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PAKISTAN & AFGHANISTAN

UNDERSTANDING ISLAMABAD'S POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

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The global war on terror is in its ninth year since it began in October 2001. In these nine years the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is faced with a situation of a stalemate since its initial gains. The past few years have seen the ISAF getting bogged down in a never ending cat and mouse game with the Taliban. The ISAF along with the Unites States are fighting the Taliban, which operates in southern Afghanistan and has extensive links with the fellow Pashtun population across the border in the northern parts of Pakistan. The geographic continuity of Pakistan and Afghanistan is one that is favoring the Taliban. In this context the key to the Afghan conflict lies in Pakistan, which has the biggest stake and influence in the Afghan conflict.

The situation in Afghanistan, once it stabilizes would create a propitious environment for the multinational ISAF to be withdrawn by the middle of 2011[1], in favor of an Afghan Government, thereby reducing the influence of foreign countries in Afghanistan. But, for a civilian government to function in Afghanistan it is necessary for a certain degree of stability and normality to be restored. This is only possible when the Taliban and their supporters are neutralized. This can only be envisaged with the active cooperation of Pakistan[2]. It is therefore necessary to understand Pakistan's sensitivities in Afghanistan and accommodate them.

Pakistan plays a vital role in Afghanistan and is its most prominent neighbor given its strategic location, geographical proximity, historical and cultural ties with the exception of political influence. This is further reinforced by the conflicts in Afghanistan for the past three decades, where Pakistan's involvement was critical in Afghanistan. Besides, the porous border region of Afghanistan-Pakistan is predominantly inhabited by the Pashtun tribes. Further, the close proximity of Pakistan when compared with the other neighbours of Afghanistan is of importance.

I
HISTORY OF AFGHANISTAN-PAKISTAN RELATIONS

The modern history of bilateral relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan is one that started on a bitter note following the latter's independence. The dip in their ties was dominated by the border issue separating the Pashtun dominated regions between the two countries. Afghanistan contested the validity of the

[1] Sunil Sharan, "A new way in Afghanistan," *Dawn*, 18 January 2010

[2] Sameer Lalwani, "Strategic rethink needed ," *Dawn*, 14 March 2010

border, called the Durand Line, between the two countries as it was an administrative demarcation made by the erstwhile Government of British India. 'The British held referendum in July 1947 in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP, now renamed as the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa[3]), offering the choice of succession to either Pakistan or India, without making any reference to Afghanistan. The Afghans protested vigorously and when their protests went unattended, they achieved the distinction of being the only country to vote against Pakistan's admission to the United Nations. This was probably the first act of distrust between the two otherwise brotherly states having much in common, except the mess left behind by the British to be resolved in terms of ill-defined demarcation and vaguely-worded treaties, neither denying nor accepting the Afghan claim across the Durand line'[4].

The Durand Line was ratified twice by successive Afghan governments. However, once the British left the subcontinent, the Afghan government laid claim to the Pashtun areas of Pakistan, arguing that following the departure of the British the treaty was no longer valid. Pakistan, on the other hand, refuted this claim as the people of NWFP voted to join Pakistan through a referendum at the time of partition. In 1976, Prime Minister Bhutto and President Daud held meaningful negotiations on improving relations between the two countries. However, before the foreign policy roadmap could be implemented both governments were overthrown.[5]

From 1947 to 1992, for obvious reasons, India had more influence in Afghanistan as compared to Pakistan. It was for this reason that the Pakistani security establishment went all-out to support the jihad when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, presuming that ultimately Pakistan will have a friendly dispensation in Afghanistan and the Pashtunistan issue will be buried forever. In the post 'Afghan War', Pakistan gained advantage during Taliban rule as the Indian influence was diluted to a great extents and New Delhi had no say in the affairs of Afghanistan.[6] There by negating the security safeguarding the security interests of Pakistan. (?)

