

Current Situation in Pakistan and Afghanistan in the context of 9/11

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Introduction

Following the unfortunate events of 9/11 which changed the world scenario for the Americans, the Bush administration invaded Afghanistan. Osama bin Laden and his al Qaeda organisation were blamed for masterminding the destruction in US by hitting the World Trade Centre and Pentagon, which not only resulted in huge losses in men and money but was also a serious blow to American prestige in the world. President Bush vowed to eliminate terrorists and dismantle their networks, then operating from Afghanistan. He demanded from the world community to support the US against the global network of terrorism. He made it clear that there were only two kinds of people in the world: those who were with the US and those who were not. To justify the American invasion of Afghanistan, the US administration demanded from the Taliban regime, then ruling Afghanistan, to expel Osama and other militants from Afghanistan but they did not comply using unconvincing pretexts.

Within a couple of months, following 9/11, Afghanistan was invaded by the US and its allies and the Taliban were ousted from power. Despite massive American bombardment, according to some reports, Osama and some of his close associates managed to sneak into the tribal areas of Pakistan and since then are busy resisting the NATO and American forces present in the region. Now the region has been thrown into war and chaos. The insurgency is escalating and despite the tall claims of Americans that they are winning the war on terror, this is simply an eye wash because the NATO and American troops are suffering heavy losses in Afghanistan. Both Pakistan and Afghanistan are directly victims of war on terror and they are paying the price in shape of huge casualties, both in men and money.

Presently, more than seventy thousands American and NATO troops are in Afghanistan. In addition, Pakistan has deployed more than hundred thousands troops in the tribal areas, adjacent to the Pak-Afghan border, to stop the infiltration of the Taliban and their supporters into Afghanistan. But still are far from successful. No significant achievement is in sight. Interestingly, both Pakistan and Afghanistan are blaming each other of not doing sufficient to curb the militancy in the region.

The present study is an attempt to evaluate the events following the American invasion of Afghanistan and the rise and popularity of the Taliban in the Pashtoon-dominated areas inside Afghanistan and the tribal region of Pakistan. Moreover, the blame game from the two neighbouring countries and its impact would also be analysed. In Pakistan, after the revival of parliamentary democracy, the change in attitude and behaviour regarding Afghanistan would be discussed in a more systematic way.

Many people believed that President Hamid Karzai is simply following the American dictates in Afghanistan. But some recent statements of the Afghan presidents speak otherwise. He is annoyed at the rising number of civilian deaths during the American raids on the suspected Taliban positions and has demanded a complete halt to it. He is demanding from the Americans and its NATO allies to provide a time line for their troop's withdrawal from Afghanistan. What has caused Karzai to change his mind and some other related issues would also be analysed. Finally, the local responses to the presence of occupational forces in the region would also be given proper attention,

reaching some conclusion which might help in bringing back peace and normalcy to the region which is otherwise notorious for being a hot spot for major insurgency and terrorist's sanctuaries.

USA under attack

In his speech on the evening of the fateful 9/11 events, President Bush of the United States had made it clear that his country would 'make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbour them'.ⁱ The following day he 'adopted the language of war' and declared that in the war on terror, you are either 'for us or against us'.ⁱⁱ This was the beginning of the war that would engulf the Middle East and South Asia. The scapegoat was Afghanistan. The world community condemned the terrorist's attacks on the US, terming it as act of terrorism and expressed solidarity with the American people. However, the US demand to handover Osama bin Laden and to dismantle the al Qaeda camps in Afghanistan were met with a blunt refusal by the Taliban who took refuge in traditional Afghan hospitality. They informed the US that according to their traditions they were duty bound to provide asylum to any one who demanded it. Since they had provided Osama refuge in Afghanistan many years back, it was not possible, according to them, to force Osama and his men to leave Afghanistan. However, if he chooses to abandon Afghanistan on his own, they would not stop him from doing that. The Americans solicited Pakistan's support at that particular juncture. It was probably by sheer chance that General Mahmud Ahmad, the ISI chief was in Washington as a guest of the Pentagon. While the attacks were occurring he was taking his breakfast with the chairmen of the Senate and House Intelligence committees, Senator Bob Graham (D) and Representative Porter Goss (R), the latter a prominent CIA official. The next day, General Ahmad and Maleeha Lodhi, Pakistan's Ambassador in Washington, were summoned to the State Department to receive the 'notorious ultimatum' from Richard Armitage, US deputy secretary of state. Later, General Musharraf revealed in his memoirs, that the ultimatum was blunt: that either you are with us or against us and that we'll bomb you into the Stone Age if you resist.ⁱⁱⁱ The next day, both were summoned again and Armitage handed the ISI boss a seven-point list of the US requirements from Pakistan in the coming war on terror in the region. General Ahmad immediately informed the State Department of its acceptance of the US demands.^{iv}

