
Post-2014 Drawdown and Afghanistan's Transition Challenges

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Abstract

The prospects of a post 2014 drawdown of foreign troops from Afghanistan and the subsequent transition process have raised concerns about the capacity of the Afghan state to endure the challenges of transition. The process of security transition was initiated in 2011 with the handing over of security responsibilities to the Afghan National Security Forces. The passing years have exposed the weaknesses of the Afghan forces while highlighting future security challenges for Afghanistan. Likewise, the process of political transition has been completed by the formation of a Unity Government in Afghanistan. The task of economic transition is a challenging one as it depends on the transformation of the Afghan economy. The paper aims at identifying the transition challenges and their implications for Afghanistan. It discusses the interests and policies of various stakeholders in the Afghan conflict. The paper highlights the role of regional states in facilitating the transition while defining its significance for regional stability.

Key Words

Afghanistan, transition, BSA, ISAF, Elections, TAPI and CASA-1000.

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Introduction

Since October 2001, when the US-led NATO forces launched the 'war on terror,' Afghanistan has remained under the control of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Though a political government has been in place since 2002, it has worked in consultation with the US and coalition forces.

After a lengthy and expensive war, Afghanistan is passing through various phases of transition. Before proceeding further, it is important to understand the concept of transition. It is one that has been described as follows:

Transition is a multifaceted concept involving the application of tactical, operational, strategic, and international level resources (means) in a sovereign territory to influence institutional and environmental conditions for achieving and sustaining clear societal goals (ends) guided by local rights to self-determination and international norms. Transition is inherently complex and may include multiple smaller scale transitions that occur simultaneously or sequentially. These small scale activities focus on building specific institutional capacities intermediate conditions that contribute to the realization of long-term goals.¹

Afghanistan's transition process can be termed as a cross-institutional transition- security, political and economic- that 'explores the interdependencies of simultaneous transitions.'² At the regional and international levels, security transition has remained the most discussed issue while the political and economic transitions somehow could not get as much importance as they deserved. All three, security, political, and economic transitions are interdependent and complement each other.

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The security transition was initiated in 2011 as the first transition, and it continued till the end of 2014. The political transition in Afghanistan was much awaited due to its significance in complementing the security and economic transitions. In this regard, Afghanistan's presidential elections of 2014 can be termed as the first step towards political transition. A successful political transition will enhance the confidence of donor states to support the process of economic transition from a war economy to a self-sustaining economy.

Afghanistan's Security Transition

Of the three transitions, the security transition in Afghanistan has remained a much debated issue. The debate has been dominated by the withdrawal of Coalition Forces, the handing over of security responsibilities to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), and the post-2014 challenges faced by Afghan forces.

The guidelines for security transition were set in the NATO Summit held in Lisbon in 2010. It was decided to hand over security responsibilities to ANSF by the end of 2014. The plans for the withdrawal of NATO combat troops were also endorsed at the Chicago Summit in 2012.³

The pace for Afghanistan's security transition was set with the ANSF's assuming of security responsibility across the country. Security was handed over to the Afghan forces in a phased manner with the first phase starting on 22 March 2011. President Karzai announced the initiation of the first phase of security transition with the handing over of security responsibility to ANSF in seven districts and provinces.⁴ The second phase of transition began on 27 November 2011 and following this phase Afghan Forces became responsible for the security of areas comprising fifty percent of Afghanistan's population.⁵

With the initiation of the third phase of security transition on 13 May 2012, the security of all the provincial capitals across Afghanistan, comprising around seventy five percent of Afghan population became the responsibility of ANSF.⁶ On 31 December 2012, President Karzai announced the fourth phase of security transition. With this announcement twenty three provinces out of thirty four came under the control of ANSF. With the launch of the fifth and final phase of the transition process on 18 June 2013, the remaining eleven provinces came under ANSF control, which had been taking the tactical lead in executing combat operations against the insurgents.

With the handing over of security responsibility to Afghan forces, the focus of the NATO-led ISAF shifted from combat operations to supporting the capabilities of ANSF.⁷ The process of withdrawal of coalition forces has continued for quite some time as the number of US troops declined from 100,000 in 2010 to 66,000 in 2013.⁸ By February 2014, United States forces were reduced to 33,000 and a likewise decrease has been noted in the number of NATO-led ISAF forces.⁹ The presence of US troops as well as NATO forces in the Post-December 2014 period was to be decided by the signing of a Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) between the United States and Afghanistan.

Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA)

The much delayed BSA was signed on 30 September 2014, a day after President Ghani took office. Dialogue over the BSA had been dominating US-Afghanistan relations since 2013 due to the differences over contentious issues that had stalled the negotiation process. Former Afghan President Hamid Karzai wanted to secure “firm, specific and multi-year financial aid commitments” from the US, but these were rejected because making such pledges was in violation of US law, under which Congress allocates foreign aid on a yearly basis.¹⁰ Another issue during the negotiations had been the key US demand to continue counter-terrorism operations to target Al-Qaeda independently after 2014, while President Karzai insisted on channeling these operations through ANSF, with the US only sharing intelligence. Another non-negotiable US requirement from the Afghan government had been the demand for granting legal immunity to US troops staying in Afghanistan after 2014. President Karzai finally agreed to most of the provisions of the BSA except for the issue of granting legal immunity to US troops, and made the final approval of the agreement conditional to the endorsement of the Loya Jirga (Grand Assembly of Afghans). Members of the Loya Jirga endorsed the signing of the BSA but President

Karzai, notwithstanding the approval of the Jirga, further delayed signing of the agreement until the new President was sworn into the office.

The BSA came into force on 1 January 2015 and will remain in force 'until the end of 2024 and beyond' unless terminated by either side on two years notice. It allowed 10,000 United States troops to stay in Afghanistan after the combat mission ended on 31 December 2014.

Under the BSA, the United States will undertake supporting activities by primarily focusing on enhancing the capability of Afghan forces by 'advising, training, equipping, supporting and sustaining' these forces.¹¹

Under the BSA annexes, the US military will have access to nine land and air bases, including the massive airfields at Bagram, Jalalabad, and Kandahar. These bases will not only be used for air operations in Afghanistan but also for launching US drone strikes that continue across the border in the tribal area of Pakistan.¹² The additional bases in Kabul, Mazar-i-Sharif, Herat, Helmand, Gardez and Shindand will ensure American military access across Afghanistan.¹³

The Afghan government agreed to grant legal immunity to American troops by accepting the United States' exclusive right to exercise jurisdiction over its soldiers who commit any criminal or

civil offences in Afghanistan.¹⁴ The text of the BSA clearly indicates that US military's counter-terrorism operations are intended to complement and support Afghan forces' counter-terrorism operations, with Afghan forces taking the lead in operations that could include entry into homes.¹⁵

The United States reiterated its commitment to seek funds on a yearly basis to support the training and equipping of Afghan forces so that they can address internal as well as external threats. The BSA also touches upon the issue of external aggression and affirms that Washington and Kabul will work together to develop an appropriate response- considering political, military and economic measures.¹⁶

The Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) and the NATO-Resolute Support Mission

After completion of the ISAF mission in December 2014, the training and assistance for Afghan forces would be provided by a new follow on NATO-led 'Resolute Support Mission' commencing in 1 January 2015.¹⁷ The legal framework for the Resolute Support Mission was provided by the 'Status of Forces Agreement' which was also signed on the same day as the BSA.

Given the lacking capabilities of Afghan forces in intelligence-gathering and logistics, the signing of the security agreements to train the nascent Afghan forces was considered imperative for the presence of coalition forces whose legal mandate was to expire in December 2014.

This agreement lays down the terms and conditions under which NATO forces will be deployed in Afghanistan. Approximately 12,000 personnel from NATO and partner nations will be deployed in support of the mission. This agreement only covers the capacity building of Afghan forces and does not cover counter terrorism cooperation.¹⁸ Given the lacking capabilities of Afghan forces in intelligence-gathering and logistics, the signing of the security agreements to train the nascent Afghan forces was considered imperative for the presence of coalition forces whose legal mandate was to expire in December 2014.¹⁹

