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Conflict Resolution in Afghanistan: India as Catalyst

Ali Ahmed



Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies

Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies

B-7/3, Safdarjung Enclave
New Delhi 110029
91-11-4100 1900
www.ipcs.org

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ali Ahmed is Research Fellow at IDSA, New Delhi.

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Address:
B 7/3 Lower Ground Floor
Safdarjung Enclave
New Delhi 110029
INDIA

Tel: 91-11-4100 1900, 4165 2556, 4165 2557,
4165 2558, 4165 2559

Fax: (91-11) 4165 2560
Email: officemail@ipcs.org
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Conflict Resolution in Afghanistan

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Ali Ahmed
Research Fellow, IDSA

Af-Pak currently it is at a military stalemate. Breaking this would require political initiatives. In this, the region could lend a hand. India as a principal player can provide the ballast to such an initiative. This would be predicated on its reaching a wider understanding with Pakistan on their strained relations. Engagement in conflict resolution in Afghanistan provides an opportunity for win-win outcomes. The paper attempts to illumine the strategic path towards such a future.

We are the world
We are the children
We are the ones who make
A brighter day
So let's start giving!

- USA for Africa: 'We are the world', 1985

I Introduction

Developments on the Af-Pak front are set to culminate at the forthcoming conference in Bonn, a decade since the first edition. Yet, there is little optimism.¹ The two antagonists, the US-led NATO force, International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), and the Taliban, are at a mutually hurting stalemate.

Ironically, even as this indicates the conflict is ripe for settlement, both continue to circle each other in the ring. It appears that both are unwilling to be the first to change military tack, even though both have given sufficient indications of interest in a peace process.² In effect, the peace process needs an external catalyst. Can India fulfill such a role? This paper outlines a strategy for India towards assisting in conflict resolution in Afghanistan.

The paper first conducts a strategic appreciation beginning with a brief environment scan. This section comprises arriving at India's aim through a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) and a discussion of strategy options. It then paints possible scenarios post-2014 to objectively test the strategy options for robustness. It finally explicates the strategy option of a politically proactive India. The proposal is for

The author would like to thank the scholars at the IPCS for their comments on a draft of this paper.

¹ See US Undersecretary for Defence, Amb. M. Flounay's remarks, 'Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan', Council on Foreign Relations, (Transcript), 4 November 2011, <http://www.cfr.org/afghanistan/progress-toward-security-stability-afghanistan/p26460>

India nudging the international community towards conflict resolution through UN mediation and peacekeeping.³ The latter can even take the form of a UN-SAARC association in 'hybrid' peacekeeping.⁴

II Environment Scan

The most significant aspect is that the world is looking at a second slide into recession in less than half a decade.

The impact on the US economy will determine the direction of the US polity, heading into the election year. This will in turn deepen its intent to end combat operations by 2014.⁵ It may even impact the manner and extent the US stays on in the region thereafter. The European economy, affecting the NATO allies of the US, will likely ensure that the exhaustion of Europeans with the ISAF engagement in Afghanistan is heightened.

The US, as principal actor, has an interest in disengaging militarily but staying on in an altered capacity due to geo-strategic compulsions. The former owes to economic as well as manpower-related reasons. Now that the military dividend from the 'surge' has been less than expected, a draw down is being proceeded with. Among other reasons, such as the degradation of the al Qaeda, this is behind the US turn towards the peace-prong of strategy. The problem it currently faces is an inability to locate a credible interlocutor.

Its opponent, the Taliban is a disparate entity with no center of gravity. This has enabled it to survive but is also the reason for its inability to arrive at a conflict termination. Its disruptive ability is extended by its support base in the Pakistani Taliban.

The relationship with the al Qaeda has been degraded because of its decimation as a significant actor, even though it exists in a metamorphosed state in Pakistan and elsewhere. That the Taliban remains a strategic actor is evident from its having reinvented itself through a changed strategy of spectacular attacks.

²Ahmed Rashid, 'Afghanistan: Tense times for delicate US-Taliban talks', BBC News, 1 July 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-13991769>.

³Ali Ahmed, 'Afghanistan: Let's try peacekeeping', *Dawn*, Blog 19 November 2011, <http://www.dawn.com/2011/11/19/afghanistan-let%E2%80%99s-try-peacekeeping.html>.

⁴United Nations, *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines*, New York: UN Secretariat, 2008, p. 86.

⁵'Text of President Obama's Speech on Afghanistan', *New York Times*, 22 June 2011.

