

US DRAWDOWN FROM AFGHANISTAN AND ITS IMPACT ON KASHMIR CONFLICT

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Abstract

This study will focus on the US drawdown from Afghanistan and its implication for the greater regional peace and stability in general and the Kashmir conflict in particular. The phase-wise drawdown of the United States forces from Afghanistan has generated concerns about the peace in the country and the continuity of technical and financial support for the Afghan National Army (ANA). The US drawdown has been accompanied by a sustained campaign by the Taliban to expand their area of influence leaving the ANA struggling to maintain control. Due to the Indo-Pak rivalry, Afghanistan is being drawn into a civil war, which shaped a parallel proxy war in Afghanistan and Jammu & Kashmir. In such circumstances, there will be no peace in the region unless these two neighbours do not sit together and talk about a common approach to Kabul and Kashmir otherwise Pakistan's support for Kashmiri militants will remain unchanged.

Keywords: Kashmir, Afghanistan, Conflict, Militancy

Introduction

The drawdown of the United States troops from Afghanistan and the switch of security responsibility to the Afghan Government raised apprehensions over the return of the Taliban in Afghanistan and its wider impact on Indo-Pak relations. This situation may provide a prospect for global Jihadis in reviving their campaign in Afghanistan and Jammu & Kashmir (henceforth Kashmir) as a parallel proxy war as Indian have already experienced the post-Soviet war epoch in which the Afghan Jihad

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had changed the regional scenario in late 1980s. The drawdown of the US troops has also created a vacuum where India and Pakistan are keen to advance their own diverse strategic targets and to marginalize each other from gaining any advantage. Some Kashmiri politicians and militant groups considered the US drawdown as an ideological victory for Jihadis in the region and optimistic that this shift would lead to a strategic support to them in revitalizing their operation in Afghanistan and Kashmir as a parallel campaign.

Both India and Pakistan have their dissimilar claims on Kashmir whereas the UN role in Kashmir is advisory and its resolutions do not provide any way forward. For the greater interest of regional peace and economic prosperity against the menacing climate, General Pervez Musharraf moved from 'position-based' approach to 'win-win' situation; however, the policy died with his fall from power. Analysts believe that there will be no peace in Afghanistan until these two neighbours sit together and talk about a common approach to Kabul and Kashmir rather than resorting to proxy war. On 5th August 2019, India unilaterally abrogated Article 370 of its Constitution while some analysts are of the opinion that there is an understanding between India & Pakistan over the resolution of bilateral issues including Jammu & Kashmir.

The research explores how the US Forces drawdown from Afghanistan will impact the following factors: implication on Afghanistan, Taliban combat capacity in Afghanistan, Indo-Pak parallel proxy war, impact on Kashmir, abrogation of Article 370 & its repercussion and acceptable alternative strategy to the powers in conflict resolution of Kashmir which is the major source of militancy that endangered the regional peace and stability. Qualitative method approach has primarily been used in this study, which allows the views and perspective of key actors involved and this is done through direct access by collecting information through one-on-one in-depth interviews of around 40 people. Secondary data and Internet information system has also been used to analyse the different views by the intellectuals regarding this study.

Implications for Afghanistan

After around one and a half decade of involvement, the United States (US) and Afghanistan have signed the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) on 30th September 2014¹ allowing for around 12,000 foreign troops (9,800 US and

¹ Raghavan, S., Karen Deyoung., "Afghanistan sign vital, long-delayed security pact." Available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/us-afghanistan-sign-security-pact>

2,000 NATO military personnel) to continue in the country.² Under BSA, the US and NATO forces were supposed to advise, train and equip Afghan national security forces so that Afghanistan could independently secure and defend itself against internal and external terrorists' threats.³ The US policy objective is peace and stability in the region by enhancing the ability of Afghan Government and security forces to defend the country themselves, however, the key question is whether with a restricted strength the recent military achievements could be consolidated in future or not.⁴ According to Dr. Ehsan Ahrari, a US based defence consultant & independent strategic analyst, "it seems that US has pulled its hands from Afghanistan and would only involve in very limited operations."⁵ In May 2014, President Barack Obama announced, the US would station just under 9,800 troops in Afghanistan, drawing them down completely by the end of 2016 but it could not be materialized because of the deteriorating security conditions and Taliban resurgence. Hereafter, the number of US military personnel was increased from 9,800 to 14,000 by 2016.⁶

The security of Afghanistan largely depends on the strength and the professional capacity of Afghan National Army (ANA) but the key challenge is that how to maintain the unity of ANA from preventing attempt to factionalize it.⁷ For ANA, it is fatally important to maintain the current foot-soldiers commitment to the nation as with strength of around 235,000, it is regarded as the best Government institution among others and any reduction of support budget will easily cause further political segmentation of ANA by former warlords factions as Afghan Government is unable to bear these heavy expenses. Therefore, the UN's commitment to more robust mission is essential for post-2014 and to keep ANA's possession of sophisticated and

²The German commander of NATO HQ in Brunssum, General Hans-Lothar Domröse announced that 1200 to 1400 trainers and advisors will be deployed; the rest (and bulk) of the personnel will be involved in "non-combat mission in Afghanistan" including medical support and force protection.

³In May 2014 by President Barack Obama is that: "America's combat mission will be over by the end of this year" and, he said, from 1st January 2015, it will be "training Afghan forces and supporting counterterrorism operations against the remnants of al Qaeda." To do this, he said, the US would station just under 9,800 troops in Afghanistan, drawing them down completely by the end of 2016.

⁴Stancati, M., and Hodge, N., Afghanistan Signs Security Pact With U.S., NATO, *The Wall Street Journal*, (30th September 2014)

⁵Ehsan Ahrari, US based Defence Consultant & Independent Strategic Analyst, Interview to BBC Urdu, (2nd of October 2015).

⁶Why Afghanistan is more dangerous than ever, *BBC News* (14 September 2018). Available at: (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-45507560>).

⁷Interview via email with Prof. Kenji, Izaski., Director, Institute of Peace & Conflict Studies, (Tokyo: Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 13th September, 2014).

high-cost weaponry and air power at bare minimum level (preventing high depreciation cost).

