

# South-West Asia in the new geopolitical framework Between the “War on Terror” and “New Silk Road” strategy

Manabu Shimizu

## **Preface**

At present the Afghan issue stands at a very delicate point. The Obama administration has declared its intention to withdraw its military forces from Afghanistan by the end of 2014. NATO also plans to pull out all of the combat forces of its International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) from Afghanistan and to hand over security responsibility to Afghans themselves. This strategic option, representing a turn-around of the US diplomacy, was necessitated by the stalemate on the battlefield and the enormous fiscal expenditures incurred by the prolonged war, both of which have resulted in poor domestic support for US activities in Afghanistan. The aggravated fiscal situation or so-called “fiscal cliff” is another factor which cannot be overlooked in formulating significant strategy directions. This prolonged Afghan war that started in October 2001 is finally expected to come to the end.

However the situation is not as simple as it appears, and the final shape of the war remains unclear as yet. Every stakeholder recognizes that the expected pull-out of the American and NATO combative forces from the land is not the end of story. Without any final and definite solution to the “War on Terror” in Afghanistan another strategic significance is coming to the fore from a different direction. This

is the rising strategic importance of Central Asia including Afghanistan given that the area is surrounded by China, Russia, and regional strategic players such as India, Iran and Pakistan. China, Russia, and India are also emerging economies on the global stage, as well.

On November 17, 2011, US President Barack Obama announced in Australia that the Asia-Pacific region would become a "top priority" for US world global security policy in the coming years. He insisted the obligatory US spending cuts would not affect the priority of Asia-Pacific-oriented strategy. The rebalancing of US policy and its shift to the Asia-Pacific has cast Afghanistan in a new role in terms of a new geopolitical framework. The developing strategy includes a sort of containment of the militarily emerging China as well as more engagements with China at the same time. In this framework, China's neighbors in Central Asia, among them Afghanistan, are seen in a different light from this strategic point of view. This change in the strategic orientation of the US may be translated in Central Asia as a transition from the "War on Terror" to the so-called "New Silk Road" strategy, which may also require "new engagements" for the US in Afghanistan. At the same time it is to be noted the US has no intention to leave the Middle East as a whole including Afghanistan and that the Middle East continues to be a focal point of US diplomacy. It is to be remembered that the US finalized withdrawal of its military forces from Iraq by the end of 2011 against its original intention to keep a military presence there, however reduced in terms of personnel numbers. Iraq's geopolitical location between Iran and the Gulf countries does not lessen its strategic importance for the US. The new Iraq maintains cordial relations with Iran and is helping the Assad regime in Syria serving as a transit route for strategic goods from Iran. The unstable Middle East continues to have direct as well as indirect interactions with Afghanistan.

## **1. The concept of a “New Silk Road” strategy and its implications for Central Asia**

In place of the “War on Terror,” a “New Silk Road” strategy was gradually proposed by the US as a guiding perspective after 2014. The idea is to combine South Asia and Central Asia in a unified strategic framework as a newly emerging development center in the Eurasian Continent. The idea of a “New Silk Road” strategy reflects the actual economic and political development in East Asia and South Asia.

The first element is a sort of “transport revolution” which is taking place on this part of Eurasian continent, namely South-West Asia including Central Asia. The “revolution” began with the dissolution of the former Soviet Union and the independence of Central Asian Republics that accompanied it. The artificial barriers during the Cold War between the former USSR and the bordering southern countries collapsed. Geographical proximity began to have positive implications in the field of trade, transportation, and movement of population of both sides. Other alternative routes were contemplated as leverage to realize economic efficiency. The post-Soviet period witnessed an emergence of new economic powers or centers which played catalyzing roles to promote this transformation. China, India and Russia became influential members of the so-called BRICS nations, a term first coined in a report by Goldman Sachs in 2003. China desired direct trade routes that would connect it with Europe more efficiently, namely, alternative land routes in place of existing sea routes. As of the beginning of 2012, there are already three overland routes to Europe from China. Another transport “revolution” is related to North-South transportation, which has increasingly tried to connect the land-locked Central Asian Republics with South Asia and the Indian Ocean. North- South transportation opens various efficient options for Central Asia and an access to the inner land of Eurasia for the South Asian countries.

