

Withdrawal, Peace Talks and the 2011 Pakistan-Afghan Situation^{*}

Qian Xuemei[†]

IN 2011, the U.S. began to withdraw troops from Afghanistan and the peace talks with the local Taliban leaders came under the spotlight. The decade-long war seems to be ending soon, and the “Endgame” has become a hot topic for the media and think tanks.

But is peace really within reach for Afghanistan and Pakistan? According to UN statistics, 2011 is the year that Afghanistan witnessed the most casualties in the past decade. Incidents of violence increased by 39%, 2,777 Afghans died, and the homeless increased by 75%. The battle has become more intense, especially in the southern and eastern regions, and NATO troops continue to suffer great losses; the U.S. troops alone have had more than 400 casualties in 2011. The situation in Pakistan however has turned for the better; violent conflict is lessening, down from 57 events in 2010 to 30. But there were still 1,996 incidents of terrorist attack within Pakistan throughout the year, claiming 2,391 casualties, with an additional 527 dead from U.S. drone attacks.¹

It's fair to say that although the U.S. is beginning to withdraw, the chaos in Pakistan and Afghanistan is far from ending and the peace talks have led to no promising future for the time being. In Afghanistan, the interest parties involved in the future government are mapping out their own strategies aiming to gain more for

* This article is originally written in Chinese.

† Associate Professor, School of International Studies, Peking University

themselves. The arrangements the U.S. made have become new variables that will have enormous impacts on the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan in the coming years.

I. WITHDRAWAL AND THE RELATED ARRANGEMENTS

THE DECADE-LONG war cost the U.S. more than 1 trillion USD and more than 1,600 casualties,² which puts the U.S. under great economic and political pressure. After Osama Bin Laden was killed, the necessity of the Afghanistan war was further undermined, with 56% of the American people believing that the troops should go home.³ President Obama, who was seeking a 2nd term in the oval office, announced on June 22 that the U.S. has met the goals of the surge, and would begin to reduce its forces. According to his plan, 10,000 troops will be removed from Afghanistan by the end of 2011, and another 23,000 will be brought home by the summer of 2012. U.S. troops then will change their mission from a combat role to supporting the Afghan forces, and the transition process is planned to be completed by 2014. Afghanistan is soon to be responsible for its own security, while in America, “it is time to focus on nation-building here at home.”⁴

However, Obama also put forward his objectives in Afghanistan: (1) No safe haven from which al-Qaeda or its affiliates can launch attacks against U.S. homeland or its allies. (2) Setting up the ability of the Afghan government to protect its people, to revive its economy, and to sustain a lasting peace. (3) Building an enduring partnership with the Afghan people, “one that ensures that we will be able to continue targeting terrorists and supporting a sovereign Afghan government.”⁵

The American withdrawal is not intended to walk away completely from the scene. In fact, even without any terrorists hiding in Afghan and threatening U.S. and its allies, the U.S. will never repeat the complete exit from Afghanistan in 1990. For the past 20 years, there has been significant change in terms of Afghanistan’s geopolitical and strategic value, given the dramatic change of both the regional and world politics and economy. What Obama wanted to change by withdrawal is the *pattern* of the

United States' existence in Afghanistan not its *presence* there: in the past decade, the U.S. spent roughly 110 billion USD⁶ each year in Afghanistan, which is costly and unsustainable, and needs to be changed. Therefore, withdrawal is nothing but a tactical adjustment.

To match the withdrawal plan, the U.S. implemented two-dimensional policies in Afghanistan in 2011:

Firstly, focusing on lessening the burden and responsibilities of its own forces, the U.S. adjusted parts of its Afghan objective, and began to transfer local economic development and security maintenance to the Afghan government. And secondly, the U.S. sought to keep its strategic presence in Afghanistan with a series of bilateral, regional, and international arrangements, aiming to ensure maximum influence and reaction capability in the region.

Obama also clearly noted that the U.S. will not seek to “make Afghanistan a perfect place.” U.S. troops will not patrol the mountainous areas and streets endlessly, since that is “the responsibility of the Afghan government.”⁷ To this end, State Secretary Hillary Clinton declared that the U.S. will focus to “fight, talk and build.”⁸

In 2011, these policies' three-pronged strategy appeared as: (1) The international security assistance force (ISAF) continued to fight the persistent insurgents. As part of the strategy, the U.S. kept using drones in Pakistani tribal regions while mounting pressure on Pakistan to launch military operations in North Waziristan, and to destroy the terrorist safe haven there. (2) The U.S. changed its attitude towards the Taliban as to separate it from al-Qaeda, and at the same time, the U.S. supported Afghan reconciliation processes and practiced peace talks with the Taliban. (3) The U.S. continued to train the Afghan national security force. It is planning to help build a troop of 400,000 Afghan security forces before 2014. Additionally, the U.S. went on fostering an efficient and incorruptible government in Afghanistan, with various projects funded and continuing operation. This culminated in the July decision for the ISAF to finish the first round of transferring security responsibility, and handed over seven regions to Afghan security forces.

