

## **Pakistan and the Geopolitics of Supply Routes to Afghanistan**

**Zahid Anwar\***

### **Abstract**

Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown and due to significant geostrategic location of Pakistan its foreign policy, at the outset, remained a tight rope walk for the decision makers at the helm of affairs. This paper explores geostrategic significance of Pakistan in the context of NATO supply routes to Afghanistan. After 9/11 Pakistan became frontline state in the global war against Al-Qaida and its affiliates along the Durand Line. One of the big contributions of Pakistan in this war was its allowing the NATO to use its routes for supply to Afghanistan. Pakistan has provided cheapest and shortest supply routes to NATO forces in Afghanistan. The supply routes through Pakistan are popularly known as Southern Distribution Network while other routes through Russia and Central Asia are called as Northern Distribution Network. No doubt NATO has established alternative routes to Pakistan but they are replete with a host of risks and challenges. NATO efforts are underway to lessen its footprint in Afghanistan and the post 2014 scenario in that landlocked country still lies in smoky cribs. It will be useful to gauge the geostrategic and economic importance of Pakistan by comparing Southern Distribution Network with Northern Distribution Network. If Washington strengthens its relations with Islamabad, Pakistan is the best option with the US for supply and withdrawal of goods from Afghanistan. Weather geostrategic location of a nation state is an asset or a liability depends on the approach of its leadership if the decision makers give priority to national interests the it is an asset otherwise it is like oil, devil's excrement.

**Key words:** Pakistan, Geopolitics, Supply Routes, NATO Withdrawal, Afghanistan

**Introduction:** Pakistan connects Central, South and West Asia as well as China. Its location on the confluence of these important Asian regions gives it

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a special position. Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown (Shakespeare, 1597) so due to significant geostrategic location of Pakistan its foreign policy formulation, at the outset, remained a tight rope walk for the decision makers at the helm of affairs. This paper explores geostrategic significance of Pakistan in the context of NATO supply routes to Afghanistan. After 9/11 Pakistan became frontline state in the OCO (Overseas Contingency Operation) as it was frontline state against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the 1980s. NATO efforts are underway to lessen its footprint in Afghanistan and the post 2014 scenario in that landlocked country still lies in smoky cribs. It will be useful to compare Southern Distribution Network with Northern Distribution Network and from this cost and benefit analysis gauge the geostrategic and economic importance of Pakistan. This train of thoughts also takes into account regional engagement with focus on Pakistan to cope with Afghanistan's mayhem.

**Setting the Scene:** Afghanistan is a land locked country, which touches Pakistan, China, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Iran. Due to its geographical location Afghanistan served as a physical and cultural melting pot of great civilizations. Islam travelled to South Asia through Afghanistan. Because of its location Afghanistan always attracted its neighbors and remained hub of an unending series of invasions and political commotion since its very inception. It was a big arena of the Great Game between Czarist Russia and British India and was the last battlefield of the Cold War between USA and USSR. The tragic event of 9/11 paved the way for NATO invasion of Afghanistan under UN mandate. Without an iota of doubt Afghanistan has become the nerve centre of the world politics in this point in time. The United States of America has spent huge sum of money on war against global terrorism in Afghanistan. In this connection the presence of US troops in Afghanistan for routing out alleged Al-Qaeda- Taliban networks can be termed as a loop in the chain of American interest in the greater Central Asian region. In Afghanistan and Pakistan region US policy focus is to disrupt terrorist networks and weaken their ability to plan and launch International terrorist attacks; to strengthen Afghan government established on the foundations of Bonn Accord and to augment democratic government in Pakistan. Afghanistan fate is deeply linked with that of Pakistan. In the aftermath of the American war in Afghanistan, there has been a complete transformation in the Afghan political system and a dramatic realignment of forces in the region.

**Regional Repositioning in Global Perspective:** In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the Muslim World saw a series of wars. These wars were replete with successes and failures. They can be judged in two ways. To what extent they succeeded in preventing Al Qaeda from attacking USA in the way it attacked it in 9/11 and if the rationale of these violent conflicts was to establish Pro-US governments,

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stable and imitating American values then its success is debatable. Since 2007 it is not the main objective of US regional policy to dominate but to create a regime which can defend itself and is not hostile to the US. 2014 is the year of withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan. But withdrawal does not mean end of involvement but that US involvement will be influenced by financial situation, war-weariness and other factors (Friedman, 2012).

