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The AfPak Strategy: Reactions in Pakistan

This paper is part of the AAN Policy Briefing Series. This series aims to provide in-depth analysis of specific political problems related to Afghanistan and the region.

Viewing Pakistan in a historical and geostrategic context, this paper by eminent Pakistan and India expert Karl Fischer highlights those aspects of the new United States strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan (formerly termed 'the AfPak Strategy') that are more relevant for Pakistan and shows predominant Pakistani reactions to these issues. The selection is limited to the responses of government and political leaders, representatives of the military as well as some prominent members of the media and academia. The material also offers some basic conclusions and policy recommendations.

1. THE BURDEN OF HISTORY

The countries of South Asia continue to carry the weight of history into the 21st century largely in the form of bilateral conflicts. This pertains in particular to the effects of the partition of India in 1947, which gave the regional configuration of power and struggle for influence a specifically complex dimension that was later further complicated by alliances formed during the Cold War superpower conflict.

Analysis of the past is a precondition for the formulation of policies attuned to the needs of the present situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan, since each country has its own perspective. Pakistan's policies were and still are defined by a deeply entrenched enmity with India. This has led to more reactive than proactive policies, a lack of creative moves in the fields of foreign and security policy, and deficits in the formulation of realistic national interests.

Since its very formation, Pakistan's relationship with neighbouring Afghanistan has been tense and troubled. On the Afghan side, the ruling elite perceived that the founders of Pakistan were unwilling to revoke the results of British 'divide and rule' policies and had engineered the incorporation of areas populated by Pashtuns east of the Durand line into the new state of Pakistan, which, the Afghans insist, should have gone to Afghanistan to end the 'unnatural' divide of Pashtun areas. On the Pakistani side, Afghanistan was and still is regarded as part of Pakistan's natural sphere of Influence and even an area of 'strategic depth'. In the eyes of the Pakistani state, this implies the need for unhindered access and for various forms of interference in Afghanistan's internal affairs. Within this framework, the tribal areas of Pakistan have special status as the geographical and operational link in the 'strategic depth' concept of Pakistan's military leadership, a position which has resulted in the continued underdevelopment and backwardness of these agencies.

2. THE DOMESTIC ENVIRONMENT

Domestically, Pakistan's political life suffers from the lack of a culture of constructive opposition as well as consensus on primary national interests. This has been a primary factor in the failure and downfall of the country's civilian governments. During the run-up to the parliamentary elections of 2008 and even more so following the announcement of the results, a set of politicians seemed to sense the need for closer cooperation between Pakistan's mainstream parties. This recognition was driven also by the compulsion to respond to the US AfPak strategy and the increasing prevalence of internal and external threats to the country's stability. Such efforts to move beyond the cobbling together of short-term coalitions would have been new to the political establishment. But once again, history registered a squandered chance as priorities were not properly established and as has often been the case in Pakistan, personal ambitions overrode the political requirements of national interest.

A further trait of Pakistani political life, strongly exercised and propagated by the ruling elite and widely accepted by the people, is the tendency to blame outsiders for domestic problems. This lack of critical introspection and self-knowledge, combined with a good degree of complacency, has repeatedly obstructed pragmatic policy decisions and has led the country into fateful dead ends.

Noted political analyst Khaled Ahmed highlights the significant differences between dominant Pakistani perceptions and outside views on the destabilisation of the country, stating that:

The national consensus is that Pakistan is being destabilised from outside. The world thinks that Pakistan is being destabilised from within. The national consensus is that the country is being destabilised by India and the US. The world thinks Pakistan is under siege from the growing strength of groups aligned with al-Qaeda. Pakistan thinks these groups are alienated because of the presence of the US in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and that a delinking of the country from the US will reconvert these groups into normal entities.¹

He makes the following projection for political developments in 2010:

The internal pressure on Pakistan to dissociate itself from the international effort against terrorism will increase. The national consensus

¹ Khaled Ahmed, 'Fallout from current misdirection', *The Friday Times* (Lahore) 1-7 January 2010.

formed in 2009 will mandate this policy change, failing which, more and more people will either sympathise with the terrorists or join them. The madrassa network will spearhead this trend followed by religious and secular parties running on the strength of anti-americanism. The hatred of the incumbent government will rise in proportion.²

Ahmed does not see a chance for self-correction but instead predicts 'anti-americanism getting out of hand'.³

This analysis stands in contrast to the assessment of President Barack Obama who stated in his address to the West Point Military Academy on 1 December 2009 that:

In the past, there have been those in Pakistan who have argued that the struggle against extremism is not their fight, and that Pakistan is better off doing little or seeking accommodation with those who use violence. But in recent years, as innocents have been killed from Karachi to Islamabad, it has become clear that it is the Pakistani people who are the most endangered by extremism. Public opinion has turned. The Pakistani Army has waged an offensive in Swat and South Waziristan. And there is no doubt that the United States and Pakistan share a common enemy.⁴

These contradictory perceptions of the domestic Pakistani scene could lead to dangerous tensions in bilateral relations between Pakistan and the United States, as the government of Pakistan will have to perform the sensitive balancing act of keeping domestic pressures under control while simultaneously avoiding alienating the US leadership.

3. THE NEW AFPK STRATEGY

Pakistan awaited the United States' new AfPak strategy with preconceived hopes that the region could face a change for the better, doubts about whether it would open a realistic way out of the current political and economic crisis, expectations that a lot of money would flow in from the US to

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, Remarks of President Barack Obama – as prepared for delivery, 'The Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan,' United States Military Academy at West Point, 1 December 2009, p. 6 (hereafter cited as the Obama Strategy Address).

strengthen Pakistan's economy and military power, and finally, fears that the US would enforce its role and influence in the region and that Pakistan could be in for extremely difficult times.

