

AFPAK CUL DE SAC

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1. THE MISLAID ‘STRATEGIC SHIFT’

- 1.1 It was as far back as 1999 that the US *Patterns of Global Terrorism* report spoke of a “shift of the locus of terrorism”. Building on the observations of the report on July 12, 2000, the then US Coordinator for Counter-terrorism, Michael Sheehan, in his testimony to the House International Relations Committee, emphasized a “geographical shift of the locus of terror from the Middle East to South Asia,”¹ A decade later, a new US Administration is rediscovering this ‘locus’.² US Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman, Admiral Mike Mullen, thus announced that, while fighting “isn’t over” in Iraq, Afghanistan would now be the military’s “main effort”.³ This was quickly followed by the broad sweep of President Barack Hussein Obama’s new ‘AfPak’ policy and, for the first time, a much larger proposed military budget for Afghanistan than for Iraq.⁴ President Obama has also announced a progressive draw-down of the present 142,000 US troops in Iraq, culminating in a withdrawal of ‘all combat personnel’ from the country by August 31, 2010, to leave behind between 35,000 and 50,000 troops to ‘train, equip and advise Iraqi security forces’.⁵ On the other hand, the promise is to ‘more than double’ US Forces in Afghanistan in a purported replication of the ‘surge’ that secured a turnaround in Iraq.
- 1.2 The first point regarding this ‘strategic shift’, consequently, is that it is no more than the belated acceptance of a reality that was abundantly recognized more than a decade ago, and that had been deliberately suppressed by the perversity of US policy that was deflected, in 2003, into an unnecessary and unjustifiable war in Iraq.
- 1.3 The new ‘shift’ is now justified by improvements in the Iraq theatre, and continuous deterioration in the AfPak complex. There is no doubt that circumstances in Iraq have improved dramatically, after the peak of violence in 2006-07. It is necessary, however, to recognize that, the ‘peace’ in

Iraq is, even now, bloodier than the ‘war’ in Afghanistan. Data for 2008 indicates that total fatalities for US forces in Iraq in 2008 stood at 314 out of a coalition total of 322, significantly down from a peak of 904 and 961, respectively, in 2007. In Afghanistan, by comparison, US military fatalities in 2008 were 155, and total coalition fatalities stood at 294, up from 117 and 232, respectively, in 2007. Data for the first four months of 2009 does, of course, demonstrate a change in this trend, with a coalition total of 62 fatalities in Iraq, as against 91 in Afghanistan. This impression of ‘stabilization’ may, however, be misleading. Iraq saw 5,929 Iraqi SF and civilian deaths in 2008 and the first four months of 2009 have already seen 1,014 Iraqi SF and civilian fatalities. According to the *Iraq Coalition Casualty Count*, ‘Iraqi deaths are higher than the numbers recorded’.⁶ In Afghanistan, Afghan Police, Military and Private Military Contractor fatalities were 1,241 in 2008 and 368 in 2009.⁷ No authoritative data for civilian fatalities is currently available, but a UN report put total civilian fatalities in Afghanistan through 2008 at 2,118.⁸ Data on civilian fatalities in Afghanistan may also be severe underestimates, since a significant, though indeterminate, proportion of those reported as Taliban militants killed in interior areas are also believed to be civilians.

- 1.4 As the US and Coalition presence in Iraq is diluted – most participating countries have announced time-bound plans for force reduction – there is reason to believe that militant violence in the country could rise again. Indeed, the architect of the ‘successful’ strategy in Iraq, General David H. Petraeus, has repeatedly warned that the gains in the country are “fragile and reversible”.⁹ President Obama has also underlined this assessment, stating, “Let there be no doubt: Iraq is not yet secure, and there will be difficult days ahead. Violence will continue to be a part of life in Iraq.”¹⁰
- 1.5 Indeed, there is much that suggests that what we are witnessing in Iraq is a manifestation of America’s progressive historical proclivity to prematurely ‘declare victory and run’.
- 1.6 In sum, the Afghanistan-Pakistan complex has, for more than a decade now, been the principal source of the global crisis of Islamist terrorism;¹¹ the crisis in Iraq was created by unmitigated American adventurism and its dangers are yet to be effectively neutralized; while Afghanistan-Pakistan certainly demand more attention, a ‘shift’ at the cost of efforts to stabilize Iraq will prove

counter-productive in both theatres. The imperatives of the situation demand application of sufficient force and resources to both theatres and not premature withdrawal from one, and merely incremental efforts in the other.