It was a crucial moment for the Pakistani authorities to decide because they were Afghanistan's neighbours and the US needed their full support in the planned war against terror. The Pakistani establishment was in a fix. If they did not agree to the US demand there were chances that the US administration would approach India for the same purpose. The Hindu extremists, then ruling India, would have happily taken advantage of the situation to provide the required support in return for a chance to establish basis for operations against Taliban, and if necessary, against Pakistan. So the military establishment in Pakistan made a quick decision. They abandoned the Taliban in lieu of American friendship and also thwarted the possible Indian machinations. It was sheer national self interest that made them to support the US and its allies in war against terror.^v With the broad support of its allies, the US launched a massive offensive on 7 October 2001 against the Taliban regime. The bombing raids on Afghanistan were worst witnessed since the World War II. They were followed by a major ground assault, leading to the ouster of the Taliban and victory for the Allied forces. Kabul fell without any

major resistance and later it was revealed that the Pakistani intelligence agencies had played a major role in it. Mullah Omar, the Taliban leader was last seen riding a motorbike and leaving Kandahar to the mercy of the Allied Forces. Till date no one knows exactly the whereabouts of Mullah Omar but conjecture is that he is hiding somewhere in the tribal areas bordering Afghanistan. It is said that in December 2001 when the US forces started the ground assault, Osama and his associates of al Qaeda, including his most trusted friend Ayman al-Zawahiri, the Egyptian militant, escaped towards the Pakistani border. They were last seen alive in the caves of Tora Bora in Spin Ghar (White Mountain), at an elevation of about 15,000 feet (4,500 metres), where many of the Taliban and al Qaeda had taken refuge. The area became the target for the US carpet bombing. For four continuous days it was bombed by the US, using the latest laser technology. Pakistani forces were posted on the other side of the border to arrest the fleeing Taliban and they succeeded in capturing several hundred. The Afghan forces were supposed to do the same but they failed miserably. There was poor coordination between the two sides and this resulted in the escape of Osama bin Laden and his close associates who sneaked into Pakistan's tribal areas. Interestingly, while al-Zawahiri has been seen addressing his co-religionists many times, Osama never surfaced once after the Tora Bora bombing by giving rise to speculations that he was killed in Tora Bora but al Qaeda leaders are using his name to mobilise Islamic militants against the US and its Allies. Not long after the fall of Kabul, however, the *jihadi* elements started regrouping in a much organised manner. The middle-cadre Taliban, who fled across the Durand Line, border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, reorganised themselves in November 2001 and started guerrilla activities the following year. They attracted a large number of the madrasa students and unemployed youth, using both religious/jihadi slogans with the money supplied by the al Qaeda financiers. Within a couple of years, they succeeded in winning over support both from within the Pashtoon-dominated areas in Afghanistan (Kandahar, Zabul, Helmand, Paktika, Ghazni, Khost and Ningrahar) and from the tribal areas adjacent to the Pak-Afghan border. From 2004 onwards, these Taliban were joined by a large number of youth from Waziristan who were exasperated by the attacks on their territory by the US drones – the unmanned aerial vehicles usually utilises for reconnaissance purposes but also has the capability of hitting the pointed targets. They were also incensed by the Pakistani military operations into the tribal areas and the impoverished conditions in the tribal territory generally. Moreover, a very high number of civilian casualties in Afghanistan caused by ‘friendly fire’ conducted during NATO operations in certain areas also caused hatred against the occupational forces in Afghanistan.

