

## The Changing Trends in Pak-Afghan Relations: An Analysis of The Peace Process (2008-2010)

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### Abstract

The Pak-Afghan relations have often been far from cordial since 1947. In mid 1990s, these relations saw a brief thaw due to the Taliban leniency towards Islamabad. But this détente soon ended after the US/NATO intervention in October 2001. The Northern Alliance, the bitter critic of Pakistan, took over Kabul and a new era of estrangement started. Blame game went on and trust deficit kept on rise. The growing Indian influence in Kabul and separatist movements in Pakistani province Baluchistan widened the gulf in Pak-Afghan relations. However, the situation underwent a positive change when the Afghan President approached a peace process and the democratic setup in Islamabad responded in the same coin. The peace process is a multifaceted process that takes into account all aspects of bilateral relationship. Mistrust seems to be replaced with trust and understanding as peace envoy has been initiated and succeeded. The ongoing process of peace can vanishes distrust between the two adjacent neighbors. The paper will analyze the mired relations in the past and to what extent that bleak scenario has been vanished due to normalization process. This paper explores different step taken on both sides to make this process a success story. It also analyzes the impacts of the process on security, stability and prosperity of the region. The relevance and importance of this new trend in the post drawdown scenario will also be highlighted.

**Keywords:** Pak-Afghan Relations, Taliban, Peace Process, Mistrust, Normalization

### Introduction

Relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan (Pak-Afghan Relations) have always remained far from except during the Taliban era since 1994 till 2001. There is no denying the fact that besides common historic, geographic and ethnographic ties, the strained relations between the two countries are indebted to the overarching regional and international factors (Siddiqi, 2009). Despite the convergence of interests in economic matters, the divergence of political objectives and the blame-game has kept them apart from each other. Two main issues; Pakhtunistan<sup>1</sup> stunt and

NWFP) and Baluchistan province. On the claim that the Pashtuns majority province should be included in Afghanistan or give a third option of Pakhtunistan, which was wholeheartedly supported by *Khudai Khidmatgars*. Movement of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, popularly known as Bacha Khan on July 3, 1947 referendum. In which more than 70% voted in favor of Pakistan. In spite of mass judgment in referendum, a flag of 'Pakhtunistan' was raised on September 2, 1947 in Kabul, alongside with Afghan national flag. Afghanistan took over this issue on many occasions after Pakistan's independence from which both countries adopted negative attitude towards each other. Retrieved from <http://www.pashtunsforum.com/social-political-issue/1232-pashunistan-concept-does-have-wider-support-pakhtunkhwa.html>

<sup>1</sup>Afghanistan vigorously raised claim to the Pashtu speaking areas of Khyber Pukhtoonkhwa (then

altogether negation of the “Durand Line Agreement 1893”<sup>2</sup> in the wake of 1947 have been impeding the cordial relationship between these two neighboring Muslim countries. The said agreement was signed in 1893 between the then Afghan government and the British Raj in India before partition. But after the end of British rule and subsequent partition of India into two independent states – India and Pakistan, the issue of Pakhtunistan resurfaced when the then Afghan government reiterated its claim over the northwestern province of Pakistan. The strained Pak-Afghan relations contributed much to instability in the region. The tribal territory has never experienced political stability as it has always been a "prickly hedge" quite unfit to serve as the frontier area between the two states (Qureshi, 1966).

Despite prevailing mistrust, convergence of interests compelled the two neighboring countries to enter into a bilateral dialogue on different occasions. Efforts on both sides were made to normalize the diplomatic relations between the two countries. Leaders of other friendly states took interest in bringing these two countries closer to each other by playing a mediating role (Dutta, 2009). Pakistan’s policies towards Afghanistan were clear and unambiguous as one of its foreign policy objective was to establish amicable relations with all Muslim and neighboring countries. Pakistan, being facing severe pressure on its eastern border due to aggressive Indian behavior, wanted to have a peaceful western border. In other words, Pakistan was in search of a strategic-depth against India and that could only be provided by a friendly Afghanistan (Siddiqi, 2009). However, the relationship could not achieve the said objective. Afghanistan showed more enthusiasm in establishing cordial relations with India than Pakistan.