2. THE SOPHISTRY OF THE SURGE

2.1 The surge, in contemporary mythmaking, has been conferred an almost metaphysical stature. It is, indeed, astonishing, and a testament to the superficiality of the global security discourse, that this notion has been projected and widely accepted as a brilliant and unique strategic innovation. This is, bluntly, nonsense. The surge is, in fact, no more than a belated recognition that the past assessments of force requirement in a particular theatre were wrong, that the existing force disposition is inadequate, and a tardy corrective to the failure to provide a sufficiency of force at the outset.

2.2 The surge, in other words, is not a strategy. It is simply the provision of additional force to a particular theatre to offset past failures. The quantum of force existing, and of additional force provided, in proportion to objective assessments (and not the fantasies that may have prevailed in the past) of the challenges and requirements, define the probabilities of securing success. All ‘surges’, in other words, are not equal.

2.3 To address the hard core of numbers first: Iraq has a total area of 437,072 square kilometers and a population of 28.95 million; Afghanistan has a territory of 647,500 square kilometers and a population of 33.6 million. Both in area and population, consequently, Afghanistan is significantly larger.

2.4 Since July 2003, the strength of Coalition forces in Iraq had remained at roughly 176,000, with US troops fluctuating between 108,000 and 168,000, before recent draw-downs commenced.¹² The ‘surge’ in Iraq comprised an addition of some 30,000 troops after February 2007, at a time when violence was peaking (December 2006 and January 2007 saw about 4,000 fatalities a month). US troop strength stood at 137,000 in February 2007, when the surge was initiated, and rose to a peak of 168,000 by September 2007.¹³ Crucially, however, this strength was backed up by a 600,000-strong Iraqi security force.¹⁴ While much of this is of indifferent quality, a significant proportion has been trained by, and has been deployed in joint operations with, Coalition Forces,

and has now been thought to be sufficiently capable to take over the tasks of national security management, as the US and various other Coalition partners progressively draw down their strength in Iraq.

2.5 In Afghanistan, on the other hand, the strength of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF, including NATO) Forces stood at 55,100 as of January 2009, with the US Forces accounting for just 23,220 of this number.¹⁵ The ‘surge’ in Afghanistan, Admiral Mike Mullen, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has clarified, will not exceed an additional 30,000 US troops.¹⁶ In the meanwhile, a number of participating nations have declared their intentions to phase out their Forces in Afghanistan, and it is not clear whether the augmentation of US troops will substantially exceed the Forces withdrawn by other ISAF partners. Several member countries, certainly including Canada, France and Germany, are facing rising domestic pressure to abandon their military commitments in Afghanistan. In any event, an addition of 30,000 soldiers could easily be swallowed by Afghanistan’s harsh terrain, and by a marginal escalation of the Taliban’s campaigns of terror. Critically, Afghanistan has a much smaller – and far more poorly equipped and trained – local Force available to share the burden of the war. As of February 2009, the Afghan National Army (ANA) had a total strength of 79,000.¹⁷ This is to be raised, on an accelerated timetable, to 134,000 by 2011. In addition, the Afghan National Police (ANP) currently accounts for 76,000 personnel, with a target strength of 82,000.¹⁸ At full target strength, consequently, the ANA and ANP would provide a total of 216,000 personnel – considerably less than domestic forces in Iraq. Crucially, General Petraeus has “acknowledged that the ratio of coalition and Afghan security forces to the population is projected through 2011 to be significantly lower than the 20 troops per 1,000 people prescribed by the Army counterinsurgency manual he helped write.”¹⁹