There is another agreement between Taliban and US in hand; however, it does not lead the Afghans toward the peace and stability in prevailing circumstances as each party is looking for maximum advantages out of it.⁸ “The “talks” formula has been the same and just repetition of the one having started around 2009 when US administration openly admitted that there would be no military victory. The deal has been already hanged over three-US presidencies where each US administration seeks the “excuse” for its honourable exit from Afghanistan.”⁹

Taliban Combat Capacity

The capability and effectiveness of the national unity Government in Afghanistan is in question as democratic institutions are pathetic and authority is largely seized by warlords on the basis of haggling and violence while ANA does not have an adequate training to control the Afghan security situation and ANA's fragmentation seems anticipated, predominantly after the inclusion of warlords into the coalition Government as peace does not serve their interests and with the passage of time, the combat capacity of Taliban will therefore improve.¹⁰ However, the power-balance between ANA and Taliban for the time being will vary until ANA have an additional edge of the latest drone technology as an effective counterterrorism strategy while Taliban have no counter measures against the drone attacks. “Taliban might feel encouraged, but drawdown does not mean that the ANA is stripped of all the modern weaponry that was supplied by the Americans/West.”¹¹

Due to the presumed collateral damages, the use of Drone and Special Forces on Afghan soil for long term will be "politically" impossible and with the passage of time, Taliban will get more strength.¹² Therefore, Taliban will try to consolidate their position in cities and any future Government in

⁸ It is to be claimed that the new agreement between US and Taliban is comprised of the following points.

-Anti-terrorism guarantees by the Taliban, withdrawal of US (and other foreign) troops from Afghan soil, inclusion of the Afghan government in the negotiations & permanent Afghanistan-wide ceasefire.

⁹ Interview via Skype with Prof. Kenji, Izaski., Director, Institute of Peace & Conflict Studies, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Tokyo, Japan, 1st October 2019.

¹⁰ Personal Interview conducted via telephone with Dr. Azmat Hayat Khan, Expert on Afghan Affairs, former Vice Chancellor, University of Peshawar, 21st September 2017.

¹¹ Personal Interview with Dr. Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, Dean, Faculty of Contemporary Studies (FCS), National Defence University (NDU), Islamabad, 2nd May 2015.

¹² Prof. Kenji.

Kabul will be weaker as compared to them.¹³ In order to establish and maintain its zone of influence in Afghanistan, Taliban will launch the combination of military operations and hit and hide strategy against the Afghan security forces. However, the situation will upsurge the gravity of violence as there are 34 provinces in Afghanistan while ANA is not capable to secure all the mountainous areas simultaneously and this situation could lead to a security crisis as the ANA and the Police will struggle in confronting the Taliban brutal aggression.¹⁴ The ultimate result will be the rise in security forces and civilian casualties. According to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) report, “in the first four months of 2015, there was high number of 2,937 civilian casualties which is 16 % increase over the same period in 2014.”¹⁵

Similarly, during the first six months of 2019, UNAMA (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan) “attributed 1,397 civilian casualties (717 deaths and 680 injured) to Pro-Government Forces, a 31 per cent increase from the corresponding period in 2018.”¹⁶ Afghan President Ashraf Ghani endorsed that “more than 45,000 Afghan security personnel have been killed since he became leader in 2014.”¹⁷ Though the unity of Taliban is uncertain as some splinter groups exist within the Taliban, more groups may emerge at mid-ranking commanders or some can join Daesh (IS) yet despite the challenges, Taliban is the main opposition force and will sustain their power in Afghanistan, predominantly in the Pashtun belt.¹⁸

Indo-Pak Proxy War

The drawdown of the US troops has shaped an environment of anxiety and created a vacuum where India and Pakistan are keen to advance their own diverse strategic targets and to marginalize each other from gaining any advantage. Both the traditional competitors view each other's role in Afghanistan with suspicion and interest assuming that each is using Afghanistan as a launching pad against the other. This proxy war has transformed their own conflicts into Afghan affairs which complicated the peace keeping efforts in Afghanistan. Pakistan pursues a friendly, peaceful

¹³ Personnel Interview with Mohammed Farooq Kashmiri, Ameer (Head) Ansarul Umamah Jammu & Kashmir, (former Harkatul Mujahideen), Islamabad, 2nd May 2015.

¹⁴ Personnel Interview with General (R) Mohammed Anwar Khan, Rawalpindi, 1st April 2015.

¹⁵ Press Statement, *United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan*, (14th May 2015)

¹⁶ Available at: <https://unama.unmissions.org/un-urges-parties-heed-call-afghans-zero-civilian-casualties>

¹⁷ Afghan President, Ashraf Ghani address to the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, 25th January 2019.

¹⁸ Interview, Dr. Azmat Hayat Khan.

and stable Afghanistan which should not be used by its adversaries to exploit situation inside Pakistan and aims to use it as a peaceful channel for enhancing commercial links with the Central Asian Republics (CARs).¹⁹

Political leadership is convinced that by negating the past, Pakistan should promote State to State relations rather than supporting an individual group.²⁰ However, the US drawdown strategy from the region before Afghanistan is stabilized has confused many analysts even Pakistan is uncomfortable with BSA as the US commitment and presence in Afghanistan is not long term basis and its policy reversal will lead it to forsaking the region as it did in the early 1990s.²¹ Islamabad's concern is that the withdrawal of NATO forces will lead to the return of Indian influence due to the Tajiks' power-sharing and influence in Afghan Government and the overwhelming majority of Tajiks in Afghan army, particularly on authoritative positions is seen by Pakistan as pro-Indian.²²

The effective role of Tajiks in Kabul is a superfluous advantage for India which has become the biggest regional donor and fifth largest donor globally to Afghanistan with aid programs reaching over \$ 3 billion since 2001.²³ It makes India another major regional player in Afghan affairs. In the existing position, Indian investment in Afghan infrastructural projects will not only frustrate the economic domain in Pak–Afghan relations but also affect Pakistan's ability to maintain domestic security. Principally, the construction of a seaport in Chabahar (Iran) and connecting highway from the port to the Afghan city of Zaranj, India will get an important access from Persian Gulf into a landlocked country which will bypass the current Karachi–Quetta–Kandahar route, the only feasible port access to import/export goods for Afghanistan and beyond.²⁴

Pakistan alleged that India has been assisting the Baloch nationalist movement through their consulate in Kandahar by funding the Baloch Republican Army and the Balochistan Liberation Army and that the Tehrik-i-

¹⁹Budihis. C. L., *What Drives Pakistan's Interest in Afghanistan?* No. 82 April, (Virginia: The Institute of Land Warfare, 2011)

²⁰ Personnel Interview with General (R) Talat Masood, Former Secretary Defence Production, Islamabad, 8th May 2015.

