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Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations and Stabilization of the Region

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Introduction

Pakistan and Afghanistan are so uniquely connected to each other by geography, ethnicity and history that if one is facing war or terrorism, the other cannot expect peace and stability. Together they have suffered and together they can prosper. The two countries are situated so strategically that conflict or cooperation between them affects South Asia as much as Central Asia, and even great powers in the near or afar. Given that, my principal argument in this paper is that security and stability of South and Central Asia hinges significantly on credible progress in relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Consequently, if securing peace in Afghanistan must be in Pakistan's vital national interest, improving relations with Pakistan is a national objective that Afghanistan has to aspire for.

There is no doubt that the history of Pakistan-Afghanistan relationship is marred by bitter disputes, and mutual suspicions and recriminations at various times. Some of their sources of conflict—real, perceived or manipulated— still threaten to create rifts in relationship. Yet the overbearing trend in recent years, in my view, is one of overcoming the trust deficit in ties and institutionalizing bilateral cooperation. Recent months have also seen the two countries increasingly synchronize their respective security approaches to combat terrorism and insurgency, while simultaneously exploring the ways to politically resolve the conflict in Afghanistan and tackle its militant ramifications in Pakistan. My conclusive argument is that if this cooperative trend in Afghan-Pak ties continues with due support from the international community, then we can certainly hope for a lasting stabilization of a region that has suffered unprecedented death and destruction in recent decades and which has enormous potential to grow in the foreseeable future.

I will first begin by discussing the underlying factors that connect Afghanistan and Pakistan and placing in perspective the historical context of their relationship, especially its evolution in the last over three decades. The real, perceived or manipulated sources of conflict between the two countries will then be discussed, particularly to clarify a few core issues or break widely held myths about Pakistan's role in Afghanistan. The conclusive discussion will be about the recent promising trends in Afghan-Pak relations and their potentially positive implications for the region.

Inseparable Factors

Unlike Afghanistan's other immediate neighbours—including Iran and the three Central Asian states of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, and China (which shares a narrow corridor with Afghanistan)—Pakistan has the longest border with Afghanistan. Known as the Durand Line, it is around 2,500 kilometers long, porous, rugged, mountainous and largely inaccessible. This peculiar geographical linkage aside, the two countries are connected with each other through Pashtun ethnicity. As we all know, Afghanistan's eastern and southern parts bordering Pakistan are lived by Pashtuns, who constitute the majority Afghan population as well as the traditional ruling elites of the

country. The same ethnic group also resides all across Pakistan's western border with Afghanistan. Even if Pashtuns are not the majority population of Pakistan, their participation in the country's political, and civil and military bureaucratic structure is relatively more significant than other ethnic minorities. History is the third most crucial factor linking Afghanistan with Pakistan in ways that no other neighbour of Afghanistan does. Through centuries, the areas constituting current Afghanistan and Pakistan remained an essential link between different civilizations of the East. If this linkage facilitated trade and commerce, on the one hand, it also exposed the Subcontinent for invasions from across the Hindu Kush chain of mountains, on the other. At the time of independence in 1947, Pakistan emerged as a sole inheritor of this long history from colonial India, when Afghanistan served as a buffer state between the British Empire..

These unique geographical, ethnic and historical connections that Pakistan shares with Afghanistan have had both negative and positive implications for relations between the two countries since Pakistan's independence. Their negative fallout is visible in the form of the unresolved conflict over the Durand Line and the continuing issue of Pakistan's border regions with Afghanistan allegedly acting as a safe haven for groups involved in current Afghan insurgency. Both of these issues need to be placed in perspective, since their articulation is most often quite simplistic.

The Durand Line was drawn by the colonial administration of British India in 1893 as a temporary boundary so that Afghanistan could serve as a buffer state between it and the Russian Empire, which it did. Following Pakistan's creation in 1947, Afghanistan voted against its membership in the United Nations and refused to recognize the Durand Line. While claiming suzerainty over Pakistan's Pashtun areas in Balochistan and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa provinces, it began sponsoring nationalist-separatist movements in these areas—an irredentist approach that caused consistent tension in Pak-Afghan ties in subsequent decades. After Afghan King Zahir Shah's ouster in 1973, the government of President Muhammad Daoud moved the Afghan army close to the Durand Line. Already faced with a security threat from across its eastern borders with India—with which it had already fought three wars, with the 1971 war dismembering East Pakistan—Pakistan felt threatened from the possible opening of a second front against it from across its western frontiers with Afghanistan.