The second element is a more strategic one. In the Western Pacific, South China Sea, and Indian Ocean, there have been a number of developments: emerging rivalry among the littoral countries in the South China Sea, China's significant expansion of its Navy and the US's cautions against it, and a rising Indian anxiety due to the imminent presence of the Chinese Navy in the Indian Ocean are new development in the Western Pacific, South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. For China the sea route which connects China and the Gulf (and beyond) to Africa is strategically imperative in the face of possible interference by external navies. China prefers possible alternative routes over land in case of emergencies. From this point of view land routes on the Eurasian continent bear special importance, as these routes seem to be more secure if supported by mutually reliable relations with the transit countries concerned. Another option, a new sea route through the "Arctic Sea" via the North Pole, and connecting East Asia and Europe, is of attraction to countries in East Asia as a quick route to Europe.

Therefore the "transport revolution" is a driving force for the reorganization of the Eurasian continent and bears with it new sets of strategic considerations. Regional actors are ready to play a more positive role in the new geopolitical framework. In a particularly recent development, at the third India-US Strategic Dialogue in New Delhi on June 8, 2011, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton sought India's active role in accomplishing her ambitious goal of a "New Silk Road" linking South and Central Asia as a whole with South East Asia. The proposed long-term vision of a "New Silk Road" is to connect markets, businesses, and consumers from the Caspian to the Ganges and beyond. Clinton referred to the signing of strategic partnership agreements between Afghanistan and India (and also by the US) and proposed scheduling a formal trilateral consultation among these three nations. She also supported India's "Look East Policy" which could be favorable to the "New Silk Road" strategy.

We observe another development between Afghanistan and Pakistan. In October

2010, the long-awaited Afghan-Pak Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) between the two states was finally concluded. The agreement allows each nation's shipping trucks the right of cross-border transit; Afghan trucks will be allowed to drive through Pakistan to the Wagah border with India, including to the port cities of Karachi and Gwadar. In November 2010, the two states formed a joint chamber of commerce to expand trade relations and solve the problems experienced by traders. The APTTA agreement has taken effect in practice after several Afghan trucks delivered fruits from Afghanistan to Wagah, the only road border crossing between Pakistan and India, in June 2011. The APTTA was engineered to help the local economies of Afghanistan and Pakistan, by affording them greater connectivity with the markets of South Asia, Central Asia and the Middle East. The agreement was intended to improve trade between the two countries. However, Pakistan-Afghanistan relations are unstable and laden with mutual historical distrust. Pakistan often delays Afghan-bound containers when tensions mount between the two countries. On November 28, 2011 NATO helicopters attacked Pakistan territories and killed as many as 24 Pakistani soldiers, which hardened Pakistan's attitude against the US and NATO. When it did not receive the requested apologies from the US, Pakistan closed the supply line on its territory to Afghanistan in retaliation for the attack. The potential difference in strategic priorities between Pakistan and the US came to the fore in this incident and mutual relations were drastically aggravated. Alternative supply routes to Afghanistan through Central Asia are thus urgently sought. In this respect Uzbekistan is expected to play an important role.

## **2. Chinese interests in the area**

China also responds to the changing priorities in its strategy and in outlining its own national interests. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is an ideal vehicle for China to promote its general interest and influence in the area, in addition to the bilateral approach with neighboring countries in Central Asia and Afghanistan. China's eagerness to gain access to various natural resources,

namely, oil and gas, coal, rare metals, and so on and not only in the Central Asian region of the former USSR, but also in Afghanistan would seem to suggest an “aggressive” approach to the area. For China Afghanistan represents a new attraction in terms of the possibilities afforded by its natural resource reserves. China took interest in the Aynak copper mines in Logar Province, Afghanistan, and has, since 2008, invested as much as 2.87 billion US dollars in the project, the biggest FDI in the history of Afghanistan. China is also exploring oil reserves in Afghanistan. China imports oil and gas from Kazakhstan. China invests in oil and gas projects in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan as well. In addition a new pipeline that carries gas from Turkmenistan to China was completed through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan as scheduled at the end of 2009.

