

The Multinational Approach to Peace and Stability in Afghanistan: Divergence and Convergence between Pakistan, United States and China

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Afghanistan provides a significant geographical linkage for the regions of the Middle East, South Asia, and Western Asia; therefore, its stability is utmost important for regional as well as broader global accord. The two and half decades of the US military engagement inside Afghanistan had a qualified success as far as peace and stability goals were concerned. The Doha talks focused on the complete withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan and the internal dialogues among the Afghan stakeholders. Here, the United States, China and Pakistan's stakes inside Afghanistan became very significant in the context of counter-terrorism and peace. However, the policies of these three significant powers diverge over major elements of security and peace in the region. This paper attempts to explore such divergence and convergence in the multinational peace building approach in Afghanistan. A mixed methodology approach is used to investigate such divergence and convergence in the multinational approach to Afghanistan in the region. The findings of the paper suggest that the two major powers, the US and China are strategically involved in countering each other's influence and retaining their dominance in Central Asian region, including Afghanistan. For Pakistan on the other hand, the major adversary to contain and confine in the region is India. The paper argues that the three nations can benefit on a common ground if a multilateral approach to peace building is carried out prudently for the sake of a long-term peace and stability in the region .

Keywords: Peace and Stability, Diplomacy, National Interests, Natural Resources

Afghanistan's strategic location provides ready access to the Middle East, and South Asia, but that access depends on the prospects of peace and stability in the region. The United States invaded Afghanistan more than two decades ago to disrupt, dismantle and defeat Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. However, after more than 20 years of US invasion, Afghanistan still reels in instability with the situation exacerbated even after the coming of the Taliban in power and withdrawal of the US. Militancy and militant backed movements are actively engaged in disruption peace and security of the country. According to the Doha Accord, a time frame for the foreign forces exit was given, and the US was to withdraw from military bases in Afghanistan and cease control of Afghanistan to an interim government. This also included ceasefire to be operational immediately after the withdrawal. The United States was to size down its forces of 12,000 to 8,600 in four months' time and within fourteen months, the remaining forces were to exit Afghanistan.

When Joe Biden became the US president, an unconditional and complete withdrawal from Afghanistan was announced and the date given was September 11, 2021. To President Joe Biden, the US main policy contour was to dismantle Al-Qaeda and other militants from Afghanistan being existential threat to the US. Since Al-Qaeda supposedly had lost its strength with the death of Osama Bin Laden, so continuing the war was no longer needed in the eyes of US policy makers (Hussain, 2021). It was also stipulated that the presence of the US in Afghanistan was to add nothing to the national interests. Because the US was to focus on a “modern landscape of threats” which was quite different from the one that existed inside Afghanistan when the US invaded in 2001 (Shah, 2021). Besides the military engagement couldn't solve the Afghan war or deter the Taliban. Consequently, the complete withdrawal from Afghanistan was decided due to internal political factors and for a strategic shift to the Indo-Pacific from South Asia (Congress, 2018; State Department, 2020). The US withdrawal saw Afghanistan taken over by the Taliban and a transition government was set up by Taliban 2.0 as iteration of the previous Taliban regime. This current Afghanistan is said to be governed by an exclusive male and Pashtun dominated composition (Gannon, 2021). It is financially constrained and isolated from the global economy which has resulted in malnutrition and food crisis (Shah, 2022). The Taliban government has major security threats from militants as Islamic State of Khurasan (Mir, 2021). The ISKP poses security threats to both Taliban government and to the general public of Afghanistan. This is evident from the fact that after the Taliban take-over, deadly attacks were carried out by ISKP on health workers, Hazara and Shia communities; the resultant Sunni-Shia rift is an implication (Ricardo, 2022). The further targeting of infrastructure and deadly attacks on schools are being carried out in order to spread terror and miseries.

