

Democracy in Afghanistan and External Actors

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Abstract

The US responded to the 9/11 terrorist attacks by invading Afghanistan. The US invasion had two perceived objectives: Military and Political. The military objective was to eliminate Al-Qaida and Taliban in order to restore peace, while the political dimension was to rebuild the Afghan state and society from scratch, to establish a healthy democratic system which would put Afghanistan on the road to prosperity. In Dec 2001, nearly all the Afghan stakeholders, except Taliban, gathered along with the representatives of international community in Bonn, Germany. The purpose of the conference was to discuss the plans which would help to materialize the dream of a stable and democratic Afghanistan. The project of democratic Afghanistan envisioned at Bonn Conference in 2001 is still far from being achieved. All the attempts made by international community to establish democracy in Afghanistan have not been met with success. The study begins with the premise that there are certain pre-conditions which enhance the growth of democracy and unless the conditions are met, democratic stability will remain a distant dream in Afghanistan. This study surveys and analyzes the deterioration of democratic system in Afghanistan with special reference to the role of ethnic cleavages and the menacing influence of foreign actors. The study recommends policies that are aimed at reducing ethnic polarization by ensuring more equitable distribution of power and resources coupled with a realistic approach on the part of Kabul to take into account the legitimate security interests of regional countries in order to compel them to play a constructive role for achieving peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Keywords: Afghanistan, US Invasion, International Community, Ethnic Cleavages, Democratic Project, Taliban Insurgency, Afghan Warlords, Northern Alliance.

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Introduction

The US responded to the 9/11 terrorist attacks by invading Afghanistan. The US invasion had two perceived objectives: Military and Political. The military objective was to eliminate Al-Qaida and Taliban in order to restore peace, while the political dimension was to rebuild the Afghan state and society from scratch, to establish a healthy democratic system which would put Afghanistan on the road to prosperity.

In Dec 2001, nearly all the Afghan stakeholders, except Taliban, gathered along with the representatives of international community in Bonn, Germany. The purpose of the conference was to discuss the plans which would help materialize the dream of a stable and democratic Afghanistan (Simonsen, 2004). As a result of Afghan deliberations, a fragile system was put in place which was composed of the leaders of various ethnic groups. Many of these leaders were Afghan warlords that had earlier fought against the USSR and later against each other. Hamid Karzai, a veteran Pashtun tribal figurehead was installed as the president of Afghanistan while the other key posts in the administration were given to the leaders of Northern Alliance. The International Community also pledged a strong financial and economic support in order to revive and sustain the Afghan economy.

The historic era was followed by a first ever experiment in democracy, symbolized by elections that were held in 2004. Even though the electoral process was far from perfect but still it marked the start of a democratic era (Maley, 2005). The menace of militancy was brought down to almost the point of complete annihilation. Suddenly, the American invasion of Iraq happened which shifted the focus and emphasis of the US led coalition away from Afghanistan. Taliban quickly took the advantage of this shift and re-emerged in the spring of 2005 with cross border attacks allegedly supported by Pakistan becoming a routine affair. As the focus kept on shifting away from Afghanistan towards the middle-east, the Taliban continued to grow in strength. In addition, as the distribution of power and resources went along ethnic lines in a disproportionate fashion, the ethnic polarization of the Afghan society also became evident which further strengthened the Taliban position.

The dream of democratic Afghanistan was slowly turning into a nightmare. The relationships between Kabul and its neighbors became hostile, as a direct consequence of the new blame game in which Afghanistan accused Iran and Pakistan of fueling the unrest. Moreover, as the deadline for the American led coalition forces was approaching, it became evident that the lofty promises made by international community were far from being fulfilled (Rippenburg, 2007). The elections of 2014 clearly showed that the democratic system was on the brink of collapse as ethnic tensions once again rose to its height and ultimately the US had to intervene to settle the issue among the two leading candidates. Owing to the events that took place in Afghanistan over the last 16 years, the dream of a strong and stable Afghan democracy is still far from being achieved. The democratic project which began in 2001 is still endangered by a combination of insurmountable obstacles.

