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Strategic Depth and Pakistan's links with Radical Islamic Groups

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Abstract

Though India remained a traditional security concern for Pakistan, the Pakistani conception of Strategic Depth in Afghanistan is much broader than mere military depth and related to expansion of Pakistan's influence towards West and Central Asia by colluding with radical religious groups and working towards installing a pro-Pakistani regime in Afghanistan. Pakistan seems to have been influenced by the idea that the more strategic depth it acquires towards its north and west, the more strengthened and emboldened it becomes vis-à-vis India on the Kashmir issue. Not merely that, Pakistan's search for natural resources and market is intertwined with the idea of deepening its strategic depth towards its north and west and keeping Afghanistan dependent on it for trade. Keeping this in view, Pakistan established strong links with radical religious groups to expand its influence primarily among the Islamic countries of Central Asia and in Afghanistan. However, increased factions within the Taliban along with the loss of Pakistani grip over them produced power vacuum congenial to the growth of a dangerous non-state actor – Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which is likely to be as much of a threat to Pakistan as to the international community. Therefore, Pakistan needs to review its age-old strategies of supporting terror groups and assist in evolving a coordinated response to the Afghan muddle.

Key Words: *Strategies, Sphere of influence, Strategic, Military and Economic depth, Non-state actor.*

Introduction: The argument that Pakistan pursues a policy of securing military depth against India by expanding its influence into Afghanistan is substantiated by the viewpoint that military planners in Pakistan had struggled over the years to overcome the deficiencies of Pakistan's geographic narrowness and the presence of important cities such as Lahore and Karachi and communication networks within short striking distance of India. This strategic concern was first appreciated and expressed in February 1946 by General Arthur F. Smith, then Chief of General Staff in India. It was henceforth argued that a pro-Pakistani government in Kabul was necessary to give Rawalpindi the much required strategic depth to launch a counter-offensive from Afghan territory.¹

However, in contrast to such a viewpoint, General Mirza Aslam Beg who had first-hand knowledge about Pakistan's military and strategic policies, argues that “the strategic depth concept was developed to gain territorial space in case of war with India has no military logic, nor does it conform to the operational policy of Pakistan, which is to defend its borders and defeat the enemy if it attempts to violate Pakistan's territory”.² Analysed broadly, Pakistan's definition of strategic depth is more comprehensive. It is related to Pakistan's spread of influence towards Afghanistan and Central Asia rather than ensuring military depth exclusively. The influence is exercised through

maintaining links with radical Islamic groups and spreading the ideology of Islam, containing the influence of other regional powers, ensuring aid and arms by facilitating the presence and operation of great powers like the US in the War on Terror, blocking its territory for the transfer of goods from Afghanistan and Central Asia towards India and vice versa and invigorating its policy of linking itself with Central Asia through communication networks and ensuring pro-Pakistani establishment in Afghanistan undercutting India's influence and influence of other major powers as well.

Pakistan's Preoccupation with Afghanistan since its Emergence: Following its emergence as a homeland for Indian Muslims to the west of India, Pakistan was privileged to spread its influence towards its north and west at the expense of India due to religious commonality and the removal of the geographical bridge between India and Afghanistan. However, given all the leverages, Pakistan ran into problems with Afghanistan just after its emergence. Pakistan's strategic concerns began to be defined by its expressed apprehensions on the issue of Pashtunistan and non-recognition of the Durand Line as an international border between Afghanistan and Pakistan by various Afghan rulers. For Pakistan, controlling the border areas with Afghanistan has been a means to control Afghanistan making the latter dependent on the former for trade.³ Though the porous and close tribal and cultural linkages between the Pushtuns across the Durand Line affected the security interests of Pakistan, Pashtunistan, more than an ethnic issue has been a geopolitical issue as it was considered vital by Afghan regimes to gain the only access to the Indian Ocean and therefore to the world market. Pakistan's interest in Afghanistan has been to install a pro-Pakistani religious regime so that the Pashtunistan issue is subsumed under the large banner of Islamic identity.