In order to ensure maximum influence and reaction capability in the region, the U.S. began the strategic partnership negotiations

with President Hamid Karzai in 2010, which have not yet reached an agreement due to Mr. Karzai's demand that NATO stop night attacks.⁹ Despite the wrangle, the U.S. will not give up. It is widely reported that the U.S. seeks five to seven permanent military bases in Afghanistan,¹⁰ to which Secretary Clinton and the U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan have both denied. They argued the U.S. does not want to enlarge its influence upon the region in this way, although skeptics doubt their words.

In the regional arrangement, the U.S. had three focuses in 2011: (1) Continuing to help India play an important role in Afghanistan. As a watershed, President Karzai signed a strategic partnership agreement with India. (2) Promoting the idea of the New Silk Road, encouraging the countries in this region to open up their boundaries, and connecting Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and the five Central Asian countries to foster a common market; (3) Struggling to normalize Pak-Indian relationship in order to reduce the potential risks. As an achievement, India and Pakistan resumed their ministerial dialogue in 2011. Furthermore, the U.S. has been planning to include stakeholders like Russia, China, Turkey and Saudi Arabia into its own regional framework,¹¹ with Iran excluded.

The U.S. pragmatically is willing to utilize the existing mechanisms or create new ones to achieve its own political objective, which is a trademark of the American way. In June 2011, the UN Security Council reached two significant resolutions at the request of the U.S. and the UK: one is to separate Taliban from al-Qaeda, another is to remove the names of 18 Taliban leaders from the UN terrorist list. These two resolutions intended to show the sincerity of the "U.S. and international community" towards the Taliban and to win the trust of their Taliban counterparts and thus pave the way for peace talk. In addition, with the Istanbul and Bonn Conferences in 2011, the U.S. managed to push the international society to a basic consensus on Afghan and regional peace issues, and established a preliminary regional as well as international mechanism to promote an Afghan peace process and assure regional security after 2014. The NATO conference and G8 summit held in Chicago in May 2012 were also a part of these efforts.

These measures will continue for the coming two or three years as the U.S. will compose more concrete policies to ensure its strategic presence in this region while withdrawing its combat forces. Particularly, it will intensify its efforts in coordinating China, Russian, and Turkey to build up a broader functional mechanism to guarantee the regional peace.

II. OPEN RIVALRY AND COVERT STRIFE AROUND THE PEACE TALKS

THE TALIBAN was one of the targets when President George W. Bush launched the Afghan war. Later, the purpose of Obama's surge strategy was to reverse the Taliban's returning momentum. With huge financial and human resource poured into Afghanistan, the U.S. declared victory regularly, and finally changed its attitude toward the Taliban into openly supporting the Afghan recommendation of negotiating with the Taliban. Again, in 2011, the U.S. trumpeted its accomplishment in the battlefield and strongly called for cracking the Haqqani Network; while on the other hand, it secretly met with Taliban; the meetings were kept covert for several months. In July 2011 they were exposed by media, and peace talks became the most paradox whirlpool in Afghan-Pakistani politics with the following puzzles:

First, who should lead the peace talks with the Taliban?

A DECADE AGO, President Bush initiated the gigantic counter-terrorist alliance to fight against the Taliban and al-Qaeda. The war was fought in Afghanistan, and it is now the Afghan people who aspire for peace most. The problem with the peace talks emerged here: does the U.S. leadership in the war justify its dominant role in the peace talks? Who then shall lead the peace talk?

Although the U.S. openly states that the Afghan peace process must be led by the Afghan government with the U.S. being a part of it,¹² the practice on the ground went the other way. As a result, there existed two parallel peace talks in Afghanistan.

One is the open negotiation led by the Afghan government. President Karzai has always stood for peace talks with the Taliban, for which he set up a High Peace Committee in Afghanistan as well

as a joint senior-level committee and joint peace committee with Pakistan. Other countries like Turkey and Saudi Arabia provided their support and assistance to the process as well. Due to various reasons however, the progress has been rather slow, the violence still goes on, and Pak-Afghan relations are still full of various twists and turns. On September 20, 2011, Mr. Burhanuddin Rabbani, chairman of the peace committee and President Karzai's special envoy, was assassinated, resulting in the committee suspending its work, and leaving President Karzai frustrated and as usual, accused Pakistan of playing a double game.¹³

Another negotiation that went on secretly was between the U.S. and the Taliban, without involving the Afghan government or Pakistan.

As early as November of 2010, U.S. officials met with Taliban representative in Munich for 11 hours, followed by several other rounds of talk in Qatar and Germany. However, these secret talks were not known to the public until the summer of 2011.¹⁴ With the pressure from the media, the U.S. glossed it over as only engaging the Taliban at an initial stage.

Both the Pakistani and Afghan governments were deeply dissatisfied and disturbed by the fact of being left out by the U.S..¹⁵ But the U.S. continued with its secret talks, with the Taliban eventually setting up a representative office in Qatar. As soon as the information was disclosed at the end of 2011, Karzai called back his ambassador to Qatar, and demanded the process be stopped,¹⁶ saying that any effective talk will have to be between Afghan parties, and "there is no alternative to that."¹⁷ Pakistan also noted that it is up to the Afghan people to decide their own future, and any solution to the problem should be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned.¹⁸

It is foreseeable that the fight for leadership over the peace process and the separate peace talks will continue through the whole process. In principle, all parties involved in the war have rights and responsibilities to participate in the peace process to ensure the effectiveness of any possible agreement. The reality shows, however, that for a war-torn country, the only reliable approach to peace is that the domestic parties reach consensus about peace. Other

countries and the international community should be supporters and assistants in the supervision and coordination of the process.