On December 27, 1979, Relations took a new turn when nearly 80,000 Soviet troops rolled into Afghanistan on the call of the then government in Kabul. Pakistan took it as a blessing in disguise and invited the US and all anti-Soviet state to joined hand with Pakistan to put Soviet communist influence to rout. This anti-Soviet drive sowed the seeds of never ending spirals of violence that are still haunting the whole region (Yousaf, 2012). Pakistan adopted all measures to force the Soviet troops to vacate Afghanistan. Since early 1980s, Pakistan had started to pursue a ‘forward policy’ in Afghanistan by encouraging religious parties to seek ideological allies. It was an attempt to bring conservative minded masses, in both the countries, into a common defense posture against the Soviet forces (Haqqani, 2005). The financial and technological assistance of Arab and Western countries respectively brought in the volunteers to back the Afghan *Jihad* in order to run what is now called Pakistan’s Afghan war (Rashid, 2009). Due to a number of factors, especially the economic one, the Soviet Union announced complete withdrawal from Afghanistan and hand over the control to Dr. Najibullah, a pro-Soviet President in Afghanistan, as part of UN-sponsored Geneva Accord on April 14, 1988. Just after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, a civil war broke-out in Afghanistan between different warring cliques. Burhanuddin Rabbani and his Defense Minister Ahmad Shah Massoud were in occupation of Kabul while Gulbuudin Hekmatyar, chief of the Hezb-e-Islamic party and the designated Prime Minister of Afghanistan who belonged to Pashtun ethnic group, was striving hard for control over Kabul (Coll, 2004). The chaotic situation in Afghanistan gave rise to another militant outfit that was called the Taliban – the students of religious seminaries. Soon this group won popular support and prominence in Afghan society. Over a span of few months, the Taliban checkmated the influence of all other groups and took control of Kabul in 1996. Besides Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates (UAE), Pakistan extended recognition to the new setup in Kabul while the rest of world remained cautious in following them. The sternest Taliban policies caused resentment at international level while stiff resistance was put forward by the

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<sup>2</sup> Durand Line refers to the 2,640 km long porous border between Pakistan and Afghanistan this agreement signed between British Indian government foreign security, Sir Mortimer Durand and Amir Abdul Rehman of Afghanistan in 1893. For fixing the limit of their respective spheres of influence as well as improving diplomatic relations and trade. Retrieved from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Durand\\_Line](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Durand_Line)

Northern Alliance<sup>3</sup> in the country. (Haque, 2011). Meanwhile A-Qaeda outfit joined hand with the Taliban that brought bad name to the latter. The alleged indulgence of Al-Qaeda leadership in the horrific 9/11 incidence mounted international pressure on the Taliban leadership to dissociate themselves with the former and expel Al-Qaeda chief from Afghan soil. On denying complying with these demands, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted Resolution No. 1333 on December 19, 2000. Thus, Pakistan was forced to stop illegal military assistance to the Taliban. Pakistan acceded to the resolution passed by this international organization (Rashid, 2008). Pakistan tried to bring the Taliban leadership to the table-talks with the United States but the former was reluctant to concurrence to such a posture (Grare, 2006). Subsequently the US secretary of state made a telephone call to President Musharraf and asked to comply with the seven US demands to abandon supporting the Taliban. The President of Pakistan gave his consent to join the US-led War on Terror (WoT) (Hussain, 2005). In October 2001, the US/NATO forces launched 'Operation Enduring Freedom'. Within a few days, they invaded Kabul and dislodged the Taliban regime. The new setup in Kabul mostly comprised the Northern Alliance leadership that was at odd with Afghanistan for its earlier pro-Taliban policies (Siddiqi, 2009).

