**The Afghan endgame post-US withdrawal**

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As September 11 draws closer, there are concerns in Pakistan about how the situation will pan out post-US withdrawal from Afghanistan. Twenty years of fierce fighting between the Taliban and a coalition of NATO and Afghan forces led by US have ravaged the country and exhausted the superpower into finally bidding adieu to Afghanistan, albeit with a couple of riders one of which is that it would create military bases in the neighbourhood to monitor the situation. The first choice, of course, was Pakistan. But with the new bold leadership in complete sync with the establishment saying a firm no, the US will have to look out for other options. Which, as a matter of fact, it already has.

Pakistan’s relationship, despite its ups and downs, with Afghanistan is something that no other country has. It’s a relationship that is rooted in culture, religion and ethnicity. And this precisely is why Pakistan, unlike other nations interested in Afghanistan, knows the country like the back of its hand. Pakistan is the country that played a pivotal role in ending the erstwhile USSR occupation of Afghanistan which finally led to the disintegration of the country, which many in Pakistan also see as giving USSR back what it did to Pakistan in 1971 by helping India create Bangladesh. It also goes to the credit of Pakistan’s strategic brilliance that Russia is on its side now as far as Afghanistan is concerned.

[At least 5 injured in Lahore blast](https://nation.com.pk/23-Jun-2021/at-least-5-injured-in-lahore-blast)

The emergence of the Taliban, after it was dislodged from power with US hot on its heels in the wake of 9/11, is no less a miracle for which the militia and its backers deserve immense respect and praise.

Pakistan created and kept sustaining the Taliban post-Cold War US abandonment of the region, having deep ethnic links with the majority Pashtun population that have divided tribes in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. The rise of the Taliban also kept the US hegemony in check besides cutting India to size, which has always used Afghanistan as a breeding ground for terrorism targeting Pakistan, long before the fascist Hindutva regime of BJP came to power in India.

However, the Afghan Taliban couldn’t help in deterring TTP terrorists from running its writ in tribal areas from where it perpetrated terror against all of Pakistan until defeated comprehensively by Pakistan’s security and armed forces. The TTP, like the ISKP and Baloch terrorist groups, all of whom have been reduced to small cells now, are being bankrolled by India to further its skewed and unrealistic agenda in the region. Not only have the Pakistani intelligence agencies given proof of India’s role in it but, after the emergence to power of the Hindu right in India, many former intelligence agents and analysts have been openly acknowledging and bragging about India’s role in an attempt to destabilise Pakistan.

[England beat Czech Republic to win Group D](https://nation.com.pk/23-Jun-2021/england-beat-czech-republic-to-win-group-d)

After the Pakistani security agencies handed a crushing defeat to TTP and its terror subsidiaries, India secretly financed and facilitated the formation of the Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM), trying to create a political force that could be passed off as a peaceful group of dissenters with demands, while in reality they were only a political face of a brutal terror organisation capitalising on decades of collateral damage. Many PTM activists were and are in constant touch with top TTP terrorists, but the alertness of the security forces and their readiness to sacrifice their lives has been keeping TTP at bay.

The Afghan Taliban are divided into four major and many minor splinter groups. It is an achievement of humongous scale for the Pakistani intelligence establishment’s senior managers to have brought them all together for a deal with the US. However, post-US withdrawal, the alliance of the various Taliban groups is a rare possibility. It also gives credence to the fear of a repeat of the bloody history in Afghanistan.

[AC indicts Saleem Mandviwalla in Kidney Hills reference](https://nation.com.pk/23-Jun-2021/ac-indicts-saleem-mandviwalla-in-kidney-hills-reference)

Civil wars and resultant atrocities at Afghanistan are not in the national interest of Pakistan, which is in the process of building trade and energy corridors with central Asia and beyond, passing through Afghanistan. CPEC also requires a peaceful and stable Afghanistan.

A central government at Kabul, having natural dispensation of all stakeholders in Afghanistan is therefore critical for Pakistan and China’s strategic interests. Russia is also clearly on-board in this endeavour. Fortunately, such an arrangement is also in the US’ interests. The Afghan Taliban seem willing to accommodate, as they do not want all these powers to play against them in the future.

A shared governance set-up in Afghanistan having all the genuine stakeholders on board will ensure the required stability suited to the strategic interests of all the major powers involved in the region. However, India will keep on playing the role of a spoiler due to their unsubstantiated fears of an increased China-Pakistan role in Afghanistan in the post US withdrawal era which is only weeks away. India’s continued opposition to the Pakistan-brokered Afghan Peace is an open secret. Irrespective of the Indian shenanigans, USA went ahead with signing the deal with the Taliban.

[Worsening situation in Amazon a ‘warning to humanity'](https://nation.com.pk/23-Jun-2021/worsening-situation-in-amazon-a-warning-to-humanity)

The geostrategic position of Pakistan makes it a compulsion for anyone dealing with the land-locked Afghanistan and central Asia, to keep Pakistan on board. Pakistan’s huge relevance cannot be ignored by India, especially after the failure of the Indian project to bypass Pakistan through Chabahar in Iran. It calls on India to take the sensible path and talk to Pakistan. A peaceful Afghanistan is in the best interests of the entire region.

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