While the first announcements of the new US policy regarding Afghanistan and Pakistan made at the end of March 2009 had already drawn a volley of mainly critical comments, the ensuing eight months' wait for a comprehensive and detailed presentation of its salient features raised doubts about the willingness and ability of the Obama administration to seriously develop an holistic approach and to implement a strategy driven by such a new concept.

Finally, President Obama explained the details of his new strategy on 1 December 2009. Regarding Afghanistan it sets out to:⁵

- seize the initiative from the Taliban with a surge of 30,000 additional US troops and possibly 10,000 more from other NATO countries, to be deployed during the first six months of 2010;
- reverse the Taliban's momentum by enhancing Afghanistan's military capacity over the next 18 months;
- increase the capacities to train competent Afghan security forces and to partner with them so that more Afghans can join the fight;
- create the conditions for the United States to accelerate the transfer of security-related responsibility to the Afghan government, enabling the gradual withdrawal of US forces;
- create space for a more effective civilian strategy.

With reference to Pakistan, the strategy places foremost emphasis on:

- the commitment to building a partnership with Pakistan;
- the benchmarking of Pakistan's performance against al-Qaeda and domestic terrorist outfits that threaten stability in Afghanistan and the safety of the international community;
- the supply of counter-insurgency military hardware to Pakistan;
- the provision of a non-military aid package of 7.5 billion USD within the next five years

⁵ Ibid, pp.1-6

to Pakistan under the *Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act 2009*.⁶

The new strategy explicitly accepts that the US and its allies are at war in Afghanistan, where 'the security situation is more serious than anticipated,' and that 'the status quo is not sustainable'.⁷

Obama's strategy also recognises a 'fundamental connection' between this 'war effort' in Afghanistan and the 'extremist safe havens in Pakistan'⁸ as well as the devastating acts of terrorism against the Pakistani people. This leads to the conviction that the security of the US

is at stake in Afghanistan and Pakistan. This is the epicentre of the violent extremism practiced by al-Qaeda...The people and governments of both Afghanistan and Pakistan are endangered. And the stakes are even higher within a nuclear-armed Pakistan, because we know that al-Qaeda and other extremists seek nuclear weapons, and we have every reason to believe that they would use them.⁹

And he formulates the goal: 'Now, we must come together to end this war successfully. For what's at stake is not simply a test of NATO's credibility – what's at stake is the security of our Allies, and the common security of the world.'¹⁰

Despite the veiled threat to Pakistan of intervention, emphasis is placed on the new definition of America's relationship with Pakistan. President Obama admits that

in the past, we too often defined our relationship with Pakistan narrowly. Those days are over. Moving forward, we are committed to a partnership with Pakistan that is built on a foundation of mutual interests, mutual respect, and mutual trust. We will strengthen Pakistan's capacity to target those groups that threaten our countries, and have made it clear that we cannot tolerate a safe-haven for terrorists whose location is known, and whose intentions are clear. America is also providing substantial resources to support Pakistan's democracy and development...America will remain a strong

⁶ The final wording of the Kerry-Lugar Bill, enacted as the 'Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act 2009'. <http://pakistaniat.com/2009/10/07/full-text-kerry-lugar-bill/>

⁷ Obama Strategy Address, p.3.

⁸ Ibid, p.2.

⁹ Ibid, p.4.

¹⁰ Ibid, p.5.

supporter of Pakistan's security and prosperity long after the guns have fallen silent.¹¹

While Obama implicitly indicates that the Afghanistan strategy of the Bush administration failed because it set goals beyond the responsibility, means and interests of the US,¹² the new AfPak strategy does not signify a total break with the past. However, Obama points to the need for far-reaching policy changes when he says, 'America will have to show our strength in the way that we end wars and prevent conflict. We will have to be nimble and precise in our use of military power'.¹³

And,

[w]e will have to use diplomacy, because no one nation can meet the challenges of an interconnected world acting alone. I have spent this year renewing our alliances and forging new partnerships. And we have forged a new beginning between America and the Muslim World – one that recognizes our mutual interest in breaking a cycle of conflict, and that promises a future in which those who stand up for peace and prosperity and human dignity isolate those who kill innocents.¹⁴

4. PRESIDENT OBAMA'S INTERLOCUTORS IN PAKISTAN

In a situation where President Obama would preferably have a strong, democratically-legitimised civilian government of Pakistan on board as a partner for the implementation of his AfPak Strategy, the recent ruling of the Supreme Court of Pakistan reversing the National Reconciliation Order (NRO) of former President General Pervez Musharraf has enabled the reopening of more than 8,000 corruption cases against politicians, civil servants and members of the economic elite, including those against President Asif Ali Zardari who, in his present function, still enjoys immunity. According to some observers, however, Zardari's options for political survival are limited to the choice between leaving office in dignity and contesting the corruption cases against him in the respective national and international courts, or being forced out of office by broad civil society agitation. Obviously, the political confrontations between President Zardari

and Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani, with the army most likely supporting the latter, between Zardari and Nawaz Sharif, leader of the opposition party Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz, PML-N), sometimes overt and sometimes covert, as well as between the Bhutto faction and the Zardari faction of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) are further deepening domestic political fragmentation.¹⁵

These developments add to the air of uncertainty about the future of the delicate equilibrium of power and the stability of Pakistan's political system. For President Obama, it could eventually mean that his favoured interlocutors might become the 'calculable' military leaders rather than the 'inefficient' politicians of Pakistan.