Soon the relations between Islamabad and Kabul got strained due to the blame game on the part of both the governments. Lack of political stability, perverted law and order situation and non-ending militancy gave rise to mistrust in relationship (Rubin, 2006). However, in 2008, newly elected setup in Islamabad took more steps to bring normalcy to the tense Pak-Afghan relations. In Afghanistan, President Karzai was reelected in August 2009 and he positively

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<sup>3</sup> Northern Alliance was a group of factions who had the common goal of toppling the Taliban was formally in power in Afghanistan. This group comprised of five factions of *Mujahid* fighters led by Burhanuddin Rabbani and Ahmad Shah Massoud, Abdul Ali Mazari, Abdul Rashid Dostum, Ayatollah Muhammad Asif Muhsini and Abdul Rasul Sayyaf. Retrieved from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afghan\\_Northern\\_Alliance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afghan_Northern_Alliance)

responded to the initiative taken by Islamabad. He not only acknowledged the role of Pakistan in fighting against militancy but also stopped issuing hostile statements and accusations against Pakistan for each and every nuisance which his country faced. In the wake of the US drawdown plan, President Karzai understood the vitality of the role of Pakistan in bringing the defiant Taliban to peace talks with Karzai government (Yousaf, 2012). He established the Afghan High Peace Council. Pakistan's role in the Afghan peace process was recognized by the Afghan leadership. The prospects of peace greatly depend upon the cooperation among Afghanistan, Pakistan and the United States but Pak-Afghan relations will be of utmost importance.

In Pak-Afghan relations, the recent process of peace can best be analyzed through the "Prisoners Dilemma" of the game theory. Pakistan and Afghanistan are the two players. Their cooperation would result in win-win situation while defection on the part on any player may lead to no-win situation that is in no one's interest. But the questions are; first, what are their respective interests; second, what are the points of convergence and divergence of interests; and last, what are the patterns of cooperation's that maximize their benefits and minimize the costs.

In the prevailing circumstances, both Pakistan and Afghanistan are much concerned with the security problems. Terrorism is the common menace that is starring them in the face. Their political, economic and social problems are mostly emanating from this monstrous issue that has troubled the whole world. All programs of social and economic uplift have become hostage by the growing militancy on both sides of the Pak-Afghan border. Resultantly the social fabrics of the Afghan and Pakistani societies have been disrupted. But, ironically, instead of coping with this peril with collective efforts, they are engaged in blame game that has given rise to mistrust. The increasing Indian influence in Kabul has further increased the trust deficit between Kabul and Islamabad. To get their security issues resolved, they have to mitigate the mutual distrust through mutual dialogue and interaction. The recently initiated peace process by the governments of

both sides is a very positive and encouraging move on the part of the leadership on both countries.

In an attempt to enhance cooperation, a joint Pak-Afghan Peace Jirga was convened in Kabul from August 9 to 12, 2007 on the initiative of Afghan President Karzai. This was the first historic gathering of all political and groups representing civil societies on both sides. It was aimed at opening a new vista of interaction through a broad-based dialogue process. The inauguration session was addressed by President Karzai and Pakistan Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz, while the concluding session of Peace Jirga was addressed by President of Pakistan Pervez Musharraf and his Afghan counterpart. In the Peace Jirga, a number of recommendations were put forward to bring normalcy to the troublesome bilateral relations. Thus, a major thaw in bilateral relations was seen after a long time.

To boost economic and commercial relationship, the Pak-Afghanistan Transit Trade Agreement (PATTA) was signed in October 2010. This new agreement replaced the old Afghanistan Transit Trade Agreement (ATTA) agreement of 1965. Pakistan's provision the trade facility to a mountainous and landlocked Afghanistan shows the Pakistan's desire to cooperate. Cooperation in the field of transit trade was there since Pakistan's independence but the innovative APTTA provides more trade facilities to Afghanistan with India through Pakistan. Until 2011, Pak-Afghan transit trade carrying out with ATTA of 1965 but old agreement of 1965 looked outdated due to the changing ground realities. The 21<sup>st</sup> century's technological development and occurrence of new problems on Pak-Afghan border i.e. border raids; smuggling and corruption that is estimated around 80-90% in the following decade diverted both countries attention towards the renewal of custom and regulations to monitor and regularize trade (Nuri, 2012). This agreement was activated on June 21, 2011 after the replacement of bank guarantees with insurance guarantees for goods carrying vehicles (Khan, 2011). Economic relations between the two countries have long been a source of both strength and friction. The Afghanistan Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) excursion,

from 1965 to 2010, disproves the misperception that Pak-Afghan relations are full of confusion and confrontation only. This positive side of the relations shows that in spite of tautness the trade relations between the two countries going smoothly from numerous decades.