Though the Taliban are administering Afghanistan since August 2021, but the country is suffering from a humanitarian and a socio-economic crisis. One of the most important challenges to the Taliban rule is de-jure recognition by the world's major powers, such as the United States, Russia and China (Cafiero, 2022). Recent research has examined Afghanistan from a wide variety of peace and security dimensions; hence, a great deal of knowledge about this country is available. However, in literature, less attention has been devoted to objective identification of the stakes that major powers hold in Afghanistan, and which are mutually inclusive and draw on wider ownership and which will accrue long-term dividends, compared to those stakes that are exclusive and more competitive. This paper addresses this gap by exploring the stakeholder (three important countries—China, US and Pakistan) paradigm - either geographically contiguous or globally influential.

To Cambridge dictionary, a 'stake' in any mutual conflict is the set of rewards for those who succeed in such conflict situations. In the case of Afghanistan's endgame, stakes, or common and conflicting interests of the major powers, including the United States, China and Pakistan, and these three countries are working out strategies for how best to safeguard and promote their stakes/interests. The United States has invested around more than one trillion dollars for more than two decades with loss of more than four thousand lives. This is what makes the stakes of the US most significant in Afghanistan. China on the other hand has an abiding interest in Afghanistan's peace and stability because it has invested huge amounts of money in the country's reconstruction and rehabilitation; furthermore, its flagship Belt and Road Initiative would bear fruit if there was peace in Afghanistan.

For Pakistan, the stakes are much higher than the above two countries. It is because being a geographically contiguous neighbour, it would benefit hugely from Afghanistan's reconstruction by way of providing skilled manpower, technology, and capital; and access to central Asia, which in turn would open doors to boundless trade. It is expected that such a scenario would help Pakistan benefit from the hydrocarbon resources of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan.

In addition, peace in Afghanistan would ensure Pakistan's western border is safe, ending the strong perception about a long history of instability in the borderland region.

This research investigates the stakes which major powers, such as the United States, China and Pakistan have in relation to Afghanistan with particular emphasis on identifying the basis of the three countries' interests in Afghanistan's peace and stability. This research paper analyses the problem under investigation in three main sections: Section one outlines the methodology of the study; Section two underscores the descriptive statistics about Afghanistan's significance for China, the US and Pakistan with the help of graphs and tables; and the third section provides a hypothetical framework which gives a theoretical base to the findings of this research.

Method

For the purpose of this research, a mixed method design consisting of both qualitative and quantitative methods has been designed. This mixed method is valid in exploring the problem under investigation within the paradigm of the research objectives. Research findings are validated to great extent through triangulation. The quantitative data underscores the importance of Afghanistan for three countries Pakistan, China, and the United States, whereas qualitative data provides the required explanations. This method had three phases of data collection and analysis: the initial data collection process, followed by a survey questionnaire and finally qualitative data collection and analysis.

Study population and Sampling

This research is conducted through primary as well secondary data analysis which comprised interviews with key Informant Interviews on the research area, especially personnel from defence, foreign affairs ministry and retired military officers having expertise on war, conflict and strategic issues and with retired civil bureaucrats for their input on foreign policy affairs. For secondary data analysis, various libraries were visited and books, research articles were collected. Online data is collected through digital libraries, searching websites as Brookings institute, Institution of Strategic Studies Islamabad, Jinnah Institute Islamabad, Islamabad Policy Research Institute, websites of NATO, the US State Department.

The sample area comprised Pakistan Foreign office, Defence Ministry, Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), public sector universities (Behria University Islamabad, COMSATS Islamabad, Fatima Jinnah Women University Rawalpindi, National Defence University Islamabad, University of Peshawar, Indian Think Tank, Thailand Senior Journalist, Director of UK Statecraft (Table 1, Table 2). The criteria for selecting the sample were taking the opinion of the experts on foreign policy, defence and security as well as academicians. This was done to cover perspectives about Pakistan, China, and the US stakes inside Afghanistan. The sample comprised 23 key informants' interviews from respondents having expertise on the research area. The questionnaire used for the study was semi-structured.