Consequently, Pakistan started sponsoring limited Afghan Islamist insurgency against the Daud government. Pakistan would have never resorted to this act if Afghanistan had not threatened its territorial integrity by sponsoring Pashtun separatism. After Daoud's fall, the only instance when Afghanistan offered to meet Pakistan's long-standing desire of converting the Durand Line into an international border was Afghan Communist President Noor Muhammad Taraki's announcement to the effect, however conditional upon Pakistan's renunciation of support to Afghan Islamist opposition—which, instead, was fuelled by the 1979 Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. Until the fall of the communist Najibullah regime in 1992, Pakistan's tribal Pashtun areas bordering the Durand Line served as a principal sanctuary for Afghan and non-Afghan Mujahideen, whose anti-Soviet jihad was aided by a US-led international coalition. During this time,

some 3.5 million Afghans also took refuge in the tribal belt as well as adjoining settled Pashtun areas, causing severe socio-economic burden on the local population.

During the intra-Afghan warfare that followed Najibullah's ouster as well as the rise of the Taliban, Afghanistan became the hub of a regional proxy war between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, on the one hand, and India and Iran, on the other—with the Durand Line continuing to act as a corridor for militants. In fact, during the Taliban rule, the Pak-Afghan border had become virtually non-existent. If seen in this historical context, the issue of insurgent safe havens in Pakistan's side of the Durand Line is not as simple as it would seem. Its complexities are grounded in successive rounds of warfare in Afghanistan, from the international fight against Soviets during the 1980s to the regional proxy war in the 1990s to the present international campaign against terrorism in Afghanistan. This issue cannot be dissociated from Afghanistan's historical claim on Pakistan's Pashtun areas and its consequent unwillingness to recognize the Durand Line as an international border. Nor can it be seen in isolation from Pakistan's historical fears regarding the revival of Pashtun separatist nationalism and its ensuing desire for turning the Durand Line into an international border.

For over two decades, between the 1979 Soviet intervention and the 2001 ouster of the Taliban regime, Pakistan's tribal belt bordering Afghanistan served as a principal sanctuary for Afghan and other militant forces, who drew their successive sustenance from international and regional powers. Given that, a culture of cross-border infiltration and militancy may have taken roots in a region whose tribal inhabitants are known for upholding socio-ethnic bonds, religious affinity and conservative religious values. In sum, the issue of the alleged infiltration of insurgents from Pakistan's Pashtun belt into Afghanistan through the Durand Line involves geographical, ethnic and intricacies, including the fact that millions of Afghan refugees continue to reside in Pakistan, mostly in the very areas alleged to have these sanctuaries. The ground reality of the Pak-Afghan frontier revolves around these intricacies—ignoring which often leads to misplaced analyses and conclusions, which, in turn, have a harmful impact on relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan and stabilization of the region.

The three crucial factors of geography, ethnicity and history have had a divisive impact on Pak-Afghan relations, yet the fact remains that none of these factors can be wished away by either country. Great powers may come and go, Afghanistan and Pakistan will have to live side by side. That Pashtuns reside on both sides of the Pak-Afghan frontier is as inescapable a fact as the centuries-old link between Afghanistan and Pakistan. It is by harnessing the full potential of these powerfully connecting factors that the two countries can hope to chart a truly friendly relationship that will be vital for their mutual progress and crucial for peace in the region.

Just one example of the enormously positive potential of this geographical, ethnic and historical inter-linkage for relations between the two countries is worth-mentioning. This pertains to the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and its aftermath. If history, geography and ethnicity had not connected Pakistan with Afghanistan so deeply, it would have been next to impossible to defeat the Soviet forces. It was the longevity of the Pak-

Afghan border, its porous nature and hospitality of the Pashtuns in Pakistan's border regions with Afghanistan that fundamentally helped the internationally-backed Afghan jihad succeed in the 1980s. It is also due to these triple linkages that Pakistan has had no qualms in hosting millions of Afghan refugees since 1979—handing over to them businesses and even locales in major cities with the slightest of racist expression ever. In recent world history, there is hardly any other example of such brotherly affection for a people in distress. Even today, the largely unreported cross-border economic activity and public interaction between the two countries is a living proof of their multi-faceted interconnectedness.