The war of the Mujahideen against the Soviet Union's occupation of Afghanistan was predominantly fought from Pakistan, with assistance from Saudi Arabia and the United States. The Mujahideen campaign resulted in Pakistan gaining a predominant role in Afghanistan. The post war scenario resulted in the Soviet Union's withdrawal from Afghanistan and a 'civil war' starting among the various Afghan Mujahideen groups and warlords in their quest for power. The period from 1992 to 1996 was very violent and volatile in Afghanistan. The scramble for power resulted in a "bloody"(?) civil war which came to an end in 1996 when the Taliban, with the help of Pakistan,

[3] "NWFP officially renamed Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa" *Dawn*, 15 April 2010

[4] Aslam Effendi, "Afghanistan: Myths, Realities and Paradoxes", *Dawn Magazine*, 13 January 2002

[5] Asad Munir, "A Shift in Policy?," *The News*, 27 Feb 2010

[6] Ibin

became the single largest group and controlled 33 of the 35 provinces in Afghanistan. It was in this background that the Taliban cane into prominence.

The rise of the Taliban in 1994 is based on half-truths, fiction or speculations. The role of the ISI and government functionaries who were at the helm of affairs had been exaggerated to an extent. The rise of the Taliban was never a planned strategy. They were a product of circumstances. The Taliban were activated in Kandahar and eventually captured it in November 1994 and soon established their sway in large areas of Afghanistan by capturing Herat and Jalalabad in the process and entering Kabul in September 1996[7]. Incidentally the Taliban movement was not the brainchild of any single institution, as generally believed. After the Taliban's initial success, plans were formulated by the Pakistani security establishment to exploit the potential of this force to control Afghanistan, something the Afghan Mujahideen factions had failed to achieve even six years after the Soviet withdrawal.[8]

The Taliban spread their sphere of influence to control the southern and eastern parts of Afghanistan, which are predominantly inhabited by the Pashtuns. They established themselves in those regions by neutralizing the influence of the other warlords, whereas the northern parts of Afghanistan were home to other ethnic groups who were left outside that Taliban fold. The non-Taliban groups that were outside the Taliban controlled areas formed an alliance known as the Northern Alliance, which was supported by Iran, Russia, Central Asian Republic and India. They opposed the rigid Wahabi Islamic ideology of the Taliban.[9]

The rise of the Taliban provided relief to Islamabad as it as ensured that its northern neighbour would be friendly towards Pakistan. This was the first time in its history that Pakistan enjoyed a comfortable relationship with its northern neighbour as the Taliban were predisposed and sympathetic towards Pakistan. All this changed with the events that unfolded post 9/11.The United States' "war on terror" resulted in the destabilization of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Since then the situation in Afghanistan is one that is far from stable, with Pakistan bearing the brunt. The ethnic continuity along the border has resulted in Pakistan playing a prominent role in Afghanistan while seeking to control or neutralize the Taliban.

II
PAKISTAN'S STRATEGIC COMPULSIONS

Pakistan's primary interests in Afghanistan concern a few critical aspects. These are predominantly concerned with meeting the strategic interests of Pakistan. Pakistan's first and foremost concern in Afghanistan is the growing influence of India, its arch rival

[7] Javid Hussain, "Rethinking Afghan Policy," *Dawn*, 9 October 2006

[8] Asad Munir, "A Shift in Policy?," *The News*, 27 February 2010

[9] Saleem Safi, "Taliban --Asset or Enemy?," *The News*, 22 May 2009

and perceived enemy since Partition. Apart from eroding the Indian presence in Afghanistan its key interests, Pakistan considers Afghanistan to lie in its sphere of influences (?). The key interests of Pakistan which reflects in its policies towards Afghanistan are given below.

Pakistan's primary interests lie in the "Strategic Depth"[10] that Afghanistan can provide, the holy grail of the Pakistan's strategic policy for more than two decades. Strategic depth remains the central pillar in Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan[11].(?) This concept has been prevalent in Pakistan since its independence. This concept has much to do with the size and shape of the country and its neighbours. Strategic depth refers to the distance from the border or the front line to the key centers of population, industry and cities. It provides space for a state to regroup and organize itself to counter the enemy's initial thrust. In the case of Pakistan, many of its key centers are in close proximity to its borders its borders with India. Pakistan's geographic narrowness and the presence of key heartlands and communications networks near its borders with its mortal enemy India means that lack of strategic depth has long haunted its military planners. It was identified as a grave concern by General Arthur F Smith, the Chief of General Staff of India, as early as 1946 when an independent Pakistan existed only on the Imperial drawing board. The possibility of a friendly - or better yet, a pliant - Afghanistan providing this much vaunted depth in relation to India has long been a mantra for the unimaginative Pakistani Generals that have long controlled the country's defense and foreign policy direction.[12] But it was Gen Zia-ul Haq who coined this term in the context of politics ands wrapped it with religion overtone. After Afghanistan was invaded by the Soviets, Pakistan looked at Afghanistan as a source of political/religious strategic depth for Pakistan. According to Gen Zia, Pakistani's strength lies in a stronger and stable Afghanistan. The General is also believed to have said have said that "if he (Zia) was given a choice to prefer the interest of Pakistan or Afghanistan he would prefer the latter".[13]