Table 1*Showing the results of different organizations.*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	4.3	4.3	4.3
BU	1	4.3	4.3	8.7
COMSATS	1	4.3	4.3	13.0
FJWU	7	30.4	30.4	43.5
India	1	4.3	4.3	47.8
ISI	1	4.3	4.3	52.2
NDU	1	4.3	4.3	56.5
PSU	1	4.3	4.3	60.9
SPU	1	4.3	4.3	65.2
TISF	1	4.3	4.3	69.6
UoP	7	30.4	30.4	100.0
Total	23	100.0	100.0	

Table 2.*Showing the number of specialized numbers Area Specialized*

Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
6	26.1	26.1	26.1
14	60.9	60.9	87.0
1	4.3	4.3	91.3
1	4.3	4.3	95.7
1	4.3	4.3	100.0
23	100.0	100.0	

Results

All data was analysed using a variety of statistical packages, including SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences); relationships between other studied variables are given by bar charts and tables included in the text of Pakistan, the US and China stakes and elaborated.

Table 3

Hypotheses of the Study and Analysis Techniques

Serial No	Hypotheses of the Study	Variable type	Data Analysis	Remarks
1	Pakistan, the United States and China have stakes in Afghanistan peace and stability	Yes or No	Descriptive Statistics	Frequency distributions and Bar charts showing Pakistan, the United States and China have stakes in Afghanistan peace and stability

Statistics for US, China and Pakistan stakes

Valid	23
Missing	0

The Multination Peace and Stability Stakes in Afghanistan Pakistan Stakes in Afghanistan Peace and Stability

Peaceful and stable Afghanistan is significant for Pakistan for its economic and strategic relations with China and access to natural resources of Central Asian Republics. Pakistan relations with Afghanistan have been strewn with multiple complicated factors as institutional disconnect, ethnicity, border issue, mistrust and people to people dissonance. (Nasreen, 2016) Whereas the systemic influence along with domestic and state factors have made it more intricate.

The research statistics shows that militancy and terrorism from Afghanistan have fall out for Pakistan in general and for tribal areas and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in particular. The Torkham border remains closed most of the time because of the troubled security situation.

Pakistan has adopted cautious diplomatic stance in the Taliban 2.0 government and has conferred only de facto recognition to Taliban rule. Afghanistan has resumed ambassadorial tasks in the capital of Pakistan (Khan, 2021).

Graph 1: Pakistan’s Stakes in Afghanistan

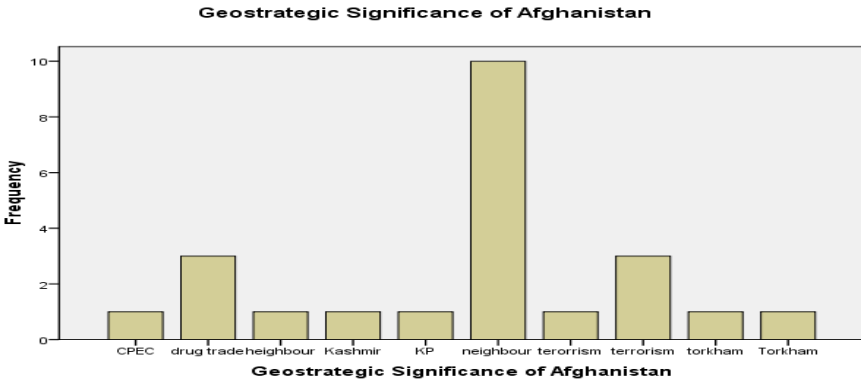


Table 4
Pakistan Stakes in Afghanistan

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	CPEC	1	4.3	4.3	4.3
	drug trade	3	13.0	13.0	17.4
	heighbour	1	4.3	4.3	21.7
	Kashmir	1	4.3	4.3	26.1
	KP	1	4.3	4.3	30.4
	neighbour	10	43.5	43.5	73.9
	Terrorism	1	4.3	4.3	78.3
	Terrorism	3	13.0	13.0	91.3
	Torkham	1	4.3	4.3	95.7
	Torkham	1	4.3	4.3	100.0
	Total	23	100.0	100.0	

Pakistan wants an inclusive Afghan government, having no any favorite inside Afghanistan and not to enmesh herself in internal friction like that of Haqqani and Mullah Baradar— whereas the Haqqani is deemed close to the Pakistan’s establishment. (Latifi, 2021). While on question of recognition, Pakistan has been in a dire confusing position because a de jure recognition to Taliban will break all hell loose on Pakistan in the form of US becoming more adamant in diplomatic and economic stances as in Financial Action Task Force (FATF), hence Pakistan is cautious following regional and global stakeholders in this matter. In the region she has efforts for China–Russia–Pakistan bloc which has a promising chance for regional recognition of the Taliban 2.0.