²¹Kronstadt, K.A., *Pakistan-U.S. Relations*, CRS Report for Congress, (Congressional Research Service, 24th May 2012)

²² Rizwan Zeb, Pakistan and Afghanistan, 2014 and Beyond: Not Friends, Not Yet Enemies? *Journal of South Asian Development*, 8, (2), (2013), 165. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0973174113494599>

²³ Saifullah Ahmadzai, *India and Pakistan: Proxy War in Afghanistan*, (Centre for Conflict and Peace Studies, 15th April 2010)

²⁴ Milani. M. M., Iran's Policy towards Afghanistan, *Middle East Journal* 60, (Spring 2006)

Taliban Pakistan (TTP) was receiving support from Indian consulate in Kunar.²⁵ In this context, it is not acceptable in Islamabad that any third party should use Afghan soil for subversion or manipulation against Pakistan.²⁶ Pakistani military establishment views the expanding Indian influence in Afghanistan as a serious threat to security and regional interests.²⁷ Pakistan is interested in larger Taliban role and their associates in power-sharing with Afghan Government and also facilitated the number of peace talks between US and Taliban. So, Pakistan wants peace and stability in Afghanistan whose land would not be used against Pakistani interests; “this is Pakistan’s red line in Afghanistan.”²⁸ However, Tajiks will strongly resist the greater Pashtun influence in Kabul because it would result in losing the Tajiks’ control of the Government and returning to a minority status.²⁹

Indian targets, the exact opposite to those of Pakistan as India intend to use political and economic influence in Kabul to prevent Afghanistan from being used as a safe-haven for Pakistani-supported extremists to launch terrorist attacks in India or against its regional interests and access to Central Asia Republics (CARs). The best-case scenario for India in Afghanistan is a broad-based Government with string Tajiks influence, genuinely independent in formulating its foreign and national security policies.³⁰ During her visit to Afghanistan in 2014, Sushma Swaraj, the Indian External Affairs Minister, noticeably revealed the Indian future plan as “India was there to stay.”³¹

India has signed a “Strategic Partnership Agreement” with Kabul in October 2011 which created an institutional framework so that India could help Afghanistan in capacity building in the areas of education, development and

²⁵Younas Samad, Understanding the insurgency in Balochistan, “*Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*,52(2), (2014)

²⁶ Personnel Interview with Ambassador Arif Kamal, Director Global Program, National Defence University Islamabad, 2nd May 2018.

²⁷ Telephonic Interview broadcasted by BBC Urdu Service, Prof. Musa Khan Jalalzai, London based Expert Politics, Analyst on Afghanistan’s Affairs, 1st November 2014.

²⁸ Interview with Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema.

²⁹ Yusuf, M., Yusuf, H., and Zaidi, S., *Pakistan, the United States, and the End Game in Afghanistan: Perceptions of Pakistan’s Foreign Policy Elite*, U.S. Institute of Peace and the Jinnah Institute, Washington, 2011.

³⁰ Kanwal, G., *India’s Policy Objectives in Afghanistan*, (New Delhi, Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis, 2013)

³¹Manan Kumar, India-specific Afghan policy in the works; China wants New Delhi to play an active role, post NATO pull-out, *DNA* Available at: <http://www.dnaindia.com/world/report-india-specific-afghan-policy-in-the-works-china-wants-new-delhi-to-play-an-active-role-post-nato-pull-out-2018672>

training of Afghan security forces.³² Indian national interests in Afghanistan are focused on gaining access to the rich natural resources in CARs. For this purpose, India, Afghanistan and Iran have signed a “Trilateral Trade Agreement” in 2003 to use the Chabahar Sea Port for reciprocal imports/exports amongst India, Afghanistan and CARs as a perpetual substitute access because Indian deal with Pakistan could not materialized.³³ Access to these countries would help India to develop new energy resources to feed its rapidly growing economic growth of more than 7 per cent annually since 1997 (now 6 per cent in 2019) which made India the world’s second-fastest-growing energy market.³⁴

Both countries have their divergent and conflicting interests and in the current state of relationship between India and Pakistan, the chances of proxy war will always exist.³⁵ This is more due to the unstoppable Indian hegemony in the entire region. Equally, it casts negative impact on the bordering areas of KPK and Balochistan with Afghanistan and mainly affects the Pak-Afghan relations. Realizing its responsibility, Pakistan should move forward and play its role as a mediator between resistant groups, Afghan Government and the United States. Pakistan security experts believe that “capping the Indian role in Afghanistan is Pakistan’s short-term vision.”³⁶ Indo-Afghan friendship can’t shake Pak-Afghan relations as Pakistan has its own strategic importance for Afghanistan which needs a very strong support from Pakistan regarding its economic development. Being a landlocked State, the nearest land and sea routes for bilateral and transit trade passes through Pakistan.³⁷

In fact, the implementation of the regional energy projects like; installation of transmission line for hydro-electric power from Tajikistan to Pakistan via

³² Gokhale, N., *India Boosts Afghan Military Role*, The Diplomat, December 7, 2011 (Available at: <http://thediplomat.com/2011/12/07/india-boosts-afghan-military-role/?all=true>). India has built over 200 public and private schools, sponsors over 1,000 scholarships, hosts over 16,000 Afghan students. India also signed its first strategic pact with Afghanistan include training of Afghan security personnel.

³³ Khetran, M. K., *Gwadar and Chabahar: Competition or Cooperation*, (Available at: http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/3-SS_Mir_Sherbaz_Khetran_No-2_2018.pdf).

³⁴ Gunda, R. K., and Teresita, C. S., *India and Pakistan in Afghanistan: Hostile Sports*, (South Asia Monitor, 2008).

³⁵ Personnel Interview with Sardar Khalid Ibrahim Khan, Head of JKPP & the member AJ&K Assembly, Islamabad, 2nd May 2017.

³⁶ Interview broadcasted by BBC Urdu Service, Rustam Shah Mohmand, Former Pakistan’s Ambassador to Afghanistan, 1st November 2014.

³⁷ Ibid.

Afghanistan,³⁸ supply of natural gas from Turkmenistan to Afghanistan and then to India via Pakistan (TAPI), future of Gwadar port as an energy corridor and access to the Central Asian markets is linked with the stability in this region.³⁹ Despite the economic advantages, Pakistani policy makers do not recognize the significance of peace in the region by sacrificing our long-term goals on short-term objectives.⁴⁰

Implications for Kashmir

Afghanistan and Kashmir have geographical,⁴¹ historical,⁴² political,⁴³ and religious⁴⁴ and arms training links⁴⁵ since centuries, however, it got new dimensions in late 20th century, particularly after the Soviet invasion in Afg-

³⁸ The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) among the Tajikistan and Kyrgyz Republic, Afghanistan and Pakistan was signed on November 16, 2007 in Kabul (referred to as "CASA-1000"). Through this project, the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan are supposed to supply the surplus hydro-electric power of 1000 to 1300 MW to Pakistan and Afghanistan. It is envisaged that the major share of the export (1000 MW) will be used by Pakistan.

³⁹ Interview, Rustam Shah Mohmand.

⁴⁰ Prentice, J, *Resetting Pakistan's Relations with Afghanistan*, Chief Policy Officer and Acting Asia Program Director International Crisis Group Brussels, Belgium.