In fact, the prospects of democracy are becoming grimmer with the passage of time due to:

- Decrease in International financial and military support
- Increased insurgent activities
- Ethnic Polarization
- Intervention of the foreign actors' hostile to democracy

Hence, the critical issue of democratic instability demands serious consideration. This paper aims at analyzing the state of democracy in Afghanistan in relation to the factors that impede the growth of democratic process. Specifically, the study draws heavily on the work of Robert Dahl, a renowned democratic theorist, who proposed the pre-conditions necessary to the growth of democratic progress. The special focus of the current research is on two preconditions enumerated by Dahl:

- Foreign Intervention hostile to democracy
- Weak sub-cultural pluralism

In the context of Afghanistan, the situation of democratic process is analyzed against the role of preconditions such as “Ethnic Polarization” and “External intervention that is hostile to democracy”

Objectives of the Study

The intent of the proposed study is:

- To find out the reasons of fragile democracy in Afghanistan even though with all the necessary support that has been extended by the United States and its allies.
- To envisage those preconditions of democracy which unfortunately Afghanistan lacks that are deemed necessary if a stable democracy is to be achieved.
- To look into the significance of ethnic divisions and their impact upon the democratic process.

Research Questions

This research contains the following questions:

- Which regional actors continued to promote their agenda through a specific group in Afghanistan?
- Which ethnic groups are being influenced and manipulated?
- How are these groups being assisted?
- What role has religion, race and language played in tilting each major ethnic group?
- What are the hostile policies of the regional and international players that prevent Afghanistan from stabilizing?

Significance and Scope of the Study

The significant feature of the study is to assess the dynamic role and interplay of ethnic division and external intervention and the collective effect they cast upon the growth of democratic process. It strives to build a new perspective by looking at the current democratic setup in Afghanistan in order to analyze the pre-conditions of democracy and whether these pre-conditions exist in reality. The study aims at bridging the gap between democratic theory and practice and most importantly to measure the future prospects of achieving democracy in the war-torn country, Afghanistan.

Review of the Literature

As the previous policies failed to establish ethnic parity, programs and policies need a reassessment in order to create mutual trust and co-operation among the different ethnic groups

Emadi (2004). The writer highlights the need of a policy change which would ultimately result in increased co-operation among the different ethnic groups.

Initially as power was concentrated in the hands of ethnic groups that were in minority, it created a sense of alienation from the political system among the Pashtuns. This sense of alienation resulted in the increased support for the Taliban (Mullen, 2010). The Taliban have taken over many Pashtun populated parts of Afghanistan but they wouldn't have been able to do so if they didn't have the support of Pashtuns but it was the policies of the US which left the Pashtuns with no alternative.

Gannon (2004) an expert on Afghanistan blames the US policies that have further aggravated the situation in Afghanistan. Afghanistan has a history of fighting and violence among the different ethnic groups led by warlords. After the US invasion, the same warlords were supported and favored by the US and given key positions of power. Another grave mistake was that the US viewed the Pashtuns as enemies and continued with policies that would concentrate powers in the hands of the Tajiks and the Uzbeks. The new government is composed of militarily strong Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazara factions while the Pashtuns who are the main ethnic group have been sidelined.

The Pakistani military is also to be blamed which took full advantage of the situation. It has a soft corner towards the Taliban as they fear that if a pro-Indian government is set in place in Afghanistan, it will be the Taliban who will guard their interests (Barber, 2009). The military of Pakistan is reluctant to take any concrete steps against the Taliban because it was ISI, the Pakistani intelligence agency that created the Taliban. The Pakistani military continues to support the Taliban to deter the Indian influence (Cogan, 2008). Pakistan has often been accused of pursuing a dual policy, posing as allies with the American and providing continual support to the Taliban (Gal, 2014).

