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## REMARKS

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### Stability in Afghanistan & Pakistan in a Post-War-NATO Period: Whither Transatlantic Unity?

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I want to thank the Konrad Adenauer Foundation for inviting me to beautiful Cadenabbia to participate in this conference.<sup>1</sup> As I prepared my remarks it struck me just how exceptional has been the trans-Atlantic partnership on Afghanistan. It is more than twelve years since the International Security Assistance Force was established under NATO command. And despite the heavy shared investment in blood and treasure over the years, the trans-Atlantic partnership proved unshakeable.

But this partnership is entering a new phase. With ISAF now playing the role of mentor, Afghan security forces exceeded expectations in maintaining security that allowed millions of Afghan citizens to cast votes in last month's presidential elections with an impressive 60 percent turnout. Despite continued hardships and frustration, the Afghan people demonstrated a clear desire for peace and freedom by choosing pro-West and politically moderate candidates. These noble accomplishments however are in jeopardy.

#### **Where Are We?**

Let me give you a snapshot of where we are today in our collective support to Afghanistan's security. As of April 1 of this year, ISAF numbers stood at over 51,000 troops, 33,000 of them from the US and most of the remaining 18,000 from Europe. Two of six regional commands are Europe-led – Germany in the north, Italy in the West -- and three others under US lead. The first major change factor to consider is the 2010 Lisbon Roadmap, by which the ISAF mission expires this year as the Afghan Government assumes full responsibility for its security. That transition has been a remarkable success as testified by the election results.

Second, as you know, Afghan President Hamid Karzai refused to sign a Bilateral Security Agreement that would set parameters for a continued US military role in Afghanistan. As the largest troop contributor it is critical for the other European countries that a BSA be signed first with the US. There is, fortunately, broad-based and deep political support among Afghans to sign one, and both presidential candidates set to square off in a second election round committed to immediately sign a BSA once in office. The delay though has negatively impacted NATO member states' planning for post-2014 contributions.

<sup>1</sup> Max Primorac is President of the Institute for Stabilization and Transition, a nonprofit organization in Washington, DC. This paper adapts remarks he delivered on June 3, 2014 to the Asia Panel of the *Transatlantic Conference: Global Challenges – Shared Culture & Values*, sponsored by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Cadenabbia, Italy. These remarks represents his personal views.




**International Security Assistance Force**

**Troop Contributing Nations**

	Albania	72		Germany	2,730		Poland	968
	Armenia	121		Greece	10		Portugal	81
	Australia	351		Hungary	131		Romania	1,021
	Austria	3		Iceland	3		Slovakia	277
	Azerbaijan	94		Ireland	7		Slovenia	34
	Bahrain	0		Italy	2,019		Spain	259
	Belgium	138		Jordan	1,066		Sweden	270
	Bosnia & Herzegovina	53		Republic of Korea	50		The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia <sup>1</sup>	150
	Bulgaria	387		Latvia	131		Tonga	55
	Croatia	160		Lithuania	95		Turkey	459
	Czech Republic	250		Luxembourg	10		Ukraine	27
	Denmark	214		Malaysia	2		United Arab Emirates	35
	El Salvador	13		Mongolia	40		United Kingdom	5,200
	Estonia	159		Montenegro	25		United States	33,500
	Finland	95		Netherlands	200		Total	51,178
	France	211		New Zealand	2			
	Georgia	805		Norway	108			

*Note on numbers:* Numbers of troops should be taken as indicative as they change daily.

<sup>1</sup> Turkey recognises the Republic of Macedonia with its constitutional name.  
<sup>2</sup> In line with ISAF's planning and in coordination with NATO, Singapore has completed its contribution to ISAF on 22 June 2013, Canada on 31 March 2014.

1 April 2014

Third, responding to pleas from Pakistan's newly elected Prime Minister, last December the US halted its aggressive drone program against terrorists using sanctuaries in Pakistan to launch attacks on Afghanistan. While effective, the drone program is uniformly resented in Pakistan as an assault on its sovereignty. Fourth, the 2012 Nato Summit in Chicago committed member states to provide \$4.1 billion annually in security assistance to Afghanistan post-2014.