In this context, one should not ignore the phenomenon of “insider attacks,” as the signing of the BSA and the presence of foreign troops may enhance tension between Afghan forces and foreign troops, much like increased friction between Afghan forces and the ISAF

was observed during 2012. Though some Afghan soldiers had attacked the coalition forces since 2006, these incidents greatly increased in number in 2012, when a 40% increase from 2011 was noted in “insider attacks,” eventually resulting in the reduction of forward deployment of ISAF troops with Afghan forces. Various measures were taken to reduce such incidents, but these attacks could not be eliminated.²⁰

The Afghan National Security Forces and Future Challenges

The Afghan National Security Forces consist of the Afghan National Army (ANA), Afghan Air Force (AIF), and the Afghan National Police (ANP) along with the Afghan Local Police (ALP) and Afghanistan's intelligence agency, the National Directorate of Security (NDS).²¹

The Afghan Security Forces have reached their full target strength of 350,000.²² With the assumption of tactical responsibilities across the country, the ANSF have been suffering intense casualties. According to a statement released by former President Hamid Karzai's Cabinet, the Council of Ministers, more than 13,000 Afghan soldiers and police officers have been killed and around 16,511 Afghan soldiers and police officers have been

wounded during the war.²³ Most of these losses occurred during the last three years and reportedly the Afghan death toll is four times higher than that of the international coalition forces, which during the 13 year conflict lost 3,425 soldiers, out of which 2,313 were American.²⁴

To keep the morale of the forces high, Afghan officials have not been disclosing the death toll of the Afghan forces, but these statistics raise important questions about the capability and effectiveness of Afghan forces to sustain themselves on prolonged basis. An important reason for the inefficiency of the Afghan forces has been the lack of sufficient training. To meet the demand for increased numbers of Afghan forces, the quality of training has been compromised.

The Afghan security forces have also been facing the challenge of high attrition rates, which present a risk to the sustainability of the future force. Attrition not only threatens the force's long-term effectiveness it adds pressure on the recruitment process and is a waste of training resources.²⁵

Moreover, logistics has always been a problem for any regular force in Afghanistan and it remains a challenge today. An ineffective logistic capability, difficult terrain, and the ability of irregular forces to disrupt lines of communications all inhibit the operational tempo of the forces.²⁶

Apart from these issues, the diverse ethnic composition of the Afghan army has been the biggest challenge to achieving cohesion in the ANSF. Contrary to the ethnic proportion of the general population, the over-representation of ex-Northern Alliance Tajiks and the under-representation of Southern Pashtuns, particularly among the officer class, has been noted. The task of ethnic balancing could be even more challenging and may further enhance ethnic fissures by strengthening the ethnic identities while compromising loyalty to the national army.²⁷

Furthermore, Afghanistan's tribal culture and history also pose a formidable challenge to the development and sustainability of the Afghan army. Afghan history shows that reformation of the national army has in the past led to the over-development of the army. It not just became too powerful to be controlled by the state but also threatened the tribal structure of the state. Thus, state and tribes both sought to undermine it by raising tribal levies and private militias to maintain the balance of power.²⁸

Not just the Afghan army but the Afghan Air Force also faces serious challenges and lags far behind expectations. Its training and development will be an important task for NATO forces staying in Afghanistan post-2014. As far as the Afghan National Police is concerned, it has been transformed from a paramilitary force to

a civilian force, with police capabilities to maintain law and order throughout the country. The US Special Forces have trained the 18,000 personnel of the Afghan Local Police that has contributed to maintaining stability in some areas, but the possibility of a reemergence of warlord militias seriously threatens the future efficacy of the force.²⁹

Afghanistan's long term stability depends on ANSF, which faces many challenges. Apart from ethnic imbalances and operational deficiencies, ANSF needs to secure enduring financial commitments from Western states. The signing of the BSA and the Status of Forces Agreement with NATO will ensure the financial assistance to train and further develop the capabilities of ANSF.

Political Transition

To ensure a successful political transition, the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework postulated the development by early 2013 of a comprehensive election timeline for electoral preparations.³⁰ Following these guidelines, the Afghan government introduced two parliamentary bills that were approved and ratified by the National Assembly and the Afghan President. The first bill was to restructure the Independent Election Commission (IEC) and Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC), and

after approval it came to be known as the Structural Law. The second bill laid out election procedures and policies and after approval it came to be known as the Electoral Law. These laws were passed to ensure fair elections, to prevent presidential control over the independent election commission and to prevent the interference of other governmental agencies in the electoral process. Given the previous controversies in the 2009-2010 elections, the new legislation was deemed necessary to improve the election monitoring system and to enhance transparency.

