

Pakistan's Afghan Policy

Today, than ever before, Pakistan must have more reasons to reconsider, restructure and change its Afghan Policy. This is necessitated by an overwhelming number of circumstances both domestic and external. Pakistan is plunging from crises to crises not only in terms of governance but also economically and socially. Growing intolerance, increasing poverty, spreading lawlessness, international isolation and a myopic vision of future are some of the symptoms of a much graver malady that is gradually consuming the body politic. Going beyond rhetoric and thinking rationally Pakistan's Afghan Policy is paranoiac. This policy has its roots in cold war mentality along with manifested traits of medireview aptitudes.

The Pak Afghan relations have seen many ups and downs for the last three decades. President Dauod and General Zia ul Haq reached a consensus to 'freeze' all the unresolved issues between the two countries. Their understanding was short lived as the communist coup sabotaged it all. The Russian invaded Afghanistan, after the end of Khalq faction's rule in December 1979. The new Parcham regime was the most unpopular and immediately invited widespread resentment among the populace of the country. On the global level it provided America and its Western allies a much-needed chance to settle scores with Soviet Union. The War in Afghanistan was not a conflict between two politico-military establishments but it was a conflict between two social structures; between a 'confederation of tribal societies' that is Afghanistan and the Russian imperialism artfully disguised as communism. Pakistan, in a matter of no time became a frontline state that equalled romancing with the West. Pakistan has had considerable leverage in shaping the over all scenario in Afghanistan. Pakistan organised the Afghan resistance along religious lines that remained essentially fragmented and weak. It never commanded the 'general will' of the vast majority of Afghan people. In the mean time Pakistan delivered the 'mirage' paradigm of strategic depth that still hauls Pakistan in the wilderness of Taliban controlled Afghanistan. Pakistan never encouraged resistance along secular or nationalist lines. Pakistan's Afghan Policy remained the exclusive domain of non-civilians. Prime Minister Muhammad Khan Junejo's government was fired when it initiated a few steps, such as holding a round table of politicians, in the backdrop of Geneva Accords.

In the post cold war scenario that threw up an essentially different world, Afghanistan did not figured high on the agendas of Western capitals. Pakistan should have overhauled and renewed its Afghan policy at that point, instead it pursued the mirage of strategic depth. The wrangling in eighties resulted in the demise of state system in early nineties. The Pakistan based Mujahideen factions did not agree to any mutually amicable power sharing formula. They resorted to conflict and in the mid nineties Afghanistan was cut short to a period of virtual anarchy literally 'a war of all against

all' . Here Pakistan' s Afghan policy' s failure was imminent. Those who were honoured guests transformed into virtual foes because they dared to romanticise with India while sitting on Kabul' s throne. Pakistan' s aspirations of reaching the post Soviet Central Asia were shattered.

The Taliban movement, at that point, put an end to the anarchy by eradicating war lordism but it was unable to finish the civil war and more crucially it failed to compensate the basic needs of its citizens because of the shattered economy and collapsed government system. Forcing everything on the people does not equate fulfilling their due rights and aspirations. True, they restored peace but remained unable to eradicate hunger and disease. Pakistan always justified its Afghan policy on the pretext of having a ' friendly government' in Afghanistan. Its notion of friendship is restricted to itself only. Afghanistan being at the crossroads of Asia cannot afford, under any circumstances, to be friendly to only one of its neighbours. It has to be friendly to all of its mighty neighbours.

Looking at the domestic and external impacts of Pakistan' s Afghan policy do not make a rosy picture. Infact, untying the Afghan knot is increasingly important for Pakistan' s prosperous future. Unfortunately Pakistan failed to sale Taliban around the globe. Pakistan is facing isolation in the region and the world at large in the wake of its Afghan policy. Vehement denials or apologetic approaches deliver nothing concrete. Instead Pakistan is increasingly viewed as Taliban' s firm backer and their most trusted ally. In the regional context Islamabad is isolated too. Its most trusted friend China has shown annoyance from the problems it got from the Taliban controlled Afghanistan in its Muslim dominated Xingxiang region. Iran and Pakistan are opposed to each other primarily on the question of Afghanistan, as Iranians have practically gained nothing from their involvement in Afghanistan. They have played both the Shia and Persian language cards but in the end their backing resulted in casing more harms to the sectarian and linguistic minorities in Afghanistan, Shia Hazaras are a good example. The Central Asian republics cannot bid farewell to their Soviet legacy so quickly as a few emotionally charged commentators alongside the state controlled media would like us to believe. The Post Soviet Central Asia is in a constant flux but its institutions and society will not agree to ' Talibanisation' , at least for the moment. The disintegration of Soviet Union does not mean complete eradication of the Russian influence in the region. Pan-Turkism will be the new dominant phenomenon in the near future. The debate on foreign policy is a lengthy one. A mere survey of print media will suggest that there is a clear divide in the civil society over the foreign policy. Unfortunately sections of the civil society are controlling, virtually dictating the foreign policy unparalleled in the cases of most post-colonial states.