Distorting Realities

The Durand Line is a real conflict between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and there is no reason why it cannot be amicably resolved. It has been years since the duration for which it was created ended. If not for anything else, the cross-border terrorist-insurgent traffic across this unrecognized frontier and its militant ramifications for both countries necessitate an urgent resolution of the Durand Line conflict. Until a few years ago, when the current level of understanding between the leaders of Afghanistan and Pakistan was not visible, the Afghan authorities would routinely exert pressure on Pakistan to prevent the alleged infiltration of Afghan insurgents by guarding a border which they were unwilling to recognize. In 2006, for instance, when Pakistan tried to fence parts of the troubled frontier and to introduce biometric system at a couple of border crossing points, the Afghan government protested. The same dichotomy in Kabul's stand on the Durand Line has led to the unwillingness of the Afghan leadership and ISAF/NATO command to set up as many security check-posts on the Afghan side of the border as they are on its Pakistani side. The border security check-posts' gap is ridiculously wide: over a thousand on Pakistan's side against just a few dozen on the Afghan side.

Yet, as Afghanistan and Pakistan further institutionalize their cooperative ties, especially in the security domain, we can expect their civil and military leaders to seriously sit down and chalk out a workable plan to monitor one of the world's most difficult border regions with the mutually beneficial aim of preventing cross-border traffic of terrorists, drug traffickers and arms smugglers. Given its porous nature and cross-border ethnic settlement, a hundred per cent stoppage in such activities may still not be possible. After all, despite all the technology and manpower, the United States is unable to stop the trafficking of drugs through its border with Mexico. Still there is no harm in institutionalizing a stringent border monitoring regime in the region. However, the first step towards realizing such goal is the resolution of the principal border conflict between the two countries.

It is my strong belief that the new circumstantial realities in the Pak-Afghan border regions have created a unique opportunity to politically resolve the Durand Line. First, if the presumption that post-Taliban Afghanistan is dominated by non-Pashtuns is correct, then a regime where Pashtuns are marginalized can be logically expected to be not so keen in making any irredentist claim for Pashtun regions of Pakistan. Why should such an Afghan government be willing to redress the historical grievances of Pashtun majority,

which essentially constitutes the current Taliban-led insurgent Afghan population? Secondly, within Pakistan, the Awami National Party (ANP), the custodian of the Greater Pashtunistan cause in the past, is now part of mainstream politics and runs the government in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. And, for the same reason as the post-Taliban regime in Afghanistan does, the secular ANP should be least interested in letting Pakistan's Pashtun areas to join Afghanistan's southern and eastern Pashtun regions where ethnic identity is seriously clouded by religious radicalism of the Taliban.

The afore-mentioned qualitative shift in circumstantial realities of the border regions straddled by a single ethnic group logically makes the Pashtunistan issue irrelevant in the perceptions of Afghanistan's current rulers, thereby paving the way for an official Afghan recognition of the Durand Line as a formal international border between the two countries. After all, the biggest price for the continuing conflict in this region—be it terrorism, insurgency or the efforts to combat both—is paid by the Pashtun masses caught in the crossfire. They have faced so much death and destruction over the past 30 years that the issue of Pashtunistan must have become meaningless for them. The prevailing insecurity may have prevented a scholarly survey to quantify Pashtun perceptions about Pashtunistan, yet interaction with Afghan academics in recent years suggests a perceptual change has, indeed, occurred among Afghanistan's current ruling elites. It is perhaps the lack of foresight or courage that prevents the Afghan leadership to translate such perception into actual policy. Since Pakistan has historically aspired for turning its western frontier with Afghanistan into an officially recognized international border, and the chief custodian of the Pashtun cause in the country has also developed a stake in the national state and governmental structure, the moment the Afghan government takes a bold step on settling the Durand Line issue, there will be no voice of dissent from Pakistan's side—and the principal conflict between Afghanistan and Pakistan will be settled overnight.

As I mentioned at the outset, the overbearing trend in relations between the two countries in recent years is one of overcoming the trust deficit and institutionalizing bilateral cooperation. The conflicts, real, imagined and manipulated, can be sorted out amicably if such inherently positive trend continues in Pak-Afghan ties in future. There are, of course, forces inside Afghanistan and beyond who have a stake in the continuity of conflict between the two countries. And, years on, they have fueled suspicion and mistrust among the Afghans about Pakistan's alleged domineering quest in Afghanistan. It is, therefore, absolutely essential to clarify a few core issues and break some popular myths about Pakistan's role in Afghanistan.