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Even as it exposes the weakness of a/the superpower, it has expressed an interest in political solutions. These feelers can be translated into opportunities for peace. Pakistan is considerably chastened by the inability of its military to control its strategic assets to the degree it prefers. This reduces the likelihood of its army being pressured into acting against the Taliban or the Haqqani network.⁶

Factors influencing its reticence are the spread of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), anti-Americanism, political fragility, consequences for military cohesion and unrest in its key urban concentration, Karachi.

This inability for taking on the extremists is useful for the army, since it can help in achieving the objective of strategic depth in Afghanistan. Pakistan has taken care to keep its western front quiet so as to tide over its difficulties.⁷

The Afghan government is low on credibility. Bolstering the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) to desired levels, while the ISAF degrades the Taliban to manageable levels, is a difficult proposition.⁸ This implies that post-2014, the threat from the Taliban, even if controllable, is going to continue to remain an obstacle for stability in Afghanistan. Its efforts to draw the Taliban to the table have met with violence, such as elimination of its chief peace interlocutor.⁹ The assassination implies that talks have potential. The other message is that for talks to progress, the US needs to be at the other end of the negotiation table.

In light of these strategic considerations, possible aims of each of the actors are as under:

USA: It is to whittle the Taliban in order to influence its political calculation, forcing it to talks. The idea of disrupting it to the extent of making it a manageable opponent for a ramped up ANSF is unrealistic. Despite periodic strains in its relationship with Pakistan, the US needs it for a cleaner draw down. The US would like to co-opt India in a nuanced way to signal potential containment for forcing Pakistani compliance. The final direction of the US strategy awaits review after the 2012 Presidential elections.

Taliban: It would like to continue the insurgency in order

⁶US must think '10 times' before unilateral action in Pakistan: Kayani', *Times of India*, 19 October 2011.

⁷The two states have completed the first round of talks since 26/11. Pakistan has granted India MFN status in principle. Its foreign minister has indicated that the army is 'on board'. The violence indices are down for several years now in Kashmir.

⁸J Owen, 'After 10 years, no security unit is fit to take over from coalition in Afghanistan', *The Independent*, 12 June 2011.

NATO, 'Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF): Training and Development', Media Backgrounder, http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2011_10/20111006_111006-backgrounder_ANSF_en.pdf

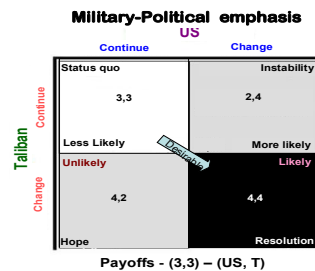
⁹MK Bhadrakumar, 'Deconstructing Rabbani's assassination', *The Hindu*, 27 September 2011.

to pressure the US and undermine Karzai. It will keep its links in Pakistan with both the establishment and the extremists alive for maintaining a sanctuary. It is keeping its political powder dry till the US shows signs of exhaustion.

Pakistan: It would like to activate the political prong of strategy since it has been singled by the blowback.¹⁰ It would like to leverage its advantages as host to the Taliban by brokering talks between its strategic allies. It would like to confine the instability to the tribal areas. This holds up its action in North Waziristan. To keep its western front quiet, it has sent the message of cooperation to India through the quiet summer in Kashmir this year. This helps it preserve anti-India strategic assets for future use.

Afghanistan: In order to survive, the Karzai government would like to have a say in the peace process, which determines the future of Afghanistan. It would prefer moderation in the outlook of the Taliban for accommodation to be arrived at. It would like to see the interests of all ethnicities protected and a return of stability and reconstruction.

The current standoff is reflected in the 'prisoner's dilemma' model below:



The dilemma appears to be one of 'who will bell the cat', both opponents valuing face-saving. Admitting to switching to the political prong of strategy is akin to signaling an inability to carry on the fight. This would imply 'weakness', making the other more inclined towards military means. In case of the US that is willing to make the switch, the problem is compounded since the Taliban may not choose to cooperate. It is critical therefore to get both to do so simultaneously to end the deadlock.

The US is set to draw down. It could leave behind instability. This is a poor outcome for a decade-long war. It can be preempted by the Taliban moderating itself. This implies getting both sides to talk to each other. This is a role that has to be played by external players. The balance of the paper discusses a role for India to help bring this about.