5. REACTIONS IN PAKISTAN TO THE US AFPAK STRATEGY

5.1 Government and political leadership

Initial critical reactions to the new US policy framework highlighted the following fundamental questions:

- Which countries will benefit from the new strategy and what advantage will it bring to whom in Pakistan?
- If President Obama is attempting a regional approach, how can his strategy harmonise the conflicting interests of international stakeholders in Afghan developments, like Iran, Saudi Arabia, Russia, China, India, and the European Union?
- Why is Pakistan treated as being on par with Afghanistan, which lags far behind Pakistan politically, economically and socially?¹⁶

¹⁵ Najm Sethi in *The Friday Times* 1-7 January 2010, summed up the President's dilemma with the following words: 'If Mr Zardari is rattled, there is cause enough for it. For a variety of reasons, the army doesn't like him. The opposition doesn't trust him. The judiciary is hounding him. One section of the media has got the knife out for him. And the fickle Americans are frowning at the diminishing returns from him. This is a result of Mr Zardari's failed strategy to keep the judges out, the army at arm's length and the opposition at bay, while bending over backwards to appease the Americans and placate the media. In short, Mr Zardari's strategy to keep on the right side of his peripheral and foreign allies at the cost of antagonizing the country's core constituents has left him nowhere.'

¹⁶ Comparative data are compiled and assessed by Christian Wagner, 'Governance in Afghanistan in a Regional Perspective', Afghanistan Analysts Network,

¹¹ Ibid, p.6.

¹² Ibid, p.7.

¹³ Ibid, p.8.

¹⁴ Ibid.

- A new partnership is welcome, but how long will it last and why is it defined predominantly in monetary terms, and with drastic benchmarks attached to the release of funds that are unacceptable to many Pakistani leaders?

While the first announcements of the strategy were treated merely as visionary, their translation into operational details was bound to raise tempers. This was particularly borne out in the controversial debate concerning the Kerry-Lugar Bill/Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act 2009 of the USA. This tension has the potential to predetermine not only the future relationship between Pakistan and the United States, but also to limit developmental options for Pakistan's state and society for years to come.

Among the political, military and intellectual elite of the country there is a widespread perception that neither Pakistan nor Afghanistan, the United States or even India will benefit from the new policy.¹⁷ The continuation of military support for Pakistan, as welcome as it is, in connection with the (less welcome) drone attacks on targets in Pakistani territory have fostered the fear that Pakistan will pay a heavy price for the relocation of war from Afghanistan to Pakistan. This fear has been further accentuated by statements made by General Stanley McChrystal indicating that US troops would shift the focus of military operations closer to the Afghan border with Pakistan, while questioning whether fighting in other regions was 'as crucial'.¹⁸

However, in Pakistan, official reactions to President Obama's AfPak strategy were positive and objections raised very carefully, if at all. Envisaging a significant improvement in Pakistan's relationship with the US, President Zardari and Prime Minister Gilani responded by terming the new policy 'a good change' that would strengthen ties between the two countries. Along with Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, both leaders highlighted the regional concept as a constructive element of President Obama's strategy.¹⁹ And yet,

it became clear that Pakistan favoured a more holistic effort that included the broader involvement of Iran. At a ministerial forum held in Kabul on 27 April 2009 with the Afghan Foreign Minister Dadfar Rangin Spanta and their Iranian colleague Manouchehr Mottaki, Qureshi specified that 'Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran were fully aware of their problems and prospects, and there was need for evolving indigenous prescriptions for lasting peace and stability in the region'.²⁰

The new policy was understood to be 'a mix of hard and soft power, treating terrorism as a threat and at the same time as a phenomenon, which requires a multi-dimensional approach'.²¹ But many Pakistanis found it difficult to understand in practical terms the difference between the 'war on terror' as conducted by the Bush administration and a 'campaign against terrorism' as projected by President Barak Obama.²²

As a result of a string of terrorist acts by Pakistani jihadi outfits and also continuous high-level exchanges between American and Pakistani political and military figures, the growing recognition evolved among a section of the Pakistani elite that terrorism had to be fought in their own country and that simply blaming neighbouring countries would not be helpful in combating it. Simultaneously, they realised that the failure to fight terrorism in Afghanistan would impact negatively on the Pakistani security situation and vice versa. Furthermore, it was clear that halting the flow of supplies to Afghan insurgent groups would require improved security and political stability as well as economic and social development in Pakistan.

Initially, it was hoped that the regional emphasis of the new US policy would help to push India towards resolution of the Kashmir problem, thus removing the proclaimed main hurdle in the development of a cooperative relationship between the two adversaries. This hope has been kept alive by continuously impressing on the United States' political and military leadership that the engagement of Pakistani troops on the eastern borders of the country limits its ability to deploy

January 2010. <http://aan-afghanistan.com/uploads/AANGovernanceRegionalPerspective.pdf>

¹⁷ See Aprajita Kashyap, 'AfPak Strategy: A Survey Of Literature', Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS) Special Report 77, New Delhi, 10 July 2009.

¹⁸ Correspondent, 'US to engage militants near Pakistan border', *Dawn* 14 September 2009.

¹⁹ Asim Yasin, 'Pakistan welcomes Obama plan', *The News* 28 March 2009.

²⁰ 'Indigenous solution needed for peace in region: Qureshi', *The News* 28 April 2009, Mariana Babar, 'Pak Afghan Iranian FMs agree to expand cooperation', *ibid*.

²¹ John O. Brennan (former career officer of the CIA, and now President Barack Obama's Assistant for Homeland Security and Counter-terrorism), A New Approach to safeguarding Americans, Remarks made at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, James S. Brady Press Briefing Room, Washington DC, 6 August 2009.