The portrayal of Pakistan as a trouble maker in the region, including in Afghanistan, is not a recent phenomenon. Back in mid-90s, the Iranians and the Indians did as much Pakistan-bashing on the emergence of Taliban in Afghanistan as a section of the Western establishments does today. In recent years, there seems to be a pattern in this sequential campaign to shift the blame for the growing frustration of US-NATO forces to quell Taliban-led insurgency on Pakistan's security establishment, whereby it is accused of playing a double game. Certainly, that there will be many more such attempts to prevent the emerging progress in Afghan-Pak ties, or the prevalence of pragmatism in Pakistan's

corresponding relations with the United States—which have also assumed strategic dimension during the same period when Afghan-Pak ties have made significant strides.

Just as all those who distorted the ground reality back in the mid-90s by depicting Taliban as Pakistan's baby, the ones singularly point towards Pakistan as a principal part of the problem of terrorism in the region are attempting to mislead the world. The rise of Taliban was largely an indigenous phenomenon. The movement, however regressive it eventually turned out to be in the end, had, indeed, a Pakistani connection. That was partly due to the inseparable ethnic, historical and geographical factors which I have narrated before and partly because of the natural political response of a country which saw the very Afghan Mujahideen leadership whom it had hosted throughout the anti-Soviet jihad turn anti-Pakistan as soon as it captured power in Afghanistan after Najibullah's fall in 1992. What was more ironic was the fact that the regime of President Burhanuddin Rabbani, with his powerful defense minister Ahmad Shah Massoud, sided with India, a country that had flouted the will of the free world by aligning itself with the Soviet Union throughout the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Whatever influence Pakistan exerted in Afghanistan during the Taliban rule was a natural outcome of the country's deep engagement in the Afghan jihad. Yet it is wrong to argue that Islamabad had a veto power over what the Taliban did or did not do in Kabul during their five-year rule. The real story was that whatever influence Pakistan or, for that matter, Saudi Arabia had over Taliban, eroded significantly as soon as the Taliban captured Kabul. After all, their decision to host and harbor al-Qaeda was without any consultation with Riyadh or Islamabad. If Pakistan had any influence over the Taliba regime, then it would have certainly stopped it from destroying the Buddha statues in Bamyian.

I have cited this detailed reference to Pakistan's alleged connection with the Taliban regime in Afghanistan to principally refute the current propaganda regarding Pakistan's alleged support to Taliban-led insurgents in Afghanistan. One theme in Pakistan-bashing with reference to Afghanistan that has transcended the previous decade and continued throughout the current one pertains to the so-called "strategic depth" thesis. At least after the 1998 nuclear tests by India and Pakistan, this thesis has become redundant. When nuclear deterrence between the two atomic powers is supposed to dissuade them from fighting an all out conventional war, then why would Pakistan need to exert its influence in Afghanistan for the sake of securing "strategic depth?" At a time when India is contemplating a potentially dangerous Pakistan-specific Cold Start doctrine, it will be a rationally incomprehensible act on the part of Pakistan's security establishment to rely on the outdated option of seeking the so-called strategic depth for the country in Afghanistan.

A final issue that needs clarity, and which is also as simplistically articulated as the notion of strategic depth, is the alleged duplicity that Pakistan practices in its counter-insurgency/counter-terrorism policy. Since late 2008, we have been hearing about the Afghan government of President Hamid Karzai pursuing dialogue with the insurgents. Soon after Pakistan arrested Afghan Taliban leaders, including their military chief Mullah Baradar in February 2010, the former UN special envoy in Afghanistan Mr Kai Eide accused it of attempting to sabotage this dialogue process, which, he said, was being

supported by the United Nations. Additionally, since the London conference on Afghanistan in January 2010, the United States is officially pursuing a plan to re-integrate low and mid-level Taliban insurgents. These two examples make it absolutely clear that the Afghan government, the UN and the US have a definition of what constitutes a good Taliban or a bad Taliban. The former is the one who renounces violence and the latter is still the fighter. If Afghanistan, the UN and the US have the right to choose between good and bad Taliban, how can Pakistan be devoid of such right? In its counter-terrorism policy, Pakistan's rational preference will always be to first strike against those insurgents or terrorists who are attacking the country's security forces and killing its innocent civilians.

