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AF-PAK STRATEGY

A Survey of Literature



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AF-PAK STRATEGY

A SURVEY OF LITERATURE

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INTRODUCTION

President Barack Obama unveiled his administration's comprehensive new strategy to deal with the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan on 27 March 2009. Since then there has been considerable debate and criticism, not the least of which concerns the term used by the administration and others – the “Af-Pak” strategy. As National Security Advisor General James Jones put it, the United States “will treat Afghanistan and Pakistan as two countries, but as – with one challenge in one region”.

Some of the goals President Obama put forth in his speech are: to disrupt, dismantle and defeat Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan; prevent their return to either country in the future; make Al-Qaeda safe havens in Pakistan the main focus of elimination, because the “single greatest threat to Pakistan's future comes from Al-Qaeda and its extremist allies”. He also said that the US would increase aid to Pakistan to \$1.5 billion annually over at least 5 years, extendable to another five years; but there would be “no blank cheques”. Instead, there would be benchmarks for progress and frequent evaluations. In addition to the 17,000 troops sent to Afghanistan, 4,000 more would be dispatched to train the Afghan National Security Forces to enable them to increasingly take responsibility for the Afghan people. Obama said more resources would be devoted to civilian efforts in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, to contribute to safety and society-building.

This survey of literature aims to analyze the ongoing debate on the Af-Pak strategy. The existing literature can be broadly categorized into the following themes. Firstly, from the US perspective – most articles and reports see the strategy as harmful to US interests. Some see it as beneficial and very few focus on the motivations of the administration in linking Afghanistan and Pakistan. Second, with regard to Pakistan – most articles and editorials opine that the strategy is against Pakistan's interests. Very few praise it, while some explore why the US should concentrate more on Pakistan. Third, from Afghanistan's viewpoint – numerous articles focus on how the Af-Pak strategy is a deterrent to peace and development in Afghanistan, and very few praise the new strategy. Lastly, the Indian viewpoint does not see the Obama administration's strategy as beneficial for Indian interests.

I AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES

As mentioned earlier, a significant portion of the literature does not see the Af-Pak strategy as beneficial for the US. The primary reason for this is concern regarding Pakistan's past record of utilizing American aid. Other factors include rising casualties among American troops on ground and doubts about the strategy's success.

Mark Urban, BBC'S Diplomatic Editor, in his report ‘US disquiet over af-pak strategy’¹ points out that Congressmen and women are angry because aid to Pakistan is being increased in spite of the

¹ Mark Urban, “US disquiet over af-pak strategy,” *BBC*, 6 May 2009

experience of the past five years. Billions of dollars of financial aid has not succeeded in improving the efficiency of counter-insurgency operations and purging Al-Qaeda's "safe havens". Loss of civilian lives and army casualties are a marker of the ineptness of the operations. The Congress wants "conditionality"; such that American aid becomes contingent on Pakistani co-operation in fighting the Taliban, controlling the notorious ISI and securing its nuclear weapons. It has also argued that access to AQ Khan, who has been accused of smuggling nuclear technology to several countries, should be made a leverage point.

An article in the *Christian Science Monitor*² highlights the concern which both, the Democrats and Republicans have about the destination and use of the proposed aid money for Pakistan. They are especially anxious about the strings that are likely to be attached to the \$400 million earmarked for Pakistan's military. The author points out that during a recent hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, US Senators said that they hadn't been briefed on the strategy; they only knew that the Obama administration was going to increase the number of troops in Afghanistan by 20,000 and the aid to Pakistan to \$1.5 billion annually.

Ben Pershing, in the *Washington Post*³, writes that several anti-war Democrats are sure to oppose the funding provided for in the Af-Pak strategy as it does not spell out a firm withdrawal date. He quotes *The Economist's* suggestion that Pakistan's "squandering of America's war-on-terror cash has been an open joke" for years. The article focuses on the Taliban threat to Pakistan's nuclear materials and the

consequent need for the US to play a bigger role in protecting the same. This has become vital largely due to Taliban's capture of regions within Pakistan as also the porous border between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Certain newspaper reports outline specific problems which the new strategy faces. Carlotta Gall in 'Pak and Af Taliban close ranks'⁴, points out that American officials have alleged that the ISI (Pakistan's military intelligence agency) continues to offer money and supplies to the Taliban in Afghanistan, with the aim of shaping a friendly government in the country once American forces leave. Also, the Afghan Taliban is persuading the Pakistani Taliban to join forces and concentrate on defeating the American forces in Afghanistan.

