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Background Paper

**Changing Regional Context Beyond 2016:
Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations
December 2014**



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FOREWORD

Changing Regional Context Beyond 2016: Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations is a paper that has been commissioned by PILDAT to serve as Background Paper for the Pakistan-Afghanistan Parliamentarians Dialogue-XII, scheduled to be held on December 30-31, 2014 at Islamabad, Pakistan.

Authored by **Senator Afrasiab Khattak** (ANP, KP), Chairman Senate Functional Committee on Human Rights, this paper covers the genesis of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations, focusing on the historical background as well as the current issues and perspectives on prospects for conflict-resolution post-2014 and the proposed strategic steps towards possible Pakistan-Afghanistan Joint Plan of Action and recommendations.

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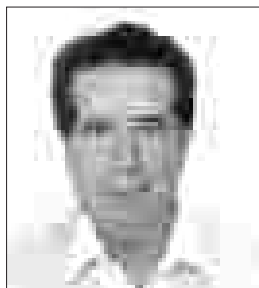
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Abbreviations & Acronyms

BSA	Bilateral Security Agreement
CENTO	Central Treaty Organisation
HPC	High Peace Council
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
SEATO	South East Asia Treaty Organisation
SOFA	Status of Forces Agreement

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Senator Afrasiab Khattak hails from Kohat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Senator Khattak is a former student leader, writer and prominent human rights activist. He has served as the President of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) for a three-year-term. Senator Khattak is also a constitutional expert and advocate Supreme Court. Senator Khattak currently serves as the Chairman Senate Functional Committee on Human Rights and is a member of Senate Standing Committees on Science and Technology, Petroleum and Natural Resources, Foreign Affairs and Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit Baltistan and States and Frontier Regions.

Introduction & Historical Background of Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations

Pakistan – Afghanistan relationship in its initial phase was burdened with political baggage from colonial past and the 20th century cold war. Unfortunately the unique commonalities in history, culture, religion and ethnic make-up, instead of bringing them together, gave rise to claims and counter claims that muddied the water.

The problem was further compounded by the political and ideological polarization in the second half of the 20th century. Pakistan was, during that period, part of the US led Western military pacts like SEATO and CENTO aimed at containing Communism. Afghanistan was technically neutral but was regarded to be closer to former Soviet Union and India. The super powers of that era tried to use their allies against the opposite camp. This situation handicapped the development of normal good neighbourly relations.

But inspite of the complicated nature of Pakistan – Afghanistan relations of 1950 and 1960, there were some positive aspects to it. For example the two sides were able to reach an agreement for Afghan Transit Trade, which was an important foundation for durable relationship. This agreement enabled Afghanistan to have access to Karachi seaport for the international trade. Similarly during Pakistan's two wars with India in 1965 and 1971, Afghanistan did not create any problem and also assured Pakistan that there will be no negative activity in the border area of the two countries. So Afghanistan's cooperation enabled Pakistan to utilise its Defence resources on the Eastern Border.

The situation fundamentally changed when the erstwhile Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1980. Millions of Afghan refugees came to Pakistan during the war in Afghanistan in 1980s. Pakistan supported Afghan resistance against the Soviet Union and a new bond of fraternity came into being between the people of the two countries. There will be hardly any other example in history of such large scale and positive interaction between any two countries.

Experience of the past few decades has proved this fact, beyond any doubt, that there cannot be stability in one country at the cost of the other. We saw that conflict in Afghanistan expanded into Pakistan and had a devastating fall-out. Thousands and thousands of people have fallen victims to the menace of terrorism in both the countries. Again experience has brought the point home to both states that without mutual cooperation they will not be able to defeat the scourge

of terrorism.

The people of Pakistan have watched with sympathy and interest the social, political and security transitions in Afghanistan. They appreciate the steady evolution of a democratic Afghanistan. It is a matter of historical record that major efforts were made by different Governments in Afghanistan for social reformation. From initiative taken by King Amanullah Khan in 1920s to the final effort made after the launch of the Bonn Process many of these efforts fizzled out because, apart from some other factors, they failed to attract societal ownership.

Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations Beyond 2014

The enthusiastic participation of the Afghan people in the recent Presidential Election has clearly indicated that majority of Afghan people support democratic process in their country, which augurs well for the future stability of the country.

The way Afghan security forces have taken responsibility of defending their country by replacing ISAF so far is a matter of tremendous satisfaction.

While high level contacts and interaction between the Defence Ministries and the leaders of the Armed Forces are reassuring there is room for intensification of this relationship. Defence Establishments in both the countries need to increase their cooperation in fighting terrorism, which is a common enemy.

It is a matter of record that there is a consensus among all the major political parties in Pakistan to have brotherly relationship with Afghanistan on the basis of sovereign equality. As we have witnessed the newly elected Government in Pakistan in May 2013 reached out to the Government of Afghanistan like the previous democratic Government, there is no difference of opinion between the past and the present ruling parties in regard to the relationship with Afghanistan. There is a lot of potential for expansion in this relationship. While there is need for further institutionalization of relationship at the state level the people-to-people relationship also needs to be further built and streamlined.

It is interesting to note that while there is a massive spontaneous interaction between the citizens of both the States, systematic interaction between the civil societies of the two countries has not yet reached the desired level. There is a lot of potential for expanding

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relationship between the political forces of peace and democracy in the two countries. Parliamentarians, traders, intellectuals, civil society activists and young people from both the countries need to be encouraged for greater interaction. The young people will have a special role in enhancing the brotherly relationship for which exchange of youth delegation should be high on the agenda.

