



AFGHANISTAN POST 2014:

Likely Future Outcomes

BY
The India Policy Group

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ENVISIONING AFGHANISTAN POST 2014

**PERSPECTIVES AND STRATEGIES FOR
CONSTRUCTIVE CONFLICT RESOLUTION
FROM THE NEIGHBOURHOOD**



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AFGHANISTAN POST 2014:

INTRODUCTION

This paper looks at the likely outcomes in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) forces from Afghanistan in 2014 as visualised by the India Policy Group. The successful completion of the first round of presidential elections on 05 April 2014 has demonstrated the capability of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) to maintain peace and provide security to the large number of personnel involved in the electoral process. However, the exit of the International Security Assistance Force from Afghanistan by the end of 2014 will lead to enhanced levels of violence, initially. Since the ANSF is the key for ensuring peace and stability, the Afghan government needs funds to sustain the large force. Although President Karzai has stalled the Bilateral Security Agreement

(BSA) to gain leverage with the United States (US), it will be signed in the second half of 2014, as all the presidential candidates were in support of the BSA, and it has also been endorsed by the Loya Jirga in November 2013. The international community is committed to support Afghanistan, to sustain the government, and these commitments are likely to be met. The process of reconciliation with the Taliban can only start when they are under pressure militarily, and realise that time is not on their side. Pakistan could play a key role in determining their choices. It is important to provide Afghanistan with the economic means to strengthen its security infrastructure, so as to put additional pressure on the Taliban. Closer economic cooperation between Afghanistan and India could prove to be beneficial to both countries.



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With the withdrawal of the ISAF, the security situation in Afghanistan will deteriorate slightly by end 2014 / early 2015, irrespective of other developments there, or in the region around it. Afghanistan could follow one of the two trajectories that have been enunciated below. The BSA is crucial, it is far more important as a psychological tool for Afghanistan than as a military measure. It will send a strong signal about the longevity of the regime and ensure that fence sitters are inclined to throw in their lot with the government. The Afghan National Army (ANA) has already killed 670 Taliban in the first two months of 2014, whereas their own casualties have averaged much less. This along with the evidence demonstrated during the elections shows that the ANA can hold its own after withdrawal of US troops, provided it is supported in terms of finance and equipment. It is also certain that the BSA will be eventually signed by the new presi-

dent. In addition, even within the US establishment, the Pentagon is reluctant to pull out completely from Afghanistan.

The two outcomes that are likely to emerge after the initial decline in the security situation are:

- A gradual wearing down of the Taliban and consequent improvement in the security situation, albeit slowly; and
- A rapid deterioration of the security situation.

The first outcome results from the capacity of the ANA to hold the Taliban to a stalemate, and the consequent reduction in its support base, with a diminishing number of recruits, as the absence of an overt foreign presence eliminates a major reason that draws Afghans to the Taliban cause. With the passage of time, if the Taliban are not successful, disillusionment

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is likely to set in, they would be forced to negotiate, and as their control and influence weaken, the situation will gradually improve. But much will depend on Pakistan's strategic outlook: whether it accepts the new government in Kabul and is prepared to genuinely assist Afghanistan in its reconciliation process.

The second outcome entails a rapid deterioration of the security situation after the ISAF withdrawal, when large swathes of territory in the south and the east are captured by the Taliban. However, even in this situation, the fall of Kabul to the Taliban is not visualised and could lead to a defacto partition of Afghanistan, although the major cities are likely to remain under government control. Currently, nine out of thirteen

districts in Kunar and large areas in Nuristan province are under Taliban control, but even in these districts, the Taliban have failed to capture the district headquarters. This provides a fair indicator of the capabilities of the ANA. On the other hand, the Taliban has made inroads into some sections of Tajik and Uzbek clergy and depending on the influence of this clergy, it can grow amongst the non-Pakhtoon population of Afghanistan.

The major factors that will decide which outcome unfolds are primarily two: firstly, the long term financial commitment and support by the international community, now reinforced by a credible presidential election; and second, the negativity or positivity of cooperation from Pakistan.