To deal with any dispute, Pak-Afghan Transit Trade Coordination Authority (PATTCA) was established on January 12, 2011. It set up an arbitral tribunal for ensuring peaceful settlement of economic and trade disputes. The APTTA is to be reviewed after every five years and if need be revised before the prescribed period (Nuri, 2012). Nonetheless, it was a positive step just before starting of the peace process between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pakistan extended full support to the goals of Kabul Conference<sup>4</sup> held on July 20, 2010. The conference was hosted by Afghan government in Kabul and co-chaired by the United Nations. The joint working group set up by Turkey, Afghanistan and Pakistan exchanged their views on the outcomes of the Kabul Conference and supported the efforts. The joint working group setup by Turkey, Afghanistan and Pakistan, exchanged views on possible output of Kabul Conference. All the countries and probably Pakistan committed on one point that the military strategy is not a workable solution to the Afghan crisis but militants should be treated as common

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<sup>4</sup> The Kabul Conference, held in July 20, 2010 was the first international conference to be held in Kabul Afghanistan. The Conference was attended by 76 delegations (including 13 from international organizations) and over 40 foreign ministers. This conference was hosted by the government of Afghanistan and co-chaired by the United Nation. The Government presented an Afghan-led plan for improving development, governance and security, including priority programs to enhance service delivery. Retrieved from <http://amudaryabasin.net/content/communique-kabul-international-conference-afghanista> The Kabul Conference is a critical stepping stone in a "Kabul Process" of transition to full Afghan leadership and responsibility, building on previous international commitments including the London Conference and outreach activities of the Afghan Government (in particular the Consultative Peace Jirga of 2-4 June 2010). Retrieved from [http://www.cevizcanprt.org/news\\_detail.php?no=13](http://www.cevizcanprt.org/news_detail.php?no=13)

people to bring them to the negotiation table through political strategy (*World bulletin*, 2012).

### **Pakistan's Security Concern over Indian Influence in Kabul**

Pakistan has serious concerns over the growing Afghan-India ties in the wake of 9/11 due to the alleged involvement of Indian consulates in Afghanistan in separatist movements in Baluchistan province of Pakistan. There is no denying the fact that Pakistan recognizes the right of the Afghan government to develop its relations with any country but the former has apprehensions over the use of Afghan soil against Pakistan (Iqbal, 2010). India has no direct geographical proximity with Afghanistan but its growing presence in the form of huge investment about \$1.2 billion in different infrastructure projects and being the fifth largest donor in Afghanistan's reconstruction work has posed great challenge for Pakistan's security. According to Pakistan, India exploits its ties with Afghanistan as a tool of creating disorder in most parts of Pakistan (Nuri, 2012; Grare, 2006). Pakistan wants to minimize Indian's presence and restrict its increasing influence in Afghanistan.

In terms of diplomacy, it is always better to keep intact the dialogue process through diplomatic channels rather than chocking ways to talks. Of course, dialogue is more effective as well as more humanist approach than bullets (Fergusson, 2010; p.5). Adopting the diplomatic channels to resolve the Afghan imbroglio, Pakistan has added strength to the peace process (Khattak, 2012). Peace and stability in Afghanistan is one of the objectives of Pakistan's foreign policy (Nuri, 2012). Pakistan will definitely help to pave way for bringing the insurgents to the talk table as well as to form broad-base government in Afghanistan. In this context, Prime Minister Gillian's visit to Afghanistan on April 16, 2011 was a right step in the right direction. On this occasion, the two countries reiterated to set up a two-tier high-level joint commission to carry forward the reconciliation process after the withdrawal of United States-led International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) troops. Firm determination was expressed to resolve the issue

of militancy and finding a negotiated settlement to insurgency through mutual consultation.