Pakistan's Strategy Following Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan: After the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, Pakistan tried to pursue multiple foreign policy objectives rather than being solely concerned about bringing Afghanistan into its control in order to secure military depth against India. One of the most important Pakistani objectives during 1980s was to create a corridor of radical Islamists and illegal arms spanning Afghanistan, Pakistan and Kashmir. Pakistan saw an alliance with the US not only as an opportunity to offset the power imbalance with India but it was also aware of the long-term benefits of cultivating Afghanistan through muffling the demand for Pashtunistan and spreading its influence into the Central Asian part of the Soviet Union with the objective of establishing a corridor of influence to its north and west by throwing its weight behind radical Islamic groups. By accomplishing this objective, Pakistan could enhance its influence from Kashmir to Central Asia even after the American assistance ceased. The US in liaison with Pakistani intelligence provided the foundation to the mushrooming growth of madrassas, which provided recruits for fighting the communist forces in Afghanistan. The Pashtuns of Pakistan from the border areas joined the Mujahedeen ranks including recruits from other provinces of Pakistan, who had transited through the Deobandi madrasas. Pakistani intelligence ISI channeled the funds and arms provided by the US and Saudi Arabia to the insurgents.⁴ There were also small scale providers of funds and arms such as the UK, China, the Gulf states, Egypt, and Israel. Afghanistan became battleground for the leadership of Muslims worldwide orchestrating the conflict between Iran's Shia and Saudi Arabia's Sunni sects. Pakistan trained Islamists with the common principles of the Deobandi tradition and created common infrastructure for their training. It received huge amount of aid from Saudi Arabia to promote Sunni variant of Islamism. Pakistan believed that by strengthening insurgency against the Soviet Union, it could also strengthen insurgency in Kashmir. It also internationalized the Kashmir issue being emboldened by the support it received from the West and Islamic countries for its active anti-Soviet role. Pakistan hoped to reverse the agreement reached between itself and India in Shimla. After the successful independence of Bangladesh, India signed

the Shimla Agreement from a position of strength. In this agreement, it was agreed that Kashmir was a bilateral issue to be resolved bilaterally. Benefits accruing from the active anti-Soviet role created hopes among the Pakistani leadership that they could now effectively internationalise the issue. Later, during the Kargil War, many non-Pakistani terrorists were found across the Line of Control pointing to the fact that radical groups from different countries undergoing common training in Pakistan could also be used in Kashmir.⁵

The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan provided Pakistan with the required security environment to pursue for a friendly and amenable regime in Afghanistan so that Pashtunistan issue was never raised and got subsumed within the large banner of Islamic identity. Pakistan directed Pashtun hostility to fighting against the Soviet Army under the rubric of political Islam. Because of the cultural affinities of the Sunni Muslim Pashtuns on the either side of the border, and through the influence of Pashtuns in the upper echelons of Pakistan's army and bureaucracy, Pakistan's Afghan policy tilted in favour of mujahedeen parties. To defuse Pashtun nationalism and exercise control over Pashtun mujahedeen, Zia discouraged the Afghan nationalists in exile to convene a loya jirga in Pakistan and form a unified command through which weapons could be channeled to fight the Jihad.

It is noteworthy that the issue of Pashtunistan is more a geopolitical issue than an expression of ethnic solidarity. The fact that Pashtunistan dominated Afghan foreign policy in the early 1960s despite the little support it enjoyed among the Pashtuns of Pakistan points to its geopolitical character. The demand for Pashtunistan, if conceded, would grant Afghanistan the most desired route to the Indian Ocean. Afghanistan for long has been in the look out of routes to reach out to the world market. However, Pakistan's policy is to make Afghanistan overly dependent on it for market so that its influence there does not get diluted. Pakistan has lent support to various radical religious groups to create an overarching Islamic identity displacing ethnic nationalism. Afghan governments tried to undercut Pashtun nationalism even before the Jihad in the 1980s. For example, it was in 1973 that the then Prime Minister Zulifkar Ali Bhutto provided sanctuary to Islamist leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar with a view to undermining the established government in Kabul. In recent years, overcoming the problem of Pashtunistan is allied with Pakistan's objective of spreading its influence further towards its north and west. Pakistan tried to create such an identity by propping up the Taliban during the Civil War period in Afghanistan.⁶