2.6 The most cursory examination of the comparative figures for Iraq and Afghanistan would demonstrate the acute paucity of Force, in comparison to the much larger population and total area in the latter. It is significant, moreover, that the insurgency in Afghanistan has a multiplicity of compounding factors and, that the Taliban are estimated to have achieved a permanent presence in as much as 72 per cent of the country’s territory by December 2008 (up from 54 per cent the

previous year).²⁰ Indeed, according to a report by *The International Council on Security and Development*, the Taliban has some influence across the whole country, with an additional 21 per cent categorized as having ‘substantial Taliban presence’, and 7 per cent with ‘light Taliban presence’.²¹

- 2.7 The sheer and acute deficit of Force is compounded by a wide range of qualitative factors that make the situation in Afghanistan far more intractable. It is useful to recall General Petraeus’ warning in this context:

In many respects, Afghanistan represents a more difficult problem set... It does not have a number of the blessings that Iraq has, in terms of the oil, gas, land of two rivers, the human capital that Iraq built up over the years, the muscle memory of a strong government, albeit one that was corrupted over time... These kinds of difficulties make Afghanistan very, very hard. We have seen that and we will continue to see that. That’s why, up front, I’ve said this is going to take sustained, substantial commitment.²²

Afghanistan, General Petraeus notes, further, is landlocked, rural and has a high illiteracy rate.

- 2.8 Many of these difficulties threaten to worsen. Population growth is a crucial source of future difficulties. With a 2005 population of 24.5 million, Afghanistan is already estimated to have grown to over 33.6 million, and has among the highest rates of population growth in the world. It is useful to recall, in this context, former CIA Director General Michael V. Hayden’s observation that rapid population growth “in poor, fragile states... will create a situation that will likely fuel instability and extremism – not just in those areas, but beyond them as well.” Afghanistan is one of the states he identifies among those where “population is expected to triple by mid-century”.²³

- 2.9 Afghanistan’s institutional structures have also been “unhinged by war for nearly 30 years”.²⁴ Despite the past eight years of liberal – though often misdirected – US and international support, the capacities for Governance remain abysmal. Worse, the destruction of infrastructure, the systematic slaughter or flight of educated elites, and the crisis of national leadership, place rigid constraints on the very possibility of rapid augmentation of capacities – even with significant

infusion of foreign financial resources. The profile of educational capacities is a telling index of this collapse:

Higher education in Afghanistan has deteriorated dramatically over the past 2 decades. From 68 colleges with well-equipped campuses in all major cities, the higher education system has been reduced to empty campuses with no faculty, students, or equipment... Decades of war and refugees have almost destroyed Afghanistan's professional and technical base of educated people, including teachers, administrators, managers, engineers, doctors, and other technocrats and professionals.²⁵

...By any measure, the education system in Afghanistan has collapsed... In secondary education, the estimated current GER (Gross Enrolment Rate) for boys is 5–11% and for girls as low as 1–2%. Indeed, the numbers of children in school declined dramatically in the 1990s because of the civil war, the destruction of education infrastructure, and the hostility of the Taliban to secular education—particularly the education of girls and female teachers.²⁶

Just 19 higher education institutions currently operate in Afghanistan, though enrolment had increased from 4,000 students in 2001 to 37,000 by 2007.²⁷ Despite the tremendous decline in Iraq as well, it is useful to note that the country's higher education system currently comprises as many as 20 Universities and 47 technical research institutes, under the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, which oversees 200 colleges, 800 departments and 28 research centres²⁸. Higher education enrolment in Iraq in 2008 stood at 370,000 – ten times the figure for Afghanistan in 2007.²⁹ [There are, of course, tremendous concerns about the content and quality of education in both countries, but these cannot detain us here].