Finally, last week US President Barack Obama announced his post-2014 plan for Afghanistan with a two-year military drawdown to zero by the end of 2016. What I found odd was that President Obama compared his plan to "like in Iraq" where he also withdrew all US troops but which saw the country plunge back into large-scale violence since. It is my opinion that the Administration's plan will similarly undo trans-Atlantic achievements in Afghanistan. By extension, this plan poses serious questions about the future stability of neighboring Pakistan as well.

As military support draws down so will corresponding non-security assistance to both countries. Between 2002 and 2010, European Union member states gave Afghanistan €8 billion in economic and humanitarian aid, excluding security assistance. In addition, from 2009 through 2013 EU countries provided Pakistan €2.5 billion in economic aid. But as NATO's presence ends so will these levels of aid. Already, whereby the US provided Afghanistan \$4.5 billion in assistance in 2010, next year that annual amount is set to drop to \$1.2 billion. Similar aid cuts are envisioned for Pakistan.

As part of its approval of US foreign aid in 2014, the US Congress mandated a new assessment of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). The Center for Naval Analysis conducted the study<sup>2</sup> and examined the current security environment, analyzed ANSF's force structure, and identified its capability gaps based on NATO resourcing plans to neutralize the threat. The results are depressing. The study concludes that

<sup>2</sup> *Independent Assessment of the Afghan National Security Forces*. The Center for Naval Analysis' Center for Strategic Studies, January, 2014.

from 2015 to 2018 Afghanistan will see a resurgent Taliban as NATO draws back and terrorist groups focus attacks on Kabul. They will gradually seize control over rural areas encircling key towns and connect those areas to corridors leading to sanctuaries in Pakistan. Furthermore, CNA predicts the enemy will conduct a probing campaign to hone in on ANSF weaknesses while launching terrorist bombings and political assassinations to destabilize the Afghan state. The probing campaign will be followed by more aggressive military offensives.

### ***The Perils of Withdrawal***

The CNA estimates that ANSF needs a force of 373,400 troops to confront the terrorist threat at a cost of up to \$6 billion per year, far below NATO's plan to support a smaller ANSF force of 258,500 at an annual cost of \$4 billion. A number of security advisers will be needed to address gaps in ANSF mobility, logistics, communication, recruitment and training, air support, intelligence gathering and analysis through at least 2018, two years beyond the US Administration's new plan. The upshot of under-sourcing Afghan security forces, according to the CNA, will be to discourage the Taliban and other extremist groups from seeking a political settlement, though I believe these groups have no interest in a political settlement no matter the circumstances. The end result is predictable: civil war.

The combined economic impact on the Afghan state from reduced security and non-security aid will be dramatic. Afghanistan will face an economic depression that will lead to the collapse of the central government. The country remains sharply dependent on foreign money having failed over the past years to generate sufficient tax revenues and redress endemic corruption. Afghanistan estimates it needs \$7 billion a year in aid to meet annual budget needs but the US is prepared to offer \$1 billion while others will offer less. Already, this year the Finance Ministry faces a 20 percent shortfall to fund operational expenses. That means forthcoming cuts in salaries to civil servants and social programs. As salaries are not paid, government workers will melt away leaving the provinces wide open for Taliban forces to step in without a fight.

### ***Back to the Future?***

Post-NATO withdrawal scenarios do not offer us a pretty picture with civil war and a breakdown of the Afghan state into warlord-controlled statelets as real prospects with the attendant humanitarian and refugee crises. Very worrisome is that some of these statelets become safe havens for terrorist training, operations and planning against the West in a replay of pre-9/11 Afghanistan. The tens of billions in trans-Atlantic investment that while dotted with many disappointments along the way has made a stark difference in the lives of Afghanistan's people and stabilized the Central and South Asian regions. While in Pakistan, its Frankenstein – the Taliban and other proxy terrorist groups– comes back to haunt its creator. The irony is that Afghanistan should become a safe haven for the Pakistan Taliban.