²² *Ibid*.

larger contingents on the border with Afghanistan and in operations against insurgents in the tribal areas. For the moment however, with the US asking for enhanced Indian involvement in Afghanistan, Pakistani demands and hopes seem to be at least temporarily sidelined by America and rejected by India and Afghanistan, while India is winning hearts by providing effective aid to Afghanistan in the civilian sector.

Based on Pakistan's earlier experience with the United States, an inherent element of doubt about the sincerity of the new policy prevailed from the very beginning. Foreign affairs policy makers and political analysts in Pakistan who were asked for a summary assessment of the new policy soon began to refer to it as 'old wine in new bottles'.²³ They referred to the fact that Pakistani leaders were bound to welcome the new policy given that their present status and role is dependent on the goodwill of the US.²⁴ Many agree with Jessica Stern that the 'United States cares far more about Pakistan's compliance to its wishes than the nature of its leadership'.²⁵ Or, in the words of a US Senator, 'You got to go with the incompetencies you've got. We have no alternative'.²⁶ Nevertheless, it has been duly noted that negotiations now have to be conducted with a democratically elected government in Pakistan and that a clear distinction has been drawn between civilian and military aid. Ruling circles in Pakistan anticipate that the country can now build on a continuous flow of funds, beyond a period of five years, for investment in the economy and social sector since the new policy grants a larger role to non-military aid. Warning voices, however, remind the public that Pakistan has an extremely disappointing record in distributing aid to civilian

projects. Analyst Shahid Javed concludes 'that the ground will have to be carefully prepared before money starts flowing in'.²⁷

5.1.1 Dissenting views

Given the present domestic political balance of power in Pakistan, the position of the PPP towards the new policy is represented by the leading figures of the government, President Zardari, Prime Minister Gilani and Foreign Minister Qureshi. Party notables with dissenting views maintain that the promised aid should be disbursed speedily in an unbureaucratic manner and without strings attached. Parliamentary circles strongly object to American drone attacks on Pakistani territory and accuse the government of protesting formally for public consumption only, while secretly consenting to these intrusions and submitting to the US's demands. Leaders of the PML(N) are carefully positioning themselves publicly in order to strengthen the acceptability of Nawaz Sharif to the US administration as a likely future Prime Minister. They object, however, to the infringement of Pakistan's sovereign rights. Attempts by the US Administration to initiate dialogue with religious parties - for example, Holbrooke's meeting with leaders of the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam faction led by Maulana Fazal-ur-Rehman - have hardly softened their anti-American attitudes. From these sources, accusations are running high that the US is turning the capital Islamabad into a cantonment for initially 1000 marines, as a large plot in the diplomatic enclave has been sold to the US at a throwaway price. Real estate agents, after a lull for the last two years, are now enjoying good business because the US Embassy is reportedly renting hundreds of houses in the capital. Justifications for the steep rise in embassy personnel as necessary for the correct disbursement, coordination, distribution, and auditing of incoming aid are perceived as a smokescreen to conceal the real objective of controlling Pakistan's nuclear assets.

The government was highly upset when at the beginning of October 2009, the Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Ashfaq Kayani deemed it appropriate to address a memorandum to Prime Minister Gilani detailing the objections of the army leadership to the conditionalities of the Kerry-Lugar aid package, which, the generals suggested, 'will have serious implications on national security'.²⁸ Reportedly, government circles were

²³ Telephone interview with a political analyst in Pakistan, 7 September 2009.

²⁴ Hans J. Morgenthau characterised this relationship years ago in his formulation that 'the supplier of foreign aid holds the power of life and death over them. If a foreign nation supplies aid it intervenes. If it does not supply aid it also intervenes. In the measure that the government must depend on foreign aid for its own and its nation's survival it is inevitably exposed to political pressures from the supplying government'. 'To intervene or not to intervene', *Foreign Affairs*, New York, April 1967, p.427.

²⁵ Jessica Stern, 'Foreword' in Hassan Abbas, *Pakistan's Drift into Extremism: Allah, the Army and America's War on Terror* (New York, M.E. Sharpe, Inc. 2005).

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<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1898092,00.html>

²⁷ Shahid Javed Burki, 'Obama's Pakistan plan', *Dawn* 7 April 2009, p.7.

²⁸ Iftikhar Khan and Syed Irfan Raza, 'Army stance puts government on back foot', *Dawn* 9 October 2009.

particularly disturbed by the 'army's over-intrusive action' and the subsequent attempts by some opposition leaders to exploit the situation by turning public opinion against the government.²⁹

In the National Assembly, the former ministers Faisal Saleh Hayat and Aftab Sherpao criticised the conditions of the package as an 'insult to the honour of the Pakistani people'. The spokesperson of the President, Farhatullah Babar, countered the attack with an outspoken defence of the government's position, but in light of the army's avowed reservations, most PPP leaders were reluctant to speak out publicly. Indeed, in the National Assembly, the Prime Minister promised that the concerns of the Army would be addressed.³⁰

Among politicians, the Secretary General of the Pakistan Muslim League (Quaid – PML-Q)³¹ Mushahid Hussain, drew public attention to the benefits Pakistan will derive from the new US policy. Summing up his appraisal, he wrote: 'A positive aspect of the Obama strategy is the President's approval towards Pakistan – a welcome tone of respect for the country and a genuine expression of empathy for Pakistan'.³²

5.2 Military

The military top brass for the most part tend to agree with the majority of analysts that

- the international effort to bring stability to Afghanistan is failing so far and compared with the Vietnam debacle, 'failure of some lesser sort looks increasingly inevitable'³³ and
- Obama's aim to prevent the destabilisation of nuclear Pakistan in the event that Afghanistan collapses into chaos, offers Pakistan a chance to open new vistas that would enhance its stature as a regional power as well as its standing among Muslim countries while possibly dealing with a neutral or friendly government of Afghanistan, even if dominated by the Taliban and other militant factions.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ The PML(Q) was founded in 2002 by politicians close to President Musharraf, in order to weaken the 'historical' PML – now PML(N) – that belonged to the opposition.