Vikrum Aiyer's article in the *Huffington Post*⁵ spells out the dangers that military expansion in both Af and Pak poses to the US. In Afghanistan, "simply putting more combat boots on the ground is not a sufficient means to promote governmental stability". Continuing air strikes in Pakistan will only brew animosity against the West due to the sheer extent of collateral damage. Political turmoil is already causing mayhem and further military intervention, although it may eliminate a few militants, will undermine the sovereignty of Pakistan, which is a key regional ally in the GWOT.

According to Kori Schake of *Foreign Policy*⁶, there are three "serious" problems with Obama's Af-Pak strategy. First, Afghanistan can not fulfill the expectations of the Obama administration at the speed projected by the latter. Building capable

² David Montero, "US Af-Pak strategy troubles some in US and Pak," *Christian Science Monitor*, 13 May 2009

³ Ben Pershing, "At White House and on the Hill, a Growing Focus on Afghanistan and Pakistan," *Washington Post*, 5 May 2009

⁴ Carlotta Gall, "Pak and Af Taliban close ranks," *New York Times*, 26 March 2009

⁵ Vikrum Aiyer, "Af-pak security at the expense of government stability," *Huffington Post*, 25 March 2009

⁶ Kori Schake, "Three problems with Obama's Af-Pak strategy," *Foreign Policy*, 28 March 2009

military and police forces of the strength that Obama envisions (134,000 troops, 82,000 police) will take years to materialize, whereas the plan calls for this to be achieved by 2011. Second, although the civilian component has been emphasized, the steps sound vague with “no design for producing the essential US civilian contribution”. Lastly, the strategy seems to be an all-American plan, due to the absence of allies in the development and announcement of the strategy. There was no NATO head of state, and although nations have been consulted, the alliance hasn’t committed itself or the resources required to make it successful.

Some editorials and articles praise the Af-Pak strategy for its focus on the civilian side of the conflict, development, and strengthening Afghan defense forces. A report in the *Huffington Post*⁷ points out that President Obama’s new policy recognizes the need for greater attention to be paid to the growing instability in Pakistan for dealing with stability in Afghanistan. The Taliban and al Qaeda have sanctuary in the former and along with domestic religious extremists, pose a challenge to security in the region. The policy provides for civilian advisers and experts in agriculture, education and law, who will “concentrate on improving life for ordinary Afghans.”

An editorial in the *Financial Times*⁸ approves of the reduced emphasis on “[The US] appealing to its allies for more troops to get behind an ill-defined strategy” and instead calls for defining goals that might be achievable. The decision to send an extra 4000 troops in addition to the 17000 reinforcements will help in building a self-reliant military as the new forces will train Afghan units and partner with them to develop policing

capacity. This will also make foreign troops, which are viewed with distrust, less conspicuous while multiplying forces at the same time. The increase in civilian aid to Pakistan is seen as a commitment to rebuild democratic civilian authority in that country.

Scott Payne and Peter O’Brien argue in the *Boston Globe*⁹ that the Af-Pak strategy is a dual-track strategy and the correct way to achieve a “stable and secure” Afghanistan. Chaos in Afghanistan would mean potential destabilization of Pakistan, the return to power of a brutal regime and most importantly, a safe haven for al Qaeda to plan strikes against the US. Track one focuses on restoring security – the extra forces will strengthen the international mission and help train the Afghan National Army, which will ultimately protect the Afghan people and connect them to the central government. These will also attack the drug trade in Afghanistan, which provides the Taliban with \$300 million annually and funds the insurgency. The authors say that track two, which includes diplomacy and development aid, will be crucial in bringing about stability.

Michael E. O’Hanlon of the Brookings Institution¹⁰ strongly supports the new policy for its focus on protecting Afghans and training the Afghan security forces. He approves of the decision to coordinate more with Pakistan. However, he believes the strategy needs certain improvements. The author says that Afghan security forces need to grow much more than presently planned and this should be emphasized by leaders. Currently, at about

⁹ Scott Payne and Peter O’Brien, “Success and security in Afghanistan,” *Boston Globe*, 30 March 2009

¹⁰ Michael E. O’Hanlon, “Grading Obama’s Afghanistan Strategy,” *Brookings Institution*, 27 March 2009. Available at http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2009/0327_afghanistan_ohanlon.aspx

⁷ Report, “The new Af-Pak strategy,” *Huffington Post*, 1 April 2009

⁸ Editorial, “Changing tack on Afghanistan,” *Financial Times*, 29 March 2009

150,000 and headed for just over 200,000 according to current proposals; they need to reach 350,000 or 400,000 soldiers and police personnel.