Pakistan's interest to militarily strengthen itself against India by capitalising on the Soviet Union's Afghan intervention was evident in Zia's refusal of Carter Administration's offer of \$4 million. Reagan government provided Pakistan with an aid package worth more than \$3.2 billion.⁷ However, the lion share of the aid package was used by Pakistan towards providing thousands of bases to so-called Mujahedeen in the tribal areas. The tribal belt, extending from Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) till northern Balochistan in Pakistan, acted as a natural destination for refugees and Mujahedeen from Afghanistan. The Mujahideen became the first non-NATO recipients of the sophisticated weapons.⁸

While the Soviet forces were bogged down in Afghanistan, Pakistan thought it to be the right time to spread its influence further towards its north where the Islamic states of Central Asia are situated. Pakistan, in order to spread its influence into the Soviet Republics of the Central Asian region trained Afghan groups and sent copies of the Koran across the border through them. An organisation named 'Islamic Union of the Northern Peoples of Afghanistan' was created in 1988 with purpose of infusing Pakistani influence into the Central Asian landmass more effectively.⁹

Pakistan's support to the Mujahedeen was carefully calibrated so that it retained control over the

outcome of the war and averted a direct confrontation with the Soviet Union. Unlike Iran, it channeled funds and arms to specific groups. For example, it funneled assistance to Peshwar based alliance of seven Islamic parties and the lion share of which was provided to Hekmetyar's Hizb-e-Islami. The Islamic dimension of the resistance was encouraged by Pakistan to keep the resistance dependent on it. Fighters from all over the Muslim world were encouraged to join the Jihad in Afghanistan. To strengthen the insurgency, the ISI made the Peshwar-based parties agree to form a Seven Party Alliance and stipulated that every mujahedeen commander in the field belonged to one of the seven parties. If he failed to do so, the commander obtained nothing from the ISI – no arms, no ammunition, no training for his troops, without which he could not exist.¹⁰

Pakistan's Attempt at Denying India any Economic Depth: A historical foray into Pakistani actions in Afghanistan suggests that they are not likely to be directed to seek a stable and peaceful Afghanistan unless Pakistan's aspiration for a pro-Islamabad regime allowing it the required strategic depth against India is fulfilled. As it has already been outlined above that though the concept of 'Strategic Depth' has been defined primarily in military terms by different experts on military and strategic affairs, it has a broader connotation in reality. Starting from the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, Pakistan pursued proactive policies towards Afghanistan not only to secure a pliable government in Kabul to acquire military depth against India, but it was also interested to expand its sway into the resource-rich Central Asian region to acquire political and economic depth against India. Economic depth was intended to allow Islamabad natural resources of Central Asia at the expense of India and the political depth to allow Islamabad to gain political support against India on territorial issues like Kashmir and to serve to raise its international standing among the Islamic countries.¹¹

Pakistan does not want Indian influence in Afghanistan primarily due to its aspirations of keeping Afghanistan and Central Asia away from Indian sphere of influence and to keep them under its own influence as much as possible. It has therefore scuttled the Indian effort at the reconstruction activities by attacking its embassy in Kabul and consulates in various places like Jalalabad. Afghanistan's membership in South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has provided India with the opportunity to reach out to Central Asia. But such prospects have been doomed by Pakistan as it was reluctant to allow its territory being used as a conduit for Indo-Afghan or Indo-Central Asian trade. Pakistan opposed Afghanistan's membership in SAARC and has always taken advantage of its geo-strategic position in blocking the transfer of goods to its south-east.

In order to reduce Afghanistan's dependence on a single entry point into the world through the port of Karachi and having been denied trade and transit rights to Afghanistan through Pakistan, India was involved in building a 218 km Zaranj-Delaram road link with Iran, which would give Afghanistan access to sea-ports like Chabahar and facilitate its trade with India and the Gulf countries. India's interest lies in the establishment of a North-South corridor linking India with Iran, Afghanistan, Central Asia and Russia.¹²

Pakistan's Evolving Afghan Strategies: Strengths and Limitations: Soviet Union disintegrated in the early 1990s and gave way to the emergence of six Central Asian states which were landlocked but rich with natural resources. With the perceived loosening of Indian ties and influence in the region after the dismantlement of its closest partner, Pakistan was eager to extend both trade and political ties to the region. This required stability in Afghanistan ripped apart by Civil War and local rule of the warlords.