While taking Pakistan stakes in Afghanistan peace and stability the security perspective is significant because terrorism has been caused and escalated in Pakistan as a fallout of Afghan war. The Tehreek-i-Taliban [TTP] and Afghan Taliban have ethnic and ideological connections which have been strengthened with establishment of Taliban government in august 2021. Afghan Taliban have had arbitration role for Pakistan and TTP in order to reach for a peaceful settlement because the later has been involved in deadly attacks on Pakistani state institutions (Gilani, 2022).

However the process did not succeed. The Taliban 2.0 regime is using the TTP as an instrument against Pakistan military.

The United States Stakes in Afghanistan Peace and Stability

Afghanistan is important for the United States in the context of emerging strategic world order being shaped in the Asian regions. The US as sole hegemon since the collapse of USSR wants maintaining same hegemonic position in the Asian region in order to have control of Central Asian resources and to lessen China and Russian leverages in the region. The US has withdrawn from Afghanistan mainly to shift its resources for the containment of China as China’s assertive economy and military is threatening for the US (Parveen, 2023). Moreover the US wanted to leave Afghanistan in a respectable way with no impression of defeat from Taliban.

The President Joe Biden has rigid Afghan policy after the Taliban take over as manifested from non-recognition of Taliban government and has refrained key partners from any diplomatic ties with Taliban government. Western world has criticized Taliban 2.0 regime for being violating women rights to education and work and for failure of stable economy and good governance. Further to the punitive measures the Biden Administration has given half of Afghanistan frozen assets to the 9/11 victims which in itself has arisen questions. (TRT World, 2022).

Graph 2: Stakes of the United States in Afghanistan

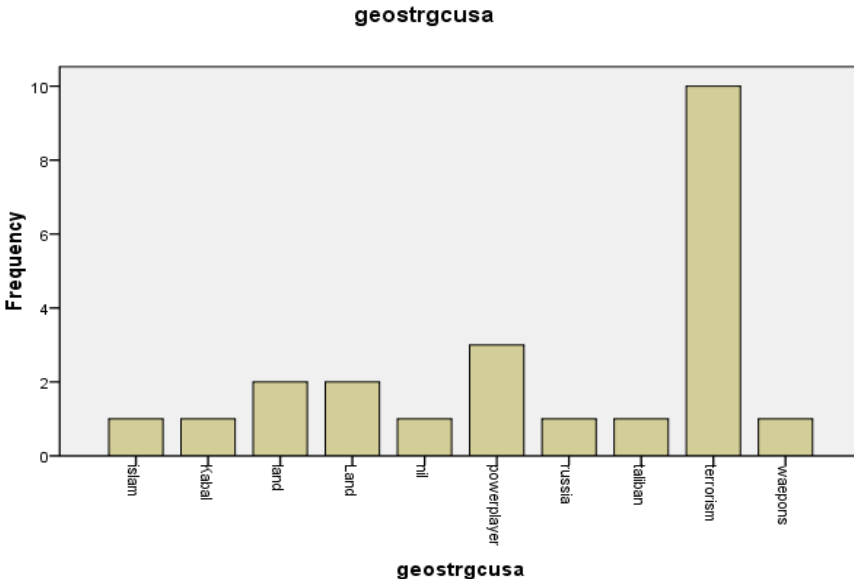


Table 5
Stakes of the United States in Afghanistan

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	islam	1	4.3	4.3	4.3
	Kabal	1	4.3	4.3	8.7
	land	2	8.7	8.7	17.4
	Land	2	8.7	8.7	26.1
	nil	1	4.3	4.3	30.4
	powerplayer	3	13.0	13.0	43.5
	russia	1	4.3	4.3	47.8
	taliban	1	4.3	4.3	52.2
	terrorism	10	43.5	43.5	95.7
	waepons	1	4.3	4.3	100.0
	Total	23	100.0	100.0	