⁴¹ Kashmir shares about 50 miles long common international border with Afghanistan through the Northern Areas of Kashmir. The area of Gujhal Valley in Hunza subdivision of Gilgit district in Northern Areas is directly linked to Pamir Khurd, a region in Wakhan (Afghanistan) through Irshad Pass (4,880 meters above the Sea level). Similarly, Khiku and Khdhorg Wurt Passes link the area of Ishkoman subdivision of Ghazir district of Northern Areas to Wakhan.

⁴² The historical linkages between Kashmir and Afghanistan can be traced back to 3rd century BC when Kashmir was under the rule of Asoka. During that time, many scholars and intellectuals permanently settled in the Valley of Kashmir. It was the genesis of foreign occupation over Kashmir and was also the dawn of new historical links with the outside world and particularly with the Afghans.

⁴³ Ahmed Shah Abdali conquered Kashmir and established Afghan rule from in 1752; henceforth, Kashmir remained as an Afghan province till 1819. Additionally, the political philosophy of Syed Ali Hamdani had a great impact on the socio-political and socio-economic lives of the people of Jammu & Kashmir

⁴⁴ A sizeable population of Kashmiri population belongs to the Deobandi School of Thought and particularly, the heads of different Mujahidin groups in Afghanistan and Kashmir who have the ideological links are the Deobandis. In Afghanistan Harkat-e-Inqilab-e-Islami Afghanistan, Hizb-e-Islami Gulbadin Hikmatyar Faction and YunasKhalis faction and in Kashmir Harkat-ul-Mujahidin, Harkat-ul-Jihad-Al-Islami and Hizbul Mujahideen are the prime examples.

⁴⁵ In 1980s, a large number of Kashmiri youth reached Afghanistan for the militant training purposes. There were many training camps in Afghanistan; however, Kashmiris groups got training at Zhawar and Argon camps. Jalaluddin Haqqani (Afghan commander of Hizb-e-Islami YunasKhalis Faction) provided the training facilities at Zhawar. During 1988-91, approximately 700-800 Kashmiris got training at Zhawar camps.

hanistan when Kashmiri militants participated in the Afghan Jihad against the Soviet forces and in return Afghans supported Kashmiris in their resistance movement against Indian forces in Jammu and Kashmir by providing the shelter and training facilities in Afghanistan.⁴⁶ Their support was on the basis of ideological lines as Harkat-e-Inqilab-e-Islami Afghanistan was an umbrella organization for Kashmiri & Pakistani militant groups like Harkat-ul-Jihad-e-Islami and Harkatul Mujahideen (through Deobandi school of thought) while Hizb-e-Islami Afghanistan Hikmatyar Faction supported Jammāt-e-Islami Azad Kashmir & Jammu & Kashmir (Sayyid Abul A‘laMaudoodi’s political thought is the common goal). These connections between some Kashmiri groups (Particularly Deobandis) and Taliban are still intact but it is really difficult to publicize it as ideological motivation remains a potent factor for any convergence.⁴⁷ These linkages are unbroken as they trained and worked together.⁴⁸

Optimism

Some Kashmiri politicians and militant groups consider the US drawdown as an ideological victory for Jihadis in the region and are optimistic that this shift would lead to a strategic support to them in reviving their operation in Afghanistan and Kashmir as a parallel campaign.⁴⁹ “The Taliban position for concluding peace talks until the country is not cleared from foreign forces will indirectly affect the Kashmiris movement as success in one region can affect the other one.”⁵⁰ Particularly, the Indian role against Pakistan in Afghanistan can provoke the situation in Kashmir and the absence of the US from this region means that there is no deterrence from two neighboring countries going into war which has the ability to diffuse.⁵¹ Kashmiri groups believe that without resistance, India will not evacuate Kashmir as it is a proven fact that occupied forces have to surrender the occupied areas.⁵² There is also another argument that if there is peace on its western border (with Afghanistan), Pakistan can station its troops on its eastern border which will boost pressure on India; however, it does not seem feasible because you cannot repeat the same strategy once it is exposed.

⁴⁶ Cooley, J. K., *Unholy Wars*, (London: Pluto Press, 1999).

⁴⁷ Personnel Interview with a reliable Source, Muzaffarabad, 31st March 2015.

⁴⁸ Interview, General (R) Mohammad Anwar Khan.

⁴⁹ Personnel Interview with Syed Salauddin, Supreme Commander Hizbul Mujahidin & Chairman United Jihad Council, 4th May 2015.

⁵⁰ Personnel Interview with Abdul Wahid Gillani, Hizbul Mujahidin Commander District Muzaffarabad, 7th May 2015.

⁵¹ Personal Interview (conducted via telephone) with Lord Nazir Ahmed, Member of UK House of Lords, London, 19th June 2015.

⁵² Personnel Interview with Abdul Rasheed Tarabi, Ameer Jamat-i-Islamai Azad Kashmir, Rawalpindi, 2nd May 2015.

Some organizations such as Harkat-ul-Jihad-e-Islami, Harkatul Mujahideen, Jaish-e-Muhammad and Lashkar-e-Tayyiba have been active in Afghanistan and Kashmir, however, the future Taliban role for Kashmiri groups would depend upon the Taliban's strength and Pakistan's position.⁵³ The only trivial prospect is that if radical elements find a place in the new political arrangement in Afghanistan and Pakistan gets a decisive say in the affairs of the country, it will have a psychological impact on Kashmiri groups which may affect Kashmir.⁵⁴

On the other hand, despite the Azad Jammu & Kashmir Government notification regarding the implementation of National Action Plan (NAP) against terrorism, the distinction between good and bad Taliban still prevails in Azad Jammu & Kashmir as there is no restriction on activities of the militant organizations engaged against the Indian forces in Indian Held Kashmir (IHK).⁵⁵ Law experts claim that NAP cannot be directly implemented in Azad Jammu & Kashmir as "we are working under a separate arrangement of the Interim Act of 1974."⁵⁶ A reliable source claimed that Pakistani support for Kashmiri militants will remain unchanged due to the Indian attitude towards the peace talks regarding the settlement of Kashmir conflict and insecurities in Afghanistan.⁵⁷

Ground Approach

Apart from the optimism, on ground, the regional situation is shifting very nippily as in recent past India has gone closer to the US as compared to Pakistan in the region. Addressing to a gathering of over 50,000 Indian-Americans in Houston on 22nd September 2019, US President Mr. Donald Trump declared that "Border Security Vital to Both Nations, we are committed to protecting innocent civilians from the threat of radical Islamic terrorism."⁵⁸ Earlier in September 2014, Indian Prime Minister, Narindra Moodi's warm reception by the US Government during his visit to the US while he was on his official visit to the UN (not the US), followed by President Barak Obama's visit to India in January 2015 where he addressed the Joint session of the Indian Parliament.