Although the increased economic aid to Pakistan is welcome, more security aid to the Pakistani military for counter-insurgency training, equipment and operations should be offered. O'Hanlon also writes that a strong international coordinator is needed for managing aid and economic development in Afghanistan. Presently, the "very weak and understaffed" Afghan ministries have to deal with several projects and donors. A single representative of the international community will give both the Afghan government and the West a main point of contact; from whom accountability can be expected.

As mentioned earlier, few editorials focus on the reasons for linking Afghanistan and Pakistan in the US administration's new policy. Bryan Bender and Brian MacQuarrie reported in the *Boston Globe*¹¹ that Michelle Flournoy, the Undersecretary of Defense for policy, said the effort in Afghanistan is hampered by Pakistan's instability. She further pointed out that failure in Afghanistan "increases the risk of failure in Pakistan. And recognizing this interaction must be central to every dimension of our strategy". The report also included Gen David Petraeus' warning that the Swat Valley cease-fire would jeopardize the central government's ability to stop infiltration into other parts of the country. Further, it would allow the Taliban to operate along the Afghan border area and step up attacks against American and Afghan troops.

Another attempt at exploring US interests in linking Pakistan with Afghanistan is found in Bhaskar Balakrishnan's editorial

'Af-pak strategy: Logistic nightmare' in the *Business Line*¹². He points out that the Taliban's tactics are similar to those used by Mujahideen guerillas in the 1980s to cripple the Soviet Army by attacking supply convoys. Trucks are looted in broad daylight and their drivers killed or kidnapped. Late last year, an attack in the Peshawar area destroyed 160 trucks bound for Afghanistan. Almost 90 per cent of American military ground cargo, which consists of non-lethal supplies such as food, fuel, water and construction materials, is currently transported through Pakistan. This makes it crucial to prevent the Taliban from controlling the region. The Pakistani Taliban realize this - Abdullah Sa'id (a commander of al Qaeda's paramilitary forces that operate in Pakistan and Afghanistan) confirmed that al Qaeda and the Taliban's aim is to cut off US-NATO supply lines in Pakistan and force the Western countries to rely on Central Asian nations for logistical supply lines. In fact, Pakistani trucking companies which move goods into Afghanistan halted operations last year due to militant attacks. In the event of a failing Pakistani state with increasing control in the hands of the Taliban, the vulnerability of US-NATO supply lines would only escalate. These factors make the struggle against the Taliban-al Qaeda in western Pakistan necessary for winning the Afghanistan war.

II

PAKISTANI PERSPECTIVES

Most of the articles and reports focus on why the Af-Pak strategy is against Pakistan's interests. The reasons that emerge are resentment over the clubbing together of these countries, anger at the US drone strikes and conditions attached to financial aid.

¹¹ Bryan Bender and Brian MacQuarrie, "US wary of Pakistan's ceasefire with Afghanistan," *Boston Globe*, 23 April 2009

¹² Bhaskar Balakrishnan, "Af-pak strategy: Logistic nightmare," *Business Line*, 2 May 2009

Mark Magnier's article in the *Chicago Tribune*¹³ focuses on public dislike of the strategy and its terminology. While the American approach combines policy for both countries into a single plan, people in Pakistan say that there "is a world of difference between Pakistan and its neighbour to the west." They contend that Pakistan is a proper nation with a functioning government and "legal tradition"; whereas Afghanistan does not "have much in the way of law, government or other conventional definitions of a nation." The author quotes Abid Sulehri, Head of Islamabad's Sustainable Development Policy Institute, who says that "majority of Pakistanis really don't want to be put in the same category."

An editorial in the *Washington Times*¹⁴ explores why Pakistan's active participation in the policy would be against its own interests. Pakistan and Afghanistan have "enduring differences" which will prevent the two countries from coming as close as the convenient acronym. Apart from that, Pakistan itself helped in establishing the Taliban and would rather not have a stable, democratic, pro-India Afghan administration on its western border.