- 2.10 President Obama's AfPak policy, of course, purports to address many of these concerns. Michele Flournoy, the Undersecretary of Defence for Policy, thus asserts, "In Afghanistan, we are pursuing – really for the first time – a fully resourced counterinsurgency strategy on the ground and civilian experts as well."³⁰ Regrettably, there is little within the outlined AfPak policy that inspires confidence that this is, in fact, the case. Indeed, AfPak merely regurgitates the failed

policies of the past seven years; the “policy framework and the importance it attaches to this region have not changed dramatically from the previous administration.”³¹ The essence of this strategy is summed up by Brahma Chellany as “surge and bribe”,³² preliminary to an accelerated withdrawal. Obama’s AfPak strategy, consistent with that of the previous administration, seeks to weaken the Taliban militarily and later strike a political deal with them from a position of strength. This experiment involves a continuation of the futile search for the ‘moderate Taliban’, the working out of unprincipled deals with fanatical warlords, and the raising of private armed militia, each of which has proven to be tragically counter-productive in the past. Given the fractious tribal politics of Afghanistan, and the limitless sanctuaries provided by its terrain, as well as the current and rising disruptive dominance of the Taliban, any deal-making with particular groups “will only strengthen the global *ihadists*’ cause”.³³ What we have, here, is another attempt by “limp liberals”³⁴ – who seek to purchase peace by offering concessions to those who systematically use the murder of civilians to secure their political or ‘celestial’ ends”³⁵ Past experiments in Afghanistan justifies little optimism regarding the success of this renewed attempt. In any event, the tiny ‘surge’ that is being attempted lacks the potential of creating even the transient dominance that would be necessary to negotiate, from a position of strength, even with the more opportunistic elements within the Taliban.

- 2.11 Another much-talked-about component of contemporary COIN strategy is the ‘hearts-and-minds’ component, the effort to win over local populations through developmental works. In the first instance, it is highly improbable that any such initiative can be successful as long as predator and missile strikes continue to inflict disproportionate ‘collateral damage’ – though the President Obama has committed particularly “to make every effort to avoid civilian casualties”.³⁶ Crucially, the USD 65 billion allocation for Afghanistan includes a developmental component that “doubles the size of the pot of money used by American commanders in Afghanistan to win over the population”,³⁷ though the US proposes to ‘limit its efforts to areas of expertise’, as far as developmental initiatives in Afghanistan are concerned, while greater emphasis would be placed on coordinating the efforts of other countries. Unfortunately, the record of developmental

investment in Afghanistan has been disastrous – what Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has described as “heartbreaking”:

For those of you who have been on the ground in Afghanistan, you have seen with your own eyes that a lot of these aid programs don't work... There are so many problems with them. There are problems of design, there are problems of staffing, there are problems of implementation, there are problems of accountability.³⁸

A very large proportion of the aid, moreover, simply flows out of the country, funding profiteering western implementing agencies. Noting that “Foreign aid accounts for 90 per cent of public expenditure in Afghanistan”,³⁹ the aid agency OXFAM had earlier charged that much of the U.S. aid in Afghanistan is wasted on consulting costs, subcontractor fees and duplication.⁴⁰ Another commentator observes,

It is estimated that less than half of development-assistance money budgeted for roads, schools, hospitals, electricity and other structural needs actually reaches the projects it was ear-marked for and only a quarter of those funds actually get to end users in the rural areas where most Afghans live.⁴¹

At bottom, it is necessary to contend with the reality of the collapse of governance in Afghanistan, and the principal that you cannot develop what you do not control. Development can only follow once the disruptive dominance of the Taliban over an overwhelming proportion of the country is effectively neutralized. The truth is, “NATO forces may be able to defeat the Taliban in individual battles, but they are not able to hold territory, much less clear, build and develop.”⁴² There is little possibility that NATO or the Afghan Government will be able to meet this necessary objective of counter-insurgency – to clear, build and develop – under the present policy framework and disposition of forces and resources.

- 2.12 To reiterate, then, the *surge* is not a solution; only a *sufficiency of forces and resources, deployed within a coherent strategic framework*, can constitute a solution. President Obama's AfPak strategy contains none of these elements. It brings, in effect, far too little and much too late to the

Afghan theatre. It does so, moreover, at the expense of Iraq, where levels of stabilization remains, at best, tentative and fragile, and consequently risks escalation in that theatre as well.