⁵³ Personnel Interview with Ershad, Mahmud.

⁵⁴ Personnel Interview with Muhmmad Naheem, Associate Professor, International Relations, University of Karachi, 12th September 2016.

⁵⁵ Azad Government of The State of Jammu & Kashmir, Home Department Notification No. Home 4010.25/2015, Dated: 1st April 2015.

⁵⁶ Personnel Interview with Justice (R) Manzoor Gilani, Muzaffarabad, 21st November 2015.

⁵⁷ Personnel Interview with a reliable source, Muzaffarabad, 7th May 2018.

⁵⁸ <https://www.news18.com/news/india/trump-vows-to-protect-innocent-civilians-from-threat-of-radical-islamic-terrorism-at-howdy-modi-event-2318885.html>.

In his speech at the Parliament as well as his interaction with media there, he showed overt support to India for its permanent membership of the UN Security Council.⁵⁹ Secondly, India is using all its sources to marginalize Pakistan as on 22nd September 2015, Indian foreign minister Sushma Swaraj and the US Secretary of State John Kerry issued a joint statement that “both India and US will fight terrorism posed by Lashkar-e Tayyiba and other groups operating from safe havens in the region.”⁶⁰ The crossing of LoC or international border to wage a war against Indian forces in Kashmir will plinth more political pressure from international community for repositioning the Jihadis, therefore, it will be nearly impossible to repeat the over-priced exercise as it can cause diplomatic isolation for Pakistan on global forums.

Since the death of Mullah Omer, Taliban have their internal leadership crisis with some disintegration in Taliban lines and visibility of crumbling in its associate groups as some of TTP commanders have already joined Daesh in recent past, hence, Taliban are no longer a colossal group and Pakistan is unlikely to enjoy its earlier domination over Afghan affairs and due to the Operation Zarb-i-Azab, Pakistani Government is against the Al-Qaida and TTP and there is no safe haven for them in the area.”⁶¹ Particularly, Al-Qaida is moving to Syria and Yemen which is its original region.⁶² Moreover, Kashmiri groups consider themselves to have enough strength and are reluctant to get any more support from Taliban as “there is a possibility that some people have disguised themselves as Taliban so they are not reliable any more for Kashmiris groups.”⁶³ Despite their religious-political links, the sympathy-level of Taliban towards the Jihad in Kashmir is even a question mark because they have changed feelings about Pakistan as they no more consider Pakistan as their well-wisher.⁶⁴ Apart from the Jihadi essence, the militancy is their major economy and for the sake of money, Taliban can

⁵⁹ Personnel Interview with Sardar Mohammad Rahim Khan (R) Secretary to the Government of AJ&K & visiting Professor on International law at the University of AJ&K, Muzaffarabad, 28th March 2015.

⁶⁰<http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2015/09/247167.htm>

⁶¹Jacob, H., *The US exit from Afghanistan and the vulnerability of Kashmir*, (Available at: <http://www.tehelka.com/2013/01/the-us-exit-from-afghanistan-and-the-vulnerability-of-kashmir/2/>)

⁶² Personnel Interview with Ghulam Rasool Shah, (General Abdullah, nick name), Commander Jamiatul Mujahidin Jammu & Kashmir, Muzaffarabad, 2nd May 2015.

⁶³ Personnel Interview with Abdul Majeed Dar, Deputy Commander, Tahreekul Mujahidin Jammu & Kashmir, Muzaffarabad, 7th May 2015.

⁶⁴ Personnel Interview (Through Skype) with Zeenat Zeeshan Fazil, Senior Correspondence Daily Kashmir Image, Srinagar, 12th August 2015.

move anywhere but at least not in Kashmir because Pakistan is within horrible watershed.⁶⁵

On the other hand, India is closely monitoring the Pakistani support for Taliban and Haqqani network to counter Indian regional hegemony.⁶⁶ The statement of Ayman-Al-Zawahiri, the Al-Qaida's (former chief) to extend Jihad to India has no foot-print on ground and the level of militancy will go down because India has developed a strong network to counter the insurgency in Kashmir.⁶⁷ Independent sources are sanguine that the drawdown impact on Kashmir is for the time being not visible as there is no Taliban and Al-Qaida in Kashmir. Foreign sources argue that "Kashmiri groups have no links with Taliban and Al-Qaida as Kashmiris have different kind of Islam (Rishism)⁶⁸ and don't like foreign intervention and they are free Muslims where young girls can be found in jeans and shirts."⁶⁹ Despite the statements of top leadership of militant groups, the militancy in Kashmir will endure fluctuating around its current position because Taliban will be engaged in post-drawdown power struggle in Afghanistan.

Kashmir Conflict

Kashmir is the main inferno in Indo-Pak relationship and the center of the spreading network of crisis that now threatens to destabilize the region. Both India and Pakistan have their dissimilar claims on Kashmir. India claims that Maharaja Hari Singh has signed the instrument of accession to India in 1947, validated by Kashmir Constituent Assembly in 1956 and it is a part of India whatever religion is.⁷⁰ In line with that endorsement, Indian Parliament through its resolution has reiterated its position on Kashmir as its integral part on 22nd February 1994.⁷¹ Earlier, on 26th January 1950, Indian Govern-

⁶⁵ Personnel Interview with Shaukat Ali Kashmiri, Chairman Jammu & Kashmir Peoples National Party, London, 18th October 2014.

⁶⁶ Pentagon Report issued on 5th November 2014, (Available on: <http://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2014/11/05/pentagon-pakistan-uses-militants-as-proxies-against-afghanistan-india/>).

⁶⁷ Personnel Interview with Riyaz Punjabi, Former Vice Chancellor Kashmir University Srinagar, Geneva, 13th March, 2015.

⁶⁸ Rishism is based upon the universal values of humanity irrespective of religion, race, colour and creed.

⁶⁹ Personnel Interview with Paul, Breersmans., (R) Captain-Commander Royal Belgian Cavalry & President Belgian Association for Solidarity with Jammu & Kashmir, served as observer for UNMOGIP, Antwerp Belgium, 5th April 2015.

⁷⁰ The Part II, section (3) of the IHK constitution of 1957, states "The State of Jammu and Kashmir is and shall be an integral part of the Union of India."

