

The New End Game

(Part 2)

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Regional End Game

President Donald Trump has announced his most controversial “Afghan Policy” by blaming Pakistan for the strategic failure of his country in Afghanistan. The new US Afghan Policy has also started the end game in the region which has spillover socio-economic, geo-political and geo-strategic repercussions even beyond region.

New Afghan Strategy (2017)

The US President termed Pakistan the only “destabilizing factor” for its “untamed militarization” in Afghanistan since 2001, by allegedly supporting, nurturing and financing terrorist groups. He focused on Pakistan’s hidden sympathies and nurseries of terrorism on its soil as a major setback to his country universal role since 9/11.

He warned the government of Pakistan to accept the so called “strategic maneuvering” of India to resolve the issue of Afghanistan. He pressured Pakistan to stop meddling into the internal affairs of Afghanistan. It is feared that Pakistan and Iran may be the next targets of the US during the presidency of Trump.

In his newly announced Afghan Policy the US president Trump said that US troops would not stay in Afghanistan for long, although there is certainly no clear exit plan. Trump has not specified the number of additional US forces to be deployed there, but he has already given the Pentagon approval for 3,900 soldiers thus bringing the total American troop presence in the country close to 10,000.

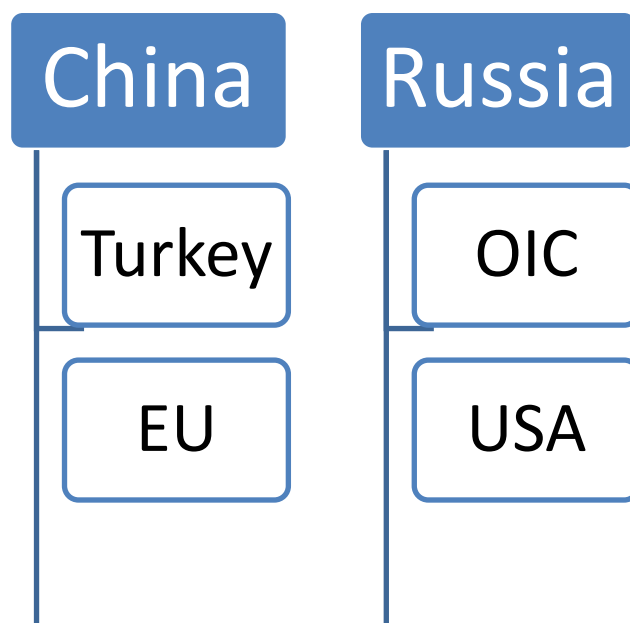
The new Afghan Policy is a complete turnaround in Trump’s election promise to pull out US troops from Afghanistan. It is apparent that he has given in to the pressure from the American military establishment, though one tends to agree with him that complete military withdrawal would have disastrous consequences for regional security. The new US strategy was announced at a time when the Afghan Taliban insurgents have succeeded to expand their influence to over 40 per cent of this country that is plagued by rising internal political discord. It will not be easy for the US forces to contain the Taliban advance and to maintain the status quo for a longer period. Diplomacy and political options are clearly not a priority for the Trump administration.

US through its new policy has tried to link Afghanistan with the US South Asia policy which may deepen regional tensions, especially with Pakistan and China. The toughening stance on Pakistan may have serious repercussions for an already troubled relationship between Islamabad and Washington, and the cancellation of the US Deputy State Secretary visit to Pakistan has reaffirmed the widening gap between Pakistan and US. It is feared that a US confused and flawed Afghan policy may push the United States much deeper into the Afghan quagmire and fuel regional tensions. While assigning India a greater role, there seem to be no plans to engage other neighboring and surrounding countries in the effort to resolve the Afghan conflict.

This is the first time a US president has publicly warned Pakistan of severe consequences if the country does not take effective action against the alleged terrorist sanctuaries along its borders. Pakistani officials contend that the Trump administration has crossed the red line by making India a part of its Afghan strategy.