³² Mushahid Hussain, 'Obama offers an opening to Pakistan', *The News* 5 December 2009.

³³ See *Eastern Economist* 22 August 2009, p.19.

For the time being, they prefer a continuation of the Karzai regime to any other set-up closer to the former Northern Alliance due to the latter's strong connections with India.

Despite the resultant ambivalence towards the strategy, the pressure being exercised by the US on Pakistan to do more for the money it wants is gradually forcing attitudinal change throughout the military, from the top brass to ranks.

Serving and retired Generals have expressed a wide range of opinions and assessments. While COAS General Parvez Kayani is tied into official responses and party to the continuous interaction with the United States' political and military leadership, he clearly represents the interests of the armed forces. General Kayani voices their concerns regarding Pakistan's security requirements and the demand for fair consideration of the performance, expenditure and losses in fighting terrorism. Drawing on the support of the entire armed forces, he argues for enhanced military aid and the supply of high-tech weaponry systems, including drones, to Pakistan, which not incidentally could also be used in a military conflict with India.³⁴

The main objections of the top army leadership to the conditionalities of the Kerry-Lugar Package, as laid down to the Prime Minister in the communication of October 8, reflected their assumption that the wording of the document 'would amount to the capping of the nuclear programme'.³⁵ They also objected to the 'requirement of certification that Pakistan has made progress in preventing cross-border attacks and whether it has dismantled the alleged terrorist bases'. But perhaps their most serious reservation was directed at the clause 'related to civilian control of the military's promotions and other related matters that were totally unacceptable to the military commanders'.³⁶

A former Chief of Army Staff warns against assuming that the new policy is being driven purely by America's goodwill and friendship for Pakistan or to amend for its past wrongdoing. 'Obama simply wants to restore and strengthen the American position in the region.'³⁷ The General further predicts that the war in Afghanistan will

³⁴ Discussions with Generals in April and May 2009 in Islamabad and Rawalpindi.

³⁵ Iftikhar Khan and Syed Irfan Raza, 'Army stance puts govt on back foot', *Dawn* 9 October 2009.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Discussion with former COAS General Mirza Aslam Beg in Rawalpindi on 18 February 2009.

recoil on Pakistan and the Taliban will not be defeated.

As senior political analyst Khalid Ahmed pointed out years ago, 'it is difficult to identify the faces that represent the Islamist denomination of the army. But it is easy to see their spokesmen outside the army'.³⁸ He characterised their modus operandi as using Islamic as well as anti-American and anti-Indian sentiments to exert pressure on the government and military leadership. The regency of General Musharraf added to the nexus between the military and the mullahs,³⁹ but the aftermath of 9/11 forced Pakistan to officially align itself with the United States and its allies. The officer corps as well as the rank and file were badly prepared for this shift, with the army neither tuned mentally nor trained and equipped to fight a domestic insurgency. Furthermore, Islamist tendencies mixed with a particular brand of religiously-tainted patriotism along with the inculcation of anti-American and anti-Indian sentiments are dominant in the armed forces and stand in the way of unreserved action against the militants. Yet the latter's brutality against civilians and security personnel, which have inflicted heavy troop losses, has promoted the realisation that the survival of Pakistan is at stake if 'talibanisation' spreads further into the settled areas of Pakistan and permeates society to a higher degree. It seems that earlier beliefs that Pakistan would become stable by isolating itself internationally have lost ground.

Other high-ranking military personnel, like retired air commodore and former ambassador Khalid Iqbal, criticise the new US policy for its lack of balance, having shifted the 'onus of the ongoing militancy' from Afghanistan to Pakistan. This group attributes the cause for the spillover of militancy into Pakistan to the obvious failure of counter-insurgency measures in Afghanistan. They favour a selective approach towards the militants, with the aim of isolating the 'hard-core'. They also support the suggested inclusion of India and Iran in the Contact Group for Afghanistan, believing that this could help to enhance regional cooperation in a range of fields. In order to remove local resistance to the incorporation of the tribal areas into Pakistan's political and economic mainstream, they request the immediate release of funds for such relevant projects as the development of

Reconstruction Opportunity Zones for these areas.⁴⁰

Retired lieutenant general Talat Masood speaks for those who believe that 'the major powers' have other goals in the region beyond the security and stability of Pakistan. He therefore concludes that 'Pakistan should formulate national policies that protect its vital interests in this highly complex and layered interplay of regional and global forces'.⁴¹

While Obama's new strategy asks for Pakistan to act also against those groups of the Taliban that exclusively oppose US occupation, but which are favourably disposed towards Pakistan, there is a strong sentiment and calculation in the army that 'the last thing Pakistan needs is to add to its problems by alienating those chapters of the Taliban that are favourably inclined towards us. They might well be the interim, or even the long term, future of Afghanistan'.⁴²

5.3 Media and Academia

The media have covered the range of opinions prevailing in Pakistan as expressed by civilian and military officials, prominent members of civil society, and scholars. However, there is also a dominant trend within the media itself to be critical of the government. Failures on the political level, by the administration, the judiciary, or the army, police and security agencies are highlighted according to their sensational value, while a systematic campaign against various manifestations of Islamist extremism and, in particular, terrorism is noticeably absent. Apparently, the media are only partially aware of their responsibility to promote enlightened opinions and attitudes among the public at large, in support of realistic objectives in Pakistan's struggle for stability against the domestic menace and those kindling it from abroad.