Second, who can represent “The Insurgents?”

THIS IS a significant problem facing both the U.S. and the Afghan government, in that the effectiveness of the talks hinges on the legitimacy and authoritativeness of the representatives. There is more than one insurgent group in Afghanistan and therefore, identifying the right counterpart for the negotiation is a prerequisite for achieving a valid agreement and generating real peace.

The Taliban is no doubt the most important “insurgent,” yet it is not a unanimous political entity. After the decade-long war, the once centralized organization has been highly fragmented into various groups scattering in different regions. They fight on their own from different points and with diverse tactics.

There are two major Taliban forces that are crucial to the peace process. One is led by Mullah Omar who has been widely respected as the supreme leader no matter how the various Taliban sections fragment and reorganize themselves. Even the Taliban sections in Pakistan follow his orders both in and outside of Afghanistan. The other key Taliban force is the famous Haqqani Network, which is reported by Western media as hiding in Pakistan’s North Waziristan. With more than 10,000 fighters with great combat capacity, the Haqqani Network is regarded as the most dangerous threat by the U.S.. Until now, both Mullah Omar and the Haqqani Network have refused to reconcile with “the puppet government” and the foreign occupiers.

The U.S. has tried to engage with these two forces in vain. As a result, Haqqani’s leaders were placed on the U.S. terrorist list, and Pakistan was pressured to launch military actions in North Waziristan. On the Afghan side, President Karzai approached Sirajuddin Haqqani, the practical head of the network, and even offered him the governorship of Paktia, but was declined.¹⁹ There was also news that the U.S. was negotiating with Tayyab Agha, a representative of Mullah Omar, but the Taliban’s spokesman refuted the reporting, and stated that somebody else impersonating Agha had swindled the U.S.. He told a Pakistan newspaper in a

telephone interview that “Agha is as close to us as ever, but he has never met with U.S. officials.”²⁰ This reminded readers of the story that emerged in late 2010 which reported President Karzai had negotiated with a fake Taliban representative. The attempts to negotiate with insurgents were getting mired in bad press, and repeatedly finding dead-ends.

By using the stick and the carrot, it has been even harder for the U.S. to build up mutual trust with the Taliban. In a conventional war, military superiority equals the weight at the negotiation table, and a certain battle may decide the outcome of the whole war. But the decade-long Afghan war shows that, victory in the battlefield does not mean political triumph. The Taliban cannot be forced to compromise as a loser. As a matter of fact, there are about 30,000 insurgents in Afghanistan, only 8% of whom have reconciled so far and 99% of them are not from the south, the stronghold of the Taliban.²¹

The U.S. is managing to be flexible and pragmatic though. In February of 2011, Secretary Hillary Clinton said that the “red lines” set before for the peace talks, including stopping violence, cutting alliance with al-Qaeda and abiding by the Afghan Constitution, were actually the desired end results of the process, rather than the pre-condition.²² Following that, the U.S. “helped” the Taliban through the UN mechanism to decouple them from al-Qaeda and to remove the names of several Taliban leaders from the UN sanction list. These friendly gestures will influence the process in two ways. On one hand, they may help the U.S. to gain trust from the Taliban and involve more Taliban forces in the negotiation. On the other hand, however, they might further promote the split within the Taliban. Sirajuddin Haqqani noted this possibility when he rejected the peace initiatives from the U.S. and President Karzai as an attempt to “create divisions” between the militant groups.²³ Although U.S. has been seeking to divide the Taliban, it is hard to say whether it is really beneficial for it if the Taliban splits into more groups with no center at all.

The Taliban cannot be forced to compromise as a loser.

In addition to the Taliban, there is another powerful player in the Afghan insurgency: the Hizb-e-Islami led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. It is concentrated in the eastern provinces and fights together with the Taliban. Hekmatyar has been calling for all Afghan insurgents to get together and set up a united front to fight against the foreign troops and has opposed peace talks with the occupiers. In October of 2011 however, he implied that he would like to take part in the peace process,²⁴ which seemed to be good news for the U.S.. Analysts however, say Hekmatyar has a special characteristic that “he will play the role of the spoiler if he does not have a lead role.”²⁵ Given the fact that he is incomparable to the Taliban, his attendance might make the process even more complicated.

Third, what role could and should Pakistan play in the peace process?