To give momentum to the peace process, Pakistan released mid ranking Taliban leaders. The *Taliban* members were released with the hope that they would contribute to the peace process by working as a bridge between insurgents and the Afghan government (Popalzai & Khan, 2012). *Al Jazeera's* reporter Bernard Smith, reporting from Kabul, said, "It's been seen as an indication that Pakistanis have adopted the idea of promoting stability here in Afghanistan." Ismail Qasimyar, the head of international relations for the peace council said, "It is a practical step in the right direction, which shows that Pakistani authorities have opened a new chapter for positive co-operation with Afghanistan" (*Al-Jazeera News*, 2013 January 1).

Meanwhile, Pak-Army Chief Gen. Kayani met the Afghan President Karzai along with other officials, including ISAF Commander Gen. Petraeus and Afghan National Army Chief of General Staff Gen. Sher Muhammad Kirmi, on the sidelines of the 31<sup>st</sup> Tripartite Commission meeting in Kabul, where the two leaders discussed the new counter-terrorism strategy for the region. To improve the regional security situation, Islamabad endorsed the Kabul plan of President Karzai that proposed peacemaking with the *Taliban*. The top military and diplomatic officials of Afghanistan, Pakistan and the US Commander Gen. Petraeus attended the meeting held in September 2010 to discuss the situation of war and the Afghan reconciliatory plan (*Times*, 2010, October 8). The most important step regarding this issue was not to accuse each other but to settle it through negotiation and to avoid killing of innocent people.

On 21 November 2012, Pakistan and Afghanistan signed the 36 tripartite border commissions in Kabul to boost the efforts of border security. In the presence of Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Ashafaq Parvez Kiyani, the Afghan Chief of General Staff (COGS) General Karimi and ISAF Commander Lieutenant General Carter known as the Tripartite Border Coordination Mechanism. An agreement for both the countries to settle the border disputes

especially raids on civilians from both side of the border (*News*, 2012, November 22). On this occasion both countries focused on strengthening of military to military cooperation and regional stability (Yousaf, 2013). The Commander of US forces in Afghanistan General Joseph F Dunford during a visit to Pakistan, on April 1, 2013 held a meeting with Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Kiyani at General Head Quarter (GHQ) Rawalpindi. General Kiyani urged the ISAF commander to help Pakistan to check cross-border attacks launched from inside Afghanistan (*News*, 2013 April 2). To encourage the efforts of building mutual trust and coordination at Pak-Afghan border, a trilateral meeting was held among Pakistan, the US and Afghanistan military commanders General Kiyani, General Joseph F Dun Ford and General Sheer Mohammad Karimi in Rawalpindi respectively (*News*, 2013, June 9).

Following three day talks in Kabul between British Prime Minister David Cameron, Afghan President Hamid Karzai and Pakistan's Prime Minister Raja Pervez Ashraf on July 19, 2012. In a joint declaration, leaders of Pakistan and Afghanistan expressed hopes that Pakistan's support to the Afghan peace process would contribute to durable peace and stability in Afghanistan. Pakistani side underlined the determination to redouble its efforts to facilitate direct intra-Afghan contacts and negotiations." Both sides emphasized the importance of peace in Afghanistan for the regional security and stability. On this occasion President Karzai said, peace process was the most important goal that we pursue to see how we could intensify the Pakistan's role in the Afghan peace process (*News*, 2012, July 19). On July 19, 2012, another round of bilateral talks was held in Kabul. Following the daylong talks, both sides agreed on to continue regular talks on Afghanistan peace process and to carry on meetings of the two-track Peace Commission. Prime Minister Pervez Ashraf assured to arrange meeting between Pak-Afghan representatives to resume regular meetings of the 'two-tier' joint commission to seek peace with the *Taliban* (Yousaf, 2012).