China Stakes in Afghanistan Peace and Stability

Afghanistan is important for China for natural resources exploitation and development of infrastructure. China is in a much better position due to assertive economy and domestic stability to claim that it can play a stabilising role in the region and, geo-strategically, to take a decisive part in regional affairs. China's policy aims in Afghanistan are, first, to safeguard Xinjiang; as China is alert that Afghanistan doesn't breeds insurgents and militants which can destabilises Xinjing. Specifically China wants no space inside Afghanistan for both the ETIM, which is causing the Uyghur unrest in Xinjiang, and the ISKP, which has plans for an Islamic caliphate under its jurisdiction in western China. As already mentioned China is apprehensive about the Uyghur unrest in Xinjiang and remained alert because Uyghur groups from Wakhan bases located in Afghanistan had attacked on administration of Xinjiang. China desires strong economic terms ensuring huge investment in mines and deposits of Afghanistan and the broader Central Asian region. Afghanistan is significant for Chinese economic interests and for the expansion of its Belt and Road Initiative although previously the economic interests have not been fully succeeded due to decades long insurgency and civil war.

Graph 3: Stakes of China in Afghanistan

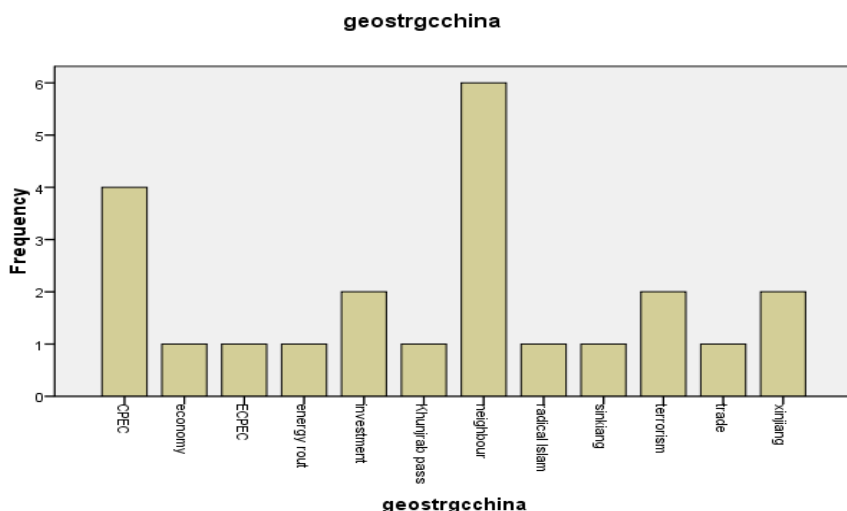


Table 6
Stakes of China in Afghanistan

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
valid CPEC	4	17.4	17.4	17.4
economy	1	4.3	4.3	21.7
ECPEC	1	4.3	4.3	26.1
energy rout	1	4.3	4.3	30.4
investment	2	8.7	8.7	39.1
Khunjrab pass	1	4.3	4.3	43.5
neighbour	6	26.1	26.1	69.6
radical Islam	1	4.3	4.3	73.9
sinkiang	1	4.3	4.3	78.3
terrorism	2	8.7	8.7	87.0
Trade	1	4.3	4.3	91.3
Xinjiang	2	8.7	8.7	100.0
Total	23	100.0	100.0	

The Chinese are apprehensive about the same possible fallout from the Afghan border into its western province of Xinjiang.

The Wakhan Corridor is also significant which is a land narrow strip in Afghanistan north and is going through Afghanistan to China, situated in north towards Pamir mountains, south towards Hindu Kush and segregates Kashmir region in Pakistan from Pakistan. This strip is used by Uighur for infiltration in Xinjiang and has enhanced security issues.