**The Geo-Strategic Significance of Pakistan:** In South Asia the oldest ally of the USA is Pakistan. It was the closest partner of the Western Bloc during the Cold War. Pakistan was important component of the US strategy of web of regional organizations around the Soviet bloc. After the disintegration of the USSR the US regional policy changed considerably yet the geopolitics of greater Central Asia increased the significance of Pakistan for the US policy makers (US Strategic Calculus, 2012).

Pakistan is a bridge that connects the above mentioned important regions of the Asian continent. Pakistan is custodian of the rich heritage of ancient Indus valley civilization and was an important link of the Silk Road Network in the Middle Ages. From time immemorial the area of present day Pakistan was key trade link through which people and goods crisscrossed. Many great conquerors passed through this area. In terms of population Pakistan is one of the largest countries in the world with a big chunk of its population comprised youth. It is a nuclear power possessing one of the best armed forces in the world and has played an important role in regional stability as well as performed very positive role in the rapprochement of the USA and the People Republic of China. It is important member of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), Economic Cooperation organization (ECO), South Asian Association for regional cooperation (SAARC) and observer of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Pakistan played significant role in the UN peace keeping missions. The history of UNSC reflects that Pakistan has played vibrant and solid role as one of the non-permanent members in that forum. Pakistan considers peace in the region as an important part of its national interests. It always supported sovereignty and independence of the regional countries and has promoted its national interests in the frame of five principles of peaceful co-existence. When the troops of the former USSR invaded Afghanistan in 1979 Pakistan raised voice against that injustice at all forums despite meager resources. Afghan resistance to soviet troops in Afghanistan transformed it into the last battlefield of the Cold War and the humanitarian and military aid of International Community in that proxy war reached Afghanistan through Pakistan. Pakistan became transit route for foreign assistance to afghan resistance forces. The phenomenon in the aftermath of these triggered events influenced the behavior of the people on both sides of the Pakistan and Afghanistan border to a great extent.

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After the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Afghanistan foreign aid to Afghanistan decreased and was left to fight with itself and transformed into a hub of instability in the region. After 9/11 Afghanistan again became media spotlight and has become a hotspot in international politics. NATO invaded Afghanistan under UN mandate and the presence of hundred of thousands foreign troops in Afghanistan affected the region considerably. A new war known as war against global terrorism or what the present day US Administration prefer to call OCO ( Overseas Contingency Operation) started and US tried to on board as many nations as it can in this big campaign. Pakistan supported the USA in war on terror. Insurgency, militancy and destabilization devastated its economy and harmed the calm of its society. By becoming frontline state in the OCO Pakistan lost more than 49000 people and its material losses exceeded 70 billions US dollars. It became non NATO strategic ally of the US and remained in the line of fire for more than a decade in this 21st century tournament of shadows. Pakistan participation and role in this tragic drama was neither clear nor its terms of engagement defined which became a hurdle to win popular support for its war on terror policy. Pakistan supported USA in the proxy war between the two superpowers in Afghanistan during 1980s. Pakistan declared that war jihad and gave huge sacrifices both in terms of human and material losses. After the tragic event of 9/11 when the USA started war against global terrorism Pakistan again joined the USA and her allies. The use of its air, road and rail links made the US job easier to achieve its war objectives in Afghanistan. India also supported the USA and the NATO in war on terror and strengthened its security position in the region.

Pakistan throughout this period remained ally of the USA in this war. It faced pressure on the one hand from its allies and on the other from its public. Pakistan faced many problem of corruption, militancy, insurgency, terrorism, destabilization, political and economic instability and last but not the least the problem of irritants in its relations with the USA. Fragmentation cast its shadow on state institutions nevertheless Pakistan continued its support to the US in its war against terrorism.