Pakistan’s role during war on terror

General Pervez Musharraf had no qualms about supporting the Americans in the war on terror. He and the Pakistani establishment were of the firm opinion that in the aftermath of 9/11 and the aggressive tone of the American response they had no choice but to side with the US in the war on terror. If Pakistan had decided against it then there were chances that the Americans would have approached India, the traditional rival of Pakistan in South Asia. This would have threatened not only to the nuclear installations but also to the very existence of Pakistan. So the Pakistani establishment satisfied itself that what it had done were justifiable and correct.

But there was a sizable opinion in Pakistan, particularly in the two bordering provinces of the Frontier and Balochistan, which was indignant at Pakistan's turn-about and its support to the US against the Taliban in Afghanistan whom they regarded as their brothers in faith. They demanded an immediate renunciation of Pakistan's help to the Americans. They were unhappy over Pervez Musharraf's decision to provide air bases in various parts of Pakistan to be used against Afghanistan. They threatened a mass movement in their respective areas against the Musharraf government if Pakistan allied itself with the Americans against the Taliban government. However, the Pashtoon nationalist groups in both areas decided to remain neutral because they were unhappy over the Talibanisation of Afghanistan and the growing Arab influence in the region.

Despite opposition from the religious organisations, the Musharraf government decided to provide all kind of support and help to the Americans and their Allies in the war on terror. The decision was conveyed to the US authorities. Pakistan mobilised a large number of its troops to the western borders to thwart the designs of al Qaeda and its supporters to regroup on its soil. In its efforts to curb the militancy in the region, Pakistan had to suffer a lot. Though no accurate figures are available, more than two thousand army personnel have been killed since the campaign was launched against the Taliban and the al Qaeda in the tribal areas of Pakistan. The losses on the other side are very high and according to some independent sources about eight thousand al Qaeda, Taliban and their supporters had been killed. Musharraf has rightly remarked that

It is often said that Pakistan is not doing enough in the war on terror. Such remarks can be made only by those who have no knowledge of the truth on the ground. Pakistan's decision to support the global war on terror was based on its own interests. There is no reason why we would not do enough for ourselves. In fact, Pakistan is the one country in the world that has done the maximum in the fight against terrorism. We have also suffered the maximum casualties. Pakistan has made the maximum sacrifices in the war on terror. We have deployed approximately 80,000 troops in antiterrorist operations, and we occupy nearly 900 posts along the Pakistani-Afghan border. It is disappointing that despite our deep commitment and immense sacrifices, some people continue to tell tendentious stories casting aspersions on our counter-terrorism operations and on the contributions we have made. We have lost more men than any other country – and we fight on'.^{vi}

Providing some details regarding the arrest of al Qaeda members, he said that 'We have captured 689 and handed over 369 to the United States. We have earned bounties totalling millions of dollars. Those who habitually accuse us of 'not doing enough' in the war on terror should simply ask the CIA how much prize money it has paid to the government of Pakistan.'^{vii}

Pakistan has been accused of allowing the cross-border infiltration into Afghanistan to de-stabilise the country and also of helping the Taliban to re-establish their rule in Afghanistan. Time and again, the Pakistani authorities have protested over it and turned it down as a baseless propaganda from the Afghan side that, according to Pakistan, failed miserably in controlling the insurgency in their areas are now shifting the blame on Pakistan to cover their failures. They advised the Afghan authorities to put their own house in order rather than blame Pakistan for the rise of militancy inside Afghanistan. Pakistan, they said, itself is a victim of terror.^{viii} Assassination attempts on president Musharraf and the prime minister Shaukat Aziz; killing of innocent people in places of their worships, markets and other public places; an alarming increase in the number of suicide killings, destruction of communication network, demolition of a very big number of schools in both the tribal and settled areas; and showering of rockets on residential areas, are only few of the many instances in this regard.