We can expect Afghanistan's neighbors Iran and Pakistan to increasingly interfere in Afghan affairs as they seek to fill the power vacuum left behind by departing NATO forces. Here, it is important to note extant cross-border tensions. Iran and Afghanistan share a mostly unguarded border where substantial legal and illegal trade takes place; think heroin, smuggled goods as well as minority Sunni Baluchi insurgents challenging Shia rule from sanctuaries in Pakistan and Afghanistan. You may be surprised to learn that the Afghan-Pakistan border, the 26,000 kilometer long Durrand Line penned at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century by the British Raj then ruling India as a way of delineating its Great Power rivalry with Imperial Russia, is questioned by many Afghans. As in so many places throughout the former colonial world, administrative borders do not align with national ones and in Kabul one hears as matter of fact claims of Pakistan territory. This encourages Pakistan to treat Afghanistan within the prism of its strategic rivalry with India. Expect border clashes as Afghan security forces pursue insurgents fleeing to their safe havens. The ensuing regional instability threatens weak governments in Central Asia and undermines civilian rule in Pakistan.

Keep in mind that Pakistan boasts the sixth largest military with 1.3 million troops facing an equal number of Indian troops across the border. Pakistan fought (and lost) three wars with India over its claims over Kashmir in 1947, 1965 and 1999. And since 1971, Pakistan has used terrorist groups, such as the Lashkar-e-Taiba, as proxies against India. The 2008 terrorist attack in Mumbai killing over 200 people is ascribed to Pakistan's intelligence services. Another such attack could escalate into a fourth war. In a worst case scenario, given the accelerating power gap between the two countries, Pakistan might look to its 100 deployed nuclear weapons as a strategic equalizer in any conflict with India. Nuclear proliferation is also a concern as an economically desperate Pakistan could decide to sell nuclear weapons to Arab countries in the event Iran develops a nuclear bomb.

### **What to do?**

For many, staying the course in Afghanistan is really about stabilizing Pakistan that presents a far greater global threat to the trans-Atlantic alliance given its large population, long standing support for terrorism and arsenal of nuclear weapons. But figuring out what policy options are available to manage this threat depends on understanding the sources of the threat.



Up until now, US policy towards Pakistan has been based on identifying a set of incentives that can shape Pakistan decision-making in ways that do not threaten others. South Asia expert Dr. Christine Fair of Georgetown University questions that premise. Fair challenges the wisdom of treating Pakistan as a normal security-seeking state. Trying to “solve the Kashmir dispute” by legitimizing Pakistan's territorial claims in a grand political bargain scheme to remove the root causes of its rivalry with India would actually reward and encourage more bad behavior from Islamabad.<sup>3</sup>

She describes Pakistan as an ideological state whose *raison d'être* is based on a civilizational conflict with India that demands a permanent state of “defensive jihad” against the “Hindu threat.” Conveniently, this thesis justifies large defense budgets, military control of state enterprises, use of terrorists as proxies and no accountability for all the wars the military has lost. According to Fair, Western concessions to Pakistan actually encourage aggression. It is interesting to note that the main area of recruiting for both Pakistan's officer corps and jihadists is the Punjab, home to many Muslims refugees who fled India during the bloody war of partition in 1947 – family memories die hard.

There is strength in Dr. Fair's argument as it is not the first state to be characterized as ideological. The same argument was heard during the Cold War and defining the nature of the Soviet Union as a normal state or an ideological one that could be trusted to hold fast to its commitments differentiated Western policy approaches during that period.

In sum, when assessing what can be done to moderate Pakistan behavior one must first answer the basic question posed by Dr. Fair of whether it is a country with an Army or an Army with a country. Are the interests of the Pakistani state subordinated to the interests of its military with, therefore, little prospect of real civilian control over and normalization of the state? That answer has enormous implications for US foreign policy making.