On January 27, 2013, an Afghan delegation, headed by the Afghan Defense Minister General Bismallah Khan Muhammadi, visited Pakistan was another goodwill gesture to

improve the bilateral relations. General Khan held a meeting with Pakistan's Army chief Gen. Kiyani (COAS). In a press release issued by the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR), the Afghan Defense Minister thanked the Pakistani authorities to release the detained *Taliban* member's and said that it will promote peace in the region. The "Tripartite Border Standing Operating Procedures" were also discussed. It was about sharing border mechanisms and co-operation for the improvement of security and defense to get help from Pakistani authorities (*News*, 2013 January 29). On August 16, 2012, at the OIC Summit at Makkah, President Zardari expressed his concern over the Afghan issue by saying that Pakistan, on every occasion, led the Afghan cause because Pakistan has been seriously affected by the unrest in Afghanistan. President Zardari on OIC platform urged the Muslim World to join Pakistan in appealing all the Afghan groups to join the peace process as for the stability of Afghanistan and the whole region was dependent on peace in Afghanistan (*The Nation*, 2012, August 17).

On May 11, 2013, general elections brought a new government set-up in Pakistan. The Afghan government raised the expectations of co-operation from Sharif's government in Pakistan. Afghanistan was cautiously optimistic about the role of PML (N) government to play its role in the elusive peace and reconciliation process (*Afghanistan Daily*, 2013 May, 13). On June, 6, 2013, President Karzai made a phone call to the newly elected Prime Minister of Pakistan Nawaz Sharif and invited him to visit Kabul with a hope that both the countries will continue to work for further improvement in the bilateral relations. Nawaz Sharif after assuming office as Prime Minister also assured to establish better relations with Afghanistan. The new government in Pakistan was considering the issue more hopefully. The PML (N) is more sympathetic towards Pakistani and Afghani *Taliban* and can assist in peace efforts in Afghanistan. Pakistan's commitment to support all initiatives and to contact regional stakeholders in Afghanistan aimed at promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan. On Sunday July 21, 2013, a Senior Pakistani diplomat, and special advisor on national security and foreign affairs, Sartaj Aziz

paid an official visit to Kabul to start high level deliberation with President Karzai and to convey a goodwill message from the new government to start a new era of good relations. Mr. Aziz held discussion with President Karzai, Afghan foreign minister Zalmay Rassoul, the HPC Chairman Salahuddin Rabbani and Minister of Commerce and Industries Anwarul Haq Ahadi. Mr. Aziz conveyed a formal invitation from Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to the Afghan President Karzai to visit Pakistan (*News*, 2013, July 20). On this occasion Sartaj Aziz said that Pakistan is willing to help startup long-stalled peace talks between the Afghan government and the *Taliban* to try put on to end to the more than 12-years old war in Afghanistan. President Karzai positively responded to the invitation and asked for setting conditions for a high-level talks designed to mend increasingly strained bilateral relations.

To give impetus to the peace talks with the *Taliban* and to strength cooperation on security and bilateral issues between Pakistan and Afghanistan, the four-tier leadership of the three countries, Afghanistan, United Kingdom (UK), and Pakistan, met on February 3-4, 2013 in London. A Trilateral meeting was held at Chequers among the British Prime Minister David Cameron, President Asif Ali Zardari, President Hamid Karzai and high military officials from both sides. Members of the Afghan High Peace Council also attended the meeting. Pakistan expressed its commitment to facilitate the reconciliation process. It was third summit in which Pakistan participated while first summit had been held in July 2012 in Kabul and second one had been held in September 2012 in New York. A timeframe of six-months was set to find a viable solution to the problem through joint and coordinated efforts. The regional peace and security was the main objective before the participants (Piracha, 2013).

Pakistan, Afghanistan and the US (Tripartite Core Group), the main players, met in Brussels on April 23-24. Pakistani delegation was led by Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Ashafaq Parvez Kiyani, Jalil Abbas Jilani, Foreign Secretary of Pakistan, and Afghanistan was represented by President Hamid Karzai (*News*, 2013, April 23). The meeting was important to

diffuse mistrust, as it came against the backdrop of some very hawkish allegations by the President Hamid Karzai against Pakistan. It was hoped by the US officials that Kerry's good terms with president Karzai would play a vital role in achieving the desired objectives of the meeting and tension would be diffused between these neighboring countries (*News*, 2013, May 7).