⁷¹ Available at: <https://indoliberty.wordpress.com/2012/02/24/indian-parliament-resolution-on-kashmir-22nd-february-1994/>.

ment granted a special autonomous status to Jammu & Kashmir.⁷² Apparently, India says that Kashmir is its Aatoot Aung” (Integral Part), however, in their inner circles; India accepts the status quo as permanent solution to this issue “out of UN intervention”.⁷³ However; Pakistan is not willing to accept LoC as a permanent solution because under this settlement, the major water resources in Valley of Kashmir will fall under Indian control which is against Pakistani interest as Pakistan wants control over the water reservoirs in the Valley of Kashmir and its adjoining areas.⁷⁴

For this very centric interest, Pakistan has repeated its claim that Kashmir is disputed region in the UN charter and an unfinished agenda of partition. Being a Muslim-majority State, it should become a part of Pakistan which was created on the basis of “Two-nation Theory” and call Kashmir as its “Sha Rag” (Jugular Vein).⁷⁵ It seems that Pakistan’s stance to apply “Two-nation Theory” on Kashmir is more Valley of Kashmir focused where around 95% majority is Muslims former Prime Minister (late) Benazir Bhutto has published that she was briefed by Pakistani military establishment to capture Srinagar, the capital city of Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK).⁷⁶

Pakistan insists that Kashmir conflict should be resolved under the UN resolution and people of Kashmir should be given the right to decide their future through their free will. However, the United Nations (UN) resolution of 5th January 1949 (supplementary to UN resolution of 13th August 1948), gives only “right of accession” to the people of Kashmir (whether to join India or Pakistan) in contradiction to the ‘Article 7’ of “Indian Independent Act 1947,” hence their “free will” has been denied.⁷⁷

Foreign sources argue that Pakistani demand for the implementation of UN resolutions has kept the issue alive; however, the dynamics of Kashmir issue have significantly changed since 1989. “I visited Kashmir in 1980s when

⁷²According to this article, except for defence, foreign affairs finance and communications, Parliament needs the state government's concurrence for applying all other laws. Thus, the state's residents live under a separate set of laws, including those related to citizenship, ownership of property and fundamental rights, as compared to other Indians.

⁷³ Personal Interview with Paul Breersmans.

⁷⁴ Personal Interview with reliable source, Islamabad, 21st March 2015.

⁷⁵ Army Chief General Raheel Sharif, address at Royal United Services Institute, London, “Kashmir is a Unfinished Agenda which Hinders Regional Peace” (Available at: <http://www.dawn.com/news/1210468/kashmir-is-unfinished-agenda-which-hinders-regional-peace-gen-raheel>).

⁷⁶ Bhutto. B., *Daughter of the East*, (London: Simon & Schuster, 2007).

⁷⁷ Article 7, which stipulated that the suzerainty of His Majesty over the Indian State lapses. The legal effect of this stipulation, following the British departure from India, was that the Princely States became completely independent, sovereign and were under no legal obligation to join the new Dominions of India or Pakistan.

Kashmir was a dispute followed by another visit in early 1991. I met the people and then found that within a decade time, it had been transformed from “dispute” to “conflict” where the Kashmiris are seeking their own identity.”⁷⁸ Kashmir conflict has filed under article 35 and chapter VI of the United Nations Charter where the UN role is advisory in nature and cannot enforce its decision while its involvement largely lasted for 17 years (1948-65). Particularly, under section 11 of article 1 of the “Simla Agreement” of 1972, both the countries are supposed to settle their differences by peaceful means through bilateral negotiations.⁷⁹ Though the UN is a forum where every State has a right to raise its concern, yet its resolutions are not compassionate as far as resolution of Kashmir conflict is concerned.⁸⁰

Hence, Pakistani and Kashmiri leadership demand and expect that the US and the European Union (EU) will play their role in conflict resolution which is not a practical approach because Kashmir is not the issue of West, and they have their own problems to address. Secondly, Kashmir has no oil and gas reservoirs to attract the western interest in the region while India is an emerging economic regional power where these nations have their vested interests and no single western country would like to disrupt its relations with India.⁸¹ Regardless of being a part of regional lobbies and political interests in their own concerning constituencies, western politicians are aware of the importance of their own State interests and adopt diplomatic approaches towards the management of the Kashmir Conflict as they are aware of the fact that Kashmiri diaspora community has been divided between Indian, Pakistani and pro-independent ideologies.⁸² “We are with the people of Kashmir but not leading them in their right to decide their future.”⁸³

The most important factor is that existing Kashmir movement is on Jihadi lines and world community is fighting against the Jihadi elements throughout the world and in such a scenario why they would support Jihadis in Kashmir. “Even China does not like Jihadis due to its internal problem in

⁷⁸ Personnel Interview with Victoria. S., Writer of a Book: Kashmir in Conflict, Lecture at National Defence University, Islamabad, 28th January 2014.

⁷⁹http://www.operationspaix.net/DATA/DOCUMENT/6771~v~Agreement_Between_the_Government_of_India_and_the_Government_of_the_Islamic_Republic_of_Pakistan_on_Bilateral_Relations__Simla_Agreement_.pdf.

⁸⁰ Personnel Interview with Shah Ghulam Qadir, Former Speaker of AJ&K Assembly and current General Secretary Muslim League (N) AJ&K, Rawalpindi, 30th April 2015.

⁸¹ Interview with Breersmans Paul.

⁸² Personal Interview with Daalat Ali, Councilor for Roachdale Borough, (Greater Manchester) UK, 12th, April 2015.

⁸³ Personnel Interview with Richard Burgon Member UK Parliament from Leeds West Yorkshire, Leeds, 19th June 2015.

Sinkiang province.”⁸⁴ Hence, the Indian approach of status quo as a permanent resolution and Pakistani plea for the implementation of the UN resolutions to this entrenched conflict are irrational and itself a failure at both ends.

As a way forward, General (R) Pervez Musharraf moved his four-point formula for self-governance in 2006 by stepping down Pakistan’s traditional claim on Kashmir which was criticized by some sections of Pakistani establishment, Kashmiri militant leaders and their umbrella political parties but it was equally esteemed by intellectuals and politicians and at one stage India and Pakistan were very close to settlement.”⁸⁵ However, the policy has died with his fall from power and now there is an opinion that more options should be unfolded to the people of Kashmir including upholding their identity.⁸⁶

Abrogation of Article 370 and its Repercussion

On 5th August 2019, the Government of India unilaterally abrogated Article 370 of its Constitution.⁸⁷ Hence, India has practically extended its border up to the existing Line of Control (LoC). It was happened after Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan meeting with US President Mr. Donald Trump in Washington on 23rd July 2019 where both sides reaffirmed their commitment to Afghan peace process. During the meeting, the US President also offered his services to mediate in the Kashmir dispute.⁸⁸ Mr. Trump said that “he was making the offer after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi requested that he mediate or arbitrate in the 70-year-old territorial dispute between the two nations. If I can help, I would love to be a mediator.”⁸⁹

Some analysts believe that there is an understanding at certain level between both the neighbouring states (India & Pakistan) as far as abrogation of Article 370 is concerned.⁹⁰ Just look at the statements of the politicians, former military bureaucrats Governments of Pakistan and the silence from opposition parties in Pakistani Parliament. Dr. Farooq Abdullah, the former

⁸⁴ Personnel Interview with General (R) Mohammad Anwar Khan.