The Americans were wrong in considering Pakistan as its ally. Pakistan was not only a safe haven for the Taliban but also their recruitment center. Fresh Taliban were recruited from the madrassas and were sent to Afghanistan to fight Pakistan's own allies (Gal, 2014). Although Pakistan has always dismissed such allegations, still it needs to be observed what benefits could the support to Taliban have for Pakistan and after having suffered badly itself, why is Pakistan still catering to the needs of the Taliban?

As seen by many, the United States has failed to secure the region as it has been unable to put in place a strong Democratic system in Afghanistan. Current developments prove that situation in Afghanistan is going downhill. This failure may lead to global terrorism and drug trade on a scale that has never been seen before (Rashid, 2008). There is no doubt about the fact that if the foreign actors continue to intervene in Afghanistan and continue supporting different groups, the already weak state of Afghanistan most probably would collapse and it will become the global hub of terrorism.

Methodology

The study employs a qualitative method of research with a historical and analytical approach, seeking to measure the role of factors as ethnic polarization and the intervention of external actors and their relation to democratic development. The period under study is between the US invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 until the NATO withdrawal in 2014, largely because it was the phase which involved initiatives of building democratic institutions, the main object of the study.

The main part of the paper will be the discussion. The possible solutions to end these internal and external problems will be given. Strategies and policies will be discussed and recommended as to how the ethnic polarization can be minimized and how Afghanistan can minimize the role of foreign actors if it safeguards the interest of its neighbors and take into account their security concerns.

Theoretical Framework-----The Pre-Conditions for Democracy

After observing the way to democracy as has taken over as the dominant political system in the last few decades, one can easily claim that Democracy has become 'The' Ideal political system to run the affairs of a state as it is not only a political system to run the affairs of a state but it is also a philosophy of life with many wonderful values. The ideas and values of democracy, the institutions and the practices of democracy have made way into almost all corners of the world and have affected the perception of the masses regarding their right, liberties and have changed their view with respect to their relation with the state.

Even though democracy has progressed by leaps and bounds, on multiple occasions democracy when introduced by replacing the older system was short lived and failed shortly paving a way for an authoritative regime. This means that there are some conditions that are necessary for a democratic system if it has to sustain and survive. Places where democracy survived must have those favorable conditions whereas in places where democracy failed must be lacking those pre-conditions as Robert Dahl calls them. We have various examples of countries where the transition to democracy was made but the underlying conditions were not favorable and it meant that the survival of democracy could not be guaranteed.

(Dahl, 1989) proposed that the pre-conditions or the underlying conditions is a set of characteristics in a country which if present, support the democratic system and if absent or weak, democracy is unlikely to exist and even if it does, its existence will be short lived. Among many conditions that favor democracy, mentioned below are the important and essential conditions for democracy.

- Weak sub-cultural pluralism
- A modern market economy and society
- No strong external influence hostile to democracy
- Democratic beliefs and political culture
- Control of military and police by elected officials

From the examples of different countries, it is observed that countries that made a transition to democracy and sustained that change and there are countries that made the transition but couldn't sustain the change and collapsed and then there are few examples where the transition to democracy never took place. These examples of transition to democracy and the different outcomes indicate that there are certain conditions that need to be fulfilled if the change has to be made and sustained.

Pre-conditions in the context of Afghanistan

Here it is significant to discuss the conditions that are absent and have therefore affected the new-born Afghan democracy. The first and foremost condition necessary for the survival of democracy is that the state should be free from foreign intervention and influence. A democracy is very unlikely to survive in a state if another state that is hostile to democracy intervenes in that

state. We have the example of USSR that intervened in different states and prevented those states from strengthening their democracies. Similarly, the USA while safeguarding their national interests intervened in many states and had those states been free from this intervention, they would have developed moderate democratic systems.

The second underlying condition that is deemed necessary if a stable democratic system is to be upheld is weak sub-cultural pluralism. In countries where cultural conflicts are absent or very minimum, the democratic system is more likely to survive and the democratic institutions are more likely to develop in a country which is culturally more homogenous compared to countries where there is much cultural diversity. The people belonging to different cultures establish close ties with the members of the same culture which is usually based on language, ethnicity, region and ideology. Based on these characteristics people establish a source of belonging towards the people who belong to their group and this liking is usually coupled with resentment towards the people of other cultures and people extract their identity by opposing people of other groups. These differences eventually divide the society and create vertical differences among the different groups.