There are concerns of different circles in Pakistani society that the US drawdown from Afghanistan will create a vacuum that can push the country again into civil war like situation. However, it is hoped Pakistan's engagement to bring the *Taliban* to the negotiation table will definitely pave the way for a broad-based government in Afghanistan. In this way, Pakistan would also be able to overcome the growing presence of anti-Pakistani elements in Afghanistan. The détente between Pakistan and Afghanistan on the plea seems part of the strategic negotiations.

To facilitate peace talks, a five-member delegation from Afghanistan under the leadership of AHPC Chairman Salahuddin Rabbani visited Pakistan from November 19- 21, 2013. The delegation exchanged gratitude during his meeting with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Pakistani delegation on the assistance and provision of channel of communication with the *Taliban* leadership. Sartaj Aziz, special advisor to Nawaz Sharif in a statement said, "The visit of HPC delegation is part of Pakistan's continuing engagement with HPC for the facilitation of peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan" (*Dawn*, 2013 November 22). In response to HPC delegation visited, Pakistan set free three more *Taliban* detainees on November 26, 2013 to shore up peace and reconciliation process. Since November 2013, Pakistan set free thirty-seven *Taliban* leaders, almost all the key leaders, to give impetus to the Afghan peace process. Reportedly, some of the released members rejoined the *Taliban* ranks (*Dawn*, 2013, November 27).

On November 30, 2013 Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif during his first visit to Afghanistan after taking oath for the third time, expresses his views, "It is an imperative to reverse the

destruction cycle of conflict. Pakistan will continue to extend all possible help for the Afghan Peace Process” In response to these views President Karzai said, “There is no doubt that cooperation and relations with Afghanistan have expanded since Nawaz Sharif has taken office” (*Dawn*, 2013 December 1).

## Conclusion

To overcome the current volcanic eruption of insurgency, both Pakistan and Afghanistan have a unanimous approach to resolving the issue. As far as the role of Pakistan in Afghanistan peace and reconciliation is concerned, Pakistan has supported the Afghan cause on every occasion. Pakistan can play a vital role in resolving the issue by using its good offices to mitigate the differences between warring factions and the Afghan government (Grare, 2006). Therefore, inclusion of Pakistan in the HPC core-group format was not only a great achievement from Afghan side but Pakistan is also optimistic to bring major policy shift to improve its strategic ties. Pakistan is on ‘tenterhooks’ to play its role in Afghanistan (Khan & Goraya (2013). “The Peace Process Roadmap”<sup>5</sup> in which both countries expressed willingness to engage in peaceful talks was the symbol of improvement in bilateral relations. The post-2014 scenario in Afghanistan has been subject to most annoying debate now-a-days. Now, all the political parties, especially religious parties are prone to peace in the region. They are of the opinion that Pakistan must play a more constructive role so that the future setup in

<sup>5</sup> A four page document drafted by President Karzai and his inner circle for scripting events and future developments between Pakistan and Afghanistan, this roadmap based on five steps each step with its objectives. HPC Chairman Salahuddin Rabbani during his visit to Pakistan in November 2012 presented the plan. Main focus was to an end to the cross border shelling, transfer of the *Taliban* prisoners by Pakistan to Afghanistan. Last but not the least through peace process brings the insurgents to the table of direct peace talks on the initiative of US and Pakistan ahead of the drawdown of ISAF troops. Retrieved from <http://www.eurasiareview.com/10022013-afghan-peace-process-roadmap-to-2015-internal-security-nightmare-for-india-analysis/>

Kabul is not antagonistic. Regardless of the facts, whether the NATO forces exist in Afghanistan or not, cordial relationship with all the stakeholders of Afghanistan should be topmost priority for Pakistan. No doubt, Pakistan’s security is constitutently linked with Afghanistan in multiple ways. Both countries’ leadership is committed that for turning the tide of conflict and instability that has engulfed the region. To remove this cynicism Pak-Afghan joint collaboration is indispensable.

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