Nevertheless, individual journalists, especially in the English language papers and television programmes, are promoting qualified public opinion and gaining influence with their knowledgeable reporting and objective analysis of complicated issues of national importance, such as the conditions in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), the weakness of democratic

³⁸ Khaled Ahmed, 'Pakistan Army and militant Islam', *The Friday Times* 5-11 January 2001.

³⁹ A useful documentation and analysis of this aspect is provided in 'Pakistan: The Mullahs and the Military', ICG Asia Report No.49, 20 March 2003.

⁴⁰ Khalid Iqbal, 'Way forward in Afghanistan', *Dawn* (Karachi) 14 April 2009.

⁴¹ Talat Masood, 'Regional Power Rivalry', *The News* 21 September 2009.

⁴² Shauqat Qadir, 'Pakistan can not alienate the Taliban', *The Friday Times* 11-17 December 2009.

institutions and requirements of Pakistan's international relations. Some journalists clearly recognise that 'Pakistan faces a problem of terrorism and militancy today that cannot in good faith be laid squarely at the feet of the Americans'.⁴³ Few of Pakistan's other international allies and friends have provided any significant aid to fight terrorism - not China, not Saudi Arabia, not the Gulf states. American aid to Pakistan, then, 'must be seen in the context of what is the problem of terrorism and militancy here and what other allies are doing to help us'.⁴⁴

Ejaz Hyder, consulting editor of *The Friday Times*, poses the question asked by many, as to why Obama should succeed in defeating al-Qaeda and the Taliban in 18 months, when the US failed to do so in the last eight years. He points out that 'the ground situation gives no indication that the US and its allies are anywhere close to achieving any of these objectives'.⁴⁵ He continues, '[a]nd if the Taliban are not defeated, or at least pressured to the point where they are amenable to talking, then the entire strategy, its civilian and military sides combined, falls flat'.⁴⁶

Examining possible motivations for Pakistan to engage with the US, Hyder identifies two of Pakistan's strategic core questions: 'Is the US providing enough military and civilian funds to Pakistan? Is the US alive to Pakistan's strategic sensitivities vis-à-vis India and within the region?'.⁴⁷ And he concludes: 'If the answer to both these question is in the negative, then we cannot even begin to talk about an incentive structure beyond mere rhetoric'.⁴⁸

Political and defence analyst Hasan-Askari Rizvi and *The Friday Times* editor Najam Sethi add more concerns to the list, which expresses an important line of thought in Pakistan:

- Pakistan's fear relates to the day after the US leaves Afghanistan. Should it not seek friends to cope with the post-US situation?
- After the US quits Afghanistan, regional powers are likely to jockey for influence in post-US Afghanistan. Pakistan therefore does not want to alienate all Afghan players.

- Pakistan does not have the capacity to move against all kinds of militant groups based either in the tribal areas or elsewhere in the country at a time when India is maintaining a steady military and diplomatic pressure on its neighbour. Pakistan must focus firstly on the elements that directly threaten it.
- A major concern in Pakistan concerns America's possible response if Pakistan is unwilling or unable to satisfy the US on the safe haven issue and does not take action against those groups identified by the US. These issues could become more serious if the Afghan Taliban slip into Pakistan's tribal areas to protect themselves from a step-up in military operations. Will the US increase drone attacks or send Special Forces into Pakistani tribal areas or both?⁴⁹
- The question arises whether the US can be convinced that the Kashmir issue must be resolved and that trust has to be built between the nuclear-armed enemies, without which Pakistan's security establishment cannot be co-opted into supporting the US AfPak strategy because of the 'India factor' in Afghanistan.⁵⁰

There is general agreement within this section of the Pakistani media that Pakistan will remain central to US policy in the region as far as security is concerned. It is also taken for granted that the US will begin the pull-out from July 2011 and probably complete it by 2012. Beyond this date, nobody is prepared to predict what the situation in Afghanistan will look like. But Pakistani authors unanimously state that: 'Nuclear-armed Pakistan is a key "principal" in the region. Its views, concerns and interests regarding the future of Afghanistan can only be ignored at great peril to all the "principals" in the region'.⁵¹ And, '[e]ven more importantly, Americans and their allies need to neutralise the geopolitical rivalries in Afghanistan. This is a point that no policy on Afghanistan has addressed'.⁵²

In marked contrast, most of the Urdu press and some of the anchors on Urdu television programmes take a far more aggressive position towards the US and demonstrate more tolerance

⁴³ 'US aid to Pakistan', *Dawn* 21 April 2009.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ejaz Hyder, 'Wanting to do it right but getting it wrong?', *The Friday Times* 11-17 December 2009.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Hassan-Askari Rizvi, 'The day after', *The Friday Times* 11-17 December 2009.