<sup>3</sup> See *Fighting to the End: The Pakistan Army's Way of War*, by C. Christine Fair, Oxford University Press, 2014. For the “grand bargain” thesis see *From Great Game to Grand Bargain: Ending Chaos in Afghanistan and Pakistan*, by Barnett R. Rubin and Ahmed Rashid in *Foreign Affairs Magazine*, November/December 2008.

**Policy options**

So, what should we do? Let us first make a set of assumptions. I think it is reasonable to maintain that India and especially Pakistan will continue to see mutual interest in a conflict-based relationship albeit careful not to escalate towards full-fledged war. The Taliban can also be expected to gain control over land in Afghanistan while their colleagues in Pakistan grow in lethality and boldness, expanding the global terrorist threat accordingly. With US global leadership diminishing, China's regional influence will grow. And one thing that we can be sure of is that time will not heal. Doing nothing will not improve matters, but rather make them fester.

For Pakistan there are three general policy options to consider. First is the comprehensive partnership approach that has guided past trans-Atlantic policy since President Obama took office. It supposes that through economic and security aid and diplomacy we can build trust with Islamabad and, along with modernizing and strengthening the state, Pakistan will then pursue more moderate policy choices. But \$70 billion later Pakistan gave sanctuary to Osama bin Laden, a deal breaker as far as the American public is concerned.<sup>4</sup>

Another option is the military first approach. Under President Bush and most Administrations before him, the US pursued a realist approach, one that looked to work with the real power brokers in Pakistan to obtain desired policy outcomes and, in Pakistan's case, the decision-makers are in the military. Yet, that did not work out well as Pakistan's military leaders proved unreliable, corrupt and extremist.

A third option was recently proposed by a former State Department official Daniel Markey called "defensive insulation."<sup>5</sup> In effect, this option represents a throwing of one's hands in the air in hopeless frustration that Pakistan can ever respond to positive incentives. Under this option, the Pakistan threat must be contained through a policy of military retaliation, economic sanctions, drone attacks from bases in Afghanistan, and partnership with India. Yet, as Markey acknowledges, such an approach would permanently poison Pakistan relations with the US, risk further radicalization, and collapse the state with even worse outcomes.

As regards Afghanistan, the current approach is a repeat of what we decided to do in Iraq and the pitfalls of full military withdrawal there are likely to beset Afghanistan. The alternative approach would be conditioned-based military drawdown within a context of a continued US military role as political stabilizer, displacing regional rivalries and discouraging third-party adventurism, much as it has done in Korea, Europe and elsewhere. Strangely, President Obama conflates the ending of wars with full US military withdrawal. It is quite striking that by withdrawing all US forces by end of 2016 the President denies his successor a critical policy tool in defining future US strategy in that dangerous part of the world.

Others may argue that a regional rather than narrowly defined bilateral approach towards Afghanistan and Pakistan is warranted. According to this view, the focus ought to be on mentoring India and Pakistan to cooperate on Afghanistan and refrain from pursuing strategic rivalries. China, in this approach, is seen as having significant commercial and security interests (think of China's restive Muslim populations in its Western provinces) and, therefore, would promote regional peace and stability. Such a diplomacy-centered approach would be buttressed with investments in expanding regional transportation and energy infrastructure that would promote peace and prosperity through economic inter-dependency and shift the political narrative from one of conflict to one of cooperation. However, as I mentioned, neither Pakistan nor India have shown a proclivity for peaceful co-existence and Chinese diplomacy is centered on bullying neighbors and bribing governments to win commercial contracts to meet its insatiable energy needs.

<sup>4</sup> *Magnificent Delusions: Pakistan, the United States, and an Epic History of Misunderstanding* by Husain Haqqani, Perseus Books Group 2013.

<sup>5</sup> *No Exit from Pakistan: America's Tortured Relationship with Islamabad* by Daniel S. Markey, Cambridge University Press 2013.

**Conclusion**

I have grossly exceeded the time allotted me and I regret offering such a pessimistic account of future prospects in Afghanistan and Pakistan. It may be that events take place to offer a rethink to current US policy, but as is it currently configured the future for Afghanistan and Pakistan looks grim.

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