The Taliban shelter and train the ETIM in Afghanistan and ex-FATA of Pakistan where these elements are fighting for separation from China. Xinjiang is significant for gas and oil production but these separatist elements have throughout impeded the security as happened in incidents in 1992 and 1997, (Chung, 2002) renewed in 2009, giving Xinjiang an international

profile. China wants security and counter-terrorism cooperation with Afghanistan in order to overcome Uighur and has had foreign ministries exchanged. China has played role in Afghanistan security agreement with the US, (China supports the security agreement between Afghanistan and the United States, 2013) and later on Taliban Doha agreement with the US.

China like Pakistan has remained cautious and did not officially recognize the Taliban government. However, Beijing has maintained embassy in Afghanistan and kept some low-level diplomatic initiatives and trade. Some quarters in Beijing hailed the US unyielding and hurried withdrawal from Afghanistan as token of declining US prestige and weak position of west (Zhou, 2021), but this has not shifted the contours of China's Afghanistan policy. China's stakes in Afghanistan are mainly to invest in Afghanistan economic resources as the later has promising gas and oil resources in north, copper fields in Jawkhar Darband and Aynak, gold reserves in the northern provinces of Badakhshan, Ghazni and Takhar, huge deposits of iron ore between Herat and the Panjshir Valley (Muzalqeky, 2010). China is in dire need of iron and copper ore, as well as giving access to the natural gas supplies of Central Asia and Afghanistan.

China owing to the viability of Belt and Road Initiative will try to modify the politico-economic landscape of Asia. It is the key to China's strategic plan for expanding its influence. China has stand for Afghan frozen assets in international financial institutions to be released (Calabrese, 2021). Moreover, China is to promote the 'Pine Nuts Air Corridor' as a token of Chinese promotion of Afghan pine nuts boosting agriculture sector of Afghanistan (MFA, 2022a).

Discussion

The Multination Common and Conflicting Interests in Afghanistan

Since the Taliban assuming power on the 15th of August 2021, the bilateral relations of Pakistan and Afghanistan are at a crossroads. Pakistan has de facto recognition of Taliban, and it has approached regional countries in order to assist them in having a working governance system. At the other spectrum, China is being watched closely by the US because any initiative on part of the China regarding Taliban 2.0 recognition will cause serious commercial and geopolitical implication for both the countries and the United States' European allies.

Pakistan role is significant for China in countering fissiparous trends, militancy, and religious extremism in order to secure Xinjiang (Haider, 2005). Post 9/11, Pakistan took it on priority to curb Uighur activity as manifested in the Pakistan-China anti-terror agreement 2005 being ratified in 2006 by China as token of cooperation. While the West led by US see Pakistan as hub of terrorism but also key to solution of Afghanistan problem. The results of this research show that terrorism is the main threat and there is a strong recognition by the US, Pakistan and China of the need to work together to combat it.

The rising Asian region is compelling countries for regional economic and security cooperation and to go in tandem for energy policies. The results of this research show the significance of Afghanistan for China and Pakistan in form of investment, energy routes, trade and above all for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and Belt and Road Initiative (Tables 4 & 6, Graphs 1 & 3).

Regional countries are interdependent especially in economics needs as in energy requirements competition is enhanced among these countries in order to control infrastructure and transportation of resources.

Geo-strategically, Pakistan and China have mutual strategic and economic interests as Gwadar port on the Arabian Sea in Pakistan's Baluchistan province is promoting these interests. Pakistan is connecting Gwadar port with Central Asia for gas and energy transit and will lead bilateral trade with Central Asia with open market of Europe.

China with an assertive economy is spreading its control and influence in the region by infrastructure development as in form of China Pakistan Economic Corridor which is facilitating China trade with shortest distance, time and low expenses. Because China face hurdles through Straits of Malacca, the journey takes 45 days and impeded by the US. CPEC is vital component of BRI which links South Asia with Central Asia.

China will have frictions for sea routes linking South Asia, the Northern Mediterranean, North Africa and Southeast Asia (Ahmad, 2015). CPEC will yield in economic cooperation and ultimately will converge interests of regional countries.