These conflicts among the people of different ethnic groups evolve into the realm of politics, usually over religion, language or region. The problem arises when there are different ethnic groups with different interests and priorities. The cultural group that is in power and dominant and creates the government might form policies that are unacceptable to the other groups. In this regard Afghanistan is an ideal case study (Adaney, 2008). It has four major ethnic groups, the Pashtuns who are in majority, the Hazaras who are opposed to the Pashtuns because they have a different language and religion, the Uzbeks and Tajiks who also have their own cultural traits that are exclusive to them.

With all these factors in the background, the political temperature always remains high as there is always a difference of opinion. Suppose the Pashtuns who are pre-dominantly Sunnis favor the implementation of Sharia law, even though this is a political demand they view it as a matter of principle because of their deep cultural preservation and religious conviction. Based on this conviction, they believe that their demands cannot be negotiated or compromised whereas in a democratic system, to settle issues negotiation and compromise is important. The recent Presidential elections and the tussle between the two top candidates is an example of how the different groups are not willing to negotiate and compromise and that they will safeguard the interests of their own ethnic group even at the expense of the Democratic system of Afghanistan.

After highlighting the pre-conditions for democracy that Afghanistan lacks, there is a need to see what could be done to put in place those pre-conditions in order to stabilize the fragile Afghan democratic system. Throughout the past, the relationships between Kabul regime and its neighbors became hostile whenever a new blame game gets started between Afghanistan and its neighbors. Afghanistan has always accused Iran and Pakistan of fueling the unrest. There has to be seen that the foreign intervention of the other states in Afghanistan is done through Afghanistan's own people, which means that the first pre-condition that is the foreign intervention is dependent on the second pre-condition, the ethnically diverse Afghan society.

Without this cultural diversity which is usually the source of unrest in the Afghan society, foreign powers couldn't interfere in Afghanistan. They exploit the differences that are present among the Afghans and further fuel those differences. They create and expand the differences among the people on the basis of language, religion and ethnicity. The Pashtuns who have throughout the past ruled Afghanistan have been controlled and manipulated by Pakistan. The reason for that is the mass migration of Afghan refugees to Pakistan who were majority Pashtuns.

As there were Pashtuns living on Pakistan side of the border also, they naturally had a strong bond which was further strengthened by the thread of Sunni Islam. On the other hand, a few other ethnic groups became aligned with Iran as they shared the same language and were also bonded by their similar religious beliefs of Shia Islam. This alignment of the different ethnic groups towards the different states of the region made it quite easy for those states to fulfill their own agenda, hence Afghanistan become a playground for the powers of the World. Through these neighboring countries, others countries were also able to mingle in the affairs of Afghanistan further deteriorating the situation. The USA, KSA (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) and some other countries made their way into Afghanistan with the help of Pakistan whereas India and some other were able to make their presence felt through Iran.

To reduce and diminish the foreign intervention in Afghanistan which continues to destabilize the newborn democracy, the problem of ethnic divisions need to be addressed as it works as a foundation for foreign intervention (Barfield, 2011). It can be seen and observed that the stable and older democracies are the ones that have managed to avoid ethnic conflicts. Even there are issues present, they negotiated upon them. In different countries of the world, this problem of Cultural differences was managed through different policies. One solution to this problem is Assimilation into the dominant political culture.

Even though we have Uzbeks, Tajiks, Turkmens, Hazaras, Pashtuns and many other ethnic groups living in Afghanistan and they might have their loyalties with their own ethnic groups but they need to overcome those loyalties and merge into a dominant culture, The Afghan Culture, a culture that has characteristics of all the cultures and is acceptable to all. This was also the United States solution to overcome cultural differences as it also had multiple ethnic groups. The assimilation of the different ethnic groups would create a multicultural society which would eventually result in a much higher level of tolerance and understanding.

