

## THE EXTERNAL SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

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2020 has witnessed an unprecedented uproar on the phenomenon of Climate Change and resultant Global Warming. In fact, it was the most talked about alarm for humanity at all fora and gatherings. In this noise, people failed to notice the heating up of geo-political landscape, which may have immediate effect. This effect is more widespread than believed and more devastating than all other negative vibes being felt around. There are many dimensions of this downturn. The crucial ones being the signs of re-emergence of a multipolar world after over four decades of arrogant dominance by one superpower, unbridled increase of population without corresponding enhancement of livelihood resources and social services, unchecked arms race, weaponization of space, interest-based realignment of nations by compromising on many principles, particularly human rights.

In the backdrop of emergence of voices challenging the unquestioned driving of global policies, the United States (US) suffered its most ignominious defeat since Vietnam when it had to vacate Afghanistan at a few days' notice. This single event was much more embarrassing than anything else that

happened in the past as the mainstream as well as social media was bringing these moments live to every living room and every street around the globe. This embarrassment has brought about a sea change not only in the behavior of US but also in that of its competitors like Russia and China, who are trying to create space for themselves in the new order. Similar change in attitude has been witnessed amongst smaller nations in their dealing with stronger and bigger countries.

- **The Region**

The happenings in Afghanistan have had direct and meaningful consequences for all the regional countries, warranting a change in their foreign policies as well as their security paradigms. Afghanistan is the 'backyard' of all the regional countries and presence of the US led North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) forces was, therefore, a threat for all of them. Each of these reacted differently through their global as well as regional stances and some of those responses were quite radical in nature. Country wise description is as follows:

- Afghanistan

Present day Afghanistan is like a new country with nearly no legacy structures and policies. The sand castles raised during the last twenty years disappeared much like when the first wave of tide sweeps the beach. Today all systems in the war ravaged country are either absent or dysfunctional. The entire population is faced with absence of governance, closed banking system, crashed social order, ineffective social services, insecure urban centers, stagnant rural landscape and finally non-existent law enforcement mechanism. All this has led the country on a path to definite catastrophe in the shape of scared populace, imminent famine, and epidemics due to harsh winter and collapse of health regime. In this situation, the only horizon for Afghans to look towards is the one across the boundaries with some degree of hope. This environment of total chaos and desperation would create space for all sort of negative forces, both domestic and external.

- India

Of all the countries in region, India

has suffered most on the geo-political and economic matrix. India had been investing heavily since 9/11 in Afghanistan's policy systems, in particular the intelligence apparatus and the military. This was primarily done to create an anti-Pakistan operating capability and trend by presenting Afghanistan's eastern neighbour as its biggest enemy. A well-choreographed and effective narrative was propagated in electronic and print media, as well as, social media to project ISI and Pakistani military as sources of all ills of Afghanistan. As a part of this effort, India invested over USD 2 billion in the social and political infrastructure to establish a definite foothold in the political domain and win the hearts and minds of the ordinary Afghan citizens. In addition, Afghan soil was being used effectively to nurture fissiparous tendencies by allowing them freedom to implement terrorist regime on the western border regions of Pakistan. The strategy was to induce internal instability while creating an

- effective ‘two front threat scenario’ for Pakistan putting its security in an almost untenable state. However, all this effort was lost after the hostile regime in Afghanistan departed on Aug. 15, 2021.
- CARs  
The Central Asian States are facing a moment of uncertainty as the policies of the new Afghan regime are yet to be clearly defined, particularly with reference to certain separatist elements belonging to some of these states, who are hitherto thriving in Afghanistan. Moreover, some economic and trade activities have been affected. Other than that, not much is expected on the strategic plane.
  - Iran  
Iran has been experiencing the effects of events right from the day the Occupation Forces landed on Afghan soil. It has had a mix bag of gains and losses, which almost ended in a No profit-No loss balance. Iran was on one side engaging the Taliban and on the other side supporting India in helping the erstwhile Afghan regime of Karzai and Ashraf Ghani. On the third plane it was helping the Shiite population of Afghanistan. So, with the departure of Occupation Forces the major benefit that Iran accrued is closure of all US activities of monitoring or influencing happenings in Iran. Finally, with the taking over of Biden Administration the nuclear impasse seems to be breaking following the resumption of the dialogue with the Five-Plus-One group.
  - Russia  
Primarily the events of 15<sup>th</sup> August had threefold implications for Russia. Firstly, it was a moment of *karma* when the US and West were made to retreat from Afghanistan in an even more embarrassing environment than the 1988-89 pull out of erstwhile Soviet Union, the mother state of present-day Russia. Second was the cleanup of the ‘backyard’ from the hostile forces and finally the creation of a power vacuum with space for Russia to assert its influence in a meaningful manner, as has been the case for most part of the history.

- China

China also benefitted from the events in Afghanistan post 15<sup>th</sup> August. Firstly the anti-state forces in the shape of ETIM were being funded and nurtured by American (CIA), Indian (R&AW) and Afghan (NDS) intelligence apparatuses. Secondly the eastern flank of CPEC was being constantly threatened by TTP and BLA, using Afghan soil as a base. Finally, the Occupation Forces were not allowing any meaningful Chinese economic and trade activity in Afghanistan. So, now China will be better positioned to deal with ETIM, which may not be as free like before to use Afghan soil, and ensure better security of CPEC with the possibility of extending it to Afghanistan. On the other hand, China will be able to invest freely in developing infrastructure and exploiting the mineral resources of that country. Removal of its arch enemy from the region would be the icing on the cake.