Central Asia gains its specific strategic importance for China in that it provides pipeline routes of oil and gas from Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. These inland pipelines are beneficial for China from a strategic point of view because China does not need to worry about the direct threat from sea powers, namely the US, disrupting the transportation of oil and gas.

In addition to Central Asia the specific importance of Pakistan for China should be emphasized. Particularly, one cannot underestimate the importance of the port of Gwadar, facing the Arabian Sea. The port has been used for commercial transportation as well as for Pakistan navy base, which is situated in Baluchistan Province in Pakistan between Karachi and the territorial border with Iran. China has taken a special interest in the port for the last decade and contributed directly and indirectly, almost 90 percent of the necessary funding for its reconstruction and expansion. Gwadar has a specific strategic importance for China now as an alternative route of transport in case the sea-lane through the Malacca strait should be disrupted or made inaccessible by hegemonic conflicts in the Indian Ocean, South China Sea or the Western Pacific. With the port of Gwadar, it is physically possible to land oil that comes through Hormuz strait and to

subsequently transport this oil by trucks to Xinjiang Province in the Western China through the Karakorum Highway in Pakistan, although the expected cost of transport might be quite high. The alternative option could give China an advantageous strategic position vis-à-vis the US. At present it is reported that negotiations are being held between China and Pakistan on the feasibility of laying an oil pipeline from Gwadar to Xinjiang through the northeastern mountainous regions in Pakistan. It is to be noted that the geopolitical as well as strategic value of Pakistan gained more importance for China in view of the intensified US approach to containment and engagement with China; the geographical location of Pakistan gives China an alternative route to the sea and to the oil rich Gulf and beyond.

### **3. Renewed Russian interest in Central Asia**

Vladimir Putin returned to the post of president of Russian Federation on May 7, 2012. Putin as Prime Minister had already announced a new integration or cooperation project targeting the republics of the former USSR. He proposed the Eurasian Common Economic Space (CES) in his article in the *Izvestia* newspaper on October 4, 2011. He focused on the future of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan in the wake of the launch of the three republics' customs union and their common economic space. The customs union is supposed to be a first step towards forming a broader EU-type economic alliance of former Soviet states, including those in Central Asia. Putin tried to present the model of a powerful supranational body, which could play an effective role in linking Europe to a thriving Asia-Pacific region. The Common Economic Space began to function on January 1, 2012 and represents a new attempt to solidify the new vision of Eurasian integration or a "Eurasian Community" under the guidance of Russia. Looking at the above-mentioned move, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have taken interest in the project and already expressed their desire to join it, which means the project covers at least three of the Central Asian republics, while Uzbekistan's stance towards the organization is dubious or cautious and Turkmenistan has tried to

distance itself from the organization for the moment. The observer states are at present Armenia, Moldova and Ukraine. Putin emphasizes the importance of development in the Russian Far East, taking into account the developing economies in East and Southeast Asia. The Russian Far East is one of the weakest links in the economic development of Russia, despite its high potential. The expanding China's presence with huge population is an increasing menace for the Russian Far East and East Siberia. Russia implicitly expects the CES to be a shield against China's rapid penetration into the economic space of the former USSR. Although Russia and China form a sort of common political front towards the US, both of the countries also have their disagreements between them. It is important for Russia to resurrect Russian initiatives in Central Asia, particularly taking into account US and Chinese challenges.

We are observing a new active approach to Central and South Asia from Russia. In the beginning of September 2012, Russia tried to organize a summit among Russia, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan in Islamabad. Although the attempt was not realized thanks to an abrupt cancellation of President Putin's visit to Islamabad for unknown reasons, Russia's attempt is extremely noteworthy from two standpoints at least. Firstly, this is the first time that Russian president (and Soviet supreme leader) has shown his intention to visit Pakistan and cultivate new, positive mutual relations. Secondly, this initiative could be Russian ambition to have a greater role in the area of Central and South Asia. In September and October, Russia succeeded in extending its right to use military bases in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan by 30 and 25 years each. These military bases can be used continuously utilized by the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization) forces officially. Russian forces represent the CSTO forces. The member states are Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan in addition to Russia. Uzbekistan, however, withdrew from the organization in 2012 with an indication that it follows a different strategic orientation. Russia seems to have come to the conclusion that if it should come to play a role in Central Asia,



Pakistan cannot be excluded. At the same time, Russia could take a balancing role vis-à-vis China in Pakistan. Some people say Russia values Pakistan in place of India in its policy towards South Asia. This judgment is misleading as India is too important a political asset for Russia. It is also possible that India welcomes the Russian approach to Pakistan as means of lessening China's influence on Pakistan.