Where as on the other hand Kamran Shafi in an article in Dawn (January 18, 2010) has ridiculed the rationality of 'strategic depth' by questioning the military as to whether they would abandon the country and its people by escaping into Afghanistan. "Will our army pack its bags and escape into Afghanistan? How will it disengage itself from the fighting? ….more importantly, how can Afghanistan be our 'strategic depth' when most Afghans hate our guts, not only the northerners, but even those who call themselves Pashtuns? Case in point: the absolute and repeated refusal

[10] Bassam Javed, "Trespassing on Afghanistan — No more!," *The News*, 9 April 2010

[11] Shibil Siddiqi, "Strategic depth' at heart of Taliban Arrests," March 24, 2010, <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/LC24Df03.html>

[12] Ibin

[13] Ayub, Dr. Ghayur " Reviving stragetic depth policy" Pakistan Tribune 18 February 2009, <www.paktribune.com/news/index.shtml?211573>

of even the Taliban government when it was misruling Afghanistan, to accept the Durand Line as the international border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, despite the fact that it was a surrogate of Pakistan — propped into power; paid for; and helped militarily, diplomatically and politically by the Pakistani government and its 'agencies'."[14]

But then there is a non military concept to 'strategic depth', which is fundamentally different to the military concept; a rather polarized vision, according to which Pakistan seeks to improve relations with Islamic countries such as Iran, Turkey, and the middle eastern and Persian Gulf states via Afghanistan and thus effecting the creation of an "Islamic pole" in opposition to the "Hindu" India. Since its separation from India in 1947, Pakistan has been trying to help establish such an axis. Its westward turn, based on developing closer economic, trade and cultural relations with Muslim countries, can be interpreted in this context. It was in this context that Pakistan, during the Taliban era tried to persuade Turkmenistan to agree to a gas pipeline crossing Afghanistan which would Pakistan to gain access to the energy rich Central Asia. Nevertheless, Pakistan has failed in its efforts to create such an "Islamic union" and its main reason has been the fact that despite common religion, each of these countries has always been separated by even stronger culture, political and sociological boundaries, hindering Pakistan's efforts to promote the idea of Islamic Unification.[15] ".

The second interest of Pakistan in Afghanistan is maintaining "strategic assets"[16]. For Islamabad, Afghanistan provides the space to maintain and nurture its strategic assets. These assets are militant groups and terrorist organizations, which comprises an array of organizations including a section of the Taliban (Haqqani group)[17] and others whose area of operations and interests are different. These assets, as they are termed, play a very important role. They are the ones leading from the front in the asymmetrical and subversive war with India. For Islamabad, Islamic terrorist organizations are viewed as force multipliers against the convention military superiority of India[18]. These terrorist organizations, including the Taliban, were formed, nurtured and provided by Pakistan. These strategic assets help Pakistan to achieve what it military can't, which is to gain parity with India, and to destabilize India. The Taliban itself is the creation of Pakistan where in there are around 30 Taliban groups (according to the presentation given by the Pakistani army to the Parliamentarians, Pakistan). No one has any idea who is backing which group; what percentage are fighting because of Pashtun solidarity; how many belong to

[14] Kamran Shafi, "Defining 'Strategic Depth'," *Dawn*, 19 January, 2010

[15] Aziz Hakimi, "Af-Pak: What Strategic Depth?," 4 February 2010 www.opendemocracy.net/opensecurity/aziz-hakimi/af-pak-what-strategic-depth

[16] **"**Pervez Musharraf was playing 'double game' with US," *Times Online*, 17 February 2009

[17] Ibin

[18] G Parthasarathy, "Past looms large over Afghanistan," *The Pioneer*, 18 February 2010

the old jihadi groups created at the time of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan; how many are actually criminals and unemployed; how many are paid by the enemies of Pakistan to destabilize the country; and so on. In other words, there is an odd amalgam of militants and criminal elements seeking to destabilize the Pakistani state.[19] But for Pakistan, Afghanistan provides the cover under which these groups operate.