Pakistan and China cooperate for peace and stability inside Afghanistan because only that will guarantee regional connectivity and economic integration through CPEC, alongside other economic plans. Pakistan's location at the crossroads of Gulf countries, China and Central Asian Republics makes its role of prime significance. In the coming forty years, the oil reserves of Gulf countries are expected to expire, so the exploration of those in the Central Asian Republics is essential and that will give new import to the economic corridors through Pakistan, providing a backdrop to the US containment of China's and India's designs for regional supremacy. It is envisaged that trade through CARs and Pakistan could increase CARs and China GDP by 2.3%, whereas nearly 2% GDP can be by Xinjiang alone. Afghanistan is contemplated by Pakistan as a soil of rail, energy supply line and roads from Eurasia and Indian Ocean.

All the three countries, Pakistan, the US and China are playing their part for stability and peace in Afghanistan. But, the policies of Pakistan, the US and China diverge over regional geo-political dynamics. As shown in Table 5, Graph 2, US interest in Afghanistan is power play, as a result of which, the US intends to stay in Afghanistan to contain Chinese influence both in Afghanistan and the Central Asian Republics. Conversely, China's interest is to counter the US leverage, and Pakistan is obsessed with countering India's position.

Pakistan would certainly like to help end the conflict; it has stakes in peace in Afghanistan. But for Islamabad the focus is on reducing India role inside Afghanistan which has been resented by Afghanistan and has taken it as interference in Afghan internal affairs by Pakistan. Similarly, the US does not want China to be beneficiary of political and economic stability as she has not invested in peace and stability of Afghanistan.

China wanted complete withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan and see herself as regional dominant economic and military power. But she wants her dominant position to be looked through cultural and economic cooperation than neo-imperialist nation asserting its hegemony on smaller nations. How these sometimes contradictory positions play out remains to be seen but it depends largely on how the political map takes shape in the near future. Now as the Taliban government has been established so there are various challenges in the form of non-inclusive political dispensation, divide among Taliban own ranks and files, and most importantly non-recognition.

In the context the US is rigid on non-recognition of Afghanistan and at the same time uneasy about China moves. Although China is cautious and with wait and see policy. It will pin its

hopes on peace taking hold in the country and not taking a partisan role because it believes time is on its side, but China CPEC and BRI endeavour are apprehensive for US.

Indian factor is causing strategic cooperation of Pakistan with China. However, the acceptance of reality is needed that an independent and free Afghanistan may initiate policies of enduring friendship with its regional countries, comprised India and Pakistan must emphasize that Afghanistan land be not allowed by any country whether openly or secretly against Pakistan's interests.

Pakistan can contribute hugely in the stability and peace of Afghanistan in form of trade facilitation, infrastructure build up and technical assistance for establishing public and private departments and giving favourable terms for bilateral trade. For Pakistan the utmost important is to have friendly or at least neutral Afghanistan with no favourite faction, group or individual which will ultimately ease their bilateral relations.

It will give Pakistan a margin for improving relations with India and in turn diplomatic working relations, calling on the US, EU and others to support these endeavours. Pakistan would reap dividends when having reality based policies and then setting priorities in that realm. Influence can be sustained or built through soft power, mutual cooperation and an outlook that would strengthen areas of convergence. Diplomacy through media hype should be minimised.

Border management issues have great significance. Once Pakistan has physically and politically established its writ over international borders, the situation could incrementally tilt in Pakistan's favour, though this is, presently, a tricky issue. The Western interests are to counter China leverage in the region hence including Afghanistan into CPEC project is implausible. China will remain within the evolving scenario while using Iran for goods transit to western markets. In this challenging situation Pakistan must emphasize transit, trade and economic potential for economic integration and connectivity in the region so that economic interests can be equally served along with security interests.

Afghanistan stability and peace is utmost requirement for access to Central Asian countries and for viability of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative. It would get dividends from exploitation of 1.5 \$ trillion mineral reserves. The US would keep stability and peace of Afghanistan on priority so that it could not be used as soil for militant activities against US. China would also like to integrate Afghanistan into its orbit of influence by becoming a partner in the country's reconstruction – and it would benefit from exploitation of Afghanistan's huge untapped mineral reserves.