#### **4. The resilient India-Russia strategic partnership**

Another factor to be examined is the expanding role of neighboring states in Central Asia and Afghanistan such as India, Pakistan and Iran when we analyze the emerging regional structure of Central Asia and Afghanistan as a field of competition among the US, Russia and China. India, buoyed by its rapid economic development in the last two decades, has increased its influence in the areas beyond South Asia. One of the most decisive structural changes after the Cold War in the area has been a rapprochement between India and the US. During the Cold War, there existed a sort of alliance between the USSR and India, with security implications, targeted against China and the US, although India remained one of the leading countries in the Non-Alignment Movement. The US has been successful in its attempts to bring India into its circle of influence through various concessions. One of the recent landmark events is the United States-India Peaceful Atomic Energy Cooperation Act of 2006. This act allows India to purchase nuclear fuel and reactors from the US, reversing a 30-year moratorium on such transfers by the Atomic Energy Act of 1954. In fact the US implicitly accepted India as a new nuclear power. India and Pakistan both had successfully tested atomic bombs almost at the same time in 1998.

There is no denying the fact that the US expects India to play a countering role vis-à-vis China in the new strategic orientation. However, it should be noted that India, while making use of this new favorable condition, pursues its own political agenda in the changing circumstances. It is misleading to suppose India has

shifted its alliance from the USSR or Russia to the US in a clear-cut way. Then what are India's priorities in the region?

In January 2012 Dr. Nirupama Subramanian, researcher at the Foundation for National Security Research, New Delhi, contributed an incisive article to the *Hindu*, one of the leading newspapers in India, titled "India's Strategic Partners: A comparative Assessment."<sup>1</sup> The article based on a study by the Foundation that assesses India's strategic partnership with six countries — the United States, Russia, France, United Kingdom, Germany, and Japan — by grading them on the dividends these partnerships have yielded for India in three areas of co-operation: political-diplomatic ties, defense ties, and economic relations.

It is interesting to note that the Russia-India partnership tops the list, earning the highest point score, "Russia consistently backs India on Kashmir, Pakistan, Afghanistan and terrorism, and is most comfortable with India's rise" while sharing Indian "concerns on the implications of China's rise." The study points out that the 2009 India-Russia civilian nuclear pact is much better than the India-US nuclear deal and stresses that Russia remains India's top supplier of military hardware. However, the study shows that of all the six countries Russia scores the poorest on trade relations, with bilateral trade of less than \$10 billion. On the other hand the United States, with which India's strategic partnership goes back to 2004, comes second, having fared poorly on political-diplomatic dimension. The study describes US support for India on Kashmir, Pakistan, Afghanistan as "insubstantial and inconsistent." "It sees U.S. support for India's candidacy to the UN Security Council as the "weakest" among the six nations. In contrast to Russia, India-U.S. trade relations are the best among the group, with greater potential for the future." "The study sees the 2006 strategic partnership with Japan as the least developed." This assessment is not an official one. However, this assessment reveals complicated understanding of India's national interest.

Simultaneously, it is necessary to add other new elements in order to have a more balanced picture. One new element is the increasing influence of Israel in India—particularly since the BJP, a Hindu oriented rightists party, took power in the latter half of 1990s. Even under the Congress government that subsequently came to power, Israel's supply of sophisticated military equipment to India increased. One estimate implies that Israel took the place of Russia as the biggest supplier of military equipment to India, supplying as much as \$10 billion in 2009<sup>ii</sup>. Half of Israel's military equipment exports go to India. Some people have postulated the formation of an India-Israel-US trilateral bond. However, it is to be noted that India's foreign policy has multiple and complex orientations, including the resilience of traditionally close Russia-India relations.