Relationship between the two countries in culture, sport and information is another area of the under implemented potential. Cultural, artistic and linguistic similarities make it possible for the countries to exchange films, dramas, music and entertainment material. So far, individual artists or groups do take their programmes from one side to the other side but the lack of systematic and large-scale official exchanges is incredible.

It is difficult to imagine any other two neighbouring countries to be sitting on such a huge potential. It is also strange that television (TV) cables in both countries do not show programmes from the other country. Governments on both sides do not publicly give any reason but it is not difficult to imagine that official discouragement at some level leads to this awkward situation. Consequently, only people with dish antennas have access to the TV programmes of the other country. Due to lack of direct media connection between the two countries, both of them have to depend on foreign, particularly Western news agencies, to get news from across the border.

It is unbelievable that during recent Afghanistan Presidential Elections there was not a single Pakistani news camera to cover the Electoral Process. Everything was received through foreign news agencies.

The situation is similarly weird in sports. Cricket being the most popular game in both the countries offers tremendous opportunities for playing matches in both countries. But because of the under-current of political trust deficit, the potential has not been realized.

The Afghan Parliament has approved Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) with the USA (now officially called the Security and Defence Cooperation Agreement) and the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with NATO. This development has paved ground for the ISAF follow up mission called Resolute Support to start on January 01, 2015. This force will comprise of 12000 soldiers including 9800 Americans. Pakistan has welcomed the emergence of National Unity Government in Afghanistan after the Presidential elections and wishes every success to it.

The recent high level political and security contacts between the two countries have demonstrated a positive trend in the relationship. Of particular importance was the maiden visit of Afghanistan President Dr. Ashraf Ghani to Pakistan on November 14, 2014. Deliberation between the top leadership of two countries during this visit has opened new avenues of political, security and economic cooperation. Pakistan was impressed by the clarity of the vision of Dr. Ashraf Ghani regarding Pakistan-Afghanistan cooperation. When Mr. Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, Prime Minister of Pakistan, talked about opening a new page in the relationship of the two countries, Dr. Ashraf Ghani, the President of Afghanistan, reciprocated by saying that he was altogether in favour of opening a new book in this regard. Concrete proposals regarding expanding bilateral trade, starting joint ventures in the field of energy augur well for the future economic cooperation.

Of particular significance was President Ashraf Ghani's offer to establish an export industrial zone for Pakistani businessmen in northern Afghanistan. The Afghanistan President also raised the issue of problems faced by Afghan Traders at Karachi port during the transit trade. Since the aforementioned proposals are of utmost significance, it is imperative for the two countries to create working groups comprising of the representatives from both public and private sectors to follow-up for processing them through the concerned state institutions.

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The Way Forward: Strategic Steps Towards Possible Pakistan-Afghanistan Joint Plan of Action & Recommendations

The potential for economic and trade relations can be realized only if there is peace in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The recent spate of terrorist attacks in Afghanistan was aimed at, apart from other things, for subverting the positive atmosphere created by the successful visit of President Ashraf Ghani to Pakistan.

All those terrorist attacks were evil but particularly despicable was the attack on innocent people busy in a volleyball match in Paktia Province of Afghanistan in which more than 80 people died.

Similarly a heinous crime was committed in Peshawar on November 16, 2014, in which innocent young students and their teachers were savagely murdered by terrorists. Peshawar tragedy is a watershed moment in the anti-terror struggle of the people and Government of Pakistan. The people of Pakistan have openly come out to demand decisive action against terrorists of all shades.

It is heartening to see that Peshawar tragedy has not only united the people of Pakistan in their resolve to fight terror but Governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan have also enhanced their cooperation for defeating terrorism. It is encouraging to see that both the Governments, instead of indulging in blame game, have quietly increased cooperation in the common fight.

One would wish and hope that such cooperation should be further strengthened to take the struggle against terrorism to a logical conclusion. We should urge both the Governments to go for taking bold steps for building confidence between each other. Of paramount significance in this regard will be mutually addressing each other's concerns regarding pockets of terrorist on both sides of the borders. This will go a long way in building confidence and removing irritants in the relationships between the two countries.

Pakistan fully supports an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process of reconciliation and peace making. Pakistan will make positive contribution in facilitating the aforementioned process to the extent desired by our Afghan brothers.

Pakistani Parliamentarians endorse the initiative for a national reconciliation taken by the High Peace Council (HPC) of Afghanistan and hope that all sides

will show maturity and would understand the vitality of peace for Afghanistan and the entire region.

There should be an inclusive approach on both regional and international levels, as zero sum games in the past have led to perpetuation of the conflict.

We appreciate the positive initiatives taken by the immediate neighbours for establishing peace in the region and intend to cooperate with them. We particularly welcome the keen interest demonstrated by our great neighbour People's Republic of China in overcoming conflict and establishing peace in our region. We hope that the Chinese support for peace and its vision for economic development of the region will go a long way in stabilizing the region and in bringing it at par with the rest of the world in economic development.

Pakistan and Afghanistan have not only wide ranging bilateral engagement but they are also part of number of trilateral meetings and other multilateral processes geared towards establishing peace and achieving stability. We are determined to work honestly and diligently to achieve the goal of peace and stability.

The year 2015 is absolutely crucial for establishing sustainable peace in Afghanistan and for defeating terrorism in Pakistan. It clearly underlines the commonalities in the destinies of the two countries. While both the countries strive for peace they will have to be prepared to defeat the terrorist who wants to inflict death and destruction on the people of the both countries.

If the past experience is anything to go by, they can achieve this goal by further enhancing cooperation in combating terrorism. By defeating the evil forces of terror both the countries can look towards 2016 and beyond for an era of socio-economic development which seems to be the common destiny of Asian countries. After all every indicator of socio-economic development hints at 21st century being the Asian century.



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