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Afghanistan will require large amounts of external aid and political support from the international community on a sustained basis. The current state of security in Afghanistan is not sustainable without long term international support. There are positive signals from China, as the Chinese Foreign Minister during his visit to Kabul talked about rising extremism and anarchy in the western Chinese province of Xinjiang. China is slowly veering round to the point that rising Islamic extremism, as represented by the Taliban, threatens its core security interests. It is widely appreciated that any drastic deterioration in the security environment in Afghanistan could be dangerous to both, China and the west.

Realistically, Pakistan does not expect a repeat of 1996, when the Taliban swamped Afghanistan and captured Kabul, but it is still obsessed with the

idea of having a government in Kabul that is favourable towards it, despite public statements to the contrary. However, if the Taliban gain territory and influence, it could provide Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) more safe havens across the Durand Line. These enclaves of the Afghan Taliban/ the Haqqani Network and TTP could raise Pakistan's fears of a larger Pakhtoonistan movement and re-eruption of the Durand Line issue. What the military in Pakistan fears most is a government in Kabul that is favourable to India.

For India, it is essential that no camps of anti-India outfits grow and thrive on Afghan soil. At this point, there seems no need to put boots on the ground. Further, New Delhi must not show excessive haste in providing military equipment to the ANSF as that could lead to the west wriggling out of its responsibility of doing the same. But all



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options must be kept open. As regards evacuation of Indian civilians, it is estimated that not more than 4,000 Indian citizens are in Afghanistan, most are working in American bases, and as such no major crisis entailing their evacuation is visualised. Nor does India need to bolster the physical security of its assets. India has no exit strategy and will continue its political and economic engagement in Afghanistan to ensure that peace, stability and tranquillity prevail there. In short, the likely outcomes are:

Outcome 1: Retention of the current situation with dips and recoveries in security stability; and

Outcome 2: The Taliban seize and secure territories in south and east Afghanistan without destabilising the government in Kabul.

Without the huge economic potential of Afghanistan – its rich resources and its potential as a communication hub – the international community's interest in it may begin to fade. China's new Silk Route initiative is, therefore, an attractive proposition. India should evaluate its Afghan policy in line with the evolving dynamics of political and security transitions and remain in sync with the reconciliation process, and the nature of the insurgency. Economic assistance and capacity building measures have to be adjusted against the quality of governance and the security environment.

India's primary interest in post 2014 Afghanistan is to ensure the establishment of a secure, strong, stable, and democratic state. This entails the prevention of an extremist takeover of the country that could lead to terrorism and violence spilling over into India. In the long term, India sees Afghanistan as

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a potential 'trade corridor', which provides access to the resources of Central Asia as well as its markets.

At a time when the international community has been scaling down its operations and disengaging from Afghanistan; New Delhi has been expanding its presence there. India's extensive development commitment of \$2 billion in aid makes it Afghanistan's fifth largest bilateral donor, after the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, and Germany. In 2011, Afghanistan and India signed the Strategic Partnership Agreement, an institutional framework, for extensive bilateral cooperation beyond 2014.

India has been providing aid for infrastructure development projects, capacity building, education and healthcare; and has been promoting private sector investment and trade with Afghanistan. It needs to evaluate

the impact of its Afghan Policy and approach in the past decade or more in terms of:

- The benefit to the Afghan people in the context of building infrastructure and strengthening institutions of democracy and governance;
- Strengthening its relationship with Afghanistan at the political level;
- Strategic gains made – conversion of goodwill into influence;
- Success in countering the destabilising forces and factors;
- Enhancement of goodwill between the two nations and its people; and
- Strengthening of commercial and cultural ties.

India also needs to evaluate the implementation of its infrastructure development projects, and the problems and delays in executing these. Some suggestions are listed below.