As the policy contours of both US and China are to access natural resources of CARs and Afghanistan and to counter each other influence hence there is a continuous struggle and competition between the superpower and the emerging regional great power. In this evolving scenario the strategic importance of Pakistan is making it an important linkage. Accordingly Afghanistan is becoming a significant determinant of three countries foreign policies and national interests.

By contrast, the continuation of the conflict would jeopardize all hopes of reconstruction and there would be increased destabilisation in the region. Daesh, Fidayi Mahaz and Turkistan Islamic movements would garner additional support and would launch further attacks, and China's western border would become more insecure. Attacks across the Oxus would increase and Iran

would not be immune to the threat of Daesh striking targets deep in the country. Pakistan would also have to confront the menace of border incursions.

Recommendations

- The Taliban 2.0 are needed to formulate an inclusive broad based government and to ensure women empowerment by allowing women for education and work in order to get legitimacy and international recognition.
- To eradicate all form of militancy and non-state actors such as Al-Qaeda and refrain from hurting the USA's interests in the region.
- Pakistan, in the changing dynamics is to reset its ties with Washington in order to overcome all mistrusts.
- Although Pakistan and China desire formal recognition to the Afghanistan but the international rigid stance is resistive to both as already mentioned in the article that Pakistan at the moment couldn't withstand the economic tough stances of the US and similarly China is to avoid confrontation with Washington in South Asia and safeguard its interest in the Taiwan straits.
- However, in the wake of Afghanistan deteriorated economy and humanitarian crisis USA, China and Russia need to take the regional players as Pakistan, India, CARs and Iran along in order to make consensus through UN forum on future Afghan inclusive political dispensation.
- The US will need to consider the geopolitical implications of non-engagement or recognition. So if the Taliban review their rigid stances then some settlements can be considered.
- Assuming the Taliban stays in power and the economy slowly rebounds, it is very likely that China will emerge as a key player in Afghanistan's economic future.
- While China becoming major economic player in the region and Pakistan will also accrue the dividends in form of CPEC then the entire situation will make the US least significant economic player and that Washington would be uncomfortable with completely ceding this space to Russia or China.

Conclusion

It would be in the interests of the three countries to counter terrorism and to ensure peace and stability in the region. If the US wants to stabilise Afghanistan, then a resolution to the conflict is possible. Ideally, it should seek to achieve the following objectives: no foreign militants in Afghanistan, no more use of Afghan soil against any country, progress towards pluralism, protection of minorities and ensuring human rights. The resistance movement in Afghanistan would be prepared to go along with all these conditions.

But a continuation of the miserable plight of Afghanistan would have deadly repercussions for the whole region. The utmost requirement is the immediate humanitarian assistance for Afghanistan specifically with release of its frozen assets and waving sanctions on Afghanistan by international financial institutions. The political dispensation inside Afghanistan be all-inclusive while giving representation to all stakeholders with no discrimination of minorities and gender. An institution building mechanism abreast of updated trends and transformation should be focused on.

Moreover, neutral foreign policy should be adopted towards neighbouring countries; an effective administration, proper media projection and above all, strong diplomatic relations with economically strong countries are viable policy options for Afghanistan. Ethnic strife has undermined any political and military headway made, so an intra-Afghan dialogue should be

arranged that brings together groups like the Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras and anti-Taliban, or at least moderate Pakhtuns, to agree on power-sharing arrangements and changes in the constitutional structure.

Pakistan role of a facilitator of peace and stability and to provide assistance in rehabilitation and infrastructure build up with no obsession on countering India influence there. The need of time is that Afghanistan as a sovereign state is to have own independent foreign relations and achieve avenue for its economic stability and growth. The rational choices for these countries are to work together for counterterrorism, and extremism and more significantly to ensure regional economic integration. All the economic projects like Belt and Road initiative, China Pakistan Economic Corridor, TAPI and CASA-1000 are in need of stable and peaceful Afghanistan in order to fully benefit from these economic endeavours. In the emerging world order, the US and China seem on more competitive pace on issues of South China Sea, East China Sea whereas the alliances of QUAD and AUKUS are on scene against China. Due to economic interdependence these two powers are adopting diplomatic stances for strategic balance and re-assurance.

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