Pakistan's favourite Hekmetyar failed to subdue other ethnic forces in Afghanistan despite making repeated attempts and under these circumstances, the second democratically elected government of Benazir Bhutto, under its Interior Minister General Naseerullah Babur prepared the ground work to utilise the Taliban to bring stability to southern and eastern Afghanistan. He foresaw greater alignment between the American and Pakistani geopolitical interests in Afghanistan in terms of opening of trade routes and forging links with different resource-rich Central Asian states. The fact that the Taliban consisted of many members drawn from the Central Asian states rather than representing exclusively the Pashtun Afghans of the refugee camps in Pakistan point to its fabricated structure to suit Pakistan's geopolitical interests.

Following the 9/11 attack on the US's twin towers and the Taliban's refusal to hand over Al Qaeda operatives to Washington brought the US and the Taliban to opposite camps. However, even after Pakistan joined the US led war on terror; it did not stop its support for the Taliban. Pakistan managed to salvage its policy on Kashmir and Central Asia even after joining War on Terror by maintaining an ambiguous stance. General Musharraf highlighted as one of the most important reasons to join the War on Terror was to 'safeguard the cause of Kashmir'.¹³ He linked Pakistan's decision to join War on Terror to India's attempt to get violence in Kashmir recognised as terrorism at an international level. After Pakistan joined War on Terror, terror incidents in India increased manifold. According to Kanti Bajpai, terrorist violence since 9/11 has been continuous and audacious. Terrorist attack on Kashmir Assembly on October 1, 2001, attack on Indian Parliament two months later on December 13, 2001, attack on army camp in May 2002, killing of Abdul Ghani Lone, a moderate leader in the separatist All Party Hurriyat Conference and attack on Hindu pilgrims on their way to sacred Amarnath temple in Kashmir and the Akshardham temple in Gujarat bear ample testimony to the fact of increasing terrorist violence in the aftermath of 9/11 attack.¹⁴ In the War on Terror, while Pakistan is battling against terrorists in the AfPak region in its western frontier, violence in the east is characterised as a freedom struggle. Pakistan's ploy to join the War on Terror has reaped rich dividends in terms of showing it as serious country, which really wants to get rid of terrorists on its land. At the same time, terrorism in Kashmir was put on the back-burner as a secondary affair to be dealt with after the War on Terror or to be glossed over as an issue related to freedom struggle in Kashmir.

Pakistan provided recurring support to the Afghan Taliban surreptitiously. Cables sent by the US ambassador, Anne Patterson, stated that Pakistan supports at least four terror/insurgent groups: the Afghan Taliban, the Haqqani network, the Hekmetyar network and Lashker-e-Teiba to strengthen its position in Afghanistan.¹⁵ Pakistan led a selective military operation against the radical groups who turned against the Pakistani state. It harped on the issue of violation of its sovereignty to curtail the American operation on its territory so as to shape the operation suitable to its own needs. America kept supplying a huge amount of economic and military aid to Pakistan because it was vital to Washington's grand designs in Central Asia.¹⁶

Pakistan's complaint that it faced a dual threat coming from its eastern and western frontier during the War on Terror led Obama Administration to develop AfPak strategy which envisaged that territorial integrity of Pakistan had to be maintained for success in Afghanistan. In order to stabilize the border areas and combat terrorism on its soil as part of the War on Terror, Pakistan received enormous aid from the US. While Pakistan desperately needed the US arms and aid to strengthen itself against India and to play a greater role in Afghanistan and Central Asia, it has had to contain the regional ambitions of Iran, Russia and India and extra-regional ambitions of the US to secure its influence in Afghanistan and through it in Central Asia.

The long-term relationship between Pakistan and the extremist Islamic groups provided the former the leverage to broker peace in various regions on the Asian continent. Pakistan's age-old strategy of exercising influence over radical Islamist groups paid it off well as Pakistan was no more treated as the "epicentre of terrorism" but as an interlocutor in seeking a practical solution the issues affecting their national security. Pakistan was able to limit India's influence on Afghan issue by exercising influence over other regional powers.¹⁷

Pakistan's military and the intelligence wing believed radical religious groups could be an asset in addressing its security dilemma posed by India – a much bigger power in terms of size, population and conventional army by making Pakistan more relevant to the American objectives, first, by pushing the Soviets out of Afghanistan and subsequently by bringing closer alignment between its interests and those of Americans in Central Asia. These groups also indirectly helped Pakistan forge close relationship with other regional powers with stakes in Afghanistan.