Several articles in the Pakistani media deride the US drone attacks in the country's tribal areas. Rahimullah Yusufzai's editorial in *The News International*¹⁵ points out that the US strategy of targeting militant sanctuaries in Pakistan's tribal areas, while helping the effort against the Taliban in Afghanistan and saving lives of American soldiers, might further destabilize Pakistan. The

author criticizes the US government's insistence on using CIA-operated drones for attacking hideouts, saying that it reflects American distrust vis-à-vis the Pakistan Army's initiative and competence. Including Pakistan in the strategy is just a way for the US to "pin blame for the defeat of its policies in Afghanistan on Pakistan," as it doesn't want to accept its failure in defeating the Taliban.

Shahid Javed Burki¹⁶ writes that the Obama administration seems keen on human and physical development in economically and socially backward regions as a counter-insurgency method. Winning "hearts and minds" is on the agenda; however, using drones to hunt and eliminate suspected terrorists is only working in the opposite direction. The extent of collateral damage is extensive; 17 militants had been killed by the drone attacks while 700 civilians have also died.

An interesting point the author brings out is that the use of air strikes "reminds the people of this area of the atrocities committed during colonial times." He quotes historian Priya Satia's view that "only a permanent end to the strategy will win the Pakistani hearts and minds back to their government and to its US ally". Satia points out that aerial counter-insurgency was invented in these two regions – Iraq and the Pakistan-Afghanistan borderland – by the British in the 1920s.

The 'Af-Pak strategy review', by *spearheadresearch.org*¹⁷ thoroughly derides US operations in the tribal areas because it undermines and disrespects Pakistan's sovereignty. These strikes are a "major motivating factor" for new recruits in terrorist outfits and deepen public resentment. The review contends that an

¹³ Mark Magnier, "Attacks by U.S. drones fuel Pakistani outrage," *Chicago Tribune*, 5 May 2009. Available at http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/c/hi-pakistan_05may05,0,3362196.story

¹⁴ Editorial, "Obama's 'stronger, smarter' war," *Washington Times*, 30 March 2009

¹⁵ Rahimullah Yusufzai, "Af-pak and the Future," *The News International*, 4 April 2009

¹⁶ Shahid Javed Burki, "A welcome change," *Dawn*, 9 Jun 2009

¹⁷ "Af-Pak strategy review," *spearheadresearch.org*, 30 March 2009

expansion of strikes beyond FATA or into Balochistan would be disastrous and plunge Pakistan into chaos.

Some reports disparage the Af-Pak strategy due to its emphasis on conditionality of aid. Rahimullah Yusufzai¹⁸ writes that the message seemed to be that Pakistan has to “earn the payment of US money...if it regularly adheres to American benchmarks.” This makes the very nature of Pakistan’s relationship with the US strained, based on distrust and friction. He also says that it will not be easy for Pakistan to fully satisfy the Americans because of the anticipated escalation of conflict in Afghanistan.

*Spearheadresearch.org*¹⁹ has further argued that economic support in poor, backward areas is the “best response to extremist and terrorist threat.” The oft repeated assertion that US assistance is not a “blank check” and the somewhat patronizing conditions requiring Pakistan to “demonstrate commitment” while the US “monitors the progress,” has angered many in Pakistan. However, the review also acknowledges that the deal is not unreasonable, considering the past utilization of 10 billion dollars.

Another perspective on US aid has been offered by Zeenia Satti²⁰ who says that considering the amount of development aid being received by the PPP government, chances of funds being “squandered are always high”. However, this view ignores President Obama’s assertion that certain benchmarks will have to be met and the aid being given is not a “blank cheque.” She also writes that accepting aid will place Pakistan in a situation with “little clout to make Washington accept its peace

deals - the one with Pakistani Taliban in Swat was frowned upon”. Thus, the author opines that the Af-Pak strategy is “good news for Pakistan’s leadership but bad for ordinary Pakistanis.”

Most articles which hail the Af-Pak strategy do so keeping in mind the promised development aid and support to the civilian authority. An editorial in the *Financial Times*²¹ praises the US’ commitment to rebuilding “democratic civilian authority” in Pakistan, warning that jihadi extremism has advanced and groups are capable of striking all Pakistani cities. The people’s trust will be won only by securing territories, providing jobs and services; which in turn will cause the jihadi influence and recruitment to shrink. The financial aid places Pakistan in the same league as Israel and Egypt in terms of US foreign aid priorities and gives it the assurance that the US is a “reliable, long-term partner”.