3. PAKISTAN: THE SEAT OF DESOLATION

3.1 It is in Pakistan that the Obama administration faces its greatest challenge, and where its policy fails most comprehensively to break new ground. Crucially, Obama's perspectives remain firmly fixed on near-term challenges and the objective of securing a tenable 'exit policy' for US forces in Afghanistan, with drastically diminished goals within the region – specifically, denying the al Qaeda safe haven and an operational base in Pakistan's border areas. The strategy to secure these limited objectives appears to be a virtual blank cheque to the Pakistan Army and Government, notwithstanding some tough rhetoric about 'conditionalities' and the diluted terms imposed by the Pakistan Enduring Assistance and Cooperation Enhancement (PEACE) Act, 2009, which gave approval to a tripling of non-military aid to Pakistan, even as it deleted the reference to "cross border attacks into India" – replacing this with the expression "neighbouring countries". While this may appear to be no more than a quibble, the reality is that Pakistan reads this as near immunity for acts of terrorism on Indian soil. In any event, US conditionalities are of no real relevance. The US has no punitive capacities against Pakistan in view of its continued dependence on the latter to secure any kind of action against the Taliban – al Qaeda combine on Pakistani soil. Indeed, if the US had the capacities to impose effective penalties on Pakistan, it would not have ignored the Pakistani role in the hundreds of terrorist attacks in Afghanistan, including many in which American lives were lost; or ignored the repeated and well documented warnings of an expanding Pakistani nuclear arsenal at a time when the security, from extremist forces, of the country's existing arsenal is suspect. The truth is, the same old 'strategic' calculation and the logic of Pakistan's 'indispensability' to the 'war against terrorism' or "COIN (counter-insurgency) campaign" – or whatever politically correct euphemism the Obama Administration may now choose – will inevitably prevail the next time US or ISAF lives are lost in Afghanistan, or Indians are targeted in Afghanistan or in India, in an ISI-backed terrorist attack.

- 3.2 Curiously, augmenting US aid to Pakistan comes at a time when President Obama explicitly recognizes that the “civilian government there is very fragile and don’t seem to have the capacity to deliver basic services.”⁴³ Worse, despite the apparent magnitude of aid flowing in to Pakistan, these are paltry amounts in terms of sheer demographic explosion and developmental deficits in the country. Far from addressing the country’s poverty and backwardness, infusions of foreign aid have historically acted as no more than bribes to the national elites – military and political – to secure minimal compliance with reduced US and Western policy objectives. There is no reason to believe that President Obama’s policy brings anything new to the table.
- 3.3 Worse, as Pakistan’s implosion gathers pace, neither the US nor the wider international community appears to be exploring the imperatives of responding to what is obviously a rapidly failing nuclear-armed state. Ignoring the entirety of the destructive dynamic that has been unleashed by enduring pathologies within the Pakistani state and society, the US leadership continues to clutch at the straws of ‘negotiated settlements’ with the ‘good Taliban’, of concessions on ‘outstanding disputes’, including Kashmir, and of developmental aid that is expected to choke off the “assembly lines of *jihad*” and the progressive formal and informal (non-state) militarization of Pakistan. But billions of dollars of aid to Pakistan in the post-9/11 era and a succession of failed experiments with the ‘moderate Taliban’ on both sides of the AfPak border have done nothing to stabilize this catastrophic country, and have only seen a continuous increase in the spaces for radicalization and religious extremism on its soil. Pakistan has, today, established itself as the very heart of global terrorism and the necessity of re-examining past policies with regard to this failing state is now inescapable.
- 3.4 The difficulty is that the world’s imagination has been conquered by a skilfully constructed nightmare fantasy, and this has long paralysed responses to a Pakistan that is now approaching the threshold of state failure.⁴⁴ Islamist extremism and terrorism have remained integral to the ruling establishment’s approach to domestic political management and regional strategic projection, as well as of international resource mobilisation. In the latter context, Pakistan presents itself as part of the solution to the problems it creates, combining manipulation, intimidation, and blackmail –

including nuclear blackmail – and is then handsomely rewarded for its ‘cooperation’. Against this backdrop,