In the case of Afghanistan, other factors are no doubt quite necessary but the rule of law and better law and order situation is extremely important. Without these two basic conditions, the other pre-conditions cannot be implemented as these serve a base for a society to maintain itself and flourish. With a bad law and order situation, people might not be at all interested in democracy. Afghanistan has seen decades of civil war and faced full-fledged attacks from the two main superpowers rather in a short period of time. Now that a fragile democratic system has been put in place, serious actions need to be taken to strengthen the democratic system if Afghanistan has to avoid collapse and the means to strengthening the Afghan democracy is the fulfilling of the pre-conditions that are suggested by Robert Dahl.

The Ethnic Division of Afghanistan

The society of Afghanistan is a highly divided society as it consists of more than seven major and seven minor ethnic groups. The population is divided in multiple ethno- linguistic groups that reside in specific regions of Afghanistan. To the North, Afghanistan has borders with Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and China, to the South it has a long porous border with Pakistan and on the west it is bound by Iran. The majority people of Afghanistan are from the Sunni sect of Islam but It also has sizeable population of Shias.



Afghan National anthem mentions 14 different ethnic groups which are all part of Afghanistan

Before going into detail, it is necessary to look into the composition of Afghan society and the different ethnic groups it is composed of. The culture of Afghanistan is not uniform as it is a mixture of people of different ethnicities and the different ethnic groups are people of different races, which is a source of pride for the groups themselves but also a source of conflict for the Afghan society. The majority ethnic groups in terms of population are the Pashtuns and constitute around 42% of the Afghan population (Riphenburg, 2005). After the Pashtuns, the second major ethnic group is the Tajik which are at times also referred to as Fars-iwan which means Persian speakers. The Tajiks constitute about one-fourth of the total population. Other major ethnic groups are the Hazaras who live in the Central regions of Afghanistan and the Uzbeks that hail from the Northern Afghanistan.

Ethnic groups in Afghanistan

Ethnic group	World Factbook / Library of Congress Country Studies (2004-present estimate)^{[28][29]}	World Factbook / Library of Congress Country Studies (pre-2004 estimates)^{[15][30][31]}
Pashtun	42%	38-50%
Tajik	27%	25-26.3% (of this 1% is Qizilbash)
Hazara	9%	12-19%
Uzbek	9%	6-8%
Aimak	4%	500,000 to 800,000 individuals
Turkmen	3%	2.5%
Baloch	2%	100,000 individuals
Others (Pashai, Nuristani, Arab, Brahui, Pamiri, Gujjar,	4%	6.9%

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnic_groups_in_Afghanistan

In the political sphere of Afghanistan, there is strong cohesiveness among the large ethnic groups except in the case when faced by a larger enemy ethnic group, for example the alliance of the Hazaras and Uzbeks against the Pashtuns. Historically, the politics of Afghanistan has centered on which group would dominate and control the government which in the case of Afghanistan was the Pashtuns. The Pashtuns have historically sidelined and sometimes persecuted the smaller group which to this day, serves as a source of animosity.

The first Pashtun dynasty was formed in 1747 by Ahmed Shah Durrani and from that time onwards, the Pashtuns have not let the power to slip from their hands. Much later in 1895, Amir Abdul Rahman took over as the ruler of Afghanistan. He crushed more than 40 uprisings which were mainly from the other ethnic groups as Pashtuns were already the privileged class. In the years to come, he executed more than 100,000 people, mainly Hazaras. There are numerous examples when ethnic solidarity has subdued all other forms of alliances. In 1929 the conservative Pashtuns and Tajiks united to overthrow the Government of Amanullah Khan who was a Pashtun himself. When the Tajiks named their leader as the Emir of Afghanistan, the two former ally groups turned enemies as a non-Pashtun Emir was not acceptable to the Pashtuns. Shortly the Tajik leader was overthrown and a Pashtun head of state was installed.