The Taliban plays another important role for Pakistan. In the words of Gen Kiyani, the Chief of Army Staff of the Pakistani Army, "we want strategic depth in Afghanistan but do not wish to control it". This means Pakistan would not like to be at the helm of affairs in Afghanistan, but would like to ensure that its diktat is carried out. The role and importance of these strategic assets is also aimed at preserving, maintaining and extending Pakistan's sphere of influence in the region.

III
PAKISTAN'S APPREHENSIONS

Pakistan is very apprehensive about the Indian presence in Afghanistan. The rationale behind this fear is that of being enveloped by India, as it is seen to be the foremost threat to the security and stability of Pakistan. Islamabad does not want India to gain a foot hold in Afghanistan. Should New Delhi extend its influence into Afghanistan it would succeed in surrounding Pakistan. [20] For Islamabad, it is top priority to arrest the rising presence and influence of India in Afghanistan. Pakistan perceives India to be using Afghanistan to aid "anti-national" elements within Pakistan[21]. India is also accused of arming and abetting extremist elements inside Pakistan like the Baluchi militants[22] and other such groups. For Islamabad, Afghanistan is the launching pad for India to carry out its subversive activities within Pakistan. In this perspective the Indian diplomatic missions in Afghanistan, numbering five in total, are viewed with suspicion as enabling India to carry out its covert operations to destabilize Pakistan.

Adopting the same perspective Pakistan does not appreciate any Indian involvement in Afghanistan, particularly in the security sphere. Indian participation in Afghanistan's security apparatus is deeply resented and is viewed askance by Pakistan. Any direct or indirect Indian presence would be tantamount to Pakistan's losing its influence in Afghanistan. This includes the direct presence of Indian military in Afghanistan in stabilizing the situation. Nor does Pakistan view benignly the prospect of Indians training the Afghan National Army or Afghan Police[23], as this would facilitate a greater Indian

[19] Imran Khan, "Time to listen to saner voices on Pakistan-Afghanistan-US," *The News*, 7 July 2009

[20] David E. Sanger, "Afghan Strategy Will Contain Messages to Several Audiences," *New York Times*, 24 November 2009

[21] Ikram Sehgal, "An Unequal Partnership?," *The News*, 17 December 2010

[22] "In Afghan end-game, India gets that sinking feeling," *Dawn*, 29 March 2010

[23] Zahid Hussain, "Kayani spells out terms for regional stability," *Dawn*, 2 February 2010

involvement in Afghanistan. Islamabad perceives India in engaging in a process that is aimed at enveloping Pakistan. Indian involvement in Afghanistan is seen as a means to such an end. Pakistan would like to have its northern borders to be secured and free from Indian influence.

Another apprehension that Pakistan has is the role that the West would play. The ghost of the past continues to haunt its psyche. Post the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Afghanistan, the United States of America lost its interest in the region. Paradoxically, many Afghans are equally concerned that the Americans will abandon them as they did in 1989, after Soviet troops pulled out[24]. Top American officials have been making trips to Pakistan to reassure the government in Islamabad, that the United States has no intention of pulling out of Afghanistan as it did 20 years ago, after the Soviets retreated from the country[25]. It was the power vacuum left by the Soviet Union resulted in Afghanistan being torn by various warring Mujahideen groups. Pakistan had to bear the brunt of the civil war. It was in a bid to restore order in the war torn country that Pakistan started to prop up the Taliban. With support from Pakistan the Taliban managed to gain control of most of Afghanistan by 1996 to restore a degree of stability. The Taliban returned the favor by accommodating the needs of Pakistan. The Taliban were in general sympathetic towards Pakistan.