THE AFGHAN peace talks are only one part of the regional peace process, restoring the domestic political order in Pakistan is of similar, if not more, significance. Parallel to the Afghan peace negotiation, Pakistan is also seeking to establish new relationships with its own insurgents, particularly the Pakistani Taliban. Therefore, the role of Pakistan in the regional peace process with insurgents is composed of at least two dimensions:

Pakistan's Influence upon the Afghan Peace Talks

No one would doubt that Pakistan is key to peace making in Afghanistan. Some defense experts pointed out that the Afghan insurgents are not united on peace talk issues, yet “if there is any player who can act as a bridge to bring these guys on board, it has to be Pakistan.”²⁶

Pakistan's importance did not enhance its position in dealing with Afghanistan and the U.S. in 2011. On the contrary, its situation becomes even more subtle and fragile. On one hand, the U.S. and Afghanistan repeated that they need Pakistani assistance, especially in persuading the Taliban to lay down their arms and to bring all resistant forces to the negotiation table. On the other hand, the U.S. and Afghanistan habitually blame everything, such as the problems in dealing with the Taliban and terrorist attacks in Afghanistan, on Pakistan, accusing Pakistan of being a double-dealer and supporting

terrorists. As a result, Pakistan and Afghanistan continued the old blame game, and the U.S.-Pakistan relationship continued to deteriorate in 2011.

Then how much influence does Pakistan have upon the Taliban? Despite that Pakistani analysts emphasized the world has overestimated and exaggerated Pakistan's influence,²⁷ the U.S. and Afghanistan seem to believe that Pakistan indeed does have such influence, and the key problem is that Pakistan will not make a full effort out of its own selfishness. Here emerged a puzzle; Pakistan, who should have been the solution, is becoming the crux of the problem itself.

To understand the influence of Pakistan over the Taliban, and their complicated relationship, the following historical facts have to be considered. (1) When the Taliban was in power, it followed suit with the former Afghan governments since 1947 by refusing to recognize the Durand Line as the boundary between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The dream of Pukhtunistan challenged the integrity and unification of Pakistan. (2) In the wake of the events of "9.11," General Musharraf tried to convince the Taliban to hand over Bin Laden in vain, which led to the outbreak of the Afghan war. (3) Since 2007, Tehrik Taliban Pakistan (TTP) openly challenged and posed a threat to Pakistan's security. Some of the Afghan Taliban commanders expressed their criticism, but the central leaders of the Afghan Taliban made no official comment, neither did they make clear their relationship with the TTP. After 2009, some TTP forces fled over the border into Afghanistan, where they were sheltered by the Afghan Taliban and launched attacks against Pakistani tribal regions. (4) After the Afghan peace process began, Pakistan asked the Afghan Taliban to open up an office in Saudi Arabia or Turkey, and offered to mediate its talks with the Afghan government in Saudi Arabia, but this was refused by the Taliban. Eventually, the Taliban did not open office in Pakistan, but chose Doha instead.

This is by no means to say that the Taliban began to or intended to confront Pakistan openly, nor does it mean that Pakistan had absolutely no influence over the former. These facts show, however, that Pakistan's capability to influence the Taliban is limited and very far from President Karzai's and the U.S.'s imagination that the

The real problem is that there is a great gap between Pakistan's real influence over the Afghan Taliban and the demand from the U.S. and Afghanistan.

Taliban is subject to Pakistan. The real problem is that there is a great gap between Pakistan's real influence over the Afghan Taliban and the demand from the U.S. and Afghanistan. To fill the gap, the U.S. and Afghanistan have only one choice, to either lower their demand, or to try to enlarge Pakistan's capability and influence. The latter option is not something the U.S. or Afghanistan would like to see.

Pakistan's Relations with the Pakistani Taliban

In principle, since the U.S. and Afghanistan can talk with the Afghan Taliban, Pakistan can also reconcile with Pakistani Taliban. In 2011, Prime Minister Gilani went on adopting the "3D" policy towards the internal insurgents, namely dialogue, development and deterrence. The All Parties Conference in September decided to "give peace a chance" and suggested that the government negotiate with militant groups to achieve national reconciliation.

However, the peace process within Pakistan is full of challenges. The first challenge is to identify the right counterpart in the peace talk. Like the Afghan Taliban, the Pakistani Taliban is not a united force, and there is no central leadership. There are at least three major groups: (1) The TTP. Composed by more than 20 military groups originally, it was further fragmented in 2011. The status of Hakimullah Mehsud has been weakened, and the Taliban forces in Swat and South Waziristan scattered away, either splitting into tiny groups with new titles, or running across the border into Afghanistan. Being afraid of drone attacks, the TTP commanders avoided using electronic communication equipment and frequently changed their location. As a result, the contact amongst them is very low. (2) Taliban led by Hafiz Gul Bahadur and Mullah Nazir. They openly oppose the TTP's terrorist attacks against the Pakistani state and people. Mainly staying in North Waziristan, they signed peace agreements with the government in 2006 and have continued to adhere to it. This is one of the reasons why Pakistan refrained from taking military action in the region; (3) Lashkar-i-Islam and

other independent, small-scale forces. Under such conditions, reconciliation with the Pakistani Taliban means the government has to engage them one by one, which will require huge financial and human resources.