Another moment came in the civil war of the 1990's when the non-Pashtun ethnic groups tried to break the hierarchy of the Pashtuns. They wanted a system in which they are given more local and regional power as they wanted their own affairs to be handled by themselves (Bergen, 2010). There were rivalries during that time among the different Pashtun factions which eventually gave rise to the Taliban. The Taliban were able to gather the support of people as they had the appeal of both, ethnicity and religion. Mullah Omar used ethnicity and religion both to attract people and to establish his rule. The rule of the Taliban was heavily resented by the other ethnic groups because of their heavy handed tactics towards them. All these ethnic groups were waiting for the perfect opportunity to bring forth their opposition and the US invasion of 2001 provided them with that opportunity.

Another reason the different ethnic groups turned hostile towards the Pashtuns was that the Taliban were from the Pashtun ethnic group which made the other Pashtuns a bit sympathetic towards them. After the Invasion of Afghanistan by the US led coalition, the Taliban who controlled the country were driven out. It was feared that Afghanistan might return to the civil war of the 1990's as different ethnic groups again gained their power bases once the Taliban fled.

It was feared that different ethnic groups might rip apart the unitary state forming small mini states where they might align with their respective ethnic brethren on the other side of the border. Given the deep ethnic cleavages among the different ethnic groups, this fear seemed credible. Fortunately, no such thing happened and the different ethnic groups remained a part of a unitary state, Afghanistan.

One aspect of the Afghan political culture is that different ethno-religious groups have never accepted each other on an equal footing and there is a culture of intolerance among the different ethnic groups. Religion could have played a uniting factor but ethnic loyalties are so strong that very rarely can a person be seen moving to different religion. The Shias are present in the form of Hazaras are usually referred to as *Kafir*. The Pashtuns have systematically kept the other ethnic groups away from the decision-making process. Therefore in the society of Afghanistan, the culture of plurality is completely absent. The demands of the minorities are not looked upon to be real and the two dominant ethnic groups use coercive tactics against them.

Even after years later, the central government seemed unable to cope with ethnic and cultural diversity of Afghanistan. This fear and dissatisfaction of the people further aggravated with the fraudulent presidential elections of 2009. Therefore the solution to the ethnic problem of Afghanistan is possible in the form of civil society (Biddle, 2010). Many researchers have concluded that violence doesn't mainly result from the presence of ethnic cleavages but it occurs because of the absence of civil society because it helps the people to rise above their ethnic boundaries and to join each other for a greater purpose, to achieve a much higher objective that is for the national good. Civil society of Afghanistan has been seriously devastated by decades long war and if the current democratic experiment is to succeed, a strong civil society is required that would help people across the different ethnic groups to unite for a broader goal that is for well-being of democracy in Afghanistan.

Influence of Foreign States

The intervention of foreign states and the different means they have been using to promote their interests in Afghanistan is not hidden from any one. Afghanistan has been the playground for different countries where they could flex their muscle. As there are many countries interfering in Afghanistan, all have different agendas. It has been used by US and its allies to tackle USSR which was willing to use it as an experiment site to promote its socialist ideology. Its land has been used to breed terrorists in the form of Al-Qaeda and Taliban with the help of different countries of the region, the role of Pakistan and Iran in its politics, all try to extract benefits from the land and people of Afghanistan (Chaudet, 2010).

Another reason the democratic system is on the brink of collapse is that there are no favorable conditions for democracy in the region. Pakistan which has been ruled by authoritative military dictators is itself struggling to keep its democratic system in place whereas India also doesn't have the promotion of democracy on its agenda. Iran being a Shia theocratic state also has no interest in the promotion of democracy in Afghanistan. In fact, all these states support different groups by providing them political and financial support which in turn harms the democratic system of Afghanistan. This means that in the absence of any regional actor that would promote democracy of Afghanistan, the people and the government of Afghanistan have to themselves work for the sustenance and progress of democracy.