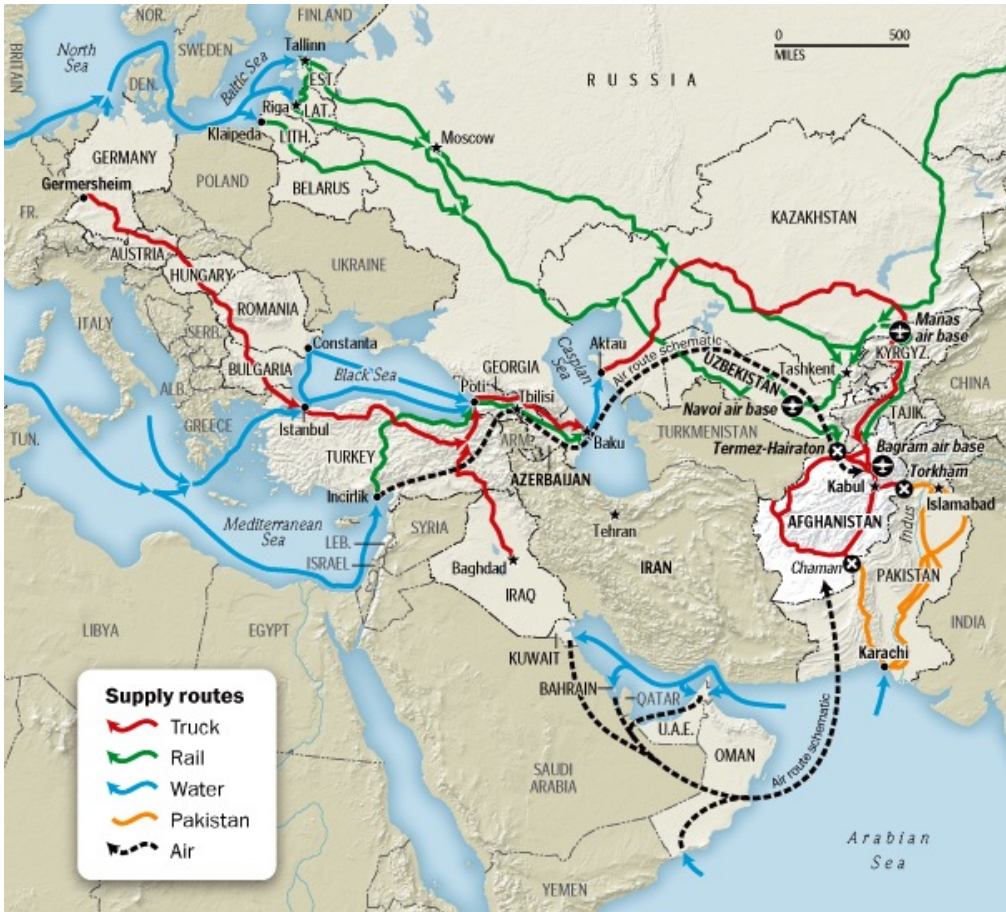
The NATO occupation of Afghanistan has negatively affected Pakistan` culture society, economy, and security as does Afghanistan civil war. Pakistan suffered a loss of 50 billion dollars in the war on terror over the past 4 years and under the same period of time the country's debt became double (Imran, 2012). The 9/11 attacks and the developments in Afghanistan in its aftermath adversely affected the security situation the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The war against global terrorism cast its shadow on imports, exports, foreign direct investment, economic activity, tax collection, security spending, physical infrastructure, tourism industry and psyche of the people. For the first time Pakistan has witnessed such a harming economic, social and psychological

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cataclysm in its history. Its economy endured huge direct and indirect costs, which rose with every passing year since 2001. For example it increased from \$2.7 billion in 2001-02 to \$13.6 billion by 2009-10 (War on Terror, 2012). In this situation Pakistan has demanded Rs. 40 billion from NATO for the physical infrastructure harm caused the containers carrying goods to Afghanistan for NATO troops (PTV, 2011).

Pakistan and the US relationship has passed through several ups and downs. There is convergence as well as divergence of interests between the two countries regarding Afghanistan's entanglement (Akram, 2012). The Abbottabad Operation and the Salala tragedy in which many Pakistani soldiers died has further harmed relations between Washington and Islamabad (Riaz, 2011). Intensifying efforts to find some common ground for putting their relationship on the track of active collaboration will benefit both states (Maqaddam, 2012).

**NATO Supply Routes Dilemma:** For reconstruction, rehabilitation and war against global terrorism in Afghanistan NATO needed the support of Afghanistan's immediate neighbors. For this purpose NATO cut deals with Afghanistan's neighbors particularly Pakistan, Central Asian Republics, Russian Federation, Latvia, Georgia and Azerbaijan. The routes, which pass through Central Asian Republics, are known as northern distribution network while those which pass through Pakistan are called southern distribution network. The elaboration of these networks will help to understand ground realities regarding regional geostrategic dynamics. Secure supply routes are essential for war in Afghanistan. Supply routes to Afghanistan were never in the control of North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Less than one third of the US supplies came through third countries and their willingness was necessary for success in Afghanistan's turmoil. It was important part of US Afghan strategy to get transit permission of these countries. In this connection US war efforts were to a considerable extent dependent on willingness of Russia, Central Asian Republics and on the other hand Pakistan to permit the movement of supplies through their respective territories (Friedman, 2012).