Another factor to be taken into account is the India-Iran relationship. India suffers from a lack of oil and natural gas reserves, and Iran is therefore a major supplier (second only to Saudi Arabia, conditioned by geo-economic factors), with the potential to become a still greater supplier. Iran and India have an antipathy vis-à-vis Pakistan for different reasons. The Delhi Declaration of January 25, 2003 laid the foundation for strategic relations between India and Iran, including provisions for military cooperation such as sea-lane control and security, joint naval exercises, upgrading Russian-made defense systems, and counter-terrorism. In addition, India has no direct land routes that connect India with Afghanistan and Central Asia. In this respect, India needs Iran's cooperation. At present, India's trade routes with the Central Asian Republics (CARs) go through China, the Black Sea, and Iran, with the Iranian connection being the most important. In 2000, India, Russia, and Iran signed the International North-South Transport Corridor Agreement, joined later by other countries. The corridor is supposed to pass through Mumbai (India, the Arabian Sea port), to Bandar Abbas (Iran, the Persian Gulf port), and then across Iran to the Caspian Sea port of Olya in the Astrakhan region of Russia. Within Russia, the corridor is to connect to Moscow and beyond with additional lines to the CARs. The agreement will reduce the

travel time between Moscow and Mumbai by as much as 15-20 days. Today, the trade route from India to Russia is a long line via the Red Sea, the Suez Canal, the Mediterranean, the North Sea(via Rotterdam), and the Baltic Sea<sup>iii</sup>. Another practical option for India's route to the CARs is through the Chabahar port in Iran. Under the present circumstances, India has to walk rope between the US pressure to cooperate with sanctions against Iran related to its nuclear program and its own energy constraints and geopolitical requirements.

### **5. India's involvement in Afghanistan**

Since the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947, Afghanistan has occupied one of the serious conflicts spot between India and Pakistan. At present, India and Pakistan continues to compete in exercising political influence on Afghanistan. The Afghan issue is inseparably connected with India-Pakistan confrontation.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh used his visit to Kabul in May 2011 to send the message that, unlike the West, New Delhi has no "exit strategy" from Afghanistan. His first trip to Kabul in six years came at a crucial time—what with the US preparing for a troop drawdown and US-Pakistan relations strained by the discovery and killing of Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad and the killing of 24 soldiers by a NATO air strike at the end of November 2011. Apart from the usual pledges about giving Afghanistan more money for its economic reconstruction, the two new developments that underscored the importance of the visit were India's support to the Afghan president Hamid Karzai's peace efforts with Taliban insurgents and the announcement of a "strategic partnership" with Afghanistan. On October 4, 2011, an agreement on such a strategic partnership was signed between India and Afghanistan. The agreement is supposed to be a sort of newly revised treaty of friendship between the Government of India and the Royal Government of Afghanistan, which originally dated from January 4, 1950. However, the new agreement has a much wider influence not only for respective sides, but also for the regional geopolitical framework in the near future. The first

implication is that the agreement is supposed to be a precursor for another, similar agreement between the US and Afghanistan in the period “after 2014.” There could be some coordination between the US and India on this front. The strategic pact agreed to by Kabul and Washington expects a continued US troop presence beyond 2014, at which point all security responsibilities are scheduled to be transferred to the Afghan side from the multinational forces. The strategic agreement is one of the new orientations for the period after 2014. India is definitely ready to play an even greater role in Afghanistan.

The second implication is that the agreement covers multifaceted bilateral relations and intends to actively develop them in political, development, economic, trade, scientific, technological, and cultural fields. The former treaty from 1950 emphasized cooperation only in the fields of culture and trade. Within the geo-political framework, India and Afghanistan have enjoyed a common strategic orientation vis-à-vis Pakistan since the Partition in 1947. Afghanistan has conflicts with Pakistan over the Durand line and the Pashtunistan problem, while India has squared off with Pakistan over the Kashmir issues. The only exceptional period in which mutually cordial relations existed between Afghanistan and Pakistan was the period of the Taliban reign throughout the majority of Afghanistan between 1996 and October 2001. During the same period, India definitely supported the Northern Alliance, which was mainly composed of Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek and other groups which fought against the Taliban government supported by the Pashtuns. India developed good relations with the present Afghan government since the end of 2001.