For Pakistan the question is of what shape Afghanistan will take after the ISAF and United States withdraw. This one question haunts the minds of the strategic elite in Islamabad and the relevant section in Afghanistan. Pakistani generals refer to the Taliban as a 'strategic asset'[26], on whom they have invested heavily and which they do not want to abandon. Besides, any turbulence in Afghanistan would directly affect Pakistan; and Pakistan does not want a repeat of the 1990's situation in Afghanistan which was marked by instability and violence.

Taliban was propped up to arrest the turbulence in Afghanistan by Pakistan. At present, the ISAF is expected to withdraw from the Afghan campaign in another couple of years (middle of 2011) leaving in place a weak, unreliable Afghan Government, whereas the Taliban are a more certain card on which Islamabad could count. Inside the Pakistani Army and the ISI, it is an article of faith among some officers that the United States is deceiving them, and that it will replay 1989. In this context, General Ziaul Haq is stated as an example. Zia supported the American war against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan; however, he was later abandoned by the US administration to experience the painful fallout of the Afghan quagmire[27].

[24] Editorial, "Pakistanis voice concerns about Obama's new Afghanistan plan," *The Nation*, 3 December 2009

[25]Editorial, "US strategy on Afghanistan will contain many messages: NYT," *The Nation*, 25 November 2009

[26] Declan Walsh, "The Pak-Afghan Conundrum," *Dawn*, 23 February 2009

[27] General Mirza Aslam Beg, "Pak-Afghan relations." *The Nation*, 23 March 2010

In the event the United States is to withdraw from Afghanistan, some Pakistanis argue that India will fill the void in southern Afghanistan, leaving Pakistan surrounded by its longtime enemy. This is in the wake of an exit of the ISAF and United States. Therefore any talk of an exit strategies is bound to reaffirm the belief of some Pakistani officials that they have to maintain their contacts with the Taliban — their hedge against Indian encroachment [28].

On the flip side, Pakistan stands to lose a lot whenever the Afghan campaign comes to an end, irrespective of its outcome. For Islamabad the uncertainties would be two fold. The first, being the uncertainty of how Afghanistan would shape up. At this junction Pakistan would not like a hostile government in Kabul once NATO forces withdraw from Afghanistan. Pakistan would like to be a part of any negotiations held with the Taliban. Pakistan would also like to be consulted in any new arrangements planned for Kabul in a post withdrawal scenario. Pakistan, for internal security reasons, may not like Afghanistan to return to a system of government which was in place in the pre-9/11 environment. Pakistan would also want the Durand Line issue to be resolved before the withdrawal of forces from Afghanistan. These are the likely objectives which Pakistan would like to achieve, and the recent detentions of the Taliban leaders in no way indicate that there is a shift in Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan[29].

And the second is the possible loss of military and civilian assistance that it gets from the United States. These two issues are not only future concerns for Pakistan but also reflect the realities of the past Afghan conflict. For Islamabad, the situation in Afghanistan was and is a means to an end. Islamabad would not like to lose the "goose which lays the golden egg" without gaining substantially from the termination of the current conflict, which is bring fought in its back yard. In the past Afghan "war" and the current one, it was Pakistan that extracted the maximum concessions from the conflict. This was in the form of both economic assistance in the form of economic aid and military assistance with the transfer of high end weapon systems and weapon platforms.

Not to mention the diplomatic support of the United States on key issues concerning Pakistan in international forums. The Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan had resulted in United States reviewing its policies towards Pakistan. The then American National Security Adviser Brzezinski wrote to President Carter: "….this will require a review of our policy towards Pakistan, more guarantees to it, more arms aid, and, alas, a decision that our security policy toward Pakistan cannot be dictated by our non-proliferation policy."[30]

[28] Editorial, "US strategy on Afghanistan will contain many messages: NYT," *The Nation*, 25 November 2009

[29] Asad Munir, "A shift in policy?" *The News*, 27 February 2010

[30] "Afghan war forced US to accept Pakistan's N-plan, says book", *Dawn*, 18 November 2004

IV
CONCLUSIONS

The situation in Afghanistan derives primarily from how events unfold in Pakistan. The role of Pakistan is critical. Thus the need of the hour is to analyze the issues that Pakistan is faced with. For Pakistan, the primary interest is to be party to any deal that is negotiated in Afghanistan. Pakistan could scuttle a peace deal or negotiating process between the Afghan Government and the ISAF with the Taliban. The absence of Pakistan in any reconciliation process is counter-productive. This was evident when Mullah Baradar was arrested by Pakistan, when the United Nations was facilitating talks between the Taliban and the Afghan Government[31]. Pakistan's intention here is to be the "central player" in any process that hopes to decide the future shape of Afghanistan.