The second challenge is that many peace pacts signed between the government and the militant groups before were torn to pieces by the latter. Therefore, ordinary people lost confidence in peace settlements and opposed further peace talks. From 2004 to 2009, the government signed 13 peace agreements with Taliban commanders, 11 of which were scrapped. Most of the Taliban would not give up the freedom of crossing the Durand Line, and continued attacking transport convoys and sheltering foreign militants. Many critics showed that previous peace treaties only gave the Taliban more time and space to rest and reorganize, and the Taliban became “bigger, more entrenched and stronger” after each cease fire.²⁸ For this reason, critics frequently warn that peace talks with the Taliban would be nothing other than repeating a tragic mistake.²⁹

The third problem is the unfavorable international environment. Following the Abbottabad raid in May 2011, the TTP immediately pledged to avenge the death of Bin Laden, with the Pakistani state as the primary target.³⁰ From May to August, the number of terrorist attacks in Pakistan increased significantly. In addition, given the complicated relations between the Afghan Taliban (especially the Haqqani Network) and the Pakistani Taliban, the Pakistani government’s engagement with the Taliban might give the handle to the U.S. and Afghanistan to maintain the accuse of “double-dealer.” In particular, since the TTP was added to the UN sanctions list in 2011, Pakistan’s peace negotiation efforts will encounter more barriers, and the U.S. might use this new list to test the authenticity of Pakistan’s support for counter-terrorism. Pakistani experts observed that the TTP has been greatly weakened from its relative strength in 2008-2009.³¹ Therefore, the sanctions upon the TTP seem to have come too late, and placed Pakistan at a loss. In President Asif Ali Zardari’s words, “While we are accused of harboring extremism, the United States is engaged in outreach and negotiations with the very same groups.”³² Double standards are

nothing new in U.S. foreign policy practices, but its present attitude towards the Taliban did perplex Pakistan: What does the U.S. want? A peace talk or an attack?"

The peace negotiations between the Pakistan government and Pakistani Taliban are also full of mystery. The government has called for the Taliban to disarm several times. Taliban commanders like Faqir Mohamed also expressed willingness to talk and went further to disclose that the negotiation was underway. But the spokespersons from the government and the TTP have both denied such negotiation reports. It is also reported that the core leaders of the TTP are divided on the peace negotiations. For instance, Hakimullah strongly opposes the talks, while his assistants Faqir and Waliur Rehman support such negotiation.³³

Another factor that originated from the peace talks which will also be influential on the process and worth noticing, is that of the attitudes of other political forces in Pakistan and Afghanistan. In 2011, cohesive groups of supporters for and opponents against peace negotiations gradually took shape and emerged in both countries. In Afghanistan, the ethnic groups besides the Pashtuns expressed their deep concerns and opposed the idea that the Taliban be a part of the future Afghan government. This was evidence that ethnic politics was coming back to the country and the north alliance was likely re-emerging.³⁴ In Pakistan, the dispute over the peace process is also shaping into the partisan politics and factional feuds, which makes the 2013 election more uncertain. Imran Khan, head of Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf, promoted that the Taliban forces be reintegrated and combined into the mainstream military, which together with his concept of a "new Pakistan," triggered a political tsunami in the country.

III. ELUSIVE REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

IN ORDER to secure the withdrawal, the U.S. has continued increasing pressure on Pakistan, while enhancing its efforts to get India involved in Afghan affairs and play a bigger role. As a result, the U.S.-Pakistan relation was crisis-ridden in 2011, and an Indo-Afghan strategic partnership agreement was signed.

U.S.-Pakistan Relations

ALTHOUGH THE Pakistani-U.S. relationship is always troublesome, In 2011 the relationship has been more grueling than usual. It started with the Raymond Davis incident in January, followed by the Abbottabad raid in May, then the besiege of the U.S. embassy in Kabul in September, and the NATO strike on the border checkpoints of Pakistan in November, all shocked the core of the relationship for both countries one after another. Some U.S. senators called for tougher measures against Pakistan and asked to re-evaluate the bilateral relationship.³⁵ Some think tanks even openly discussed the necessity of containing Pakistan.³⁶

Anti-U.S. movements have been increasingly fervent in Pakistan as a result of this fractious relationship. A new phenomenon in 2011 was the anti-U.S. emotion being a banner that united the Pakistani religious and political forces. In September, Gilani successfully convened the APC, passing a resolution that refuted any accusation of the Pakistan state having ties with terrorist organizations. The resolution claimed that it is a supreme responsibility to safeguard the sovereignty and integrity of Pakistan. All Pakistanis shall unify as one person and support the military establishment in its effort to secure the country. The resolution also mentioned that the country must adjust its policy and be committed to national reconciliation and that “give peace a chance” shall become the guiding principle for the future.³⁷

General Kayani, the supreme commander of the Pakistan army, said after the APC that Pakistan should not be treated as Iraq or Afghanistan, and the responsibility for turning Pakistan into an adversary from an ally would lie with the U.S. and its allies.³⁸ After the NATO border checkpoints strike in November, religious forces and radical groups convened several times under the name of the Difa-e-Pakistan Council, strongly demanding the Pakistan government quit the U.S.-led coalition, and permanently close the ISAF passage in Pakistan. With the increasing confrontational sentiment, the U.S. was regarded as an arch-enemy by many Pakistanis.³⁹