Pakistan's Policy Options

Pakistan has been a frontline state in the fight against terrorism since 2001 by losing more than 70,000 precious lives and suffering collateral damages worth \$US 100 billion. The government of Pakistan has miserably failed to improve its relations with the Trump administration despite passing of so many months. It has also failed to build a functional relationship with Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani. Nevertheless, the government of Pakistan may initiate rigorous diplomatic channels to defuse increasing tensions between Pakistan and the US by engaging:-



There is an urgent need to realize drastic geopolitical and geo-strategic changes happening rapidly across and around our region in terms of US-North Korea stand-off affecting China, Russia, South Korea and last, but not the least, Japan.

The new US Afghanistan Policy is another attempt to rewrite the regional geopolitical landscape by engaging anti-Pakistan-China powers, especially India, and encircling Russia by increasing the US troops presence in Afghanistan.

The Armed Forces of Pakistan, the Foreign Office, and the government slammed US accusations of harboring armed groups, and demanded serious integrated efforts to defeat the Taliban fighters. Qamar Javed Bajwa, COAS, rejected any financial assistance from the United States:

"We are not looking for any material or financial assistance ... but trust, understanding and acknowledgement of our contributions.[...] We have done a lot towards [achieving peace in

Afghanistan] and shall keep on doing our best, not to appease anyone, but in line with our national interests and national policy”.

Shahid Khaqan Abbasi chaired a high-level meeting of the National Security Committee, in which he rejected Trump's allegations, and termed the policy an attempt *"to scapegoat Pakistan"*. The Committee expressed Islamabad's resolve to work with Washington, and called on US military forces to target Pakistani Taliban elements reportedly based in the Afghan regions.

"We would like to see effective and immediate US military efforts to eliminate sanctuaries harboring terrorists and miscreants on the Afghan soil including those responsible for fomenting terror in Pakistan. The Afghan war cannot be fought in Pakistan," the Committee said in a statement released after the meeting.

China’s Diplomatic Support

China was the first country to show solidarity with Pakistan after the announcement of the US Afghan Policy by praising Pakistan’s valuable sacrifices in the fight against terrorism. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said that Pakistan was on the front line in the struggle against terrorism, and that it had made “great sacrifices” and “important contributions” in the fight.

“We believe that the international community should fully recognize Pakistan's anti-terrorism efforts.” she said during a daily news briefing.

“We are happy to see Pakistan and the United States carrying out anti-terror cooperation on the basis of mutual respect, and to work together for security and stability in the region and in the world. We hope the relevant US policies can help promote the security, stability and development of Afghanistan and the region”.

Concluding Remarks

The new end game has been started by the main movers and shakers in the country, region and the world. Elements of irrelevancy have already brought about drastic changes in the country. Now, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi has been sworn in as new Prime Minister, and he is trying his best to sail out the country from the deep waters of uncertainty to the shores of political maturity, stability and economic sustainability.

The rules of the game have been changed, and the role of politicians has been further marginalized in the country. If there was widespread war in Afghanistan in the near future, things would not be easy in Pakistan either.

All political parties and pressure groups must realize the rapidly changing geopolitical and geo-strategic scenarios in the region. There is an urgent need to develop pragmatic foreign policy to counter the effects of the newly announced US Afghan Policy. Close liaison with China, Russia, Turkey and the EU may provide strategic cushion to us, in times of crisis.

The survival of Pakistan rests on national consensus between the main stakeholders, i.e. civil government and the military brass. Respect for humanity, rule of law, supremacy of the

constitution, and the will of people is crucial. Any kind of misadventure owing to national crises or regional compulsion ought to be discouraged.

Politics must not be misused for prosecution. It must be utilized for establishing productive channels to provide a better qualitative life in the country. There is no scope for political cronies in a democratic system if we want to build a decent society. Transparency and accountability across the board must be our mantra, instead of selective justice.