Notwithstanding the electoral reforms and legislation, the Afghan Presidential elections held in April 2014 gave rise to a political crisis due to the inability of any one candidate to secure more than 50% of votes in the elections. It is enunciated in the Afghan constitution that a candidate must secure more than 50% of votes otherwise run-off elections will be held to decide the successful candidate. Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, who has a mixed Tajik-Pashtun background and has been a leader of the Northern Alliance, had a lead in getting 44.5% of votes. He had served as Foreign Minister during President Karzai's first term in office and had been a candidate during the 2009 Presidential elections in Afghanistan as well. Dr. Ashraf Ghani, an ethnic Pashtun and a former World Bank official, secured 31.5% of the votes.³¹

Given the ethnic polarization of Afghan society and ethnic rivalries, there were fears that run-off elections might spur a new wave of violence and instability while further highlighting the ethnic cleavages within Afghan society. Contrary to these fears, the Afghan people enthusiastically participated in the elections with an impressive voter turnout.

The Afghan run-off elections, which were held on June 14, 2014 between the front-runners of the April elections, Dr. Abdullah and Dr. Ashraf Ghani, did give rise to controversies. The Independent Election Commission announced results of the run-off elections showing Mr. Ghani leading with 56.4% of votes to Mr. Abdullah's 43.6%.³² Mr. Abdullah, charging fraud, rejected the election results and demanded an audit of suspected ballots.

Dr. Abdullah's refusal to accept the election results prolonged the political deadlock. In this context, US Secretary of State John Kerry held talks with Mr. Ghani and Mr. Abdullah to broker the election dispute. US intervention ultimately resolved the issue by creating a National Unity Government in Afghanistan. The unity government was formed as a power sharing agreement where Mr. Ghani became the President of Afghanistan and Mr. Abdullah took charge as Chief Executive Officer.

The new post of chief executive was created for Mr. Abdullah and he was

granted 50% share in the cabinet. He will become the Prime Minister after the convening of the Loya Jirga in two years' time to approve the constitutional amendment required for this purpose.³³

A significant aspect for peaceful political transition relates to future good governance in Afghanistan, as the Karzai government was highly criticized for rampant corruption and mismanagement.

After taking oath as President on September 29, 2014, Mr. Ghani promised to form the cabinet within 45 days, in consultation with the Chief Executive, but it took him almost three months to announce 25 nominees after lengthy negotiations with Mr. Abdullah. These cabinet nominees had to get the approval of the Parliament but unfortunately only 8 of 25 were approved by the Afghan parliament.³⁴ The key positions of Ministers of Economy, Defence and Justice all remain vacant so far.

The Afghan presidential elections have been the decisive factor in determining future political stability. Another significant aspect for peaceful political transition relates to future good governance in Afghanistan, as the Karzai government was highly criticized for rampant corruption and

mismanagement. Afghanistan has long been lacking political watchdogs, so introducing political reforms will not be an easy task for the Afghan government. As far as the role of other states in facilitating Afghanistan's political process is concerned, Indonesia and Tanzania, the two states with large Muslim populations and impressive track records in eliminating corruption and improving governance, can be given the task of helping to bring about political reforms in Afghanistan.³⁵

Reconciliation with the Taliban

Political transition will remain inconclusive unless the reconciliation process with insurgent groups is resumed and successfully completed. Dialogue with the Taliban has been the most challenging task so far. It is more than a tripartite affair because the concerns of different stakeholders also matter in defining the terms of engaging with the Taliban. The outcomes of reconciliation have to be acceptable not just for the Afghan government, the Taliban and the United States, but also for Afghanistan's ethnic minorities, who have been dominating the political and military affairs of the country for more than a decade. Initially, Dr. Abdullah opposed the talks with the Taliban but later on changed his stance, while Mr. Ghani has long been urging reconciliation with the Taliban.