III A Strategy for India

Arriving at the aim

¹⁰Taliban, Pakistan in peace talks: Taliban commander', *Times of India*, 21 November 2011, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/pakistan/Taliban-Pakistan-in-peace-talks-Taliban-commander/articleshow/10817087.cms>

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India as Catalyst

India has an eminently justifiable and feasible ambition of becoming a developed state and a great power. It is following through on this vision with an 'economy first' grand strategy. This entails a 'strategy of restraint' in order to protect its economic trajectory from undue buffeting by forces of instability in the region. Its interests in Af-Pak are in preserving itself from terrorist provocations, cauterizing Kashmir from fallout of the 'end game' in Af-Pak and managing the strategic challenge posed by Pakistan. Its Afghanistan strategy has a dimension that is independent of Pakistan and also one that is intimately related with the Pakistan strategy. The parameters of the strategy are avoidance of two extremes: one of getting into a quagmire due to over-extension; and, second, of marginalization and roll back of constructive efforts and investment in Afghanistan. The 'aim plus' would be to gain a 'say' in determining Afghanistan's future in accord with India's position as a regional power.

SWOT analysis

Indian strengths are not self-evident and its weaknesses are liable to be over-looked. A reality check on this strategic intent through a SWOT analysis is therefore in order. India's strength is that the situation calls for a breakthrough. This requires weight of a regional power. The US reliance on India has increased apace with its disillusion with Pakistan. Pakistan is in a tight spot, one India can exploit either way to its advantage. It can choose to contain or to ease up on Pakistan. The latter incentivizes Pakistani reciprocation.

'Weaknesses' can only be ignored at the peril of strategy. The US draw down is inevitable, if not imminent. The ANSF is unready to substitute. India's military training support cannot bridge the gap adequately.¹¹ The Taliban remain viable and will continue to be supported by Pakistan. Pakistani feelers of good behaviour are tactical and there is no guarantee that it would change its spots since the internal power balance in Pakistan favours the military and conservative forces.

And finally there are limitations in Indian power, both military and diplomatic in terms of institutional capacity. There is the geographical problem to be overcome also. This must sober its self-expectation and intentions. Lastly, Pakistan has the ability to checkmate India in rekindling its proxy war, at abeyance currently, an avoidable possibility in light of the gains made over the past half decade in Kashmir.

The opportunity stares the region in the face. The military surge of the US is beyond the culmination point. The peace surge that had been envisaged has not been in evident at all. A mutually hurting stalemate requires intervention by a mediator. While international and regional efforts have been ongoing, these have their limitations of there being too many actors on the table.

While these are necessary to keep the problem to the fore, the UN has not been exploited for peacemaking purposes adequately. Increasing its political profile can be done by the two South Asian states, India and Pakistan, instigating progress in this direction using their position on the Security Council.

Finally, the threats need factoring. Potentially part of the future are US departure that can perhaps be a precipitate one; Pakistan's implosion; Chinese interventionism; Islamist reassertion etc. These require preemption. India has a strategic choice to make: to prevent these proactively or face consequences as a bystander casualty. Doing nothing is not an option, even while action could lead to burnt fingers. Pakistan will very likely sabotage any unilateral Indian initiatives. A prerequisite is to have it on board through a preliminary, off-the-headlines understanding. Strategizing indeed has a seemingly insuperable test.

Summary

India has comparative limitations in terms of useable levers in Afghanistan. This explains its strategy of constructive cooperation with the international effort. However, it has a significant potential role. Pakistan pays it a left-handed compliment in its exaggerating this role for its own purposes. To it, India can provide assistance to anti-Taliban forces in Afghanistan to prevent Pakistan from gaining strategic depth.

Thus there exists potential for Afghanistan to serve as a site for a cold war by proxies between the two.¹² This can be exploited to sensitize Pakistan on its limitations and the realization used for conflict resolution in Afghanistan.

Aim of strategy

India's declared aim is for a peaceable Afghanistan.¹³ It can play a constructive role in conflict resolution. This it can do by instigating political initiatives towards a shift in strategy of the US, and in rebound of the Taliban.

This is in keeping with Indian intent and action thus far, contributing to international efforts for a stable and democratic Afghanistan.¹⁴ It bears mention that only a democratic Afghanistan can be stable and a stable Afghanistan can be democratic. The strategic parameters include, firstly, a continued US presence and involvement in Afghanistan,

¹¹Thomas Johnson and Matthew DuPee, 'Transition to nowhere: The limits of "Afghanization"', *Foreign Policy*, 22 March 2011, http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/03/22/transition_to_nowhere_the_limits_of_afghanization.

¹²Shekhar Gupta, 'Get out, leave Af to Pak', *Indian Express*, 19 November 2011.

