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## Afghanistan Post-2014: Politico-Strategic Perspectives

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Afghanistan post-2014 politico-strategic perspectives are complex, intriguing and clouded by unpredictability given its tortured history where external powers outplayed their strategic hands at the cost of Afghanistan's political stability.

Afghanistan has been the crucible of competing external strategic interests for over two centuries. In 2014 as its end draws near, Afghanistan post-2014 politico-strategic perspectives suggest that these competing interests would now revolve around the strategic stakes in Afghanistan's future of the United States, Russia, India, Iran and China-Pakistan strategic nexus.

Afghanistan Post-2014 unfolding events, when analysed, portend that Afghanistan can no longer be the exclusive strategic preserve of the United States or the United States bowing to strategic sensitivities of the US-Collusive Pakistan Army on Afghanistan.

In 2014 year-end as Afghanistan prepares to settle down to the impending reality of drawdown of US Forces, the political situation is relatively more stable than the earlier exit of US involvement after its first military intervention in Afghanistan in the early 1990s. However, this relative Afghan political stability is not on sound foundations as the national unity power-sharing political dispensation contrived by the United States to facilitate its smooth exit carries inherently in its conception, seeds of further political instability.

United States second military intervention in Afghanistan in the aftermath of 9/11 viewed in 2014 does not seem to have attained any of its strategic and military objectives. Afghanistan is still open to Pakistan Army's military destabilisation operations, Taliban terrorism arising from the foregoing and a marked reluctance of the United States to clamp down hard on its Pakistan Army protégé to desist from disruptive strategies in Afghanistan

.United States and Pakistan represented by the US-Collusive Pakistan Army and its notorious intelligence set-up the ISI, have been the prime external military actors for over two decades and responsible for muddying the politico-strategic broth in Afghanistan beyond comprehension.

The resultant security environment in Afghanistan is a likely reversion to the chaotic and explosive situation prevailing prior to the US military intervention. Once again the Taliban and the Al Qaeda are again rearing their heads in Afghanistan with the obvious encouragement of Pakistan. To make matters worse the ISIS is also heading towards Afghanistan aided singly or jointly by these Islamic Jihadi entities.

Russia, India and Iran have legitimate high strategic stakes in Afghanistan's stability and despite this have limited their engagement and involvement in Afghanistan to the political and economic domains so far. However, the unfolding threatening security environment in Afghanistan Post-2014 threatening to impact their respective national security interests, they may now be impelled towards a more active involvement in Afghanistan, including possibly military.

China's has lately developed significant economic stakes in Afghanistan. China however has significant strategic stakes in Afghanistan by virtue of propping up the strategic interests in Afghanistan of its "Iron Friend", namely Pakistan. The China-Pakistan strategic nexus considerations determine China's policy attitudes and strategic formulations on Afghanistan.

Before analysing the stakes and strategic challenges faced by the external powers in Afghanistan, a few salient points need to be observed with clarity to establish the contextual setting. Afghanistan' post-2014 stable future would still be outside the purview and control of the Afghanistan national unity political dispensation installed in Kabul. Post-2014, Afghanistan would be passing through a highly fragile follow-up existence politically, economically and militarily. Residual US military presence left behind in Afghanistan would be insufficient to deter Pakistan Army's protégés in Afghanistan from attempting to regain control of Kabul and Afghanistan. Pakistan does not seem to have taken kindly to a national unity power-sharing political dispensation in Kabul which in actual effect amounts to power being shared by the Pashtuns with the Northern Alliance.

In such a fragile military situation as Pakistan attempts install a wholly Pakistan-friendly regime in Kabul dominated by its Pashtuns affiliates, political dangers lurk where Afghanistan's other ethnic groups opposed to Pakistani control of Afghanistan may resort to a civil war to secure their interests. Politically the Afghan situation would continue to be tenuous in the absence of credible political institutions.

Economically, Afghanistan without sizeable economic aid from the global donors would be unable to survive and reconstruct war-ravaged Afghanistan and rescue it from poverty. United States and the West may not be all that inclined to assist in ample measure.

Pakistan's nefarious role in Afghanistan for over two decades now hardly qualifies it to be considered as a responsible and benign stakeholder in Afghanistan's stability. Pakistan's role in Afghanistan Post-2014 is predictable and that of being an irresponsible 'regional spoiler state' intent on subverting Afghanistan to its dictates. Therefore nothing more needs to be said on its unidirectional fixative obsession on Afghanistan of reducing it to a Pakistan satellite or colony. The United States lost this perspective early in its military intervention post 9/11 and is now facing the costs of a double-timing ally.

United States would be in effect abandoning Afghanistan for a second time without even notional military stabilisation after a decade of military intervention, sustained military operations and control for more than a decade.. In the Post-2014 phase the United States in view of advances made by ISIS, Al Qaeda and the Taliban anticipating US drawdown from Afghanistan may be forced to revise its military exit schedules or increase its residual presence in Afghanistan from the figure of 6,000 to 9,000 announced. The United States drawing on its Iraq experience of being forced to re-deploy US Forces to combat the ISIS menace may have to drastically revise its Post-2014 strategies and contingency plans on Afghanistan.

With economics fraying the Atlantic Alliance ties, NATO countries may now be reluctant to follow suit and oblige the United States in its revised formulations and decisions.

The resultant security environment ensuing in Afghanistan Post-2014 would therefore be nightmarish for the United States to manage on its own, single-handedly.

United States would then be forced to be more accommodative and to accept an increased involvement of Russia, India and Iran and not be overwhelmed by Pakistan Army's contrarian sensitivities and objections on the subject.

United States would have to be wary of an increased role of China in Afghanistan which though welcome on the face of it would in effect endanger United States national security interests in the region, in Central Asia, and in Afghanistan

Russia India and Iran have legitimate strategic and security stakes in Afghanistan's stability. Pointed many times over in my past SAAG Papers on Afghanistan are the imperatives that these three significant regional actors have in coordinating their responses and involvement

in Afghanistan's future even if in the end -game it entails military involvement to secure Afghanistan's future as a moderate and democratic Islamic state.

Afghanistan Post-2014 would pose a special challenge to Chinese policy planners where China's Pakistan-Centric policy fixations in the region would dominate China's perspectives in the Post-2014 phase and these would be in contradiction to the strategic interests of Russia, India and Iran of a stable Afghanistan not vulnerable to Pakistan's military coercion. Despite Afghanistan's new President's undertaking his maiden foreign visit to China, though politically ominous, China would in the ensuing period may find it difficult to elbow out Russia, India and Iran from the Afghan political and strategic space.

Concluding, politico-strategic perspectives on Afghanistan Post-2014 suggest that Afghanistan is in a long haul of a transitional future where the United States alone would not be in a position to militarily, economically and politically determine events in Afghanistan. In United States own national security interests and Afghanistan's stable future. American strategic prudence would dictate jettisoning its Pakistan Army-Centric Afghan formulations and co-opt Russia, India and Iran as responsible regional players and partners to secure Afghanistan's future.

Only the passage of time will tell whether the United States has in it the strategic prudence and vision to do so.

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