Praemon.org

**Northern Distribution Network (NDN):** The USA and the NATO used air, road and rail routes for transit of goods and people to Afghanistan. The Northern Distribution Network passes through Russian Federation, Trans-Caucasus ( Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia) then through the steppes of Kazakhstan and deserts of Uzbekistan and finally over the friendship bridge into Northern Afghanistan. NDN is comprised many routes. One route starts at the port of Riga (Latvia) on the Baltic Sea, and continues for 3,212 miles (5,169 km) by train southwards through Russia, using railroads built by Russia in the 1980s for the Soviet war in Afghanistan ( NATO Supply Routes, 2013). Another, more southern route starts at Poti (Georgia) on the Black Sea and continues to Baku (Azerbaijan), where the goods are transferred to barges and ferried across the Caspian Sea. Supplies land in Turkmenistan and then move by rail through Uzbekistan before arriving at the Afghan border. It was estimated that in 2010, this route carried one third of the NDN's traffic (Kamal,

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2013). A third route, created in order to avoid going through the often volatile country of Uzbekistan, goes from Kazakhstan to Kyrgyzstan and then through Tajikistan before reaching Termez (Chicago Summit, 2013)

International Security and Assistance Force has asserted that it is used for commercial cargo mostly food and spare parts. Afghanistan has 75 km long border with China, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan too. Notwithstanding its status of neutrality Turkmenistan has supported US efforts for reconstruction Afghanistan and refueling of NATO planes in war against global terrorism (Dawn, 2011).

The USA and the NATO settled terms and conditions with all these independent and sovereign states to avail and get access to rail, road and air links of these countries. In this connection so far northern distribution network is concerned in the beginning per container costs were more than \$2100. The USA and the NATO sought transportation facilities from Latvia, Russia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and other countries in the region. Russia considers instability in Afghanistan a threat to its sphere of influence which includes Central Asia. The USA got Manas air base from Kyrgyzstan, Karshi-Khanabad air base and Novi air base (indirectly through South Korea's Korean Air) from Uzbekistan. Turkmenistan officially neutral state even though gave support to the USA particularly in the context of fuel facilities. The Northern Distribution Network came into existence in 2009 it passes through Central Asian Republics and this distribution network was developed as alternative to the supply route which passes through Pakistan. Despite higher transit costs it is estimated that sixty percent of NATO forces fuel needs are transported through northern distribution network. Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and other regional states agreed to allow NATO to use their routes for supplies to Afghanistan. Through successful diplomatic efforts US got consent of the regional states for easy flow of capital, goods and people. Uzbekistan agreed to allow its territories to be used for retro-cargo when US agreed to use Uzbekistan's suggested route, which is the most expensive one.

The USA is trying to sign agreements with states that lies in the Northern Distribution Network so that to transport body armor, Humvees and other non-lethal equipments. In this connection Balkh Province in northern Afghanistan is emerging an important collection point for goods scheduled for removal from the troubled country. After the completion of Rail link between Termez, Uzbekistan and Mazar-i-Sharif capital of the Balkh province of Afghanistan, Balkh strategic significance increased. It is said that Marmal, German-run camp will be enlarged with the cost of \$10 to \$25 millions to facilitate "Northern Distribution Network hub".