India is the sixth-largest bilateral donor to Afghanistan, having pledged some US\$1.3 billion on various projects. Important infrastructural projects undertaken by India include the construction of electricity transmission lines, the Salma Dam power project in the Herat province, and the construction of the Afghan parliament building. India will also help in the expansion of the Afghan national

television network and undertake several smaller projects in agriculture, rural development, education, health, energy and vocational training. The 218-kilometer Zaranj-Delaram highway, enabling Afghanistan to have access to the sea via Iran and providing a shorter route for India, was completed by India's Border Roads Organization (BRO) in 2008 despite stiff resistance from the Taliban. A 300-strong paramilitary force ensured the safety of the Indian workers and allowed the project to beat construction and monetary deadlines.

In May 2010, in Washington, DC, President Obama and President Karzai committed to negotiate and conclude a strategic partnership that would provide a framework for mutual relations in the future. The US and Afghanistan accordingly signed the Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement on May 1, 2012. The details remain to be decided at a later date. However, the crux of the agreement is that the US forces are allowed to stay on even after 2014 to continue training to the Afghan forces. However, the exact size of the remaining forces and their mission will be determined at the appropriate time. The US failed to secure an agreement to allow an extended stay of its armed forces in Iraq beyond 2011 and therefore does not want to repeat the same mistake in Afghanistan.

When we compare India and the US, one of the focal points to be considered is whether there is a well-coordinated strategy between the two countries. US Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta visited India on June 5, 2012. There he emphasized that India was a "net provider of security from the Indian Ocean to Afghanistan and beyond". The US expects India to play an active role in Central Asia vis-à-vis China. However, India's scenario is different from the US in that India places special importance on the continuation of its strategic partnership with Russia. Russia and India have strategic interest in common in terms of trying to check China's rapid expansion in Central Asia and other areas. The partnership with Russia has been more stable and reliable since the Soviet period from the Indian point of view, although its importance has declined to some extent. It may

be difficult for the US to take the place of formerly enjoyed by Russia in spite of expansion of economic relations with the US.

## **6. The unwelcomed AfPak strategy— and its aftermath**

The most complicated and difficult issue to be solved in South Asia is without doubt the India-Pakistan conflicts. It is not possible to understand the behavior of Pakistan army and the ISI (Inter—Services Intelligence) without taking into account the priority Pakistan has placed on establishing strategic parity with India above all else. This is the reason why Pakistan's attitude to the Taliban, particularly the Afghan Taliban and including the Haqqani group, is sometimes ambiguous and contradictory. The responsibility and sense of maintaining territorial integrity is also very keen among Pakistan's military leadership. Even during the period of civilian governments in the past, the Pakistan Army has had the final say in deciding the fundamental diplomatic orientation and defense strategies of the country. Parity with India has sometimes been a stronger impulse than the "War on Terror."

The AfPak is a new term given to describe the strategy introduced in 2009 by the Obama administration to promote the cooperation of its top commanders and allies concerning the nations of Afghanistan and Pakistan. The AfPak was a response to the view that both Afghanistan and Pakistan share a single, dominant political and military situation that requires joint policy objectives. The term reflects the Obama administration's perception and strategy of using a unified policy for dealing with the two countries as a part of the strategy concerning the "War on Terror." That policy objective is to disrupt, dismantle, and prevent Al Qaeda and its affiliates from having a safe haven from which they can continue to operate and plot attacks against the US and its allies. The "safe haven" was supposed to be the "Federally Administered Tribal Areas" (FATA) in Pakistan bordering Afghanistan. This policy decision represents a shift from previous ways of thinking about Afghanistan as an independent issue that required a military

solution unto itself. However, the AfPak strategy touched the most sensitive part of the Pakistan military establishment.