Mustafa Qadri in *worldpress.org*²² also stresses the fact that efforts to root out extremism and militant threats, especially in the tribal areas, will succeed only when “the poverty upon which the militants prey is addressed”. He therefore, commends the decision to provide development aid for new schools, roads and clinics in Pakistan’s tribal areas. The author goes on to say that the “most welcome aspect of the new policy” is the greater emphasis on Afghanistan and Pakistan’s civil institutions over individual leaders such as President Karzai or former President Musharraf.

Very few articles explore why the US should concentrate more on Pakistan. ‘The Real Afghan Issue Is Pakistan’ by Graham

¹⁸ Rahimullah Yusufzai, “Af-pak and the future,” *The News International*, 4 April 2009

¹⁹ “Af-Pak strategy review,” *spearheadresearch.org*

²⁰ Zeenia Satti, “A new dawn for af-pak,” *The News International*, 30 March 2009

²¹ Editorial, “Changing tack on Afghanistan,” *Financial Times*

²² Mustafa Qadri, “Obama’s New AfPak Strategy: The View from Pakistan,” *worldpress.org*, 8 May 2009

Allison and John Deutch²³ is among the few that outlines reasons for greater American concentration on Pakistan. The authors argue that in order to protect Pakistan's nuclear arsenal from falling into the hands of terrorists such as Osama bin Laden and the Taliban, radical Islamic extremists will have to be prevented from controlling the country. AQ Khan's secret nuclear dealings with countries like Iran, Libya and North Korea prove "the danger is not hypothetical". According to them, the counter-terrorism strategy in Pakistan offers the "best hope" for regional stability and success against the al Qaeda.

III AFGHAN PERSPECTIVES

Several articles and reports view the Af-Pak strategy as harmful for peace and development in Afghanistan. The reasons put forth for this are civilian casualties from military operations, less emphasis on civil society development, and a perception of America's indifference in making Afghanistan modern and prosperous.

A report on *eurasianet.org*²⁴ points out that a military buildup in Afghanistan raises concerns that civilian suffering will increase. A major source of friction between the coalition forces and the local population has been civilian casualties from military operations. International organizations, such as Human Rights Watch are calling for greater attention to the need for providing basic security to Afghans in conflict and non-conflict areas. Amnesty International also demanded more accountability for humanitarian law violations by coalition forces.

While the Afghan government and the UN's Mission in Afghanistan hail Obama's policy for its emphasis on development and a combined approach; some officials feel that the problem is not the same in the two countries and concentrating on Pakistan could take away attention from the real problems in Afghanistan. According to Aziz Hakimi, a political analyst, the emphasis is on "al Qaeda and (US) homeland security. It is not about Afghanistan. Where is the Afghan voice in all this? It is not about us."

*Spearheadresearch.org*²⁵ identifies the failure to develop governance capacity and stabilize civil society as the reason for NATO's continued struggle in Afghanistan. Increasing troop strength means the military is getting renewed importance, not so much development effort, which is the real requirement.

Vikrum Aiyer²⁶ outlines the dangers of military expansion in Afghanistan, without concomitant government stability. Although an expanded professional army is needed to keep the Taliban in check, he argues that a strong central government is a must to ensure that the fate of Afghanistan "lies with the people and not the Ministry of Defense". He gives two reasons for this – first, that an empowered civilian government allows for a power balance between political and military security. This will help ensure that expanding the Afghan National Army does not preempt a civil society, accidentally propping up a military or police-style state. Secondly, a clear civilian command from the outset would ultimately help foreign troops create an exit plan and hand over power seamlessly.

²³ Graham Allison and John Deutch, "The Real Afghan Issue Is Pakistan," *Wall Street Journal*, 30 March 2009

²⁴ Aunohita Mojumdar, "Afghanistan: Obama's af-pak strategy and Afghanistan's response," *eurasianet.org*, 4 April 2009

²⁵ "Af-Pak Strategy Review," *spearheadresearch.org*

²⁶ Vikrum Aiyer, "Afpak security at the expense of government stability," *Huffington Post*, 25 March 2009

The author opines that administration tactics in the region suggest Obama is privileging military security over, and at the expense of, government stability. This poses several risks, not the least of which is being a trained and “disproportionately empowered military engaging in illegal narcotics or arms trades” or undermining the authority of elected Afghan leadership.