Overbearing Trend

It is clear from the above discussion that there are forces which are, and will, attempt to scuttle the emerging pragmatism in the region. Instead of focusing on their politically motivated attempts to distort the realities in the region, we must appreciate the fact that Pakistan's ties with Afghanistan as well as the United States, which is leading the international war and reconstruction effort in Afghanistan, have made significant strides in recent period. If this cooperative trend in Afghan-Pak ties continues with due support from the international community, then we can certainly hope for a lasting stabilization of a region that has suffered unprecedented death and destruction in recent decades and which has enormous potential to grow in the foreseeable future.

President Karzai did issue a statement critical of Pakistan after the leak of US Afghan war diaries by Wikileaks in summer 2010, but that is probably the only accusation the Afghan leader has made since early 2008, when the current civilian democratic government came to power in Pakistan. The period since then has seen Mr. Karzai developing a close rapport with his Pakistani counterpart, President Asif Ali Zardari. The Afghan president had attended Mr Zardari's presidential oath-taking ceremony back in late 2008, a symbolic gesture of goodwill by Afghanistan leadership, which was reciprocated by its Pakistani counterpart in late 2009, when Mr Karzai took oath in Kabul as an elected president for a second term.

Moreover, on three separate occasions in 2010—at the two successive international donors' conferences on Afghanistan in London and Kabul and during his visit to Islamabad—the Afghan leader emphasized Pakistan's pivotal role in realizing political reconciliation in Afghanistan. At the London conference, he said: “We ask all our neighbors, particularly Pakistan, to support our peace and reconciliation endeavors. We're looking forward to the international community supporting this plan of action.” During his Islamabad visit, the Afghan leader reiterated that without Pakistani cooperation, “Afghanistan cannot be stable or peaceful.” “There is a recognition now...I am certain, in both nations...of the opportunities together and on the dangers that we have faced together,” said the Afghan President, adding: “And that it is upon both of us a responsibility towards our own nations and towards the future generations that we notice the dangers and that we work together to remove them, to take them away from amongst us, and to work together toward stability and peace in both countries,” Mr Karzai said.

Hardly a few years ago, when Pakistan was under the quasi-military regime of President Gen Pervez Musharraf, Mr. Karzai was known only for making hawkish statements against Pakistan, or accusing the country of facilitating Taliban infiltration across the Durand Line.

One of the reasons why relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan have recently become so cooperative is also because the Af-Pak strategy, being pursued by the US Administration of President Barack Obama since March 2009, perceives the two countries as being afflicted by the same problem which requires a common response by them and their international partners. The stated reason why Pakistan was bracketed with Afghanistan is because its tribal areas alongside the Afghan border were perceived by the Obama Administration to be a safe haven for al-Qaeda and its terrorist allies, fueling Afghan insurgency and threatening to increase international terrorism. The Af-Pak strategy aims to engage Afghanistan and Pakistan in a new trilateral framework at the highest levels, and to foster their bilateral relationship in areas of political, economic and security cooperation. This linkage has facilitated cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistani for combating terrorism as well as reconciling pliable insurgents.

One of the concrete outcomes of President Karzai's visit to Islamabad in March 2010 was, for instance, the reported agreement on reviving the stalled peace jirgas. The two sides have agreed on a road map under which they will hold a jirgagai, or small meeting, after a domestic Afghan peace jirga on April 29. That meeting is meant to set out the Afghan government's plan of reconciling with moderate Taliban members and get the backing of the entire Afghan political spectrum. A follow-up loya jirga, or grand assembly, will then be held in Islamabad later this year. The first peace jirga between the two neighbors was held in Kabul from August 9 to 12, 2007. Both President Musharraf and the then prime minister Shaukat Aziz participated in this 700-member gathering, which issued of a six-point Joint Declaration.

First, the Jirga recognised the fact that "terrorism is a common threat to both countries and the war on terror should continue to be an integral part of the national policies and security strategies of both countries." Jirga participants unanimously declared their commitment to "an extended, tireless and persistent campaign against terrorism" and further pledged that "the government and people of Afghanistan and Pakistan will not allow sanctuaries/training centres for terrorists in their respective countries." Second, the 2007 Jirga resolved to constitute a smaller Jirga consisting of 25 prominent members from each side "that is mandated to strive to achieve the following objectives: a) Expedite the ongoing process of dialogue for peace and reconciliation with opposition; b) Holding of regular meetings in order to monitor and oversee the implementation of the decisions/recommendations of the Joint Peace Jirga; c) Plan and facilitate convening of the next Joint Peace Jirgas; and d) Both countries will appoint 25 members each in the committee. Third, the Jirga emphasised the "vital importance of brotherly relations in pursuance of policies of mutual respect, non-interference and peaceful coexistence and recommends further expansion of economic, social, and cultural relations between the two countries." Fourth, while taking cognisance of the nexus between narcotics and terrorism, the Jirga members condemned "the cultivation, processing and trafficking of