¹³PM's statement at the Joint Press conference with the President of Afghanistan, 4 October 2011, <http://pmindia.nic.in/speeches.htm>

¹⁴Statement by EAM at the 'Istanbul Conference on Afghanistan: Security and Cooperation in the Heart of Asia', <http://>

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with its combat mission discontinued; secondly, moderation of Taliban; thirdly, containment of Pakistani propensity for interference in Afghanistan; and, lastly, protection of well being of all ethnicities in Afghanistan. This is in keeping with the strategic partnership India has forged with Afghanistan.¹⁵

Strategy choices

The strategy choices at the extremes need pruning out first, specifically 'boots on ground' at one end and introspective isolationism at the other. The 'boots on ground' thesis prefers India's military involvement in Afghanistan.¹⁶ This does not have a broad constituency in India since it would be to step on a slippery slope by heightening Taliban aggression and Pakistani paranoia. Isolationism would have costs in terms of sparks from continuing instability getting through border fences to ignite regional crises.

Broadly, this leaves three choices: status quo, hard line and proactive. The status quo option is a 'wait and watch' one characterized by developmental engagement, political distance and military detachment. The hard line option is an extension of a 'contain Pak' strategy in which Afghanistan is used as a site for the squeeze. The proactive strategy is one in which India flexes its political muscles, relies on its soft power and gets into the 'game' constructively.

The strategy for Afghanistan will be inevitably dependent on India's wider Pakistan strategy. Currently, India's strategy for Pakistan is poised between containment and engagement. The choice between these two, and a third - of continuing with both strands simultaneously - seemingly awaits the unfolding of the US action in the end game and the nature of Pakistani reciprocation of Indian reengagement initiatives. Of the two Afghanistan strategy choices – status quo and proactive – the former corresponds to India's 'wait and watch' approach with Pakistan and the latter is counter part of the thrust for increased engagement. The strategy option chosen must help break out from this reactive dependence on the attitude and action of other actors: the US and Pakistan. 'Proactive' essentially implies taking initiative, even as catering for contingencies can take care of the flanks. However, any sense in these strategy options can best be objectively judged by testing them for robustness against scenarios by mid decade.

A scenario building exercise

¹⁵Text of Agreement on Strategic Partnership between the Republic of India and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan', 04 October 2011, <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=100518343>

¹⁶Gurmeet Kanwal suggests a regional force to supplement the ISAF for peace enforcement in his 'Strategic Stalemate in Afghanistan', *IDSA Comments*, 19 July 2010, <http://www.idsa.in/idsacomments/>

[StrategicStalemateinAfghanistan_gkanwal_190710](#); and 'US Strategy in Afghanistan and Regional Concerns', *IDSA Comments*, 21 February 2011.

The aim in this section it to visualize the scenarios in Af-Pak in 2014,¹⁷ the period set for military disengagement of the ISAF from Afghanistan. The purpose for doing so is to assess which of the strategy options - status quo, hard-line and proactive – measures up better. Identifying the 'no go' futures can help in identifying the strategy that best helps avoid them and enables materialization of the desirable futures. The key finding is that civil war looms large, but is avoidable. This onus of the choice rests less with non-state actors, but with state actors, principally the US. The current status quo suggests that the choice needs a midwife. The recommendation is for India to instigate action that will preempt the dismal scenario and nudge developments towards the positive scenario.



The 'two axis' method suggests three possible scenarios: the incredible one of Taliban 'giving up' being negated at the outset itself. The first is a status quo of continuing ISAF operations. This is less likely since the stage is being set

for an ending of ISAF's combat mission. The more likely scenario is in a draw down of the ISAF with an increasing proportion of the fighting being done by the ANSF. This would leave Afghanistan in a state of perpetual counter insurgency, an end state it might not manage adequately well. The third is relatively less likely, even if the more desirable one, of stability through accommodation and reconciliation. Since prospects of instability are unappetizing, the return of stability is the preferred option, even if less likely. The strategy that can measure up to increasing this likelihood quotient is the one that better passes muster.

Testing strategy

The strategy options need testing in their impact on the actors. As seen below, status quo keeps India marginal to the developing situation. The hard line option will only serve to energize animosities on all sides. These two are at best conflict management strategies. The proactive option on the other hand exhibits potential for conflict resolution and termination, unlike the other options.