...it is useful to conceive of Pakistan as a state acting as a suicide bomber, arguing that, if it does not receive the extraordinary dispensations and indulgences that it seeks, it will, in effect ‘implode’, and in the process do extraordinary harm to others. Part of the threat of this ‘implosion’ is also the spectre of the transfer of its nuclear arsenal and capabilities to more intransigent and irrational elements of the Islamist far right in Pakistan, who would not be amenable to the logic that its present rulers – whose interests in terrorism are strategic, and consequently, subject to considerations of strategic advantage – are willing to heed.⁴⁵

This threat has yielded enormous rewards in foreign assistance as well as great latitude in conduct that would otherwise be construed as unquestionably criminal and as appropriate grounds for international sanctions. It is under a benign international dispensation – rooted in fears of possible state collapse – that Pakistan has consistently remained a ‘minimal satisfier’, doing as little as is possible to secure itself against punitive action, but preserving its instrumentalities and networks of terrorism, sustaining its campaigns of terrorism at currently available levels of deniability and the international ‘tolerance of terrorism’.

3.5 The instrumentalisation of Islam and *jihad* remain an integral element of the political and strategic ambitions and outlook of the military-feudal-fundamentalist bloc that has ruled Pakistan since its creation. Despite the colossal ‘blowback’ of the *jihadi*-terrorist enterprise that the country is now experiencing, it remains the case that a powerful constituency in the political-military establishment remains sympathetic to and complicit with the Islamist extremist and terrorist formations that continue to operate with varying degrees of freedom across Pakistan. Ahmed Rashid thus notes,

A nuclear-armed military and an intelligence service that have sponsored Islamic extremism as an intrinsic part of their foreign policy for nearly four

decades have found it extremely difficult to give up their self-destructive double-dealing policies after 9/11, even under the watchful eye of the CIA.⁴⁶

3.6 Pakistan's accelerating hurtle into the abyss now appears irresistible. Unfortunately, US policy continues to fail to deal with the realities of Pakistan and its enduring pathologies, and with what one commentator has described as "the slow transformation of the Pakistani state itself into an instrument of the *jihadi* agenda."⁴⁷ The sheer urgency of the crisis has largely been neglected by America's *status quo* policies, which ignore the fact that, as Ahmed Rashid notes, "the situation in Pakistan deteriorates at a pace faster than policymakers can grasp."⁴⁸

3.7 It is critical to recognize the augmenting danger, in this context, of WMD terrorism. Graham Allison, a Harvard professor and a leading nuclear expert, observes,

When you map W.M.D. and terrorism, all roads intersect in Pakistan... The nuclear security of the arsenal is now a lot better than it was. But the unknown variable here is the future of Pakistan itself, because it's not hard to envision a situation in which the state's authority falls apart and you're not sure who's in control of the weapons, the nuclear labs, the materials.⁴⁹

3.8 Despite a growing realization among wide segments of its national elite that terrorism is doing irreparable damage to Pakistan, and despite the best-intentioned abundance of aid and advice from other countries, Pakistan's paper-thin institutions and deeply compromised leaderships simply lack the capacities, the vision and the will to check the augmenting momentum. Traditional 'solutions' – democratisation, development, negotiated settlements and peace processes – have little scope for success in this context. The Army is the only significant and relatively stable power in the country, and it has historically held the nation together principally through the application of brute force and the instrumentalisation of radical Islamism – devices that are now producing diminishing returns. Crucially, this Army remains deeply ambivalent about the ongoing *jihadi* terrorism, treating it still as a principal instrumentality of regional power projection and domestic political management, even as it is locked in uncertain war with its own creations, stretched to the limits of its diminishing capacities across multiple theatres of internal conflict. This is an Army, moreover, that has long been mobilised on precisely the same ideology and principles of an aggressive,

conquering Islamism that motivate the Taliban, al Qaeda and the numberless *lashkars* that project carnage across South Asia and into the wider world through their ‘global *jihād*’. It is an Army that cannot commit itself unambiguously to the objectives of counter-terrorism – even if the tasks of counter-terrorism could still be assessed to be within its capacities.

