



View Point

Security Transition in Afghanistan: Implications for India

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NATO endorsed the exit plan from Afghanistan at the Chicago Summit held on 20-21 May, 2012. It was decided to end the Afghan mission and complete the transfer of command of security to the Afghan National Security Forces by the end of 2014. Although international forces may have broken down the ‘momentum of Taliban’, security in Afghanistan is still fragile. Major parts of the country are vulnerable to terror attacks. A series of terror attacks in several cities in April, bombings just after the departure of US President Barack Obama from Kabul and the killing of peace negotiator in May, reflect the perpetual state of conflict in Afghanistan. It is widely believed that Afghan security forces are not in a position to take full charge of security of the entire country. As ensuring security without the international forces seems uncertain, NATO’s withdrawal appears to be premature.

The implications of NATO’s withdrawal are bound to impact India’s stakes in Afghanistan. India has been trying to enlarge its footprint in Afghanistan ever since the fall of Taliban regime and recently agreed to widen its engagement in trade, investment, reconstruction and development. At the first meeting of the Indo-Afghan Partnership Council in New Delhi held on 2 May, 2012, India announced to host a conference on Afghanistan for regional investors. It has also agreed to train Afghan Security Forces. However, the entire Indian engagement and its strategic interests will hinge on how the Afghanistan security scenario unfolds after the end of the NATO

mission. Insecurity and political instability in Afghanistan can adversely affect India's security scenario.

Apart from security stakes, India has vital economic interests in Afghanistan in terms of natural resources, i.e. iron, copper, cobalt, gold and critical industrial metals like lithium. Reserves of these natural resources are estimated to be worth US \$ 1 trillion. Afghanistan is also endowed with natural gas and oil. As most of the country is unexplored due to war and conflict, prospects for additional natural resources reserves cannot be denied. Natural resources are very significant for economic development of Afghanistan that primarily relies on international development assistance. For instance, lithium is crucial for green energy products. It is used in mobile phone and laptop batteries as well as electric car batteries. As the threat of climate change looms large and there is emphasis on developing clean energy technologies, importance of lithium is bound to increase. Several Indian companies have started investing in mining sectors. For India, mining sectors and infrastructure development are suitable areas for private investment as Indian companies have hinted to invest up to US \$ 10 billion in mining and steel sectors. Afghanistan has awarded three of four blocks of its largest iron ore deposit, *Hajigak*, to a consortium of Indian companies led by the state-owned Steel Authority of India Ltd. Indian entrepreneurs have also shown interests in petroleum and copper mining blocks in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is vital for the revival of the silk route that can be a gateway for India to Central Asia for trade and energy resources. In return, transit routes will generate substantial revenue for Afghanistan. For example, TAPI (Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India) pipeline project is estimated to add around US \$ 5 million annually in transit fee to the Afghan coffer. 735 kilometers of this gas pipeline will pass through Afghanistan and the entire project could be jeopardized, if the security scenario in Afghanistan does not improve. The NATO's withdrawal has created a sense of uncertainty in Afghanistan and regional countries are anxious about the country's future.

Afghanistan figures predominantly in Indian foreign policy and New Delhi needs to look beyond the "post-2014 scenario". India has pledged around US \$ 2.0

billion development assistance to Afghanistan and it is engaged in several areas of reconstruction and development. However, Afghan reconstruction is inexorably interlinked with security, and development and assistance cannot take place in an insecure environment. Although the United States and the European Union encourage India towards a broad engagement in rebuilding Afghanistan, Pakistan has always been apprehensive of India's engagement. Tensed India-Pakistan relationship can add to insecurity and risk the potential of regional trade. Besides economic viability, there needs to be some sort of political stability and security predictability for Indian companies so that they can weigh up the pros and cons of their business engagement in Afghanistan.

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