The concerns of Pakistan with respect to an Afghan security force lies in this sphere of uncertainty. Islamabad does not envisage a strong and capable Afghan security establishment getting established that can threaten Pakistan. Even if it is the Taliban, as the present Taliban are different from those in 1988 and 1989. They are what the CIA's website named The Long War Journal describes in detail. Added to it, is the hardcore of young Taliban fighters who were born 30 years back and have grown under the shadows of war. Their only objective in life is to win their freedom. They have enjoyed no pleasures of life - courtesy foreign invasions, by the Soviets and the Americans. They live in a state of anomie, where life and death have little meaning for them. They are a phenomenon, least understood, yet one can understand them, if there is the willingness to engage with them.[32] The current bread of Taliban need not be as sympathetic like the previous generation. Maybe it is for this reason the Taliban was segregated into the good, bad and moderate ones. Was this a bid to categorize those elements within the Taliban fold who would not work against the interests of Pakistan? But if such a situation arises it means that Pakistan would have both its eastern and northern frontiers with hostile neighbours. Consequently, Pakistan is hedging its bets by training the Afghan National Army and the Afghan Police thereby negating the prospect of any unforeseen issues with Afghanistan arising in future. More importantly is to ensure that India does not train the Afghan army as this would result in it imbibing the ethos and mentality of the Indian Army. This would place Pakistan in a position where it would be preoccupied on two fronts with similar if not identical views.

Another concern for Pakistan is the role of India. The animosity between the two runs deep. There is a strong suspicion of the Indian involvement in Afghanistan.

[31] Editorial, Talks with the Taliban," *Dawn*, 21 March 2010

[32] General Mirza Aslam Beg, "'Churchill's Choice' for Afghanistan", *The Nation*, 4 April 2010

The main issues that Pakistan has in Afghanistan which affects its policy on the same are:

- The role of India in Afghanistan is of deep concern to Pakistan. The mutual animosity between the two countries has spilt over into Afghanistan. It is of utmost interest to Islamabad to see the back of New Delhi in Kabul. The limited presence or even the total absence of India in the affairs of Kabul would be welcomed by Pakistan.
- The future government in Kabul must be on the same wave length as Islamabad. Pakistan would not appreciate an Afghan government at logger heads with it. For Pakistan, Afghanistan is seen as its backyard. Islamabad would like to maintain this situation.
- Afghanistan provides strategic depth to Pakistan. Islamabad would not like to lose it for reasons that have already been put forth. By the same note Pakistan would also like to retain its strategic assets that are seen as an integral part of its security apparatus vis-a-vis India. This is also accompanied but other security issues and the enveloping of Pakistan by India.

The above points show that Pakistan has a clear cut policy on Afghanistan. This is in contrast to its past policies when it piggy-backed the United States of America.

In a single line the interests of Pakistan in Afghanistan can be summed up in the words of Gen Kiyani "we want strategic depth in Afghanistan but do not wish to control it". The implication of this statement has already been put forth. But the General also said that "we can't think anything for Afghanistan that we don't think for ourself". Gen. Kiyani clearly describes here the policies of Pakistan towards Afghanistan, i.e. Pakistan would not involve itself in the day-to-day affairs of Afghanistan but will guide the policies of Kabul. This is similar to the set up that existed in Afghanistan during the days of the Taliban. Thus Islamabad would like to have the future government in Kabul which serves the needs of Pakistan the way the Taliban did earlier. For Pakistan, the most crucial aspect in Afghanistan is to have a government that is sympathetic to the sensibilities of Pakistan. Islamabad is not really concerned with the kind of government established in Kabul but wishes to ensure that this government is in tune with the Islamabad.

Pakistan's preoccupation in a future Afghanistan does not revolve around the shape that Afghanistan would take, but more with the direction in which it will go. The role of the Taliban in the future Afghan system is not of real concern but whether their establishment serves the needs of Pakistan's geo-strategic ambitions is of concern. As for the Taliban, they are a means to an end and not the end itself.