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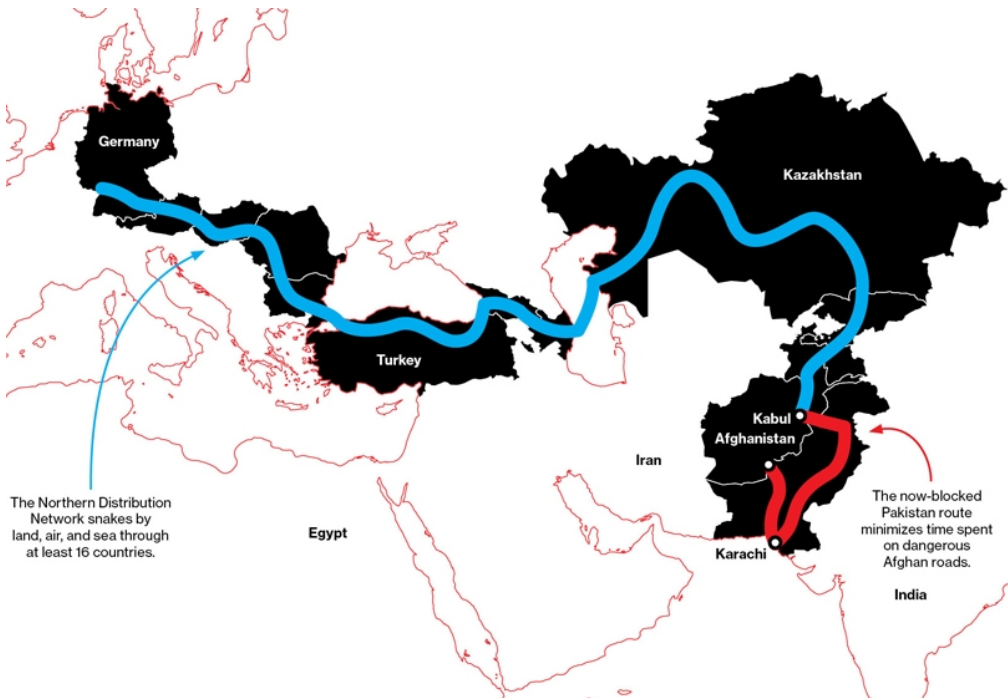
In the context of the withdrawal of North Atlantic Treaty Organization troops from Afghanistan supply routes will be used as exit routes. They will be used for removal of hi tech weaponry, intelligence and communications systems. There is likelihood that sensitive items will be removed from Afghanistan through Manas Airbase which the US got on lease (till 2014) from Kyrgyzstan. At the Manas Air base US aircrafts are not subject to inspections ( Eurasianet, 2012). In this context another development is transformation of Ulyanovsk {former Simbirsk which was renamed as Ulyanovsk in honor of Vladimir Ulyanov (Lenin) who was born there in 1870 ( Ulyanovsk, 2013)} into a combined U.S.-Russian transit centre to move U.S. war materiel out of Afghanistan ( Michael, 2013).

It was the uncertainty over the supply routes which pass through Pakistan that US opted for alternative routes and established Northern Distribution Network, which is dependent on Russian Federation and CARs. At the outset Russian Federation has extended support to US led military campaign in Afghanistan. Russian President Putin expressed this support in Febraury 2012. "We have a strong interest in our southern borders being calm; we need to help them (U.S. and coalition forces). Let them fight. ... This is in Russia's national interests."(Ibid)

Though it is much expensive compared to Pakistani routes yet it is workable. Supplies through NDN will support the NATO operations in Afghanistan. Fifty two percent of NATO non lethal supplies and sixty percent of all fuel come through NDN. Forty eight percent of NATO supplies even now pass through Pakistan. Azerbaijan has also played important role in this connection. Azerbaijan not only contributed troops to US war against terror but also provided refueling, landing rights and over flights for the NATO airplanes going to Afghanistan and US air force are using Azerbaijani airspace. More than 1/3 of non lethal equipments, which include food, fuel and clothing utilized by the military of the USA in Afghanistan, moves through Azerbaijan (Azerbaijan, US Relations, 2012).



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Apart from commercial transit costs through NDN for every container the CARs have also negotiated transit fee for the use of their physical infrastructure. This sum is about half a billion dollars a year. The CARs will get about five hundred million dollars from transit fees every year.

Four Central Asian States of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan provide rail and road facility for non-military goods for NATO troops in Afghanistan. Though Turkmenistan is not officially part of Northern Distribution Network yet it supports US war by providing refueling facility to at Ashgabat airfield for Afghanistan bound flights and by giving fuel to commercial dealers selling to the NATO forces.

Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan is focal point for operations which involve transport planes like C-5 and C-17. Turkmenistan airspace and facilities are utilized by the USA since at least 2002. World Fuel Services got 3-year contract worth \$11 million for refueling services at Ashgabat airfield. Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan are major exporters of fuel to the USA facilities inside Afghanistan. \$720.6 million contract was given to Red Star Enterprises to supply jet fuel to Afghanistan's Bagram Air Base in 2008. In this context fuel's origin country is Turkmenistan. The US war on terror in Afghanistan

daily consumed 1.1 million gallons of fuel in 2009 of that quantity seventy percent of all petroleum sustainment came through NDN (Central Asia) ( Eurasianet, 2012).