Before anticipating the future of the reconciliation process, it would be desirable to briefly review the past efforts to engage the insurgent groups. An important factor that hindered the reconciliation process from the beginning has been the lack of trust among the three parties to the Afghan conflict regarding their divergent interests in engaging the insurgents.

President Karzai, while highlighting the policy priorities of his government in 2009, identified peace and reconciliation as the key areas of focus.³⁶ To achieve this objective, the National Consultative Peace Jirga was convened in 2010. Though the Jirga composition was highly criticized due to the dominant presence of warlords it nevertheless succeeded in building national consensus on conditions under which direct negotiations between the Afghan government and the insurgent groups would take place. A resolution was adopted by the Jirga participants that called upon all parties to avoid discussing contentious issues that might harm national unity and limit the reconciliation options. It sought security and safety guarantees for those willing to quit the insurgency, and also called for speedy training of the Afghan National Security Forces. It proposed the establishment of a High Peace Council (HPC) to overview the implementation of the Jirga's resolution at the district and provincial levels and the establishment of a committee to deal with 'Prisoners Release' issues.³⁷

The High Peace Council was formed through a Presidential decree in October 2011. The Council was chaired by former Afghan President and prominent Northern Alliance leader Burhanuddin Rabbani. After his assassination in April 2012, his son assumed the chairmanship of the Council. The HPC not just involved the political actors to formulate the reconciliation strategy but also reached out to the neighboring and regional states to get their support for the Afghan led peace process.

The failure of US military strategy to defeat the Taliban changed the United States approach towards reconciliation with the Taliban as the Obama Administration showed willingness to reach out to moderate elements within the Afghan Taliban.

On the issue of reconciliation with the Taliban, the composition of the HPC was criticized due to the presence of warlords who remained involved in the war against the Taliban, and for most of its members being known as having “war expertise rather than peace expertise”, a factor that had a negative impact on building trust and confidence between the Afghan government and the Taliban.³⁸

The most daunting task for the United States Administration has been to bring the Karzai government and the Taliban to the negotiating table. The mistrust between the two parties has remained an irritant in the initiation of the peace process. The Afghan Government and the US Administration had diverging views on the reconciliation and reintegration process. Initially, the United States agreed to reintegrate the mid-level Taliban into mainstream society but was unwilling to include top leadership in the reconciliation process, while the Karzai Government was willing to hold talks with Taliban leadership.

The failure of US military strategy to defeat the Taliban changed the United States approach towards reconciliation with the Taliban as the Obama Administration showed willingness to reach out to moderate elements within the Afghan Taliban. The US bypassed the Afghan government and held secret talks with the Taliban. In November 2010, direct contact between US officials and the Taliban was facilitated by German and Qatari officials in Munich, Germany. The preliminary talks started in February 2011 in Doha and came to be known as the Doha Process. The opening of a Doha office showed the willingness of the two parties to the Afghan conflict, the US and the Taliban, to negotiate. It also highlighted the desire to seek a political end to the war. Taliban representatives set preconditions for the

release of five Taliban prisoners detained in Guantanamo Bay and in return they offered to release an American soldier, Sergeant Bowe Bergdahl, held prisoner since 2009. The US refusal to agree on a prisoners release agreement stalled the Doha process, which could not be revived until after 18 months, when the Taliban agreed to resume talks.

President Karzai has always remained distrustful of the United States and other Western partners regarding dialogue with the Taliban and it became evident from President Karzai's criticism and opposition of the Doha Peace process. He boycotted the process mainly due to the Taliban's use of the Islamic Emirates flag and plaque at the Taliban office and also suspended talks over the BSA.³⁹ As a result, the US held back on direct talks with the Taliban. President Karzai always wanted to be at the center of any dialogue process with the Taliban and also feared that if such an initiative worked out well it would give the Taliban international legitimacy as a significant political actor in Afghan politics. He demanded the closure of the Taliban Office and in response Qatari officials removed the plaque and flag.

Taliban representatives have rejected the election process and the legitimacy of the new President as well. President Ashraf Ghani, after coming to power, invited the Afghan Taliban to join in a peace process. The Taliban highlighted three conditions for ending the Afghan conflict.⁴⁰ Firstly, all foreigners should

immediately leave Afghanistan. Secondly, all the agreements including the security pact with the US should be cancelled. Thirdly, an Islamic government should be established.⁴¹ This three point agenda of the Taliban is now being taken seriously and is posing challenges to the new government in Afghanistan.