- 3.9 The strategic and foreign policy challenges for the US and the global community, within the emerging scenario, principally involve the neutralisation of Pakistan’s nuclear assets and the containment of the fallout of the country’s collapse into anarchy or takeover by a Talibanised terrorist order. Evidently, these are colossal challenges, and the temptation to lapse into the make-believe of aid driven development, democratization, ‘peace processes’, ‘negotiated settlements’, and deals with the ‘good Taliban’ will be great. But these are precisely the contours of past failure. Unless the hard core of Pakistan’s ‘enduring pathologies’, its risk of state failure, and the cumulative consequences of these, are directly addressed, policy initiatives, including Obama’s AfPak, will secure nothing of enduring value.

4. FROM WISHFUL TO STRATEGIC THINKING

- 4.1 Regrettably, there is little in the US policy shift from Iraq to Afghanistan, or the related AfPak strategy, that gives grounds for any hope of a ‘new era of peace’ or any significant ‘opportunities for advancement’ in the South Asian region.
- 4.2 President Obama’s AfPak strategy overwhelmingly concentrates on unrealistic short-term targets and goals, based on irrational settlements with the most dangerous elements in the region – the Pakistan Army, the ‘moderate Taliban’, and a powerless and unreliable political leadership in Pakistan. At the same time, the setting of hard deadlines for US withdrawal, both in Iraq and Afghanistan, encourage an extremist calculus within a protracted war framework that simply seeks to exhaust the political will of the Western leadership to remain engaged in the war. It is only when the US and the West accept and operate within the protracted war paradigm that a rational policy framework can emerge.
- 4.3 For the moment, as President Obama has rightly noted, “there will be more violence”.⁵⁰ Regrettably, this violence, with its overwhelming dependence on both sides of the AfPak border,

- on long range weapons and aerial targeting, and the inevitable and disproportionate ‘collateral damage’ – the killing of numberless civilians – cannot lead to stabilization of either theatre. It has already provoked a massive displacement of populations, and this will also further feed radicalization, even as the Pakistan establishment’s duality on Islamist terrorism persists. Crucially, with urban centres and parts of Punjab increasingly affected, the very core of the surviving institutional base has come under threat. Within this centrifugal dynamic, there is little within Pakistan’s existing institutional configuration or the foreign policy tools currently available to foreign powers that can help stem the country’s ‘descent into chaos’.
- 4.4 President Obama’s ‘AfPak’ strategy rightly recognizes the irreducible connectivity of the many crises of the region, but fails to recognize that this ‘connectivity’ is itself part of the problem. Pakistan has successfully established an Afghan dependency through its strategy of disruptive dominance, and current US perceptions and strategy are perpetuating and institutionalizing this dependency. If Afghanistan is to escape the destructive dynamic imposed on it by Pakistan, it must be helped to escape this dependency, and not to be forced into closer and closer “intertwining” of interests through initiatives such as the Reconstruction Opportunity Zones (ROZs), joint security arrangements, etc. – structures and initiatives that will always be held in jeopardy by a wilful, disruptive and extremist Pakistani state.⁵¹
- 4.5 It is necessary to recognize that Pakistan continues to dictate the agenda for the region through its violence and extremist perversity, and also that Afghanistan is now secure from all directions except Pakistan. None of its neighbours have demonstrated any evidence of hostile intent, and most (excepting, for extraneous reasons bound to the relationship with the US, Iran) are now cooperating, in various measure, with the US-led coalition. These are the ties that need to be enormously strengthened, both on tactical and strategic grounds.
- 4.6 Within the framework of strategic initiatives in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, it is crucial to understand that areas of conflict cannot be developed unless they are first recovered. The ‘clear and hold’ imperatives of COIN must – but rarely do – precede efforts of development.
- 4.7 While emphasis shifts increasingly to the AfPak complex, it is imperative that the ‘fragile and reversible’ gains in Iraq are not lost. There is significant risk that Iraq may be destabilized again.