Lack of Coordinated Response to the Afghan Muddle: It is noteworthy that China was least interested to intervene in the Afghan muddle and antagonize the Taliban given its concerns of Islamic uprising in Xinjiang and therefore had a free ride on American military operations though later on showed an increased interest in Afghanistan due to the gradual draw down of American forces and to execute its Silk Road Economic Belt project by holding peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban. American reliance on Pakistan also determined Indian role in Afghanistan to a large extent given Rawalpindi's sensitivities towards an increased role of New Delhi had to be taken care of by Washington. There is no gainsaying the fact that Pakistan's policies involving security issues and primarily its relations with India and Afghanistan are controlled by its military in collusion with the intelligence wing ISI and formulated in Rawalpindi rather than in Islamabad.¹⁸

Absence of a viable and inclusive regional framework to address the Afghan issue enhanced the American role in the region indirectly contributing to Pakistan's ability to shape the contours of Afghan developments. Russia, Iran and China despite their concerns over the rise of Sunni fundamentalism sought Pakistani cooperation to stem this due to their common antipathy towards the American designs in the region along with the availability of contending regional frameworks to address regional security issues.

Russia has been keen to see the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) playing a major role on security issues while China looks to the Shanghai Regional Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and Iran is interested to see other forms of regional groupings to lessen the role of China and Russia in Afghanistan and Central Asia. The long-term relationship between Pakistan and the extremist Islamic groups provided the former with the leverage to broker peace in various regions on the Asian continent. The quadripartite summit of Russia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Tajikistan in Sochi, hosted by President Dmitry Medvedev, pointed to a redefining of the relationship between the two countries in the post-Cold War era in so far as Kremlin realised that seeing Islamabad as part of the region's problems did not help to advance the Russian goal of playing a bigger role in the region and underlined it must be part of the solution.¹⁹

The US, China and Russia and other regional powers perceived threats from different terror groups and therefore lacked a common threat perception and sought Pakistani cooperation to manage their national security concerns particularly for the twin reasons of Islamabad's geographical contiguity with Afghanistan and its control over radical Islamic groups operating within and from Afghanistan and Pakistan. These countries believe that Pakistan would use its

influence over specific terror groups to desist from posing threat to these countries. For example, China expressed its concerns over the Uighur-separatist group East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) being trained, armed and sheltered by Al-Qaeda and the Tehrik-I Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Beijing was also wary of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), the principal host to this group making significant advances in the northern Afghanistan. Similarly, the US has been worried about the resurgence of the terror groups like Al-Qaeda and continued armed attacks on the NATO and US forces by the militant shades of the Afghan Taliban.

Primary threats to India emanated from the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba operating in Afghanistan but New Delhi failed to comprehensively engage the regional powers like Iran and Russia on the Afghan issue partly due to its dependence on American military strategy. India's estranged historical relationship with China also prohibited it to engage it on regional security issues. This, in turn, led to India's engagement with Afghanistan taking predominantly a bilateral shape.

Lack of a common-front against terrorism led to the Pakistani belief that it could manage Chinese and American security concerns and promote its geopolitical and geo-economic interests along with them while simultaneously undercutting Indian role. As the American geopolitical objectives seemed to be farfetched with the gradual drawdown of its engagement in Afghanistan, the US welcomed increasing Chinese economic activity and role in the reconciliation process in Kabul. China has pledged \$46 billion to Pakistan for building Gwadar port and interlinking transport corridors between the port and Chinese province of Xinjiang in order to develop the Silk Road Economic Belt linking China to Europe through Central Asia and Middle East. This Chinese initiative has been invited by Kabul, Islamabad and Washington as well. It would enhance Beijing's economic foot-print in Afghanistan along with Pakistan and would also fulfil the American larger geopolitical aspirations. All these reasons have made a coordinated response to Afghan issue farfetched and elusive by far.²⁰

Looming ISIS threat: The Pakistani control over the radical groups has become slimmer than ever before following the public announcement of the demise of Mullah Omar on July 29, 2015, the supreme head of the Afghan Taliban by the Afghan government. The unity of the Taliban movement has been sabotaged by leadership struggles. Though Omar died in Pakistan in April 2013, Islamabad kept this as a secret for two years just to maintain the fiction that the movement was united and was under its control. This also helped Islamabad prop up the new leader Mullah Akhtar Mansour on its own soil by appointing him by a shura outside Afghanistan and pursue American sponsored peace talks with the Afghan government with the Chinese assistance.²¹