The concept presupposes the fact there is one theater of war, straddling an ill-defined border, the Durand Line, and that NATO and other forces are able to operate only on the western side of that border. The eastern side represents the sovereign territory of Pakistan, although Pakistan central government has failed to have a full control over it. The complicated aspect of the problem lies in the fact that it is the eastern side that has been deemed the safe haven for “terrorist” groups who are active in Afghanistan. However, Pakistan gives its priority to the defense of its sovereignty over the FATA rather than to other considerations induced from the US or NATO’s military points of view. There have existed contradictions, sometimes fundamental, between the US and NATO’s strategies and Pakistan’s own specific security programs and concerns. The “AfPak” strategy served to intensify and aggravate these contradictions. It has reinforced the message that the problems of Islamic religious extremism, and the resulting terrorist infrastructure and problems in the two countries, Afghanistan and Pakistan, are intertwined.

The term “AfPak” has been widely criticized in Pakistan as well as in Afghanistan according to different presuppositions. Pakistan became accustomed to being compared with India. Pakistan demands a similar nuclear deal that enjoyed by India with the US as an extension of its natural “parity” with India. At the same time the “AfPak” reminds Pakistanis of the historically complicated issue of “Pashtunistan” because the dominant population in the FATA is Pashtun and the FATA is sandwiched between Pashtunkhwa Province (formerly the North West Frontier Province) in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The border between the FATA has been always in question between the two states depending upon the understanding of the legality of the Durand Line.



In June 2009 former Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf criticized the term in an interview with *Der Spiegel* : “I am totally against the term AfPak. I do not support the word itself for two reasons: First, the strategy puts Pakistan on the same level as Afghanistan. We are not. Afghanistan has no government and the country is completely destabilized. Pakistan is not. Second, and this is much more important, is that there is an Indian element in the whole game. We have the Kashmir struggle, without which extremist elements like Lashkar-e-Taiba would not exist.” In January 2010 Holbrooke who was engaged in the AfPak strategy of the US said that the administration had stopped using the term, stating "We can't use it anymore because it does not please people in Pakistan, for understandable reasons."

## **7. The complicated external and internal politics of Pakistan**

The most complicated “external” factor for “War on Terror” for the US and ISAF is certainly the role of Pakistan. Pakistan occupies the most important geopolitical position vis-à-vis Afghanistan because of longstanding historical relationship with the country, particularly since the independence of Pakistan in 1947 through the Partition of British India. There have existed influential political trends in Afghanistan which do not recognize the Durand line agreement in 1893 which demarcated the Pashtun area into two parts by ceding one part of it to British India. The concept of Pashtunistan covers not only Afghanistan but also Pashtunkhwa Province (former the Northwest Frontier Province) and the FATA in Pakistan. When Pakistan was admitted to the United Nations in 1947, Afghanistan was the only country to vote against its inclusion.

In addition to the Pashtunistan issue, the outstanding India-Pakistan conflicts, including those centered on the Kashmir issue, have dominated Pakistan’s foreign policies since independence. How to face up to India is the most important and difficult challenge for Pakistan —and the only dominant task for its foreign policy. The India-Pakistan conflicts should not be understood only within the

framework of territorial issues over Kashmir, however. From the point of view of Pakistan, India is a constant challenger for the survival of Pakistan itself as an independent state. The Partition of British India into two states was realized by the contradictory fundamental concepts of nation-building. The Indian National Congress based India's independence on the concept of a "secular" state that includes every citizen regardless of religion on an equal footing. As a matter of course Muslims are the second biggest religious community in British India. The Muslim League, which advocated the creation of Pakistan, rationalized the independence of Pakistan separated from India by the "two-nation theory" which presupposes the existence of two nations in British India, namely the Hindu nation and Muslim nation." The Muslim League applied the right of self-determination to the "Muslim nation." From the Pakistani perspective Kashmir should belong to Pakistan as the Muslims are dominant there. According to the Indian logic, Kashmir should belong to India to support the concept of "secularism" of Indian Nation. Pakistan's anxiety was intensified by the independence of East Pakistan as Bangladesh in 1971, supported by India. Pakistan tried to fortify its weaker positions and establish a strategic parity with India by every means available despite the latter's advantages in terms of size and developed economic infrastructures.