⁵⁰ Najam Sethi, 'Crunch time for AfPak', *The Friday Times* 11-17 December 2009.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Rasul Bakhsh Rais, 'Afghanistan new strategy, old problem', *The Friday Times* 11-17 December 2009.

of Islamist opinions and activities. Naturally, the Jihadi media are even more radical. In the North West Frontier Province and the adjacent tribal areas, about 150 illegal FM radio stations are run in madrassas, mosques and the compounds of militant leaders. According to the BBC World Service, 'mullahs and militants [are] using the air waves to broadcast propaganda against their opponents and Western governments'.⁵³

6. A FUTURE FOR FATA

The experience of North and South Waziristan, Swat and Malakand indicate that negotiating peace-deals with the Pakistani Taliban from a position of weakness does not usher in any sustainable calm or change. Agreements made between military authorities and militants failed to re-establish the writ of the authorities. Instead, the militants used the respite to regroup, recruit fresh fighters and to expand their territorial control and influence. The government's ineffective strategising allowed 13 individual groups to combine their forces into the Tehrik-e-Taliban-e-Pakistan (TTP) under the leadership of late Baitullah Mehsud and, after his killing by a US drone attack in autumn 2009, Hakimullah Mehsud.

The government and army saw their only remaining option as inflicting defeat on the militants, securing the regained areas and protecting the population against the retaliatory strikes of the Taliban. This has been achieved to a considerable extent, but at the cost of severe losses in human lives among the population as well as troops on the ground, widespread destruction

of houses and other property, and a huge number of internally displaced persons (IDPs).

At a conference of the Corps Commanders on 4 June 2009, COAS General Kayani stated 'that the tide in Swat has turned against terrorists and organised resistance' and that the army would stay in Swat for up to one year to prevent the return of the militants. He urged the government to enforce a robust administrative effort to make it possible for the IDPs to return to their homes.⁵⁴ Prime Minister Gilani followed suit a month later adding that 'the Army will stay in the area till the reconstruction of the affected areas and rehabilitation of the displaced persons'.⁵⁵

Wherever the army succeeded, it raised the confidence of the population in the capacity of the government and armed forces to create a secure environment conducive to better governance, reconstruction and development. Under this impression, 1.65 million people returned to Swat by the end of August 2009. Notwithstanding these positive signs, financial and material constraints as well as the traditionally slow motion of the wheels of bureaucracy and judiciary have meant that progress has not been satisfactory. The future will demonstrate whether the lessons of Swat have been learned.

Events in Malakand also initiated a national debate about whether granting limited areas special rights to replace the common law and judicial institutions with a modified form of Sharia, as was signed into law by President Zardari under the title 'Sharia Nizam-i-Adl Regulation 2009', served the stability and unity of Pakistan. After all, this demand from the people of that area arose from the failure of the judiciary to provide fast and fair dispensation of justice, free of corruption. The demand will remain and spread so long as the judiciary fails to reform itself for the better, as Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhri has recently promised. The official objective of reform is noteworthy, but not many are hopeful that strength can be generated to implement such reforms against the opposition of vested interests.

These events sparked profound changes in the political perceptions of the Federally Administered Tribal Agencies (FATA)⁵⁶ population itself as well as

⁵³ Dawood Azami, 'Pakistan's Taliban radio insurgency', BBC World Service, 22 June 2009. http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/south_asia/8108881.stm

The following are some excerpts from the report: "FM mullahs" they condemn everyone and everything that goes against their interpretation of religion...Some illegal FM radio stations also criticise the Pakistani army's operations in the region and threaten tribesmen with dire consequences if they help the government fight the Taliban...Militant Taliban have also been using their FM radio transmitters to issue warnings and directives to local people..."The Taliban have used radio in a clever way to increase their influence and intimidate the general population," says retired Brigadier Mahmood Shah. "Of course, the illegal stations have contributed a lot to the spreading of militancy."

⁵⁴ Iftikhar A. Khan, 'Civil, military leaders discuss roadmap for IDPs' return', *Dawn* 6 June 2009.

⁵⁵ Essa Khankhel, 'Militants on the run, Army to stay in Swat: Gilani', *The News* 11 August 2009.

⁵⁶ The seven Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan enjoy a unique constitutional status, which has kept their population out of the mainstream of Pakistani society and deprived the tribal population of

in the views of the Pakistani public in general concerning the tribal areas. Notwithstanding the many shortcomings in content and style, the government of Pakistan and the provincial government of the North West Frontier Province (NWFP), including authorities dealing specifically with FATA, are initiating political moves that stand in clear contrast to the positions taken by earlier governments. Among a number of goals, these measures are directed at improving institutional arrangements for governance, involving the population in public consultations, and increasing access to knowledge, information and development.⁵⁷

These policies have resulted from a growing awareness that integration is the only practicable future for FATA, with the consequent demand for a comprehensive programme to uplift the area. A significant step in this direction was already undertaken in 2006 with the formulation of the *FATA Sustainable Development Plan 2006-2015*,⁵⁸ a flexible instrument designed to address social needs and to overcome the prevailing disparities within FATA as well as between FATA and the national average development of Pakistan.

The fragile security situation in FATA, however, impeded the systematic and extensive implementation of the plan. The issues and strategies defined there – for governance, law and order, society and culture, services and utilities, economy and development as well as environment⁵⁹ – remain as overarching as they were in the past. Under the impact of the new US