The domestic scenario is not different altogether. Pakistan, by any standard is undergoing political and economic crises. The post eighty-five Republic exists no more, and the general political atmosphere remains pessimistic as the political culture

has undergone tremendous change in the last two decades. The post Cold War State with pressures from above and below finds it difficult to cope with mounting onslaughts from information technology, Trans National Corporations and a new global political order. Pakistan's basic dilemma is the paradoxical relation between wishful thinking and 'ground realities'. Interestingly Pakistani establishment has always justified its Afghan policy in the name of 'ground realities' that has not attracted much crowd around, leave alone people agreeing to it. A vast majority of Pakistani political elite from across the political divide has criticised Afghan Policy. Pakistani economy is undergoing a series of hangovers, floating around marginally on the 'bail out' packages of international donors. The common men in the street are having the worst of it. Recent poverty indicators show tremendous growth in poverty. Violence has not decreased despite a military regime, from which the public expects better security. Refugees, already a source of conflict in South Asia and elsewhere, to some extent, are a by-product of Pakistan's involvement in Afghanistan. Initially Pakistan invited Afghan refugees on the classical Islamic model of Mecca and Madina. Now, the same Muslims are held responsible for all the problems being faced by the people. Refugees will certainly return to their homeland if Afghanistan's political and social conditions are conducive for living. Drought and famine stricken Afghans fled 'Taliban's Utopia' in huge numbers to survive. Closing the gates at Torkham does not guarantee the closure of two thousand kilometres long Durand Line dividing Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pakistan's involvement in Afghanistan has earned it many problems. Every body knows of arms, drugs and above that unprecedented heights of ethnic and sectarian violence. Pakistan's informal economy grew leaps and bounds, as it found favourable environment to grow. The Afghan war not only resulted in the demise of a state system but it has forced many communities along the Afghanistan Pakistan border to look for livelihood systems that were not in accordance with state regulations. Today this economy comprises around two-three billion dollar's trade and the network is spread in Southeast Asia, Middle East, West Central and South Asia. At this point also Pakistan's Afghan Policy failed to apprise the medium and long-term repercussions of its involvement. The unstable political environment has provided the establishment to create a mass psyche of sensationalism and emotionalism. In this regard Pakistan also mixed its Afghan policy with Kashmir policy. Here too the policy makers were subjective and gave away their objectivity that resulted in setbacks on both fronts.

Proposing solution to the Afghan problem is not easy, as there are numerous stakeholders, often with conflicting interests. The basic step, which until now is not cared for, is respecting Afghan sovereignty. Afghans after all have the right to determine their fate and they, be of any caste, colour, creed or ethnicity has the right to chalk the course of their destiny. Pakistan until now has a partisan policy. It should neutralise its relations with all the Afghan political factions. Pakistan has exhausted the religious card by using it extensively. Pakistan, as a genuine peacemaker is increasingly discredited among the Afghan factions. Claiming that 90% of Afghans support Taliban while sitting in the comforts of Islamabad and living in the Taliban controlled Afghanistan are two different matters. Pakistan's Afghan policy makers need to have an extensive knowledge of Afghan history and an insight into the

Afghan society. Pakistan' s involvement in Afghanistan till this point has been driven by a militaristic notion of security that resulted in the overlooking many crucial social, economic and political aspects while formulating policies.

Pakistan can conveniently embrace the role of a peacemaker in Afghanistan. Its peace efforts need to be neutral. In fact, a stable and long lasting peace in Afghanistan will help achieve Pakistan many of its major Policy objectives alongside rehabilitating its drowning economy. Firstly, by backing a peace process Pakistan can ensure a friendly government that can be amicable to all of Afghanistan' s neighbours this will put an effective end to the ongoing proxy wars in Afghanistan. Secondly, a peaceful Afghanistan will be the major conduit to Central Asia. Taliban' s military conquest of the whole of Afghanistan does not guarantee major stakes in Central Asian riches. Last but not the least, peace in Afghanistan will provide a golden opportunity for Pakistan to rehabilitate its economy. The reconstruction of Afghanistan will certainly require expertise manpower, infrastructure building materials and related paraphernalia. Pakistan being most proximate to Afghanistan will be the major gainer in such scenario. Stable peace in Afghanistan will automatically resolve the refugee problem, as they will return to their homeland.

Pakistan' s pioneering efforts towards peace will compel other regional players to follow suit. The various peace efforts in Afghanistan failed because of two basic flaws, firstly All Afghans, across the board are never involved in a single peace effort, and the peace processes fail because they centre on the conflicting interests of players in the ' Great Game' . These initiatives were centred on likes and dislikes. Secondly, war and conflict are prescribed as medicines for restoring peace and tranquillity in Afghanistan, which often result in contra indications. The Heritage Foundation has recommended an Austria Like solution to the Afghan problem where Afghanistan' s neighbours should be the guarantors of peace in Afghanistan. This is true because in Africa many conflicts spread into surrounding regions. Pakistan should take lead in this regard.

Pakistan and Afghanistan share many similarities. Apart from their close geographic closeness they share common ethnic groups, religions and common historical heritage. Allama Muhammad Iqbal, in a fore word to Jamal-ud-din Ahmed and Muhammad Abdul Aziz' book wrote of Afghan and Afghanistan, "The history of the Afghans has yet to be read and appreciated. Mere record of events is not history, it is not material for history. Events are like words and have meanings, which it is the duty of a genuine historian to discover. This work has yet to be done in regard to the history of Afghans both in India and Afghanistan. A people, who have produced such men as Muhammad Ghauri, Alauddin Khilji, Sher Shah Suri, Ahmed Shah Abdali, Amir Abdul Rehman Kahn, King Nadir Shah and above all Maulana Sayyed Jamal-ud-Din Afghani - in many respects the greatest Muslim, and certainly one of the greatest Asiatics of our time - cannot but be regarded as an important factor in the life of Asia. For long periods in the past, Balk, Bamian, Hadda, Kabul, Ghazni and

Herat have been great centres of culture; and the earnestness of the present ruling dynasty does certainly hold a promise that they may well revive their past glories again." Pakistan' s Afghan policy demands humane and humanitarian concerns than ever before.