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- Careful and more strategic project selection review since earlier, most large projects were decided upon in an ad-hoc manner.
 - Selection of projects has to be on the basis of comparative advantage (e.g. fellowships, capacity building, and training). High investment projects should be left to the US or multilateral institutions.
 - Greater involvement of Indian Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) in development projects, as it ensures better understanding and implementation. The newly established Development Partnership Administration within the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, is already in the process of preparing a list of Indian NGOs. This needs to be expedited.
 - Efforts should be made to make Indian projects more visible, within Afghanistan as well as in the international discourse, by collaborative ventures including joint evaluation, development dialogues, etc.
 - In the post 2014 phase, the Government of India should make serious efforts to work for joint projects, in the areas of education, capacity building and even infrastructure, with other leading international donors like the European Union and United States Agency for International Development.
 - Objectives have to be clearly defined beforehand in order to evaluate each project's utility.
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India's Afghanistan policy is perceived to be conditioned by its sensitivity to Pakistan – what will Pakistan think and do – and the US – whether it will approve Indian actions. Perhaps it is time to act in India's enlightened self-interest. New Delhi needs to enlarge its engagement with leaders and people at different levels, in Afghanistan, especially in the south and east to counter opposition and build bridges with people in these regions, who are the most affected by conflict and cross border terrorism.

The withdrawal of western coalition troops, the impact on the security situation, and how India can adequately participate in supporting and equipping the ANSF to counter the threat of insurgency and ensure the security of its projects and assets in Afghanistan should be a primary concern.

India needs to push the transit trade issue to increase trade through Pakistan between Afghanistan and India. This will go a long way in increasing economic benefits and interdependence in all three countries, lead to a positive impact at the people to people level, and contribute to the respective economies and government revenues. This will also lead to development of a trade corridor to Central Asia with Afghanistan as a hub. At every possible forum, India needs to raise the issue of extending the Afghanistan – Pakistan Trade and Transit Agreement (APTTA) to India and Central Asia.

India needs to seriously support and expedite large projects like the Haji Gak iron ore mine and the Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline which will be game changers in the development of Afghanistan by

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providing employment and business opportunities.

Cultural ties need to be further strengthened and enhanced by cultural exchanges in arts and music, and especially Indian television and films which are very popular amongst a large cross-section of the Afghan population. Already, Turkish television serials are competing with Indian programmes.

New Delhi's staying power in Afghanistan will be linked to its ability to innovate, expand and deepen its engagement at multiple levels. Indian assistance has to become more systemic and should be in support of the Afghan Government's development priorities and plans. It is therefore, essential that India pitches in those areas, which deliver the most political capital i.e. maximum

development impact. The specific area could also depend on India's comparative advantage. It may be prudent to act in conjunction with other governments and agencies to achieve synergies and deliver better results. India needs to engage with Afghan stakeholders, across the spectrum, so that the Afghan government's engagement with India becomes deep and irreversible. In summary India needs to remain engaged and enlarge contacts with the Afghan leadership. India also needs to constantly evaluate the situation by monitoring developments and being proactive, rather than responding to outcomes. The bottom line being to keep all options open. A constructive dialogue with Pakistan on Afghanistan at an early date by the new Indian government is recommended.

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NB. President Obama's surprise announcement recently to pull out all troops by end 2016 has not been incorporated in this paper. Its impact on Afghanistan, India and the region could be far reaching. The uncertainties this would create especially over financial commitments must be factored into policy evaluation as the previous assumption reckoned US and North

Atlantic Treaty Organization troops under the BSA will remain till the end of the transformation ending 2024.

{The contents of this paper were discussed among Jayant Prasad, Rana Banerji, Shakti Sinha, Alok Bansal and Ashok Mehta. This compilation is a combined effort of Sumeer Bhasin, Gulshan Sachdeva, Alok Bansal and Ashok Mehta}.

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The **India Policy Group** is part of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) regional project 'Envisioning Secure and Independent Afghanistan Post 2014: Perspectives and Strategies for Constructive Conflict Resolution from the Neighbourhood'.

FES has established a regional network of National Policy Groups, in Afghanistan, Central Asia, India and Pakistan, who analyse national perspectives on Afghanistan and develop policy recommendations for regional efforts to ensure a peaceful Afghanistan post 2014.

The **India Policy Group** comprises of influential experts, policy makers, scholars, analysts and journalists from various fields who are well-connected to decision-makers in India.

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