policy, President Zardari recognised the urgency of efforts to normalise the situation in FATA and sensed the chance to tackle the military as well as the civilian aspects of the problem with US financial support, which has now become available. On 14 August 2009, he announced a *Reform Package* for FATA that encompasses political, judicial and administrative reforms. These reforms allow political activities in FATA, provide for the establishment of an appellate tribunal, curtail the arbitrary powers of political agents, give people the right to appeal and bail, exclude women and children from the territorial responsibility clause, and envisage the audit of accounts by the Auditor-General.⁶⁰ Although procedural flaws and inconsistencies in the content and style of this *Reform Package* face qualified criticism, it could nevertheless be a useful step forward, provided that vested interests are not allowed to sabotage its spirit and essence.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Pakistan is on record with a host of objections and reservations concerning President Obama's AfPak strategy, but so far has not developed a strategy of its own that is tuned directed towards changing US foreign policy.
2. The persisting disequilibrium of power in South Asia has not been conducive to the resolution of conflicts nor to the development of fruitful economic cooperation in the region in general. Foreign interference, mainly military and driven by the self-interests of external parties, has only intensified the problems. In view of the multiplicity of levels and issues of conflict and their intricate interconnections, history seems to dictate a strategic paradigm change for the regulation of conflicts in this region. This would include the replacement of military force with diplomatic instruments and a credible assurance to the Islamic world that policy is based on mutual respect. A comprehensive regional approach with the constructive involvement of neighbouring countries should be the ingredients of any policy that seeks to disengage from the devastating results of intervention, while aiming to contain or peacefully regulate conflicts and restrain the spread of terrorism.

the benefits of development activities. These units are therefore among the most underdeveloped areas of the country with devastating social indicators. With six of the Agencies directly bordering Afghanistan, they were instrumentalised as the geographical and logistical link for the implementation of the 'strategic depth' concept of the military leadership of Pakistan. Official neglect combined with the exploitation of the tribes and their involvement in the Afghan wars of the last three decades led to unprecedented instability and turned parts of the FATA into safe havens for Afghan, Central Asian and al-Qaeda militants. A concise and reliable overview on the situation in the area is provided in 'FATA – A Profile of Socio-economic Development', Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI), Factfile, Vol. X, No.1, January 2008 (cited hereafter as FATA – IPRI Factfile).

⁵⁷ These assessments are based on discussions with residents of FATA, officials of the Awami National Party and political analysts in Islamabad and Rawalpindi in April and May 2009, and telephone interviews in August and September 2009.

⁵⁸ FATA – IPRI Factfile, pp.31-35.

⁵⁹ Ibid, pp.35-37.

⁶⁰ 'FATA Special Report', *The News* 23 August 2009; Syed Irfan Raza, 'Far-reaching FATA reforms unveiled', *The News* 14 August 2009.

3. As long as there is no fundamental change in the approach of international politics to the resolution of conflicts – that is, from the use of military force to diplomatically negotiated settlements – the likelihood of establishing conditions of sustainable peace in a conflict-prone region like South/Central Asia are remote. What is more likely is that military surges, as now determined for Afghanistan, are likely to provoke intensified jihadi activities, with an increasing spillover into Pakistan. Irrefutably, all military efforts are exhausted and have failed, while the UN's mandate has been squandered and the organisation's prestige as a neutral and respected peacemaker relinquished.
4. From the Pakistani point of view, American and other international military forces in Afghanistan are occupants pursuing their own national interests. Increasingly, Pakistan's elites also regard them as contributing to a major domestic problem in their own country: the gradual talibanisation of Pakistani society, in settled rural areas as well as in urban centres, and the increasing number of terrorist acts are drawing strength from a growing anti-American public mood.
5. At the same time, the Taliban insurgency and the talibanisation of society are recognised by many as contrary to the fundamentals of Pakistan. However, fighting fellow-Muslims with military means in their own country is a traumatic experience for the armed forces. Only gradually is it giving way to a sense of patriotism, where top priority is assigned to the survival of Pakistan and the values cherished by the majority of the population. At a leadership level, the planning and operational execution of counter-insurgency is taking a turn towards greater conceptual clarity and higher professional efficiency. It aims at less collateral damage, the sustainable presence of armed forces in areas cleared of organised militancy as a precondition for the return of IDPs, institutional stability, reconstruction and durable development.
6. The military leadership expects the politicians to absorb the fact that lasting peace is unachievable until consensus is reached on the use of the military option against the insurgency and that on this basis a comprehensive and credible national anti-militancy strategy is developed and put into operation. There is also hope in military circles that at least the leadership structures of alien elements of the insurgency can be driven out of Pakistan, thereby reducing the eventuality and danger of cross-border operations by US and international security forces stationed in Afghanistan. The removal of Afghan Taliban from FATA is preferably left to the tribal population in order not to prematurely damage strategic options. It is also perceived that sustainable change, meaning improved conditions of living for ordinary people, can only be achieved by gradually replacing the military option with a comprehensive development program.
7. The military leadership of Pakistan has no doubt that US and international forces will leave Afghanistan in the course of the coming three to four years. Given the present ethno-political dispensation in Afghanistan, it expects their withdrawal to add further seeds of confrontation to the conflict-ridden relationship between the domestic Afghan stakeholders. As the Afghan security forces will require considerably more time to succeed in controlling the security situation, it is understood that Afghanistan and Pakistan will be jointly committed to keep terrorist networks under control in exchange for the substantial aid that will continue to flow. This is the expected deal with the United States. Pakistani strategists base their approach on the premise that 'if Pakistan is important for Afghanistan's stability today, it will continue to be important for Afghanistan's future after the US quits the region'.⁶¹
8. Even so, Pakistan realises that the departure of foreign troops from Afghanistan will not guarantee a peaceful transition to politically- and ethnically-balanced conditions in that country. Anticipating a period of violent power struggles in Afghanistan, Pakistan would like to prevent elements of the former Northern Alliance from taking over the commanding heights of the Afghan army, police and intelligence service, as this could mean an invitation to expand Indian influence. However, this would also mean that a mistake of the past is repeated if Pakistan aligns itself unilaterally with the Taliban and similar groups in order to secure influence for itself in future Afghanistan.

⁶¹ Hassan-Askari Rizvi, 'The day after', *The Friday Times* 11-17 December 2009.

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