External threats to any country often promote national solidarity. But the worsening of the foreign relations of 2011

did not resolve Pakistan's internal disputes, conflicts and confrontation. On the contrary, the existing conflict functioned together with the international elements and intensified the turbulence within Pakistan. For instance, the death of Bin Laden and the scandal of the memorandum damaged the authority of the Pakistan army and the legitimacy of the government.⁴⁰ Civil-military relations became more intense, and there were rumors of a military coup d'état. Prime Minister Gilani even publicly said that he had become the longest serving elected chief executive in Pakistan.⁴¹ The domestic problems provided opportunities for foreign interference, which made the challenges more serious for Pakistan government. The Balochi, the TTP, and the energy shortage were some of the typical examples. In 2011, the Balochi nationalists continued to challenge the state unity and sovereignty, and the authority of the central government. The HRW and the U.S. House of Representatives spoke publicly against Pakistan government in the name of human rights, which displeased Pakistan. Over whether or not TTP has got supports from India, Afghanistan, or even from the U.S., Pakistan and these three countries kept bickering. In order to alleviate the domestic economic crisis, Pakistan promoted the Pakistan-Iran gas pipeline project, which upset the U.S.. Mrs. Clinton tried to persuade her Pakistani counterpart to give up the plan. However, Pakistan insisted that the pipeline project is essential for its own economic survival and development. It is foreseeable that, with this pipeline and many other disagreements, the Pakistan-U.S. relationship will trudge on in the future.

The Indo-Afghan Strategic Partnership Agreement

In the past decade, India has participated heavily in the reconstruction efforts within Afghanistan with the support of the U.S.. With more than 2 billion USD aid to Afghanistan, it has become one of the largest donors, and in May of 2011, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh declared that New Delhi is different from Western countries in that it will never retreat from Afghanistan.⁴² In October, the two countries signed their strategic partnership agreement, which included (1) India will help Afghanistan with

training, equipment, capacity development of national security forces; (2) enhance the bilateral cooperation in the global arena and develop a “lasting peace and friendship”; and (3) reinforce bilateral economic and education relations, especially develop the trade, investment and transportation connections.⁴³ This agreement, the very first of its kind in Afghanistan’s past three decades, assures an Indian role in Afghanistan into the future. In fact, given that the U.S. has been supporting India to play a greater role in Afghanistan, this equates to acknowledging an Indian takeover of Afghanistan from the U.S..

The Pakistani government did not comment on this pact officially, but the media was furious. Mr. Pervez Musharraf criticized that India, intending to create an anti-Pakistan Afghanistan, has been indoctrinating Afghan students, troops, security staff and officials with anti-Pakistan ideas. He also mentioned that he had offered similar free training programs to President Karzai during his tenure, but with no response.⁴⁴

This agreement distresses Pakistan; with more than 60 years of feud between India and Pakistan, this agreement is regarded by Pakistanis as a threat of being attacked from two fronts. This is unbearable for Pakistan. Although not all people support the army’s mindset of “strategic in-depth,” Pakistan diplomats and politicians have come to two basic consensuses about the bottom line and principle of their Afghan strategy, namely, (1) the solution to Afghanistan should have no negative spill-over effects for Pakistan and shall not add elements of instability to the region; (2) Kabul shall not antagonize Pakistan, and the Afghan land shall not be used to harm Pakistani interests.⁴⁵

Therefore, unless Indo-Pakistan relations can break new ground, Pakistan will not sit here without doing anything. The U.S. tried to promote normalization of Indo-Pakistan relations in 2011, and the bilateral minister-level dialogue resumed. But it will be very difficult to dispel the entrenched hatred and antagonism that has existed for decades, let alone to foster strategic mutual trust between these two countries. A defense analyst from Pakistan said that the Indo-Afghan pact will exacerbate the “proxy war” in Afghanistan because India’s training assistance of the Afghan army is not in

the interests of Pakistan, who will be forced into “reappraising its approach to militancy.”⁴⁶ This would definitely have a profound impact on the region were it to become true.

CONCLUSION

AS WITH all military operations, the U.S. withdrawal is a political arrangement that serves a higher strategic objective. Unless the enemy can be eliminated completely, the war will inevitably lead to peace talk. Signing a peace agreement is the official legal procedure to end the war, and peace talks are the continuation of war. There are diverse players leading the Afghan peace process, with contradictory narratives and appearances. For example, while engaging in peace talk with Afghan Taliban, the U.S. demands Pakistan to crack down on the Haqqani Network, an important Afghan Taliban force. Though the U.S. claims that it has reversed the momentum of the Taliban and has begun the peace negotiations from a position of strength, the Taliban emphasizes that the decade-long war has proven a fact that foreign occupying troops can never win the game and thus the U.S. launched the peace negotiations.

It was the U.S. that started the Afghan war, and its decision of withdrawal is a crucial change for the region. However, withdrawal is not equal to ending the war, and the U.S. is still fighting and

negotiating now. What is more important is that war can be launched unilaterally, and even peace talks can be initiated from top-down, whereas real peace requires consensus from all sides. History tells us that peace must be endogenous, inclusive and supported by the nation and the people themselves. Any externally-designed peace plan or framework

War can be launched unilaterally, and even peace talks can be initiated from top-down, whereas real peace requires consensus from all sides.

that is imposed on others will prove to be fruitless.