**Southern Distribution Network (SDN):** Since shipping of supplies by air is prohibitively expensive, therefore, NATO / ISAF is inclined to rely on ground overland routes. War supplies to Afghanistan by air costs up to ten times as much as transporting them through Pakistan. The air supply effort in Afghanistan is third largest in history after Berlin Airlift and the 1990 airlift for the Gulf War (William, 2013). The US-led NATO has been delivering supplies to its troops in Afghanistan through Pakistan since 2001. The USA has been using the two main over land-routes of Pakistan i.e. Torkham (KP) and Chaman (Baluchistan). Supply routes are important for maintaining the pace of war in Afghanistan. The Southern Distribution Network passed only through Pakistan. From Karachi port and Qasim Port it straight led to Chaman (Balachistan) and Torkham (KP) both located on Pakistan`s side of the Durand line. Chaman in very near to Kandahar and Torkham is close to Jalalabad, capital of the Nagrahar province of Afghanistan and it is the shortest route for transit to Afghanistan. Afghanistan is a land locked country and has no access to any sea. The nearest sea and port to Afghanistan is Arabian Sea particularly Gwadar port in Baluchistan province of Pakistan( Ali, 2013). Another plus point of Afghan access via Pakistan to Indian Ocean is warm water access while northern distribution network is not warm water route as well as that network is more difficult and expensive. The USA and the NATO utilized both southern and northern distribution networks.

The SDN is though cheap yet replete with quandaries. The deliberations of the Pakistan parliamentary committee in the wake of Salala tragedy reflect those predicaments. The Parliamentary Committee on National Security has unanimously disapproved the use of Pakistani air space by American and NATO forces without the consent of parliament besides endorsing the cut in the ground supply line and vacation of the Shamsi Airbase. Following the closure of NATO supply line, Pakistan`s air space serves as the lifeline for the US-led foreign forces inside Afghanistan. The committee which has reviewed the existing terms of engagement between Pakistan and the United States has said that the war on terror required a political solution and not a military option. The parliamentary committee, which comprised members from different political parties of parliament, has given 40 recommendations which includes that there was no room for any drone attacks inside the Pakistani territory, the withdrawal of Pakistani air space unless approved by parliament, endorsed the vacation of Shamsi Airbase and disallowed any such bases to be used by the US or any other foreign forces, supported the government`s

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decision to cut the NATO supply line, besides disapproving any other overt or covert Pak-US agreement that does not have the sanction of parliament.

NATO forces have in recent years been transporting between 70 and 80 percent of its non-lethal supplies to northeastern and southern Afghanistan through the two crossings at Pakistan's northern Torkhum and southwestern Chaman borders. An Average of 200 to 250 containers pour into Afghanistan daily through these routes. 72 Pakistani paramilitary troops have been killed and more than 250 injured in five NATO air strikes, including one that led Pakistan to close down the two supply routes for 11 days in 2010 ( Globalpost, 2012).

Pakistan closed NATO supply routes when on November 26 2011 NATO helicopters killed 24 Pakistani soldiers in Salala check posts, which further damaged trust between Pakistan and the USA. Pakistan reopened NATO supply routes after Hilary Clinton, the US secretary of State apologized for the incident on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2012. An agreement was signed on 31 July 2012 between U.S and Pakistani officials which will allow NATO supply convoys to cross into Afghanistan from Pakistan up to the end of 2015, one year beyond the deadline for withdrawal of U.S. combat forces ( Leiby, 2013).



[www.npr.org](http://www.npr.org)

One third of all goods that NATO bring to Afghanistan pass through Pakistani routes, another one third are brought directly to Afghanistan by air, while the remaining consignment goes through the NDN (Daud, 2012). It is said that Pakistan has suffered big financial loss by giving permission to NATO to use its routes for supply to Afghanistan. Twenty nine thousands containers were loaded in Karachi but the record whether they crossed border or not is missing due to which Pakistan economy has suffered fifty five billion rupees loss in revenue. Overloaded NATO containers caused road damage on its passage from Karachi to Chaman and Karachi to Torkham routes due to which national exchequer has suffered forty billion rupees. It is stated that under the existing terms and conditions NATO paid to Pakistan four hundred and ten rupees per container (Irfan, 2012).