Islamabad was aware of the increased factions within the Taliban movement and its reduced clout over these groups. Mansour does not command enough support within the movement and is seriously challenged by other prominent leaders of the movement. Mullah Abdul Quayyum Zakir, another deputy of Mullah Omar who commands the largest insurgent front inside Afghanistan, is opposed to peace talks and instead is committed to continuing the armed struggle against the Afghan government. Mullah Yaqoob, son of late Mullah Omar, is another claimant of leadership and reserves the support of many of his father's supporters. Sirajuddin Haqqani, the leader of the Haqqani group may not like to be subservient to any of the factions of the Taliban and continue autonomous military operations. Major attacks on the NATO and Afghan forces were conducted by this group even while the peace process was going on to prove their strength.²²

ISIS has begun exploiting the differences between the Taliban factions to spread its sway into Afghanistan and fill the resultant power vacuum. It is reported that with the prior knowledge of Mullah Omar's death, ISIS could persuade five senior Tehrik-I Taliban Pakistan (TTP) officials, a faction of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and various Taliban fighters, to shift their allegiance.

In this larger context, Kabul has shown greater interest in increased Chinese economic activity and wants Beijing to use its leverage over Islamabad to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table. It was evident in Murree where Beijing played an important role in encouraging Islamabad to bring an unwilling Taliban for peace talks, but it is becoming almost impossible for China to carry forward peace talks in view of increased factions within the Afghan Taliban movement and Islamabad's lack of grip over them. ISIS has reportedly called on the Muslim Uighur separatists in Xinjiang to join it for Jihad. It is important to note that ISIS' advance would carry with it serious implications for Pakistan's security and territorial integration. It is argued that in Pakistan, the army's fight against the Tehrik-I Taliban Pakistan (TTP) could fragment the outfit leaving the power vacuum filled by mullahs likely to be aligned with ISIS. The battle would be fought on Pakistani ground and India is not on the frontline.

Under the present circumstances, the idea of economic integration of the South and Central Asian regions remains farfetched. Even the success of the Chinese mega initiative 'One Road One Belt' in this direction looks murky given continued instability in the Af-Pak region including the Chinese province of Xinjiang and Kashmir. Pakistan has shown enough interest in the Chinese initiative and raised a special security force for the protection of Chinese infrastructure and workers working in Pakistan. It is not surprising that Pakistan sees enormous gains from the project. However, the irony remains that the continuing instability in Pakistan has largely been of its own creation for promotion of its geopolitical interests and acquire strategic depth in Afghanistan. Currently, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's economic diplomacy is not likely to convince Pakistan, as things stand now, of its benefits given deep-rooted mistrust of each other's intentions and geopolitical designs driven by the factors like power asymmetry and fixed and rigid territorial conceptions.²³ The primary concerns are geopolitical which very often give rise to notions of ideological irreconcilability between the two countries.

Conclusion: It is evident that the use of the concept of 'strategic depth' in Afghanistan does not signify Pakistan's crave for military depth against India rather it is related to expansion of Pakistani influence into Afghanistan and beyond it into the Central Asian steppes through a corridor of radical Islamists. This not only has the objective of preventing India's strategic and economic influence in Afghanistan and Central Asia, it also aimed at emboldening Pakistan on Kashmir issue by strengthening its resolve to continue the asymmetric warfare with the assistance of radical Islamists. Pakistani strive for strategic depth has been reflected in its continuous attempts at vying for influence in Afghanistan and Central Asia through radical Islamic groups and ideas, keeping Afghanistan dependent on it for trade and its strategy of taking military and financial aid from the US in order to maintain its sphere of influence rather than fight terror. However, Pakistan, being a state actor, has been hard-pressed to fight terror in Afghanistan contrary to its strategic objectives and at times ran the risk of losing control over radical religious groups. Emergence of dangerous terror groups like ISIS comes as a caveat to Pakistan's age-old strategy of supporting radical religious groups. It is time that Pakistan revisits its policies primarily aimed at maintaining sphere of influence in Afghanistan and instead helps evolve coordinated strategies to tackle the menace of international terrorism which has been afflicting many countries including Pakistan as well.

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