Pak-Afghan relations in the context of war on terror

Despite the presence of the Americans and their allies in the region, Pak-Afghan relations have deteriorated. Hamid Karzai, the Afghan president accused Pakistan of masterminding the suicide attacks inside Afghanistan, particularly the huge blast at the Indian embassy at Kabul which resulted in considerable losses both in terms of men and money. More than one hundred people, including some prominent Indian diplomats, were killed. The Afghan authorities also alleged that the Taliban and al Qaeda leadership is hiding in Pakistan, with the knowledge and support of some members of its intelligence agencies. Naturally, the Pakistani authorities tried to exonerate themselves from these accusations and made it clear time and again that both al Qaeda and the Taliban leaders were not hiding in Pakistan. Rejecting the Afghan accusations, Musharraf contested that:

Another misperception Pakistan has to contend with is that the leaders of al Qaeda and the Taliban are operating from Pakistan. This is nothing but conjecture, without any evidence. The mountainous terrain of the border belt does afford an opportunity to hide, but this is the case on the Afghan side of the border as well, because the terrain is similar there. Whereas we have an effective security mechanism on our side of the border, no such arrangements exist on the Afghan side. In large areas of the Afghan countryside, there are no military operations. Hence it is easier for anyone to hide on the Afghan side than on the Pakistan side.^{ix}

Pakistan on its part, showed its concerns on the growing Indian influence in Afghanistan, particularly the latter's grant of permission and assistance for establishing Indian consulates in several important Afghan towns along Pakistan's western borders. They expressed indignation over the opening of Indian consulates in Jalalabad and Kandahar and accused both Afghanistan and India of helping the anti-Pakistan elements to reorganise themselves against the Pakistani establishment. Pakistan also accused the Afghan authorities of helping the Baloch insurgents with money and logistics. Pakistani authorities also suspected Afghan hand behind the recent surge of the militancy in Bajaur and Swat. Pakistani authorities advised the Afghan government to put more vigilance on their side of the border because Pakistan, according to them is capable of doing its job in a proper way.

While this blame game continued, some positive changes occurred in Pakistan. The general elections held in February 2008 paved the way for the new representative government which did its utmost to develop friendly relations with their neighbourly Muslim country sharing things in common with Pakistan. Before providing details of the normalisation of relations between the two countries, I would like to elaborate briefly on the February 2008 elections in Pakistan and its repercussions on the region, particularly on Pak-Afghan relations in the context of war on terror.

February 2008 General Elections in Pakistan and its repercussions on the region

Meanwhile, the public opinion in Pakistan had become more vocal against Musharraf government and pressed for reinstating of democratic institutions. Foreign pressure in general and the Bush administration in particular insisted upon holding of free and fair general elections in Pakistan on party basis. Reluctantly, the Musharraf regime announced holding of general elections on 9th January 2008. Since both Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, leaders of the two major political parties were in exile, the government implemented a special ordinance which enabled them to come back to Pakistan and

participate in the forthcoming elections. Benazir Bhutto returned to Pakistan on 18 October 2007 but Nawaz Sharif was not permitted to come back. He was forcibly turned back to Saudi Arabia. Later, on the initiative of Saudi government, Nawaz Sharif was allowed to return to Pakistan before the elections.

While the major political parties were busy in electioneering, some groups and parties decided to boycott the elections on the plea that they did not recognize Musharraf as the legitimate ruler of Pakistan. They formed themselves into the All Pakistan Democratic Movement (APDM) that included Qazi Hussain Ahmad, Mahmood Khan Achakzai and Imran Khan. Meanwhile, a major roadblock occurred when on 27 December 2007 Benazir Bhutto was assassinated in Rawalpindi. The government blamed Baitullah Masud, the Taliban leader from South Waziristan, who immediately denied the involvement of Taliban in her murder. The election was rescheduled for 18 February 2008. The PPP exploited the sympathies of voters to the maximum. During the election campaign the only issue it raised was about the probe into the murder of Benazir Bhutto. The PML (N) showed its indignation over the continuation of the Musharraf regime and its dismissal of Iftikhar Chaudhry, the Chief Justice of Pakistan. It demanded the restoration of judges to their pre- 3 November position. Among other parties, the ANP promised to give priority to the worsening law and order situation in the settled areas of the Frontier and also vowed to curb the rising tide of militancy in tribal territory. Since the PML (Q) and the MQM were both in the government, they tried to cash in on their contribution in improving the economy and promised to provide more opportunities for the unemployed. The PML (Q) leadership also tried to bring about educational uplift while MQM proudly displayed its developmental projects in Karachi. The JUI (F), a major component of the former MMA restricted itself to the mild criticism of US policies in the region.