⁸⁵ Personnel Interview with reliable source, Islamabad, 3rd May 2015.

⁸⁶ Personnel Interview with Sardar Mohammad Yaqoob Khan President of State of AJ&K Muzaffarabad, 7th May 2015.

⁸⁷ According to this Article 370, except for defence, foreign affairs, finance and communications, Parliament needs the state government's concurrence for applying all other laws. Thus, the state's residents live under a separate set of laws, including those related to citizenship, ownership of property and fundamental rights, as compared to other Indians.

⁸⁸ www.aljazeera.com

⁸⁹ www.bbc.com

⁹⁰ Personal Interview with Dr. Sarfraz Khan, Former Director Area Study Centre, University of Peshawar, Peshawar, 5th December 2019.

Chief Minister of Jammu & Kashmir repeatedly advocates that “in Jammu & Kashmir, you can’t change anything. What is theirs is theirs, what is ours is ours.”⁹¹ Whereas A. S. Dulat, the former head of RAW (Research & Analysis Wing, Indian Intelligence Agency) said, “We have to settle on the Line of Control.”⁹² Gen. (Retd) Asad Durrani and former chief of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) said “do we want all or nothing? Is it just take it or leave it? When we want all or nothing, we are likely to get nothing. But also, whoever asked you to take it or leave it was also likely testing your nerve.”⁹³ Mr. Durrani endorsed the statement of his Indian counterpart on the other way round as “Maybe it was intended to teach us all the need to compromise and the criticality of timing. Prophet accepted the Treaty of Hudaibiyah.”⁹⁴ This is a clear direction that we should compromise on LoC as international border for the time being but we can get more in future as Treaty of Hudaibiyah proved to be a turning point in the history of Islam.⁹⁵

At the same time, Pakistani Government is gradually diluting the intensity of situation as on 20th August 2019, talking to ARY News, Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi said that “We have decided to take Kashmir case to the International Court of Justice as the decision was taken after considering all legal aspects.”⁹⁶ The UN was the best forum to invalidate the Indian action; however, no further step was taken in this direction. Secondly, Pakistan announced that “Pakistan will fight for Kashmir till last soldier and last bullet but at the same time Pakistan declared that it won’t initiate military conflict with India.”⁹⁷ This is no logic because people of Kashmir are looking for military support from Pakistan which is not there at this crucial stage. Talking to the Gulf News, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan said, “war is not a solution to issues.”⁹⁸ Even Prime Minister Imran Khan said, “A jihad in Kashmir would be an act of enmity towards the Kashmiris and anyone, who thinks that he will cross the border to join the Kashmiris, is a big enemy of them and Pakistan.”⁹⁹

⁹¹ Dullat, A. S., Asad, D., & Aditya, S., *The Spy Chronicles: RAW, ISI and the Illusions of The Peace*, (Delhi: Harper Collins Publishers, 2018)

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Hijazi, A. T., *Hudaibiyah: A Turning point in the history of Islam*, Available at: (<https://www.arabnews.com/hudaibiyah-turning-point-history-islam>)

⁹⁶ Available at: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1500629>

⁹⁷ Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/09/pakistan-won-initiate-military-conflict-india-imran-khan-190903064631438.html>

⁹⁸ Available at: <https://gulfnnews.com/world/asia/pakistan/pakistan-prime-minister-imran-khan-says-war-is-not-a-solution-to-issues-1.66171959>

⁹⁹ Available at: Khaleej Times, “No emotional attempt of jihad in Kashmir,” 20th September 2019.

Earlier on 14th August 2019, addressing a special session of the Azad Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly Imran Khan warned India of serious consequences “if AJ&K is attacked.”¹⁰⁰ It means Pakistan is just saving Azad Jammu & Kashmir which is Pakistan’s defensive approach and the future line of action as far as the status of LoC is concerned. Some analysts believe that this is Pakistan’s pragmatic approach towards the management of long-lasting Kashmir Conflict.¹⁰¹ The scenario will be more visible for researchers if we look at the ground position rather than believing on supernatural and fictitious things. The arms struggle for freedom movement in Kashmir; nothing could be achieved except the diplomatic isolation for Pakistan on global forums and economic adversity mainly due to its close liaison with the militant groups’ active in the region. Linking Pakistan with money laundering and terror financing, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) placed Pakistan on the grey list with a warning to implement the 27-point action plan by February 2020 otherwise the country would be added to the blacklist.¹⁰²

Alternative Strategy

It is to be said that you can’t solve problems by using the same kind of thinking you used when you created them. Searching for a solution in 2019 of a dispute which originated in 1947 is not an easy task. Both India and Pakistan tend to see their rivalry as a zero-sum game in Afghanistan and in turn, it caused reservations that Afghanistan will ultimately be drawn into a new great game between Pakistan and India.¹⁰³ Analysts believe that there will be no peace in Afghanistan until these two neighbours sit together and talk about a common approach to Kabul and Kashmir rather than resorting to proxy war. “It will not be calmed as long as the Kashmir dispute rages. The road to stability in Afghanistan, then, runs first through Kashmir.”¹⁰⁴

As compared to India, Pakistan is more flexible and has manifold choices.¹⁰⁵ In this context, if Pakistan asserts unilaterally that it is willing to recognize

¹⁰⁰ Available at: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1499498>

¹⁰¹ Personnel Interview with Islamabad based security analyst, Islamabad, 12th November, 2019.

¹⁰² The FATF places those countries on its grey list which are not taking measures to combat terror funding and money laundering. Placement on the grey list is a warning for a country that it may be put on the blacklist in case of its failure to take effective measures against money laundering and terror financing.

¹⁰³ Personal Interview with Dr Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema.

¹⁰⁴ Rashid, A., *The road to Kabul runs through Kashmir*, (Available at: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2010/11/11/the-road-to-kabul-runs-through-kashmir/>)

¹⁰⁵ Article 257 of Pakistan’s Constitution reads as “when the people of the State of Jammu and Kashmir decide to accede to Pakistan, the relationship between Pakistan and that State shall be determined in accordance with the wishes of the people of that State.”