Obama’s counter narcotics plan under the Af-Pak strategy has also been criticized in an editorial in the *Washington Times*²⁷, as being “culturally ignorant”. Opium cultivation in the Helmand Valley supports militants, but handing out wheat seeds to poppy farmers will not work. That area is traditionally a cotton producing area and the most practical way would be to allow the people to choose what they want to grow and then buy the product. A former Afghan National Security Council member is quoted as saying that farmers in Helmand will still go back to growing cotton if they know their products can find a market. Forcing farmers and torching their poppy fields will certainly not “win hearts-and-minds”; it will only provide the Taliban with more jihadis and acceptance. Alienated and vengeful refugees will settle in camps and come back to wage jihad, making the Muslim world even more resentful and suspicious of the West.

An article by Graham Allison and John Deutch²⁸ emphasizes that it is not vital for American interests that Afghanistan becomes a “modern, prosperous, poppy-free and democratic country”. While it is indeed a “worthy and desirable outcome,” developments in Afghanistan do not undermine Pakistan's stability and assistance in eliminating the al Qaeda. They point out that President Obama himself declared during the presidential campaign that “America has one and only

one vital national interest in Afghanistan: to ensure that it cannot be used as a base to launch attacks against the United States”. This echoes the perception that the US is indifferent to development in Afghanistan, and is content as long as its own purpose is served.

As mentioned earlier, very few articles or editorials are optimistic about the Af-Pak strategy. A *Financial Times* editorial²⁹ approves of sending 4000 extra troops in addition to the dispatch of 17000 reinforcements, arguing that this will help train Afghan units and build a self-reliant military while being less conspicuous. The policy’s professed shift towards building institutional capacity at a provincial level away from the focus on Hamid Karzai’s government has been commended, because of the “rampant corruption and a failure to provide basic services to much of the population”.

Zeenia Satti³⁰ believes that the Af-Pak strategy is “good news for the Afghan people and bad news for the Afghan leadership”. She writes that the Afghan reality of a “fragmented unity” is being taken into account; unlike the PDPA (People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan), Soviets, Taliban and the Bush administration, who all failed to develop centralized state structures. Various provinces and ethnic races who elect their representatives, as long as they do not harbour terrorists and abuse “women and girls,” will work better and end the reliance on Karzai for normalizing Afghanistan.

According to the author, the civilian advisors (also called ‘inspector-generals’) provided for in the new strategy will ensure aid is spent correctly and that

²⁷ Editorial, “Obama’s ‘stronger, smarter’ war,” *Washington Times*, 30 March 2009

²⁸ Graham Allison and John Deutch, “The Real Afghan Issue is Pakistan”

²⁹ Editorial, “Changing tack on Afghanistan,” *Financial Times*, 29 March 2009

³⁰ Zeenia Satti, “A new dawn for af-pak,”

Afghanistan can “expect a better tomorrow”.

IV INDIAN PERSPECTIVES

Articles in the Indian press mostly opine that the Af-Pak strategy is against India’s interests. While the primary reason for this is the linking of the Kashmir issue to the policy; potential de-stabilization of the neighbourhood is also a major factor.

An editorial in *The Hindu*³¹ criticizes Obama’s reference to the need for pursuing “constructive diplomacy” with India and Pakistan and the implicit suggestion that the Kashmir issue reduces Pakistan’s ability to co-operate in the Af-Pak plan. It is not as if Indian military presence along the Kashmir border has engaged the Pakistani army or taxed it. There has been a considerable easing of tension along the LoC in the past four years, as both countries have moved towards narrowing their differences over Kashmir.

Siddarth Vardarajan³² describes how the new strategy links the military instability along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border to the relationship between New Delhi and Islamabad and what India should do to address this. Pakistan’s capability to help destroy the al Qaeda depends on its strength and security. The US aims to address the first constraint by economic aid, and the second through “constructive diplomacy with both India and Pakistan”. This is because the US sees lack of durable peace along the LoC as a strain on Pakistan and consequently, a distraction from the effort against the al Qaeda and Taliban in Afghanistan. National Security Adviser James Jones put this across very clearly when he told the press that the US

did not want to get involved in the Kashmir issue, but intended to help build more “trust and confidence so that Pakistan can address the issues that it confronts on the western side of the nation.”