Pervez Musharraf and the establishment supported the PML (Q) and its allies. The President addressed election rallies and requested the electorates to support PML (Q) candidates whom he regarded as the only worthy Pakistanis deserving to come back. The two major opposition parties, the PPP and the PML (N) accommodated each other to the maximum following the Murree Declaration (9 March 2008). Despite many apprehensions and speculations, elections were held on the scheduled date i.e. 18 February 2008. As compared to the previous elections, much less electoral violence was reported. There were three powerful blasts in Hangu, Charsadda and Swat (NWFP). Few cases of coercion and rigging were also reported. Except in some constituencies of Karachi and Balochistan, elections were reported to be 'free and fair'. The election results were surprising in many ways. In the National Assembly out of total 339 seats, the Pakistan People's Party secured 124; PML (N) 91; PML (Q) 54; MQM 25; ANP 13; JUI (F) 7; PML (F) 5; BNP (A) 1; NPP 1; PPP (Sherpao) 1 and Independents 17.^x In the Provincial Assembly elections, in the Punjab PML (N) and PPP were the major parties; in Sind PPP and MQM became victorious; in the NWFP, ANP and PPP emerged as the majority parties and in Balochistan PPP and PML (Q) were successful.

After the elections were over, there were high hopes and expectations for the return of political stability in the country. Asif Ali Zardari and Nawaz Sharif, leaders of PPP and PML (N), one time arch rivals but now friends, showed gestures of good will to each other. The next few weeks were crucial. Both at the centre and at the provincial level, the successful parties were busy in the formation of the ministries. At the centre there was a

brief tussle for power within the PPP. Makhdoom Amin Fahim, the PPP veteran from Sind, was expected to be the only candidate for the Premiership. But astonishingly, Yusuf Raza Gilani from Multan (Punjab) emerged as front runner. Asif Ali Zardari, the co-chairperson of the PPP and also the husband of the slain PPP leader Benazir Bhutto, put his weight behind Yusuf Raza Gilani who succeeded as prime minister (25 March 2008,) which was followed by a unanimous vote of confidence by the National Assembly on 29 March. Next was the formation of the government at the centre by the PPP and its coalition partners which included the PML (N), ANP, JUI (F) and some Independents. The distribution of the ministries was as follows: PPP 11; PML (N) 9; ANP 2; JUI (F) and 1 Independent from FATA.

In his first address on the floor of the National Assembly, the PM announced that his government was ready to talk with those militants who would lay down their arms. At the same time he also announced about the abolition of the notorious FCR in the tribal areas of Pakistan.

The formation of the PPP Government at the centre was followed by the formation of governments in the provinces. A coalition government of the PML (N) and PPP was formed in the Punjab. In the NWFP, the ANP and PPP coalition was formed. In Sind, despite some strong reservations from the party workers in interior Sind, the PPP entered into a coalition with MQM, its rival since many years. In Balochistan, majority of the PML (Q) parliamentarians deserted their party and joined the PPP. Thus a PPP government was formed in Balochistan.

Despite all the tall claims of accommodation, the PPP-PML (N) relations were seen strained from the very beginning. While the PPP showed a soft corner for Musharraf, the PML (N) was not ready to pardon him for his previous 'crimes'. He was charged with abrogating the constitution by seizing power illegally in October 1999 and by removing an elected prime minister (Nawaz Sharif) from office. Moreover, they were not prepared to exonerate him from the charges of playing dirty with the judiciary and the declaration of emergency on 3rd November 2007. The PML (N) reiterated its demand that Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry and other judges should be restored to their pre-3 November positions and gave 30 days to the PPP to fulfil its promises. They also threatened to quit the government if the demands of the PML (N) were not accepted. The PML (N) leadership also accused the PPP government of not consulting its major allies on policies regarding military action in the tribal areas. As the PPP failed to 'fulfil' its promises the PML (N) ministers quit the government on 12 May 2008. However, in the Punjab the coalition between the PPP and PML (N) survived.