Economic Transition

Apart from the political and security transitions, transformation of Afghanistan's war economy, which is heavily dependent on foreign assistance, will be a real challenge in the post-2014 drawdown of forces. Despite more than a decade of western aid and assistance to make the Afghan economy self-sustaining, the budget shortfall has been constantly increasing.

According to World Bank estimates, Afghanistan will need more than US\$ 7 billion annually over the next decade to sustain a functional government, to maintain infrastructure and to fund the Afghan Army and Police. But the real concern has been the willingness of donors to provide funds.

An analysis of the United States strategy regarding Afghan transition shows that economic transition had remained a neglected subject and has not been able to gain as much importance as the security and political transitions. Given the lack of an integrated economic strategy, the

US interagency policy group produced a document in September 2009 entitled 'US Economic Growth Strategy for Afghanistan: FY 2009-2011.'⁴² The document suggested that US economic policy should be based on four pillars: job creation; providing basic services; the construction of infrastructure; and the development of fiscal sustainability.⁴³ Though prospects for sustained economic growth did not get the desired attention, development of logistics and transit facilities has been an integral part of US counter-insurgency strategy.⁴⁴

Similarly, a report co-authored by S. Frederick Starr and Andrew C. Kuchins in May 2010 identified that a comprehensive economic strategy for Afghanistan must meet four criteria.⁴⁵ First, the future economic strategy for Afghanistan must directly and manifestly improve the lives of Afghans, Pakistanis and the people of the Central Asian Republics so that a broader regional consensus regarding Afghanistan's stability could be developed. Second, an economic initiative might reduce the incentive to achieve military victory and diminish the need for large US military presence. Third, economic strategy must complement the military strategy. Fourth, the economic strategy must leave the Afghan government with a sustainable revenue stream and it must be coordinated with the goal of transferring full sovereignty to Afghanistan by the end of 2014.⁴⁶

In this regard, the only strategy that meets these criteria as suggested by policymakers is the transformation of Afghanistan into a trade and transport hub linking Central Asia and the Middle East with South and Southeast Asia. This concept has been fully supported by the Afghan government and at the Kabul Conference in July 2010 President Karzai presented the future vision for Afghanistan as "reemerging 'Asian Roundabout', a central point of interconnection of goods, ideas, services, and people in the fast expanding Asian economy."⁴⁷ Keeping in view the enhanced Afghan trade with its neighbors, he was hopeful that the 'Roundabout' vision would materialize soon and quoted the example of Pakistani imports, which have grown from US\$ 26 million in 2001 to over US\$ 4 billion in 2010.⁴⁸

The Afghan government started to institutionalize the concept of a "Silk Road Initiative," with the view to give regional neighbors a higher stake in stabilizing Afghanistan. The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) Natural Gas Pipeline Project and the Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project (CASA-1000) present huge economic and political opportunities for Afghanistan. The implementation of TAPI would enable Afghanistan to generate revenue by getting transit fees and by enhancing employment

opportunities. As far as Afghanistan's war economy is concerned, this project would enable Afghanistan to sustain its economic growth, which is dependent on foreign aid, and will be the biggest challenge for the Afghan government after the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan.

The most significant hurdle in the actualization of the project is Afghanistan's precarious security situation. Herat, one of the largest provinces of southwest Afghanistan, shares a border with Iran, and is a volatile region because of its proximity to Kandahar and Helmand, which are centers of resistance against coalition forces. This proximity makes investors fearful of future insecurity. Secondly, the Afghan National Security Forces have taken over security responsibilities, and given the past performance of Afghan forces, it is unclear whether they would be able to provide pipeline security.

Likewise, CASA-1000 (comprised of four countries: the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan) is the transmission infrastructure project that will put in place the commercial and institutional arrangements as well as the infrastructure required for 1,300 megawatts of sustainable electricity trade.⁴⁹ In addition to the World Bank, several other development partners have agreed to provide financing for CASA-1000 including the Islamic Development Bank and the United States Agency for

International Development (USAID). The CASA-1000 project will enhance energy interdependence between the Central Asian and South Asian states. The Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan have abundant hydropower generation capacity that exceeds national needs in summer but becomes insufficient in winter. Exporting surplus electricity to South Asia will help Pakistan and Afghanistan to meet their electricity needs during the summer and would enable the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan to generate revenues.