The Pak US relations have passed through several ups and downs during the period under review. The relations between the two countries have deteriorated due to Salala incident. It galvanized perceptions in Pakistan that the US presence in the region is not conducive for the national interests of the country. The two supply routes through Pakistan to Afghanistan were closed by the government of Pakistan in the wake of Salala event. Negotiations were held to restore the supply roads and Pakistan asked for five thousand dollars per container to compensate about hundred billion rupees damage caused to the roads in the last decade (Ali, 2013) And the rest of four thousand dollars will be for charges on account of port charges, scanning of goods, handling, stocking, road safety and environmental impact. The US has paid two hundred and fifty dollars per container before the Salala incident. Pakistan has not charged transit fee on NATO / ISAF containers. Being a transit state it can not charge any transit fee or custom duty on goods intended for Afghanistan and port authorities were also not permitted to physically inspect NATO / ISAF supplies meant for Afghanistan. Before the tragic event of Salala private truck owners were charging between 250000 and 300000 rupees per container. When one dollar was equal to 88.5 rupees per container cost was between \$2824 and \$3389. An oil tanker can carry fifty five to sixty thousand litre and oil tankers were charging twelve rupees per litre. Before 2011 most of the NATO goods intended for Afghanistan passed through SDN after that NATO transportation through NDN increased due to increased disruptions through Pakistani routes. The disruptions increased when 2 cross border attacks by NATO aircraft in 2010 killed 3 Pakistani soldiers nevertheless NATO apologized for that event which it said has taken place due to misunderstanding of the situation. Public opinion in Pakistan is against drone strikes. And people of the region have closed the routes in the past to show their resentment against the drone attacks particularly the collateral damage caused by drone attacks. Pakistani routes are also vulnerable to militant

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attacks that's a cause to develop NDN and decrease NATO dependency on SDN.

**Comparative Perspective:** No doubt NATO has established alternative routes to Pakistan but every new supply line includes a new coterie of actors, and a host of risks and challenges. The introduction of Northern Distribution Network (NDN) increased NATO dependency for supplies on Eurasian States as well as they are much expensive and lengthy compared to Southern Distribution Network (SDN) via Pakistan.

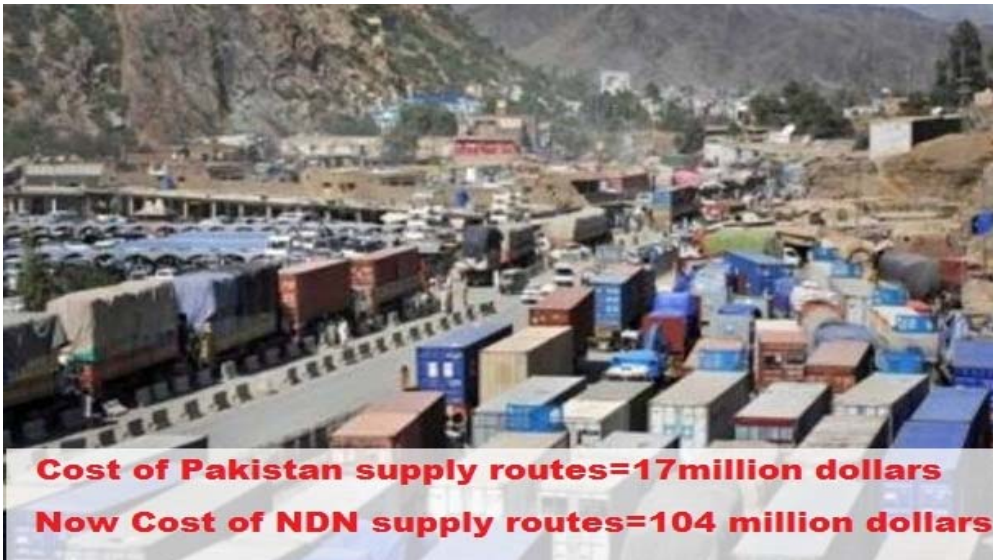
NATO use of NDN increased when reliability of SDN decreased after 2011. Then NATO relied more on Northern Distribution Network to support its troops engaged in Afghanistan. Though NDN is more reliable it is more expensive than SDN. Per container actual cost through Pakistani roads is approximately seven thousand two hundred dollars, while per container cost through Central Asian Routes is seventeen thousand five hundred dollars. Before 2010 the average cost per container through NDN was twenty one thousand dollars. In spite of the fact that Pakistani routes are less reliable NATO will use it because they provide the cheapest and shortest access for NATO to Afghanistan the arena of global war against terrorism and it will require huge amount to re-direct consignments from the SDN. The short term estimate in this connection is that to redirect goods from Pakistani routes NATO has to spend one hundred and four million dollars per month, which will then be able to move goods into Afghanistan through a combination of air / sea routes, NDN and direct air movement (Tynan, 2012).