- Pakistan

Interestingly, Pakistan is the most as well as the least affected by US withdrawal. Least affected because

for the previous four decades it has faced the consequences of the turmoil in Afghanistan, first by the Soviet invasion and then by US occupation. Under both the environments, Afghan dispensations, including the Taliban were at best unfriendly. Everything bad in Afghanistan was conveniently blamed on Pakistan, in particular, on ISI and Army. After each turmoil Pakistan became optimistic about the emerging scenarios and calibrated its policies accordingly, only to be disappointed.

Now how is it most affected? It has the longest border with Afghanistan, which was porous till recently when Pakistan built a fence. Afghan soil has always been used by different hostile agencies in different combinations from time to time. From 1947 to 1989 by KGB-RAW-KHAD, in part of nineties by NDS-RAW and from 2000 to 2021 by CIA-NDS-RAW. Pakistan is most affected because due to ethnic affinity of tribes straddling the border between the two countries the Afghans find it most convenient to cross over at



times of turmoil, and at present there are over three million refugees in Pakistan, both registered and unregistered. These refugees not only played havoc with the economy due to absence of international humanitarian assistance but also provided a secure foothold to hostile elements operating from Afghanistan. Finally, Pakistan has been used as a conduit for drug trafficking during the last two decades when the Afghan ruling elite as well as the occupation forces turned a blind eye towards increased drug production and trade, rather encouraged it to support clandestine activities of various agencies operating in Afghanistan. On the geo-political front Pakistan is facing the wrath of the NATO countries for their ignominious defeat and retreat from Afghanistan. Moreover, in their efforts to avenge their defeat they are punishing the people of Afghanistan by economically squeezing them by putting them in the throes of famine, epidemic, death, and destruction. Whatever little reserves Afghanistan

possessed have been frozen abroad, no banks are being allowed to operate thereby even preventing private remittances, no LCs can be opened for any trade or business, even food and medicines are being traded on a barter like arrangement. All this is creating a looming threat of mass migration towards the East, which will be an unprecedented disaster for the Pakistani economy. This feared scenario is a recipe for socio-economic and security upheaval in Pakistan.

## • **EXTERNAL SECURITY** **DIMENSION FOR PAKISTAN**

During the last two decades, the US and Afghan leadership blatantly blamed Pakistan for the consequences of their faulty strategy, incompetence, and corruption. Now that the drop scene has caused them unprecedented humiliation and embarrassment, they are likely to resort to measures to undermine Pakistan's sovereignty. In any such design, India is a more than willing partner to avenge its failure in isolating and encircling Pakistan. This effort is going to be more intense because Russia and China are supportive of Pakistan's policies for resolving the post 8/15 Afghan crisis. Both

these countries are, moreover, challenging the sole superpower status of the United States of America.

As a first step, the multidimensional crisis in Afghanistan is being aggravated by political isolation and economic strangulation of the war-ravaged country. This can cause political unrest as well as humanitarian crisis, which will force a large section of population to resort to violence and migrate to greener pastures. Both these eventualities threaten Pakistan on numerous planes. Internal instability would create governance issues for Afghan people, who would turn to Pakistan even for basic requirements like medicine and food, thereby causing an unbearable stress on its economy and social structure specially in the two western provinces. In case of refugee influx, a greater pressure would develop on economy that is already stretched by existing refugee burden. All this would create space for elements desirous of harming Pakistan during these times of its economic difficulty.

On the eastern front India is facing humiliation after losing military standoff with China and a virtual downgrade in its status as a member of Quad after being left out in the latest anti-China alliance AUKUS. Simultaneously the situation in Indian Occupied Kashmir is aggravating by the day resulting in increased instability and LEAs'

casualties. Moreover, the fissiparous forces in India's eastern provinces are gathering pace. In the face of such external and internal setbacks, India is likely to resort to a false flag operation to distract attention from its problems and avenge its failure in anti-Pakistan campaign from Afghan soil.

The US and its allies are also resorting to measures that are adding to Pakistan's difficulties. Pakistan is being dragged in FATF on flimsy reasons. Similarly, international financial institutions are imposing stringent conditions on routine financial dealings with Pakistan. Simultaneously the US State Department has been maligning us on issues like treatment of women or other perceived cultural negativities in the country. On the military front, India is being armed to its teeth on the pretext of containing China, knowing fully well that India is and will never be in a position to challenge China on any plane. Consequently, the conventional military balance is tilting exponentially against Pakistan which in its turn must take measures to counter this imbalance.

To conclude, Pakistan has been and will be made a scape goat by US and its allies for all that has happened in Afghanistan and their failures there. Despite, Afghan media being critical of Pakistan's efforts, Islamabad went out of the way to help Afghanistan by hosting

an extra-ordinary session of OIC foreign ministers. Pakistan must be relentless in its efforts in this direction, irrespective of any or all efforts of its detractors against its mission of helping the people of Afghanistan in their hour of need, consequently establishing a durable peace in the region.

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