The author feels that India’s approach should be to emphasize that it is not reluctant to engage Pakistan on Kashmir, but that confidence could only be established once there is a serious commitment to end all support to terrorist outfits, such as the kind that carried out the 26/11 attack on Mumbai. New Delhi should also exploit international awareness about the Pakistani military’s “continuing links with terrorist elements within and beyond the country’s borders”.

An editorial by Brahma Chellaney³³ criticizes the Af-Pak strategy; firstly due to the money being given to Pakistan for exterminating terrorists, without any assurance that such aid will make a difference. Second, exploring truces and alliances with tribal chieftains, insurgent leaders and “moderate Taliban” is only a replication of what was done in Iraq with the Sunni tribal leaders. It sets the stage for these groups to go back to their old ways once Western forces leave. Lastly, the author disapproves the creation of the US-funded local civil militias in every Afghan district. Just as the existing Afghan militias took to terrorism after being armed during the Reagan presidency to fight Soviet forces, the new militias could start terrorizing local populations.

Chellaney writes that very soon, India will face diplomatic demands from the US to aid the Af-Pak strategy by resuming peace talks with Pakistan and reducing border-troops; so that there is greater Pakistani military cooperation on the Afghan frontier. However, India has no offensive

³¹ Editorial, “Obama’s AfPak strategy,” *The Hindu*, 30 March 2009

³² Siddarth Vardarajan, “From de-hyphenation to dual-hyphenation,” *The Hindu*, 30 March 2009

³³ Brahma Chellaney, “The march of folly: Obama’s four-word Af-Pak strategy,” *Asian Age*, 20 May 2009

troop formation along the border and a reduction in border troops could provide the Pakistani military an opening to infiltrate more armed terrorists into India. Moreover, a peace dialogue will be meaningful only when Islamabad takes strict action against terrorist groups like the LeT and Jaish-e-Mohammad. India needs to be frank about guarding its own interests, in the face of a strategy which is “doomed to fail, with serious security consequences for India and the rest of the free world”.

An editorial in the *Deccan Chronicle*³⁴ spells out how two aspects of the new Af-Pak strategy are going to provoke a “fierce regional competition leading to greater regional instability” which will affect India. Attempting negotiations with elements within the Taliban who can be persuaded to support the Afghan government in some way seems to appeal to “outsiders desperate to make an exit”. This approach of dividing the Taliban into good and bad categories poses a threat to countries such as India, Iran and Russia. Those groups who do strike deals with the West just to see the forces leave will harm the security of states like India and Iran afterwards, just as they have done in the past.

The second aspect is an increased focus on Pakistan due to the realization that the real source of problems in Afghanistan is the Afghan-Pakistan border areas where most of the al Qaeda leadership has taken refuge. As a part of this, more economic and military aid will be provided to Pakistan and efforts will be made to strengthen relations between India and Pakistan, since it is believed that a resolution of the Kashmir issue will allow Pakistan to “concentrate less on its feud with India and more on its turbulent

western frontier”. The author points out, (somewhat petulantly) that this is the only context in which Obama has spoken of India, to “find a way out for the West’s troubles in Afghanistan” and “the talk of a strategic partnership between the two democracies has all but disappeared”.

V

EXISTING LITERATURE: A CRITIQUE

A survey of the existing literature on the Af-Pak strategy reveals the following:

- All the articles and opinions published in newspapers are reactions to the US Administration’s announcement of the new Af-Pak strategy.
- Most of the articles which disapprove of the strategy do so because of the emphasis on military methods, civilian casualties and clubbing together of Afghanistan and Pakistan. The utilization of financial aid by Pakistan in the past and future is also a matter of concern.
- Opposition to the strategy reveals how it is against the interests of all three countries involved – US, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.
- The advantages of the plan seem to be very few when weighed against the negatives. Moreover, any praise for the strategy rests on the presumption that the plan will be implemented in its entirety, which seems quite utopian.
- Several articles (irrespective of their leanings towards any of the countries involved), address the need for local development and inspiring trust and confidence in the people, both in Afghanistan and Pakistan. This shows the world’s rising concern about humanitarian issues in the conflict-ridden region. Recognition of the link between poverty, under-development,

³⁴ Harsh V. Pant, “India’s Af-Pak policy must not look at US for support,” *Deccan Chronicle*, 23 March 2009

alienation and religious extremism
also clearly emerges.