In the third week of May 2008, the PPP government proposed a draft of 18 Constitutional Amendment Bill, aimed at clearing the way of reinstatement of judges and 'balancing the power between the president and the prime minister'. It included the repeal of the controversial Article 58 (2b), which empowers the president to dissolve the National Assembly. Previously, it was repealed by the Nawaz Sharif government but was re-introduced by the Musharraf regime through Legal Framework Order and was validated by parliament through the 17 Amendment. Zardari remarked that 'The nation must trust us. We are working to strengthen democracy, revive national economy and restore democracy. We will also restore judges'.^{xi}

President Musharraf, who initially withdrew into the background as there was talk of his fleeing the country. On 4 July he addressed a gathering of the business community in

Karachi and made a hard-hitting speech on that occasion. He said: 'I am not afraid. I have deliberately kept this (low-key) posture under a well thought-out plan because I have been trained to respond both in offensive and defensive manner, especially defending the national interest'. He was of the view that the prevalent uncertainty and instability had caused flight of capital and had created a host of other problems mainly because the political leadership had let the people down in tackling real issues. Acknowledging that the country was passing through a critical phase, he said terrorism, extremism and economic instability were affecting trade and industry, besides fomenting political turmoil. Commenting on the latest situation in FATA and adjoining areas he said that a three-pronged strategy involving use of force, political dialogue and economic reconstruction, was the only way out.^{xii}

Pervez Musharraf had ruled the country for more than a decade with unchecked powers. He had committed Pakistan's full support to the US and its allies against the war on terror. He had been successful in convincing the Americans that he was the perfect choice to combat al Qaeda and their supporters in the region and if he became weak then the extremists would regroup and become a menace to the peace and tranquillity of the whole world. To prove his 'sincerity', he routinely presented dead bodies of the alleged al Qaeda activists as gifts when some one in a higher position in Bush administration happened to visit Pakistan. In addition, the Pakistani authorities handed over some 'wanted' terrorists to the US administration. Yet, he was forced to resign on 18 August 2008 and the PPP co-chairperson, Asif Ali Zardari managed to become the new president of Pakistan. He started with a gesture of good will towards Afghanistan and invited Hamid Karzai to participate as a guest of honour on the occasion of Zardari's oath taking ceremony in Islamabad.

Future Prospects

Interestingly, despite strong reservations and differences, the two neighbouring countries of Pakistan and Afghanistan are compelled to share the responsibility of war on terror and sit together to chalk out strategies to combat the rising tide of militancy in the region. There have been some isolated efforts to curb militancy. In August 2007, a Jirga was convened in Kabul to address the problems related with the war on terror. The Americans showed their special interest in the Jirga proceedings. Both Karzai and Musharraf addressed the concluding session of the Jirga but despite all tall claims from Kabul and Islamabad the desired goal was never achieved. The main reasons have been the non-representative character of the Jirga. Neither the politicians nor the warring factions were invited to the Jirga. So the outcome remained inconclusive.

In the last week of October 2008, another effort in that direction was made. A mini Jirga known as Jirgagai was convened at Islamabad with similar purposes in view. The Jirgagai session went on for two days, i.e. 27 and 28 October. The Pakistani side was represented by Shah Mahmood Qureshi, the new foreign minister who was accompanied by Owais Ghani, the NWFP Governor, Afrasiyab Khattak (ANP), G. G. Jamal, Sardar Yaqoob Khan Nasir, Nawab Ayaz Khan Jozegzai, Jaffar Khan Mandokhel and Jan Mohammad Jamali. The Afghan side was led by Abdullah Abdullah, the former foreign minister and other participants from Wulusi Jirga (National Assembly) and the Masharano Jirga (Senate).^{xiii}