The first strategy is a diplomatic one. During the Cold-War period, Pakistan warmed to the US. However, the appearance of Soviet-China conflicts created a specific situation in which Pakistan and China established a kind of special strategic relationship. China tried to counter the Soviet- India "alliance" by supporting Pakistan. The Pakistan- China "alliance," in turn, has been formidable and strong enough to survive even after the conclusion of the Cold War. After all, expanding China-Pakistan axis is more important than before given the latter's geographical location in the new geo-political framework. The second strategy is to compensate for the loss of "East Pakistan" by extending a "strategic depth" into Afghanistan. In case India attacks Pakistan, Pakistan wants to have an area,

namely Afghanistan, to retreat into and from where it can retaliate. The task was not easy for Pakistan, as Afghanistan had traditionally amicable relations with India and in fact had traditionally cool relations with Pakistan given the Pashtun problem. In addition to that, in the Pashtunkhwa province there has been a consistent political mobilization against the concept of Pakistan nation. The only success story for Pakistan has been the formation of the Taliban in 1990s which was created with the encouragement of the ISI of the military forces. The Taliban controlled the major portion of Afghanistan in 1996 and it was the only government in Kabul that had good relations with Pakistan. This historical fact explains the complex and contradictory attitudes of Pakistan, particularly of the Pakistan Army, towards the US military operations against the Afghan Taliban. The third strategic option was the development and acquisition of atomic bombs. Pakistan successfully tested its nuclear armaments in 1998, as did India.

#### **8. Bridges to be built**

In order to promote a “New Silk Road” project, it is necessary to have a soft-landing strategy from the so-called “War on Terror” in Afghanistan. There has been an increasing recognition that arriving at any feasible solution in Afghanistan requires the Taliban’s involvement in the process. The US gradually gave up the target of elimination of the Taliban entirely. The Afghan government also tried to engage in peace talks with the Taliban. However, in September 2011, Afghanistan’s President Rabbani was assassinated by a man disguised as a Taliban envoy in Kabul. The Afghan government announced the suspension of peace talks with them. The Taliban in Afghanistan have also suspended preliminary peace negotiations with the United States. The group blamed the Americans’ “ever-changing position” and said US efforts to involve the Afghan authorities have been a key stumbling block to further talks. The Taliban regard the Kabul government as illegitimate. However, the Taliban set up a diplomatic office in the Gulf state of Qatar in January 2012 US officials met the Taliban in Qatar and held preliminary discussions. The gaps between Taliban and the US are

still quite considerable.

The US-Pakistan relations have always been characterized by instability and Pakistan is very cautious about the US and its policies towards Pakistan, in spite of the fact that Pakistan needs the US military assistance. Since May 2011, the US- Pakistan relationship has been at a historic low because of the Bin Laden operation and the American shelling resulting in the death of Pakistan soldiers.

Another obstacle to a comprehensive solution is the continuously tense India-Pakistan relationship. A sort of common perception of the threat of “Islamic extremism” began to intensify in India, particularly after the large-scale Pakistani “Islamist” terrorists’ attack in Mumbai on 29 November 2008 resulted in the death of 164 people. The Mumbai massacre was a psychological turning point for the Indian public’s attitudes towards terrorism masterminded by external actors. However, there are small signs signaling improvement. On November 1, 2011, Pakistan declared that it would normalize trade with India by granting India "Most Favored Nation"-status. Pakistan President Zardari visited India in April 2012, marking the first visit conducted by a Pakistan president in seven years. It is not realistic to expect too much from these new developments. However, it is to be noted that economic interests surpass other considerations in some cases. For India, China is the biggest trade partner and dialogue between the Planning authorities in both of the countries started in 2011. If economic development is followed by an increase in stability for the middle class, it will be in those classes’ interests to seek political stability in the region.

How to build a bridge between the reality in Afghanistan and a “New Silk Road” strategy is a new task before the international community. The challenges are not easy to overcome. However, new economic opportunities are also opening in the central part of Eurasia, and a new way of thinking is thus required among the actors implicated.

---

<sup>i</sup><http://thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/article2806158.ece> access Oct.15,2012

<sup>ii</sup> Shashi Tharoor, *Pax Indica —India and the World of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Allen Lane, 2012, p.177

<sup>iii</sup> Angira Sen Sarma, *India and Central Asia-Redefining Energy and Trade Links*, Pentagon Press, 2010, pp.80-82