Interference of Pakistan and India

Pakistan and Afghanistan have been at odds with each other from the day Pakistan was created. Afghanistan was the only country in world that opposed the inclusion of Pakistan into the

United Nations. Afghanistan getting it aligned with India in 1947 was enough evidence that relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan in the coming times are going to be uneasy. Afghanistan was not willing to accept the Durand line as an International border and wanted the Pashtun populated parts of Pakistan to be made a part of Afghanistan. Therefore the relations of Pakistan with Afghanistan have been marred with many issues and the Soviet war and as a result the mass migration of Afghans to Pakistan changed the dynamics of this relation completely. After the 9/11 attacks, more than 300,000 Afghans migrated to Pakistan and it was mainly through these refugees that Pakistan promoted its agenda in Afghanistan.

The US led coalition dealt a severe blow to the Taliban and with their invasion of Afghanistan, the political dynamics of Afghanistan changed overnight. Pakistan was left out of the political setup made in Afghanistan and the non-Pashtun Northern Alliance dominated the new government. Pakistan had strived for years for its policy of gaining strategic depth, evaporated suddenly and this came as a great shock to them but its leading role in the war against terror again brought it into the spotlight and it regained some influence in Afghanistan. However, in the current time, there seems to be concerned in different circles of Pakistani society due to the increasing ties between Pakistan's arch rival India and Afghanistan.

Although there are some historical problems between Pakistan and Afghanistan like the Durand line but that issue doesn't have much relevance now as it has been overshadowed by more current issues. With India playing a more instrumental role in the development of Afghanistan and establishing embassies and consulates throughout Afghanistan, Pakistan had to make a shift in its foreign policy regarding Afghanistan post 9/11. Some key issues that surround the Pakistan-India-Afghanistan relation are the sponsorship of terrorism in the three countries, the menace of Taliban, the gas pipeline and the transit trade route. Afghanistan and India have been fostering the Baloch separatists that were running an anti-state agenda in Pakistan. There have been many sightings of the Baloch separatist leaders in Afghanistan who have openly declared that they receive Indian support. On the other hand, India and Afghanistan have been blaming Pakistan for the support they keep on extending to the Taliban.

Pakistan and US have always maintained a need based relation. Both the states have ties with each other but at the same time were skeptical of their relation with each other. After the US invasion, the US needed a trade route and an ally in the region which it had in the form of Pakistan, in return Pakistan received economic and military aid for its services and most importantly a say in the Afghan political system. The US and Afghan governments have been criticizing Pakistan for its double game, being a friend and a foe at the same time. Pakistan housed the Taliban leadership that had fled from Afghanistan, provided them assistance and urged them and fight back in Afghanistan. The existence of Quetta Shura, the presence of Osama Bin Laden in Abbotabad and the strong control of Pakistan over Taliban are enough proof to claim that the policies of Pakistan no doubt are deteriorating the democratic process in Afghanistan. The previous president of Afghanistan Hamid Karzai always maintained that it is Pakistan that acts as a major stumbling block in progress of his country.

Influence of Iran

Iran a neighboring country like Pakistan is long-blamed for disturbance in Afghanistan. Iran sees an opportunity in Afghanistan that it can fill the power gaps that would be more easily accessible once the American leaves. Iran is investing heavy sums of money in some parts of Afghanistan. The motive of Iran is to make a long-lasting influence in Afghanistan by gaining the support of some groups within the society of Afghanistan. Iran shares a common religion and language with some ethnic groups of Afghanistan which makes them naturally aligned with each

other. Just as Pakistan has been supporting Taliban which is pre-dominantly a Pashto speaking group of Sunni Muslims, Iran has been supporting the rival groups of Taliban. These Persian speaking groups belonging to the Shia sect share the same language and religion with Iran (Milani, 2006). The Hazaras have often looked to Iran for their political and spiritual guidance. Important Hazara leaders retain important positions in the government of Afghanistan.