In his inaugural address Qureshi made it clear that an elected government stood a better chance of tackling terrorism than an unelected one. He said that the new elected government of Pakistan was 'deeply committed to the cause of peace in the whole region. Our government has already made a new beginning in Pak-Afghan relations, restoring a climate of trust and confidence and is developing a forward-looking vision of peace, prosperity and development for our people and the region'. He also said that the terrorists would not 'be allowed to launch strikes in Afghanistan from Pakistan. 'Today Pakistan is more committed than ever not to allow anyone to use its soil for nefarious activities against its own or Afghanistan's interests'. Advocating a dialogue for a sustainable peace, he said that there was an increasing realisation among those involved in the conflict that the use of force alone could not produce the desired results. 'For lasting success', he remarked, 'negotiations and reconciliations must be an essential part of the process'.^{xiv} Abdullah Abdullah was optimistic about the outcome of the Jirgagai. He said that the Afghan side was 'deeply' and 'seriously' committed to the achievement of the objectives. He was particularly impressed by the commitment of Pakistan's new government to work with Afghanistan for ending militancy in the region. 'I am very happy,' he pointed out, 'about a positive outcome because of the amount of goodwill on both sides, realities confronting the people of the two countries and lessons learnt from recent history'.^{xv} To provide a further boost to commitments, an in-camera joint session of parliament was called to session by President Asif Ali Zardari on 8 October. The ISI chief briefed the parliamentarians about the latest situation in the region. To elaborate further on it, a 16-member committee was formed to frame a joint consensus resolution which was prepared and adopted immediately. The resolution showed concern on the rising tide of militancy in the region and exonerated Pakistan from the charges that they are helping the infiltration of militants across the border. While criticising the previous dictatorial regime for launching policies detrimental to the interest of Pakistan the resolution made it clear that 'we need an urgent review of our national security strategy and revisiting the methodology of combating terrorism in order to restore peace and stability of Pakistan and the region through an independent foreign policy', and 'that Pakistan's territory shall not be used for any kind of attacks on other countries and all foreign fighters, if found shall be expelled from our soil'.^{xvi} The Pakistan Army Chief, General Pervez Kiyani, also endorsed the legislators views on security challenges and said 'It is satisfying to note that there is an emerging consensus in Pakistan that terrorism has to be squarely addressed with the help of the people of Pakistan, as manifested by the recent unanimous parliament resolution'.^{xvii}

Post-Script

While the present article was about being concluded, some interesting developments had taken place in Afghanistan. Hamid Karzai, the Afghan president in a statement criticised the growing incidences of 'friendly fires' resulting in huge civilian losses inside Afghanistan. Moreover, the uncertainty regarding the time frame for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan is another contentious issue with the Afghans. According to a careful estimate there are about 70,000 US and NATO troops in Afghanistan. But in spite of such a large number of troops, equipped with the latest weapons, the coalition forces have not achieved the desired results. They are now planning to increase the number of their troops in Afghanistan, particularly along its

border with Pakistan. An announcement in this regard has already been made by the US military authorities.^{xviii} This has irked Karzai, who has demanded a timeline for the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan. Karzai told a visiting delegation of the UN Security Council that met him in Kabul on 25 November that the international community should give them a timeline of how long or how far the ‘war on terror’ will go on and for how long they were planning to stay in Afghanistan.^{xix} Karzai also complained that the international community had lost focus and had allowed the Taliban to regroup and create sanctuaries in Pakistan. ‘Rather than conducting the war against terrorism and the sanctuaries’, he remarked, ‘we began to conduct this war in the villages of Afghanistan where there were no terrorists’.^{xx}

Ignoring Karzai altogether, Robert Gates, the US Defence Secretary, announced sending three more US combat brigades to Afghanistan by spring 2009. ‘I do believe’, he remarked, ‘there will be a requirement for a sustained commitment here for a protracted period of time. How many years, and how many troops that would take nobody knows, he pointed out. General David McKiernan, the top commander in Afghanistan, informed reporters that it would take three to four years to build up Afghan security forces sufficiently to reach a ‘tipping point’ leading to less reliance on some 70,000 foreign troops. ‘Until we get to this tipping point’ he remarked ‘where there is sufficient security capabilities in Afghanistan, Afghans led, there will probably continue to be a degree of insurgent violence. Absolutely’. Gates also endorsed his views and said that ‘this is a long fight and I think we are in it until we are successful along with the Afghan people’.^{xxi}

In an article, Peter Beaumont has indicated that more troops would not help in winning war in Afghanistan. According to him, with each death in Afghanistan — civilian or military — it becomes more of a common place to say this is a war that can’t be won’.^{xxii}

He further said that ‘the response has been the usual knee jerk reaction in these circumstances — to bomb more, to send more soldiers and to prop up further a largely discredited government. The only real question now is whether it is too late to salvage any thing from this mess. The answer is that it may be. The lessons of recent conflicts is that there is a short and finite period for reconstruction and peace-building to gain traction. And what is most crucial is not necessarily grant structural projects. What is necessary is to identify and then mediate areas of dangerous competition — what some specialists call ‘conflictual peace-building.