¹ Afghan war violence up nearly 40 percent: UN (<http://www.dawn.com/2011/09/28/afghan-war-violence-up-nearly-40-per-cent-un.html>); U.S. launches new push to secure Afghan peace talks (<http://tribune.com.pk/story/320371/us-launches-new-push-to-secure-afghan-peace-talks/>); U.S. Threatens Pakistan with Sanctions over Iran Gas Line (<http://www.nation.com.pk/pakistan-news-newspaper-daily-english-online/national/01-Mar-2012/us-threatens-pakistan-with-sanctions-over-iran-gasline>); There are different statistics regarding terrorist attack and civilian casualties. According to some think tanks, there were 2,545 civilians and 760 security staff died in terrorist attack in 2011 (Saad Khan, “Pakistan in 2011,” 30 Dec 2011, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/saad-khan/pakistan-in-2011_b_1176027.html); According to ISAF, violence incident reduced by 8% in Afghanistan (Michael O’Hanlon, “Is Afghanistan more Violent?” 20 Nov. 2011, <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1111/68787.html>); Brookings Institution said that the attack by Afghanistan rebellion force was down by 20% in the second half of 2011, http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2011/1219_iraq_afghanistan_pakistan_ohanlon.aspx.

² There were 187 casualties in the first half of 2011. AFP: “Obama Declares Beginning of End of Afghan War,” 23 June 2011, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/194734/obama-declares-beginning-of-end-of-afghan-war/>.

³ Reuters, “Afghan Plan Political Gamble for Obama,” <http://www.dawn.com/2011/06/23/afghan-plan-political-gamble-for-obama.html>.

⁴ “President Obama on the Way Forward in Afghanistan,” <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2011/06/22/president-obama-way-forward-afghanistan>.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Committee on Foreign Relations U.S. Senate Report, *Evaluating U.S. Foreign Assistance to Afghanistan*, June 8, 2011, <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/congress/index.html>.

⁷ “President Obama on the Way Forward in Afghanistan,” <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2011/06/22/president-obama-way-forward-afghanistan>.

⁸ Hillary R. Clinton, “Opening Remarks Before the House Foreign Affairs Committee,” <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/10/176281.htm>.

⁹ The U.S.—Afghan Strategic Partnership Agreement was finally reached in May 2012.

¹⁰ Naveed Hussain, “Reconciliation Talks: U.S. Duped by Fake Interlocutor in Talks, Says Taliban,” <http://tribune.com.pk/story/236229/reconciliation-talks-us-duped-by-fake-interlocutor-in-talks-says-taliban/>.

¹¹ Leslie H. Gelb, “Obama’s Secret Afghan Exit Formula,” <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2011/06/10/exclusive-obama-s-secret-afghan-exit-formula.html>.

¹² AFP: “U.S. Met Haqqani Network, Says Hillary Clinton,” <http://www.dawn.com/2011/10/21/us-met-haqqani-network-says-hillary-clinton.html>.

¹³ AFP: “Afghanistan, India to Bolster Security Ties,” 4 Oct. 2011, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/266631/afghanistan-india-to-bolster-security-ties/>.

¹⁴ AFP: “Little Progress in Taliban Talks as Afghan Handover Begins,” <http://www.dawn.com/2011/07/21/little-progress-in-taliban-talks-as-afghan-handover-begins.html>.

¹⁵ Munizae Jahagir, “Pakistan Upset at Being Left out of U.S.-Taliban Talks,” 27 June 2011, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/197215/pakistan-upset-at-being-left-out-of-us-taliban-talks/>.

¹⁶ Reuters, “U.S. Launches New Push to Secure Afghan Peace Talks,” 12 Jan. 2012, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/320371/us-launches-new-push-to-secure-afghan-peace-talks/>.

¹⁷ AFP: “Only ‘Direct’ Talks can Bring Peace: Afghan Official,” <http://www.dawn.com/2012/01/20/only-direct-talks-can-bring-peace-afghan-official.html>.

¹⁸ AFP: "Regional Countries to Play Supportive Role in Afghanistan: FM," <http://www.dawn.com/2011/11/01/regional-countries-to-play-supportive-role-in-afghanistan-fm-khar.html>.

¹⁹ Hamid Mir, "Haqqani Network Pushing TTP to Make Peace with Pakistan," <http://www.thenews.com.pk/TodaysPrintDetail.aspx?ID=9323&Cat=13&dt=10/5/2011>.

²⁰ Naveed Hussain, "Reconciliation Talks: U.S. Duped by Fake Interlocutor in Talks, Say Taliban," 21 Aug. 2011, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/236229/reconciliation-talks-us-duped-by-fake-interlocutor-in-talks-says-taliban/>.

²¹ AFP: "Taliban Peace Talks Have Failed: Ex-Afghan Minister," 17 Nov. 2011, <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5igeSZjYBuLPhHiC4ioEcEXwXA3fQ?docId=CNG.7bce1ab7eb2ad3750d12a344d112923a.411>.

²² Tariq Fatemi, "Entering the Endgame," 17 June 2011, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/190210/entering-the-endgame/>.

²³ Reuters, "No Sanctuaries in Pakistan: Haqqani Network Shifts Base to Afghanistan," 18 Sept. 2011, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/254368/no-haqqani-network-sanctuaries-in-pakistan-sirajuddin/>.