4.8 While the AfPak strategy offers very little that is new in this region, it is also the case that there is no evidence of any alternative strategy within the US perspective. There is, in other words, no ‘Plan B’ that could engage with and contain the consequences of the high probabilities of structural failure in the region. Crucially, existing US perspectives seem to be focused on devices that are merely incremental and entirely inadequate. As one commentator notes, “No one in Washington is, as yet, responsible for winning the war.”⁵²

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 - ¹ Ambassador Michael A. SHEEHAN, Coordinator for Counterterrorism, US Department of State, Statement for the Record Before the House International Relations Committee July 12, 2000, <http://www.usinfo.state.gov/topical/pol/terror/00071702.htm>. Ambassador Sheehan was echoing Secretary of State Madeline Albright’s earlier statement (of May 1, 2000) that there had been an “eastward shift in terrorism’s center of gravity” towards South Asia. See “US says terrorism threat has shifted from Middle East to South Asia”, CNN.com, May 1, 2000, <http://www.cnn.com/2000/US/05/01/terrorism.report.02/>.
 - ² The idea of a ‘locus of terrorism’ is itself suspect and diversionary in its impact. Terrorism is a method, it exists wherever it has significant probabilities of success. See, Ajai Sahni, “The Locus of Error: Has the Gravity of Terrorism ‘Shifted’ in Asia?”, *Faultlines: Writings on Conflict & Resolution*, Volume 13, November 2002, New Delhi: ICM-Bulwark Books, <http://www.satp.org/satporgrp/publication/faultlines/volume13/Article1.htm>.
 - ³ Gordon Lubold, “Obama’s defence budget shifts focus to Afghanistan and Pakistan”, *The Christian Science Monitor*, May 7, 2009.
 - ⁴ *Ibid.* Afghanistan is to receive USD 65 million as against Iraq’s USD 61 million.
 - ⁵ Luis Martinez and Z. Byron Wolf, “Obama: ‘By Aug. 31, 2010, Combat Mission in Iraq will End’”, ABC News, February 27, 2009, <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/International/Story?id=6971574&page=1>.
 - ⁶ iCasualties, Operation Enduring Freedom and Iraq, <http://icasualties.org/oef/>; <http://icasualties.org/Iraq/index.aspx>.
 - ⁷ “List of Afghan Security Force fatality reports in Afghanistan”, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Afghan_security_forces_fatality_reports_in_Afghanistan#Totals.
 - ⁸ “UN report: Civilian casualties hit record high in Afghan Conflict”, *cnn.com*, February 17, 2009, <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/asiapcf/02/17/afghanistan.civilian.casualties/index.html>.
 - ⁹ Petraeus first offered this formulation in his testimony to the House and Senate in April 2008. See, Peter Baker and Jonathan Weisman, “A Plea from Petraeus: Extending the Drawdown in Iraq Could Imperil Gains, General Tells Lawmakers”, *The Washington Post*, April 9, 2008. He has since repeated this assessment at several fora. See, for instance, “Iraq Progress ‘Fragile and Reversible’ After Bombings, Petraeus Warns”, Foxnews, April 24, 2009, <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/first100days/2009/04/24/petraeus-warns-iraq-progress-fragile-reversible-bombings/>.
 - ¹⁰ “Obama: ‘By Aug. 31, 2010, Combat Mission in Iraq will end’”, ABC News, February 27, 2009, <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/International/Story?id=6971574&page=2>.
 - ¹¹ See, K.P.S. Gill, “Pakistan: The Footprints of Terror”, South Asia Terrorism Portal, <http://www.satp.org/satporgrp/kpsgill/2003/chapter2.htm>.
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