve stability in the country.

e. Special Emphasis on Making the ANSF Viable

The ANSF must be fully capable, competent, and sustainable as soon as possible, as only a functioning, effective ANSF can ensure survival of Afghanistan as a state after U.S. withdrawal. Similarly, the ethnic makeup of the ANA must be proportionate to the ethnic makeup of the country; otherwise, unit warlords might have too much say in the ANA's operations. For professional legitimacy, the ANA must pursue training from abroad, especially from Pakistani institutions due to advantages like a common operational environment, more expertise, and experience of the Pakistan Army.

f. Economic Alternatives

The Afghan government needs to immediately introduce alternate means to counter the narco-economy, i.e., uplifting the agriculture/local industries and getting access to Western markets. Smuggling will be further controlled by settling the border issue with Pakistan, or at least improving border SOPs. For instance, Afghanistan's handmade carpet industry—the most popular in the region—could be further encouraged, and could gain access to the international market through legal means. This alone would make a huge difference through legal export and taxation.

g. Speedy Justice

Delivering speedy justice is an essential element of the Taliban, and convinced many people to join them. Modern justice systems may not work or may be difficult to implement in a country like Afghanistan, where traditional values/beliefs cannot be disregarded. Instead, their local/village councils (Jirga system) may further be legitimized to play a constructive role in society at the national level. Open hearings in this sort of

system, with governmental oversight, would reduce the chance of corruption and provide the general public with justice through their own ways and culture.

h. Madrassah Reforms

The majority of Afghan population seeks knowledge through religious seminaries (*madrassahs*). Religious extremism and narrow-mindedness spread in the society may be addressed by undertaking reforms in the *madrassah* system. The Afghan government must take necessary measures in this regard such as registering religious *madrassahs* of all sects, standardizing their syllabi, banning of the rogue groups handling such educational places, apprehension of wanted/blacklisted terrorist elements among religious scholars, and through effective border controls (not allowing foreign funding/support of *madrassahs* for anti-state interests).

i. Adult Literacy Programs

Afghanistan's education sector has shown progress, and more than 8.3 millions of children including 40 percent of girls have gained access to schools since 2001.²²⁴ But, after three decades of constant war, uneducated adults form the majority of the population. "If militants can motivate people to join their ranks in the name of Islam, then why not motivate them to work for their own country? It is possible, through education that good results will occur."²²⁵

j. Developing Media Warfare

Media in the recent past has emerged as the fourth pillar of any state, owing to its reach, speed, and potential to spread perceptions. The media can influence every facet of society, including civic values, cultural heritage, religious beliefs, and the economic, military, and political arenas. As a war-waging tool, it can leave its imprint not with guns and bullets, but with words and images, opinions and views, to show viewers/listeners the justness of a cause as well as the adversary's implacability. If Afghanistan strengthens

²²⁴ "Basic Education and Gender Equality," *UNICEF: Afghanistan*, accessed December 2015, <https://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/education.html>.

²²⁵ Imran Khan, "Few Suggestions for Afghanistan," *Global Security News*, (Afghanistan: 26 Aug, 2008), <http://www.globalsecuritynews.com/Afghanistan/Khan-Imran/Few-suggestions-for-Afghanistan>.

this state pillar, it could use today's gains for tomorrow's prosperity. Free, fair, and objective media can make the Afghan people think, and can generate an atmosphere of openness while also generating a positive counter-narrative against extremists or the Taliban. Nationalism, human rights awareness, and women's empowerment can be promoted. The Afghans themselves, however, must adopt and pursue this avenue; otherwise, the media may prove counter-productive for Afghan society due to outsiders' influence.

k. Setting Developmental Goals

The Afghan government must set priorities and developmental goals regarding their internal dynamics in order to improve law and order, followed by political and economic stability. Such goals could be summarized as:

1. **Goal 1** (by year 5 of the transformation decade): Achieve consensus and political harmony through reconciliation and proportionate participation of all provinces, ethnicities, tribes, minorities, and women.
2. **Goal 2** (by year 7 of the transformation decade): Enforce the writ of the government across the country through an effective ANSF, and by ruling out insurgency/terrorism/others' proxies in the country by hard and soft power means.
3. **Goal 3** (by year 7 of the transformation decade): Bring economic reforms through immediate and long-term alternatives.
4. **Goal 4** (by year 8 of the transformation decade): Resolve issues with neighbors, especially Pakistan (i.e., the Durand Line), or at least work to improve border SOPs.
5. **Goal 5** (by year 9 of the transformation decade): Internal transformation through institutional reforms, e.g., speedy justice, education and *madrasahs* reforms, etc.
6. **Goal 6** (by year 10 of the transformation decade): Create good foreign policy and strengthening diplomacy for enhancing relations with other countries.
- 7.

B. CONCLUSION

Pakistan today stands at a critical juncture as regards Afghanistan. Any situation that arises during/after U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan will directly affect Pakistan. Afghanistan, merely due to its strategic geographical position, has huge economic potential. Located in the heart of the energy corridor, transit trade alone may be able to sustain its national economy. However, the opportunity can only be exploited if the political landscape after U.S. drawdown enables such an environment. A peaceful and stable Afghanistan would also provide a gateway to the CARs through the shortest transit route.

The intended setup and role of the ANA remains questionable in the post-U.S. exit environment. Despite considerable investment in training, its capacity remains doubtful. The Taliban's anticipated reaction to the political structure the United States intends to leave behind (coupled with the ANA's deficiencies) will directly impact the country's peace. The most pronounced impact of the drawdown will be on Pakistan due to its geographical proximity and demography. Afghanistan provides a host of opportunities for the entire region in general, and Pakistan in particular, depending upon the prospects of stability.

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