The two Pakistani routes one through Torham ( KPK) and the other through Chaman (Baluchistan) account for one third of all goods that ISAF / NATO ships into Afghanistan. It means one third goes through SDN and the other one third goes through Northern Distribution Network (NDN) and the rest, which is about thirty one percent is brought to Afghanistan by air. It is worthwhile to keep in mind that the details of the shipments of cargo through either Torkham route or Chaman route are not clear yet. When Pakistan closed its routes for NATO supplies to Afghanistan in 2011 NATO spent 6 times more on its supplies through NDN compared to SDN. Though total costs North Atlantic Treaty Organization then paid one hundred and four million dollars per month to transport goods to Afghanistan and support its troops there. It spent eighty seven million per month more on NDN than SDN (Pakistani routes) (Guardian, 2013). Despite the rise in cost on per container through SDN, it is still cheaper than NDN which cost US \$17500 per container. Another important point is that NATO consignments takes about sixty days through Northern Distribution Network while its supplies through SDN via Chaman takes 8 days and via Torkham from Karachi takes 11 days.

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When Pakistan closed supply routes to the US and the NATO to some extent Afghanistan Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) helped the coalition efforts to reconstruct Afghanistan. Some experts have pointed out that Pakistan may have allowed Afghan civilian supplies through the closed roads. Afghanistan is a landlocked country, which is dependent on Pakistan for its imports. During that closure Afghanistan has asked Pakistan to allow hundreds of trucks and tankers loaded with goods and fuel which were held along with ISAF / NATO supplies (Klapper, 2012).

It is projected that using the NDN for the NATO withdrawal in 2013 and 2014 would cost up to five times as much as using the Pakistan routes (Hoffman, 2012). The cost of the northern supply route is nearly double that of the Pakistani route, but at least it's cheaper than flying all that equipment out by air, which costs the US military \$14,000 per ton ( Scott, 2013). If the southern land routes through Pakistan remain open, the cost of the equipment retrograde would be about \$4 billion, Dunford said in testimony to the House Armed Services Committee. But if political problems and Taliban attacks close the Pakistan land routes, the cost of getting the equipment out will balloon to \$6 billion (Sisk, 2013). Alternate supply routes via Central Asian countries could be used, the fact is that this will involve massive airlifts and time delays and has not been found very viable (Siddiqui, 2013).



[Pakconnects.blogspot.com](http://Pakconnects.blogspot.com)

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Due to social breakup and civil war in Afghanistan war lordism, anarchy, opium and drug trafficking, organized crime, weapons smuggling, and struggle for control of resources flourished. In such a situation, the warlords acquire an abiding interest in perpetuating insecurity. The Afghan population is ethnic mosaic. The ethnic diversity of the country elevates the status of a local warlord to that of a community leader. It suits him well. For durable solution of Afghanistan crisis the neighbors of Afghanistan particularly China, Iran, Central Asian States, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan can play a significant role. There may be divergence and convergence of interests among these countries yet they have consensus among themselves on one point that political stability in Afghanistan will help in the stability of the region at large (Akram, 2011).

**Conclusion:** Pakistan has great geostrategic location this is clearly demonstrated by the developments in Afghanistan since Saur Revolution in April 1978. Without Pakistan support it would have been highly unlikely to fully assist Afghan resistance forces known as Mujahedeen against the Soviet troops. And again it would have been very difficult if not impossible for the NATO to occupy Afghanistan and sustain that occupation if Pakistan would have not joined the US led war against the Al-Qaeda and its affiliates. One of the biggest contributions of Pakistan in this war was its decision to allow the NATO to use its routes for supply to Afghanistan. This network of routes is called Southern Distribution Network. It was cheap, short and passed through only one country, Pakistan while the other network of supply routes which was known as Northern Distribution Network was expensive, long and passed through many countries like Latvia, Russian Federation, Trans-Caucasian States and Central Asian Republics. Weather geostrategic location of a nation state is an asset or a liability depends on the approach of its leadership if people at the helm of affairs take decisions in the light of national interests then it is a great asset, on the other hand if the leadership adopt policies giving priority to personal and group interests rather than national interests then geostrategic significance of a country is like oil, devil's excrement.



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