‘The problem is that as the conflict in Afghanistan has been escalated by all sides, the room for such strategies has been squeezed out. And with the US committed to sending ever more troops to Afghanistan in pursuit of the hubristic notion that the surge worked in Iraq in absolute terms, rather than simply freezing the lethal competitions there until after a US withdrawal, then all that seems certain is more war and further death’. He provides the following details regarding the losses of US and its Allies in Afghanistan since 2001:

Britain:	132
Canada:	100
Denmark:	19
France:	24
Germany:	30
Spain:	25

Netherlands: 17
United States: 628

Total: 1030 deaths.^{xxiii}

The presence of foreign troops in the region is the major cause of resentment, particularly for the Pashtoons who simply consider them as occupational forces and are showing their determination in resisting them till the ouster of these troops from Afghanistan. They take pride in narrating that they were faced with all three imperialist/colonial powers of the world, i.e. the British, the Russians and now the Americans. They defeated the British and the Russians and would not spare the Americans. Serious efforts are needed to bring back peace, tranquillity and normalcy to the region. In this particular connection both official and non-official links/resources should be mobilised to achieve this cause. There are some suggestions that more time should be given to exchange of good will visits from both sides. Further, a dialogue process should be initiated with all those who believe in peaceful solution of the problems. In brief, peace should be given a chance, and this is possible only through dialogue.

ⁱ Ian Markham and Ibrahim M. Abu Rabi (eds.), *11 September Religious Perspectives on the Causes and Consequences* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2002), p. 12.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Pervez Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire: A Memoir* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2006), p. 201.

^{iv} These demands were published in *The 9/11 Commission Report*, published in July 2004.

1: Stop al Qaeda operatives at its border and end all logistical support for bin Laden.

2: Give the United States blanket over flight and landing rights for all necessary military and intelligence operations.

3: Provide territorial access to US and allied military intelligence and other personnel to conduct operations against al Qaeda.

4: Provide the United States with intelligence information.

5: Continue to publicly condemn the terrorist attacks.

6: Cut off all shipments of fuel to the Taliban and stop recruits from going to Afghanistan.

7: If the evidence implicated bin Laden and al Qaeda, and the Taliban continued to harbour them, to break relations with the Taliban government. See Tariq Ali, *The Duel Pakistan on the Flight Path of American Power* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2008), p. 146.

^v Ibid. pp. 201-2

^{vi} Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire*, p. 271.

^{vii} Ibid. p. 237.

^{viii} 'The other common accusation against Pakistan is that most of the terrorist acts inside Afghanistan are emanating from the tribal areas of Pakistan. A negative perception is growing that Pakistan abets and provides sanctuary to terrorists. This propaganda is linked with efforts to create anti-Pakistan sentiments in Afghanistan. The world at large and countries involved in the war on terror have to take a realistic view of such malicious propaganda. Pakistan's own stability is linked with peace in Afghanistan. The Afghan government needs to focus more on improving security inside its own country instead of blaming others'. See *ibid.*

^{ix} *ibid.* p. 272.

^x For these and other details see Syed Karim Haider, *Pakistan's General Elections 2008* (Lahore: Pakistan Study Centre, 2008). pp. 90-300.

^{xi} *The News*, Islamabad, 20 May 2008.

^{xii} *Dawn*, Islamabad, 5 July 2008.

^{xiii} *Dawn*, Islamabad, 26 October 2008.

^{xiv} *Dawn*, Islamabad, 28 October 2008.

^{xv} *Ibid.*; *The News*, Islamabad, 28 October 2008.

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- xvi *Dawn*, Islamabad, 23 October 2008.
- xvii *Dawn*, Islamabad, 26 October 2008.
- xviii *Dawn*, Islamabad, 24 November 2008.
- xix *Dawn*, Islamabad, 26 November 2008.
- xx *The News*, Islamabad, 27 November 2008 and *Dawn*, Islamabad, 27 November 2008.
- xxi *Dawn*, Islamabad, 12 December 2008.
- xxii *Dawn*, Islamabad, 15 December 2008.
- xxiii *Ibid.*