Kashmir as an independent State; this will be great leap in the relationship between Kashmiris and Pakistan. By doing this, Pakistan will shift all the pressure towards India and international community will support this step because democratic forces always support the indigenous voice.¹⁰⁶ Pakistan will be in a better position as compared to India in this region as after the completion of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the relations between the people of Kashmir and Pakistan will come closer as their economic interests will be interlinked because the highway running from Kashgar to Gwadar will also link Kashmir to the nearest seaports in Pakistan.¹⁰⁷ However, the first option is no more viable because Pakistan did not take the advantage of right phase when movement for independent State was gaining strength in late 1989-90, and that was the best time to take Kashmir out of India.¹⁰⁸

Some experts claim that “Pakistan should adopt a pragmatic approach by accepting the LoC as an international border.”¹⁰⁹ By accepting this, Pakistan’s will lose nothing at all as its main interest over rivers’ water in Kashmir will remain intact as Indus Water Treaty has been successfully running for last 59 years and considered to be one of the most effective water treaties in human history. Even area wise, Pakistan controls 85,793 sq. kms area (including AJ&K & G-B) as compared to 101,387sq. kms area under the Indian occupation while China took control of over 35,000 sq. kms area of Aksai Chin from India during Sino-India war of 1962. At next stage Pakistan should shape a new province comprising of Azad Kashmir, Gilgit-Baltistan and Hazara Division with its headquarter in Hazara region (Hazara region remained a part of State of Jammu & Kashmir from 16th March 1846 to 10th May 1847) which is easily accessible from all these regions.¹¹⁰ New agreements, regarding the regional peace and prosperity should be signed

¹⁰⁶ Personnel Interview with Shams Rehman, a UK based writer and intellectual, Manchester, 12th August 2015.

¹⁰⁷ Personal Interview with Masood Khan, Director General, Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, Islamabad, 5th May 2015.

¹⁰⁸ Video interview of Major (R) Aamir, the former Head of Pakistan’s Intelligence Bureau, (Available on social media.

¹⁰⁹ Personal Interview with Dr. Sarfraz Khan, Former Director Area Study Centre, University of Peshawar, Peshawar, 5th December 2019.

¹¹⁰ Under the Treaty of Amritsar of 16th March 1846, Hazara region was the part State of Jammu & Kashmir; however, in 1947 Maharaja Gulab Singh asked the British Government to exchange Hazara and Kahuta (in Rawalpindi district) against Kheri and Manawar, a large portion of existing Mirpur Division (excluding Noshera). On 10th May 1847, the agreement for readjustment of the Jammu & Kashmir boundary was signed with British Government. Under the agreement, Hazara and Kahuta were exchanged against Kheri and Manawar including Suchetgarh. The agreement was settled under the supervision of the British officers, Cunningham, Strachey and Thomson.

with all the neighbouring states as wars massively damage economies and leave long-lasting marks on states and societies while peace creates business opportunities and develop trade activities which bring affluence and stability. It will also help in ending the humanitarian crisis in Kashmir Valley.

Conclusion

The US step of drawing its forces down from Afghanistan before the country is stabilized has put the future of Afghans endangered where the number of civilian casualties is significantly rising. The peace and stability of the country will remain a paramount challenge for the Afghan Government. However, it will largely depend on the US technical and financial support. The reduction in the US aid will push the situation in the landlocked country more or less to pre-Taliban era as Afghanistan is a mountainous region and limited ANA force cannot control the entire country whereas Taliban will get more strength when drone/air strikes support will not be available to ANA.

With this shift, both India and Pakistan will be engaged in proxy war in Afghanistan to gain their greater influence in Kabul to marginalize each other which will jeopardize the peace efforts in Afghanistan. Pakistan wants peace and stability in Afghanistan whose land would not be used against its national interests. However, Pakistan is worried over the withdrawal of NATO forces as it will lead to the return of Indian influence in Afghan Government, particularly in Afghan Army while India wants to prevent Afghanistan from being used as a safe haven for Pakistani-supported Jihadis to launch guerrilla attacks in India occupied Kashmir and pose threat to its access to Central Asia Republics. The proxy wars in Afghanistan and Kashmir are inter-linked with each other. Therefore, it is agreed that the road to peace and stability in Afghanistan runs first through Kashmir.

Meanwhile, India has established closer ties with the US and agreed to address terrorism with special reference to their safe-haven in the tribal belt of Pakistan which pushed Pakistan on back foot. Hence, despite some linkages, there have been a paradigm shift in the situation and so, there is no chance of Taliban involvement in Kashmir's movement in future; however, in the current state of relationship between India and Pakistan, the chances of proxy war will always exist mainly due to the enduring conflict of Kashmir and Indian desire to dominate the region.

The stances of both the countries on Kashmir do not provide any mechanism including the UN resolutions as far as its settlement is concerned. Therefore, the best way forward is to come up with a new proposal by the reassessment of the conflict as the people of Kashmir have been suffering for last 72 years while Indo-Pak approaches are not getting Kashmiris anywhere. So, India and Pakistan should come to an agreement and jointly decide to convert LoC

as “International Border” which will have long lasting impact on the economic prosperity of the people and the rejection of terrorism in this region and beyond.

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Appendix

Interviews

Personal Interview conducted via telephone with Dr. Azmat Hayat Khan, Expert on Afghan Affairs, former Vice Chancellor, University of Peshawar, 21st September, 2015.

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- Personal Interview with, Dr. Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, Dean, Faculty of Contemporary Studies (FCS), National Defence University (NDU), Islamabad, 2nd May 2015.
- Personnel Interview with Mohammed Farooq Kashmiri, Ameer (Head) Ansarul Ummah Jammu & Kashmir, (former Harkatul Mujahideen), Islamabad, 2nd May 2015.
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- Personnel Interview with Abdul Wahid Gillani, Hizbul Mujahidin Commander District Muzaffarabad, 7th May 2015.
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- Personnel Interview with Abdul Rasheed Tarabi, Ameer Jamat-i-Islamai Azad Kashmir, Rawalpindi, 2nd May 2015.
- Personnel Interview with Muhmmad Naheem, Associate Professor, International Relations, University of Karachi, 12th September 2016.
- Personnel Interview with Justice (R) Manzoor Gilani, Muzaffarabad, 21st November 2015.
- Personnel Interview with a reliable source, Muzaffarabad, 7th May 2018.
- Personnel Interview with Sardar Mohammad Rahim Khan (R) Secretary to the Government of AJ&K, & visiting Professor on International law at the University of AJ&K, Muzaffarabad, 28th March 2015.
- Personnel Interview with Ghulam Rasool Shah, (General Abdullah, nick name), Commander Jamiatul Mujahidin Jammu & Kashmir, Muzaffarabad, 2nd May 2015.
- Personnel Interview with Abdul Majeed Dar, Deputy Commander, Tahreekul Mujahidin Jammu & Kashmir, Muzaffarabad, 7th May 2015.

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- Personnel Interview (Through Skype) with Zeenat Zeeshan Fazil, Senior Correspondence Daily Kashmir Image, Srinagar, 12th August, 2015.
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- Personnel Interview with Riyaz Punjabi, Former Vice Chancellor Kashmir University Srinagar, Geneva, 13th March, 2015.
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