As Iran is a much stronger nation in terms of Economy and repute in the region, the Afghan government is reluctant to accuse them of any interference the way it criticizes Pakistan. Iran being in a stronger position in the region, the US and its Allies fear that after their departure Iran will exercise much more influence in Afghanistan. Iran being a fierce rival of the west has provided strong support to the insurgents fighting the coalition forces which became a source of instability for Afghanistan. Iran and its interference in Afghanistan will also depend on the treatment of the Shia minority groups by the Pashtuns and Tajiks who are mainly in power. Iran houses the second largest population of refugees after Pakistan. The Afghan refugees in Iran have often been treated badly by the Iranian regime. Iran even uses the threat of mass deportation of the Afghan refugees in order to convince Kabul to formulate policies that suit Iran.

Influence of other states

Apart from Pakistan, India and Iran that are the main stake holders in Afghanistan, there are other countries that have an Influence in Iran. The policies of Russia are aligned with its allies Iran and India. It wants to tackle the spread of Sunni extremism. Russia wants to minimize the influence of Pakistan of in Afghanistan. The Arab countries of the Gulf promote their agenda in Afghanistan through Pakistan. They fund different Sunni extremist groups in Afghanistan and they have the support of Pakistan with them. The Arab countries of the Gulf which are headed by KSA have been accused by many for their support of the different Islamist groups. Iran and Pakistan continue to compete with much stronger countries at their back. The Russians are also concerned with the spread of Sunni extremism in Central Asia and the Caucasus. As a result, Russia's interests in Afghanistan align most closely with those of Iran and India, both of which seek to prevent the Taliban's resurgence in Kabul.

Now as the American withdrawal is near, China's interest in Afghanistan has started to increase. Afghanistan being rich in natural resources is a good investment for the Chinese. China and India both compete to get greater control of the resources of Afghanistan and therefore have conflicting strategies (Hong, 2013). According to Ahmed Rashid, in recent years "China has broken the economic connections that traditionally tied Central Asia to Russia". Gaining access to Afghanistan will give China a much stronger hold of the Central Asian markets. Therefore, to conclude, India, Iran, Pakistan, China and Russian have all economic interests in Afghanistan. While preserving their economic interests, they will be supporting different groups in Afghanistan and will be following divergent policies. This might lead to more political instability in Afghanistan and could result in much greater turmoil.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Afghanistan is war torn country as it experienced decades of war, lost millions of lives, whole cities were burnt down to ashes, hence it has experienced the worst that could happen to a country. The war in Afghanistan had its impact on the whole world, the effects of war spilled across the border into Pakistan and affected it in the worst possible way. Its land served as a breeding farm for the terrorists of Al-Qaeda who planned the attacks of 9/11. Hundreds of thousands lost their lives first at the hands of the Russians, then the Civil war and then the Americans. Now that there is a weak democratic setup in place, this is the best opportunity to be

ceased, not only by the Afghans themselves but also by all those states that mingle in the affairs of Afghanistan especially Pakistan and Iran.

Pakistan needs to realize that without a strong and democratic Afghanistan, the existence of a stable Pakistan is merely a dream. Similarly, Iran needs to stop promoting its religious, cultural and political hegemony of Afghanistan. The Arab states have seen that their extremist ideology has been refused by the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan, therefore there is no need to further advance their agenda by pumping their dollars into Afghanistan to support the Islamic militants. It is clearly visible that the actions of all these afore mentioned are hostile to democracy. A de-stabilized Afghanistan cannot serve the interests of any state but if the democratic system in Afghanistan is supported, it would be a win-win situation for all.

The dream of democratic Afghanistan is slowly turning into a nightmare. The relationships between Afghan government and its neighbors have become hostile as a new blame game has started between Afghanistan and its neighbors as it accused Iran and Pakistan of fueling the unrest. As the withdrawal deadline was approaching, it became evident that the lofty promises made by international community were far from being achieved. The elections of 2014 clearly showed that the democratic system was on the brink of collapse as ethnic tensions once again rose to its height. The losing candidate Abdullah Abdullah was not willing to accept his defeat and ultimately the US had to intervene to settle the issue among the two leading candidates.

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