Option/ Actor	Status quo	Hard line	Proactive
Taliban	Continues	More ag- gressive	Gains politi- cally
US	Takes self- regarding action	Disengage- ment possi- ble	Draw down possible
Pak	Pursues stra- tegic depth	Resumes proxy war	Satisfied power
Afghanistan	Exposed to interminable instability	Heightened instability	Stable

¹⁷The scenario exercise is necessarily a rough sketch for reasons of space.

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India as Catalyst

The assessment suggests that there are two potentially workable options – status quo and proactive. The third, the hard line option, is an extension of containment of Pakistan. It could over time likely see deepening Indian involvement distracting from India's grand strategy. Foreclosing it is necessary also since keeping it on the table will make it appear seemingly plausible and enticing. This will make the proactive strategy option recede in comparison. The remaining two options are considered below:

Pros and Cons

The assessment suggests that there is much to commend the status quo strategy. The advantage is in keeping options open so that once the future materializes, strategy choices can be appraised. In case of containment, the switch from status quo to the hard line is feasible. The direction of India's Pakistan strategy is also consequential. Presently, the Pakistan strategy has a prong of engagement, supplemented with the threat of containment in the background. However, the status quo strategy option amounts to doing little in relation to India's aspirations, power and strategy aims. The consequences of a 'wait and watch' stance in case of a worst case scenario are unwelcome. Keeping open the option of switch over to the hard line option - ruled out here -

Parameters	Status quo	Proactive
Desirability	Lower	Higher
Feasibility	Higher	Lower
Suitability	Higher	Lower
Sustainability	Higher	Lower
Acceptability	Lower	Higher
Adaptability	Higher	Lower

makes little sense since it is not in sync with India's grand strategy. Therefore, the status quo option recedes in comparison, despite its seeming merits. The option that remains is a proactive option. Since the devil is in the detail, it needs fleshing out.

The proactive strategy

The strategy is ambitious in terms of multiple objectives. What are the demands on the strategy?

USA: It would need to work on the US to turn unambiguously towards the political prong of strategy and decisively away from the military prong. The US would require staying on in the region, not in a military capacity but for reconstruction with financial and infrastructural support. This will avert the situation as obtained after its disengagement in the early nineties.

Pakistan: In respect of Pakistan, the strategy in conjunction with the Pakistan strategy would require to get Pakistan to deliver Taliban to the negotiation table. It would require restricting any fallout of the evolving situation in Af-Pak on signing Kashmir. This would be a departure from the past precedent in which it used its political and military space in a restive Afghanistan to foster trouble in Kashmir.

Taliban: The outreach to the Taliban would be to condition it to be responsive to political overtures. The diplomatic aegis of the Arab states can be utilized towards this end and for moderating it over time. The Taliban would require being forward looking in mellowing its extremism in return for reconstruction aid and a share of power.

Afghanistan: The Afghan regime would have to be accommodationist, quite as promised. A multi-ethnic, inclusive regime must emerge at the end of the process for warding off retribution and civil war. The ANSF ethnic profile may need balancing with integration of Taliban fighters in its ranks over time. This can end up as a 'wish list' without political investment, diplomatic effort and economic engagement.

A constructive approach will not be readily apparent to Pakistan since there is over a half century of mutual hostility cluttering the radar screen. India would require opening up communication lines to Taliban. This is against its grain and past practice of over a decade and half of aversion. India would also require extract reciprocation from Pakistan for working with it for enabling political space for its proxy, the Taliban, in Kabul. This appears counter-intuitive, given the precedence.

The feasibility of the strategy must be seen against the grain of what is unfolding. The US is seeking a military exit. The Taliban have been conditioned sufficiently to compromise. The two antagonists have already engaged earlier through intermediaries.¹⁸ In other words, the peace process is on. India would be left out in the cold in case it is not sufficiently networked with the Taliban, set to return in some form in a negotiated way. India must, at a minimum, open up lines to the Taliban.

India's political assertion at this juncture is to enable it to protect its interests in Afghanistan, act its weight, and further stabilizing the gains in Kashmir.

The latter is through defusing any jihadist energy in the region through conflict resolution, directing it into reconstruction activity. India, by involving itself constructively creates space for itself that is otherwise threatened with constriction.¹⁹

¹⁸'US confirms Saudi role in talks with Taliban', Dawn, 25 November 2009.

¹⁹Michael O'Hanlon, 'Don't Turn to India', *The Wall Street Journal*, 22 November 2011.