²⁴ Najmuddin A Shaikh, "Pakistan and Afghanistan Reconciliation (VI)," 6 Sept. 2011, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/246398/pakistan-and-afghanistan-reconciliation--vi/>; Naveed Hussain, "No Talks unless U.S. Changes Dual-Faced Policy, Says Taliban," 29 Oct. 2011, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/284479/peace-in-afghanistan-no-talks-unless-us-changes-dual-faced-policy-says-taliban/>.

²⁵ Najmuddin A Shaikh, "Pakistan and Afghanistan Reconciliation (VI)," 6 Sept. 2011, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/246398/pakistan-and-afghanistan-reconciliation--vi/>.

²⁶ Rahim Faiez and Deb Riechmann, "Afghanistan Taliban Talks Unravel, Government Urges Pakistan Help," http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/10/02/afghanistan-taliban-talks_n_991131.html.

²⁷ Ta=nvir Ahmad Khan, "Consensus on Afghanistan is Elusive," <http://www.pkarticleshub.com/2011/11/07/consensus-on-afghanistan-is-elusive/#more-23605>; Rahim Faiez and Deb Riechmann, "Afghanistan Taliban Talks Unravel, Government Urges Pakistan Help," http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/10/02/afghanistan-taliban-talks_n_991131.html.

²⁸ Alex Rodrigues, "As Pakistan Eyes Peace Talks with the Taliban, Anxiety Builds," <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/nov/13/world/la-fg-pakistan-taliban-talks-20111113>.

²⁹ Shafqat Mahmood, "Talking Peace with Militants," 7 Oct. 2011, <http://www.thenews.com.pk/TodaysPrintDetail.aspx?ID=71228&Cat=9>.

³⁰ "We will Avenge Osama Killing: TTP," 3 May 2011, <http://www.thenews.com.pk/NewsDetail.aspx?ID=15044>.

³¹ "Weakened TTP Limp into Talks," <http://www.nation.com.pk/pakistan-news-newspaper-daily-english-online/national/24-Nov-2011/Weakened-TTP-limp-into-talks>.

³² Asif Ali Zardari, "Talk to, Not at, Pakistan," http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/talk-to-not-at-pakistan/2011/09/30/gIQAfFUBBL_story.html.

³³ Reuters, "Peace Negotiations: Ousted TTP Deputy Chief Favours Talk with Govt," 7 March 2012, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/346593/peace-negotiations-ousted-ttp-deputy-chief-favours-talks-with-govt/>.

³⁴ ICG Asia Report No.221, *Talking about Talks: toward a Political Settlement in Afghanistan*, International Crisis Group, 26 March 2012, p.i.

³⁵ Amitai Etzioni, "Rethinking the Pakistan Plan," *The National Interest*, Jan/Feb 2012, p.58.

³⁶ Bruce Riedel, "Pakistan's Jihadist Threat: Obama's Terrorism Challenge in 2012," 21 Dec. 2011, http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2011/1221_pakistan_riedel.aspx.

³⁷ "Full Text of the APC Resolution," 30 Sept. 2011, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/263586/apc-concludes-marathon-session-with-join-resolution-full-text/>.

³⁸ Mahmood Shah, "TTP's 'Offer' of Negotiations," <http://dawn.com/2011/11/29/ttps-offer-of-negotiations/>.

³⁹ Tariq Fatemi, "Dangers in the Endgame," 28 June 2011, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/198056/>

dangers-in-the-endgame/.

⁴⁰ Mansoor Ijaz, a U.S. businessman of Pakistan nationality told Financial Times in Nov. 2011 that he had forwarded a document to the U.S. department of defense at the request of the Pakistan ambassador in the U.S., the content of which was to ask U.S. troop to intervene in a coup d'état in Pakistan. This allegation was later confirmed by General Mike Mullen. This became known as “memogate.” Pakistan military troops, Nawaz Sharif and Musharraf took the opportunity to accuse the government. The supreme court was also involved and took sides with the military as this issue touched upon “national sovereignty.” The affair triggered a great political crisis within the country.

⁴¹ “Review of 2012: The Predictable Uncertainty of Pakistan’s Political Economy,” 1 Jan. 2012, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/314843/preview-of-2012-the-predictable-uncertainty-of-pakistans-political-economy/>.

⁴² Bhashyam Kasturi, “India’s Role in Afghanistan (II),” 18 Feb. 2012, <http://www.indiandefencereview.com/geopolitics/indias-Role-in-Afghanistan—II.html>.

⁴³ See <http://outlookindia.com/article.aspx?278537>.

⁴⁴ AFP: “India Wants an ‘Anti-Pakistan’ Afghanistan: Musharraf,” 6 Oct. 2011, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/268389/india-wants-an-anti-pakistan-afghanistan-musharraf/>.

⁴⁵ M. Yusuf *et al.*, *Pakistan, the United States and the Endgame in Afghanistan: Perceptions of Pakistan’s Foreign Policy Elite*, Jinnah Institute 2011, <http://www.jinnah-institute.org/images/ji-afghanendgame.pdf>.

⁴⁶ AFP: “Pakistan Squeezed by Afghan-India Pact,” 6 Oct. 2011, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/268073/pakistan-squeezed-by-afghan-india-pact/>.