poppy and other illicit substances and call upon the two governments to wage an all out war against this menace.” Fifth, the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan agreed to “implement infrastructure, economic and social sector projects in the affected areas”, with the support of the international community. Finally, the Jirga decided to implement the comprehensive and important recommendations made by its five working committees, in areas of social and economic developmental projects, people-to-people contacts, political ties between the two countries and various issues pertaining to their joint fight against terrorism. There is, thus, a recent historical context for the rapid progress that Pak-Afghan ties are currently making.

If Pakistan’s counter-terrorism ties with Afghanistan and its international stake-holders continue to evolve as cooperatively as they have in recent weeks and months, whose credible outcome is visible in the qualitatively improved security situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan, there is no reason why issues lingering issues such as the Durand Line cannot be amicably settled. At the end of the day, what matters the most is that all those who have actively taken part in insurgency and terrorism in the two countries, whether against Pakistanis, Afghans or international forces—and who are responsible for so much bloodbath in the region—should be brought to justice. Conditional reconciliation with insurgent leadership and reintegration of insurgent warriors are, indeed, pragmatic options, but the governments in Kabul and Islamabad must be extremely careful in exercising them.

In Pakistan’s case, insofar as the non-state actors like Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan are concerned, there is nothing that the state or the government can negotiate with them, except to urge them to renounce violence and live as peacefully as other Pakistanis do. In Afghanistan’s case, the Pashtun marginalization is a direct outcome of the fall of the Taliban regime. President Karzai seems to understand the need to co-opt Pashtuns in the country’s security and political structure. That is the main motivation behind his recent proactive diplomacy—and also one major factor that brings Afghanistan and Pakistan together on the same platform insofar as the quest for peace in Afghanistan is concerned. In sum, never before Afghanistan and Pakistan have needed each other as much as they now, when their shared hope for getting out of the terrorist quagmire is brighter than ever. Additional good news in this respect is that there now exist broader international consensus today for the need to politically resolve the Afghan conflict. Just like the regimes in Kabul and Islamabad, Afghanistan’s international stakeholders seem to be clear about the actual source of this common danger and what needs to be done collectively to combat it.

Pakistan’s role will also be instrumental in resolving the Afghan conflict within the regional framework. A couple of regional initiatives for resolving the Afghan conflict and combating terrorism in the region have already been proposed, including the US-proposed formation of a UN Contact Group on Afghanistan (including Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran, India and Central Asian states), and the British-proposed Regional Stability Council (consisting of China, Russia and India). Moreover, in January 2010, the foreign ministers of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran met in Islamabad, and agreed to take several cooperative steps to combat extremism and terrorism together. The Islamabad

moot was a reflection of the pivotal interest of Afghanistan and its two most important neighbours to come up with a united response to a common danger. In any regional solution to Afghan conflict, the role of Pakistan as the most important neighbour of Afghanistan, followed by Iran and then the other two active Central Asian states cannot be ignored. As for involving China, Russia and India, they do not share any border with Afghanistan, even though China because of regional proximity has been directly affected by extremist threat from Afghanistan (in the form of radicalized factions within the ethnic-Turkic Uyigur population in Xinjiang province bordering Pakistan's northern areas.) So, China's case for inclusion in any regional framework for Afghan settlement can be justified.

Conclusion

To conclude, the reason Pakistan is interested in peaceful Afghanistan is largely guided by its regional geo-economic motivations of benefiting from Central Asian riches in energy resources. It is not for seeking strategic depth or any other alleged domineering notions that Islamabad wants to dominate Kabul. Likewise, the reason why Afghanistan needs a stable and friendly relationship with Pakistan is not difficult to understand. As a land-locked country, it will always be economically dependent upon Pakistan. If history, geography and ethnicity constitute a powerful connection between the two countries, their respective economic motivations create a rational context, which necessitate a faster pace in the Pak-Afghan ties in coming months and years. If that happens, then not only the people of the two countries will be its direct beneficiary, the whole regions of Central Asia and Central Asia will be able to realize in an era of globalization which they could not due to continuing conflict in Afghanistan with all of its militant regional implications.