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It creates the possibility of a 'grand bargain' over Kashmir in which Pakistan's gains in the north are reciprocated by its conceding ground on Kashmir.²⁰

V

Recommended Course of Action

To reiterate the 'aim' is to facilitate and enable political resolution for the conflict. The 'means' are already in play, specifically diplomacy, developmental aid and soft power. Not only do these have to be intensified, but significant political investment needs to be made for conflict resolution.

These necessitate extension of the UN mission in Afghanistan and shift from peace enforcement by the UN mandated ISAF to peacekeeping, albeit 'robust' peacekeeping.²¹ Triggering this is India's catalytic role. Since this cannot be done unilaterally, given the suspicions India's intentions and actions will arouse, there are preliminary steps that need to be first taken.

Firstly, India needs arriving at an understanding with Pakistan prior in an off-the-headlines meeting of minds through 'back channel' reactivated for the purpose. In this, India and Pakistan arrive at an off-the-record *modus vivendi* in which India is not disruptive of the Pakistani position in Afghanistan, furthered through its proxy, the Taliban, in return for Pakistan letting up on proxy war in Kashmir.²² It addresses one of the problems holding up resolution, namely, Pakistani suspicion of Indian designs. The underside is that it appears to reward Pakistan's unacceptable behaviour of using terror as a tool.

Second, India need not place itself at the vanguard, but can progress its political initiative using the cover of the regional organization, SAARC. SAARC activation for this purpose, with joint ownership by both protagonists, India and Pakistan, will make the initiative a regional, as against a unilateral one.

Its thrust will be in getting the UN to involve itself in the political reconciliation, in addition to its current preoccupation with governance, rule of law and peacebuilding.²³ This is practicable in keeping with existing trust levels between the two. Constructive cooperation can be incrementally deepened with time and trust reinforcing cycles of interaction. This could eventuate on ground in the UN peacekeeping mission acquiring a

²⁰Teresita Schaffer, Howard Schaffer 'Afghanistan, Pakistan and Kashmir: A grand bargain?', *Foreign Policy*, 20 October 2011, http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/10/20/afghanistan_pakistan_and_kashmir_a_grand_bargain

²¹*United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines*, p.19.

²²Maroof Raza, 'The quagmire next door', *Times of India*, 25 October 2011.

²³See UNAMA website for details of its activities, <http://unama.unmissions.org/default.aspx?/>. From the position of the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General in charge of Political Affairs being vacant, it is evident that the political part of the mission needs stimulus.

regional colour in the form of hybrid UN-SAARC peacekeeping. Since a politically driven strategy caters for preserving strategic space and interests of all sides, it has a 'win-win' spiel.

The outline strategy recommendation is as follows:

Mediation: The United Nations Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) is a special political mission. It has a political mandate that has not been progressed sufficiently. Its credibility and legitimacy can help it fill the vacuum in conflict resolution efforts.

Peace-making: A ceasefire needs to succeed preliminary talks and be followed up by negotiations.

Peacekeeping: Clearly, the ceasefire is susceptible to breaking down unless monitored. This necessitates insertion of an international force of blue helmets.

Peace-building: This would require Indians lending a hand under a regional rubric, bankrolled by the US, international institutions and China.

India's role

I. Getting to a preliminary understanding with Pakistan and thereafter 'trust but verify'.

II. Initiating under SAARC aegis a thrust for mediation under UN auspices.

III. Organizing a regional initiative under Articles 53 of the UN Charter for supplementing UN efforts.

IV. Assist in deploying a hybrid UN-SAARC mission for peacekeeping.

V. Intensifying its development and capacity building engagement for reconstruction.

VI. Prepare public opinion through public diplomacy and political investment.

VII. Contingency planning for cauterizing India against ill effects of continuing instability in Afghanistan.

IV

Conclusion

India's Afghanistan strategy is an under-stated one owing to it being predicated on its Pakistan strategy. The latter is a hesitant engagement with Pakistan, one subject to Pakistani reciprocation. The onus is thus on Pakistan. Pakistan is for its part waiting for the US hand in Af-Pak to play itself out. In effect, India's policy is reactive and poised between containment and engagement depending on evolving circumstance. This is not exceptionable, but is overly sensitive to India's limitations and lays India bear to the ill effects of negative futures. So far strategic analyses had not illumined the future actively enough to enable a reasoned choice. This paper has attempted to dispel the gap. India must now exercise the choice to self-confidently shoulder the regional burden. This must be after due commiseration with the other regional power, Pakistan. The two can help constructively support their strategic partner, the US, and neighbour, Afghanistan. The political initiative will place India squarely at the vortex in keeping with its power credentials and aspirations.