Realization of these projects depends on the development of infrastructure. Afghanistan, though geographically at the crossroads of regions, possesses inadequate road infrastructure, non-existent rail network, and lacks pipeline infrastructure for transiting Central Asian oil or gas resources to South Asia.

Though neighboring states have connected the landlocked Afghanistan to the outside world through ancient trade and transit networks, the decentralized nature of Afghan polity has encouraged cross border linkages on a cultural or ethnic basis, and resulted in stronger ethnic identities rather than encouraging national identity and loyalty to the state.

Moreover, Afghanistan's untapped deposits of iron ore, copper, and lithium valued between US\$ 1 and US\$ 3 trillion presents huge prospects for economic development.⁵⁰ The Afghan government and the international donors have also pointed to Afghan mineral wealth as a potential savior of the economy. According to World Bank estimates, after mining, Aynak's copper and Hajigak's iron ore deposits could earn US\$ 500 million in revenue within seven years.⁵¹ This wealth could be utilized fully if Afghanistan is connected to a regional transport network.

Regional Consensus Building

The regional states can play a significant role in facilitating the Afghan transition process because regional players greatly influence the internal dynamics of Afghanistan, ranging from politics to economic activity. For decades, regional states have been meddling in Afghan internal affairs by supporting different ethnic groups to protect their own interests, and have subsequently contributed to fueling the internal conflicts in Afghanistan. Though neighboring states have connected the landlocked Afghanistan to the outside world through ancient trade and transit networks, the decentralized nature of Afghan polity has encouraged cross border linkages on a cultural or ethnic basis, and resulted in stronger ethnic identities rather than

encouraging national identity and loyalty to the state.⁵²

Given their importance, regional states can help in facilitating the transition process by developing consensus on non-interference in Afghanistan's internal affairs and not supporting different ethnic factions. These states can help in capacity building in Afghanistan while respecting the sensitivities of neighboring states. Pakistan has long been facing the fallout of Afghan conflict and the chaos and instability in Afghanistan directly affects Pakistan's stability. Pakistan did play role in facilitating the dialogue process between the United States and the Taliban and it also tried to bridge the gulf between the Afghan Taliban and the Afghan government by releasing prominent Taliban prisoners from Pakistani jails. This can also be termed as an attempt to build trust and confidence between Pakistan and Afghanistan. After years of war, the NATO-led ISAF coalition has also realized the importance of a regional approach to address the issues of stability and security in Afghanistan. For some years, efforts have been made to develop institutional frameworks for neighbors to coordinate among themselves to participate in developmental activities in Afghanistan. Such initiatives would help to accommodate the interests of stakeholders and would create a conducive environment for successful political and security transitions.

Conclusion

After years of war, Afghanistan has been passing through various phases of transition. All three transitions (security, political and economic) are interconnected, and while success in one sphere will complement the others, failure of one transition may hinder progress in the other transitions.

The NATO-led Resolute Support mission and U.S. troops will stay in Afghanistan to train Afghan forces but there are serious concerns about the capability of Afghan forces to provide security or to withstand the insurgency.

It is the process of political transition that has been the most challenging one and will define the contours of the emerging order in Afghanistan. With the transfer of political power, one aspect of political transition has been completed but the new Afghan government faces many challenges including reconciliation with the Taliban and a precarious economic situation.

The primary responsibility for making the transition process successful rests on the Afghans themselves, who have been facing the sufferings of wars for the past three decades.

The primary responsibility for making the transition process successful rests on the Afghans themselves, who have been facing the sufferings of wars for the past three decades. Their internal conflicts, tribal rivalries and ethnic and culture-based priorities have caused civil wars and have also provided external powers with opportunities to enhance their own interests at the cost of Afghanistan's peace and stability. The successful completion of transition processes, though a challenging task, should lead to durable peace and stability in Afghanistan, because a stable Afghanistan is the key to regional stability.

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