

INTRODUCTION

Afghanistan is presumably a tribal country with abundance of guns, narcotics, war lords, and mountains. The current wave of violence in Afghanistan is embedded in its recent history as the country had been at the center of many pitched proxy wars between global and regional powers over the past four decades. The geo-strategic position of Afghanistan gives the country an utmost importance in global power politics. It is located at the doorstep of three important regions of the world: the Middle East, South Asia and Central Asia. It borders with former Soviet states, and China. The stability of these regions is interconnected with the stability in Afghanistan, therefore, the key contenders in global power politics like the US, China, and Russia are desirous to maintain influence in Afghanistan.

“The Great Game” between Russia and the British Empire helps us to understand the importance of the geostrategic position of Afghanistan. Russia was on the north of Afghanistan controlling Central Asia whereas in South-East of Afghanistan British was controlling their biggest colony India better known as "the jewel in the crown."¹ Russia was fearful of the British that it might cross Afghanistan and attack the Russian controlled Central Asian region. On the other hand, the British feared that Russia might cross Afghanistan and take away "the jewel in the crown" from British possession. This atmosphere of distrust and fear created political and diplomatic confrontation between Russia and the British. Ultimately, Afghanistan ended up as a buffer zone between Russia and the British in the 19th century.²

After the end of “the Great Game”, Afghanistan remained out of foreign influence until 1979. The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan on the night of December 24, 1979, to spread their socialist ideas and to take lead in the Cold War from the United States of America. The USSR backed Babrak Karmal of People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan and made him President of Afghanistan. However, the Russian rivals in the Cold War didn’t let Russia to take complete control over Afghanistan. The US, Iran, China and Pakistan’s intelligence services

¹ Harjeet Singh, “The New Great Game”, *Indian Defence Review* 24 (2009): 107

² Akhilesh Pillalamarri, “How the British and the Russians Drew the Afghan-Turkmen Border”, *The Diplomat*, March 31, 2015, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/04/how-the-british-and-the-russians-drew-the-afghan-turkmen-border/> (accessed January 10, 2020)

backed a group of freedom fighters known as “mujahedeen”.³ Because of the mujahedeen, Russia suffered many losses in Afghanistan. This war lasted till April 1988, and USSR was forced to leave Afghanistan. An “Agreements on the Settlement of the Situation Relating to Afghanistan”⁴ sponsored by the United States was signed by governments of Afghanistan, the USSR, the United States and Pakistan.⁵

When USSR left Afghanistan, the United States showed no interest in war-torn Afghanistan, which was facing several problems like weak government, a land filled with landmines, and dominance of strong militant groups. After the USSR withdrawal, civil war ensued in Afghanistan and the mujahedeen overthrew the government of Najibullah- the successor of Karmal. Due to this violence, 6.3 million Afghans left the country. Finally, in 1996, the Taliban-Sunni Islamic fundamentalist of Pashtun ethnicity, established a government in Afghanistan. They imposed a strict Sharia Law (Islamic law), and according to their interpretation of Sharia Law: women must wear veils and must stay in home, men were forced to grow a beard and public beheading and lynching were considered legitimate.

Taliban regime was hard on its citizens but it ensured the political stability of Afghanistan. Afghanistan was recovering politically from the devastations of the USSR invasion and civil war under Taliban regime but something unexpected happened. It was 9/11. On September 11, 2001, series of four coordinated terrorist attacks took place in the USA. The US held Osama bin Laden responsible for these attacks. Osama bin Laden was the head of an Islamic militant group known as Al-Qaeda. According to the US, Osama bin Laden was taking refuge in Afghanistan, so it demanded the Taliban regime to extradite him from Afghanistan. The then President of the United States of America George Walker Bush put some demands before Taliban regime: close all terrorist training camps in Afghanistan, and handover the leaders of Al-Qaeda network to the US. Osama bin Laden was a close ally of Mullah Omar- the head of Taliban regime, so he refused to meet the demands of George Walker Bush. On October 7, 2001, the US, with support of Northern Alliance, invaded Afghanistan. It overthrew

³ “Afghanistan Profile - Timeline”, *BBC News*, September 9, 2019 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/amp/world-south-asia-12024253> (accessed November 10, 2020)

⁴ Ekaterina Blinova, “30 Years After Soviet Afghan Pull-Out: CIA-Funded Mujahedeen War Backfired on US”, *Sputnik News*, February 15, 2019 <https://sputniknews.com/amp/asia/201902151072443025-soviet-afghanistan-pullout-30-years/> (accessed October 15, 2020)

⁵ *Ibid.*

the totalitarian rule of Taliban within a span of few weeks, and established a democratic government in Afghanistan in the months to follow.

In 2005, after a gap of 30 years, elections were held in Afghanistan with the help of NATO and the US. The outcome of that election was in favor of Hamid Karzai. Although, the United States and NATO removed the Taliban from power after 9/11, and established a democratic government, yet they remained unable to abolish the influence of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Taliban continued fighting with the Northern Alliance and the US to reclaim their lost rule. The fight between the Taliban and NATO forces proved the biggest hurdle in the security pursuit of Afghanistan. The Taliban continued to increase their power day by day, and the allied forces in Afghanistan were facing insurgent attacks. In 2009, Obama administration sent additional 17,000 US troops to Afghanistan to counter the growing insurgency.

In May 2009, second post-9/11 presidential elections were held in Afghanistan. Hamid Karzai turned out victorious and retained the presidency of Afghanistan by securing fifty five percent of the votes. After the elections, more than 2000 complaints of intimidation and fraud in elections were registered against Hamid Karzai.⁶ The United Nations backed Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) was tasked to investigate these complaints. After the investigation, ECC invalidated one-third of Hamid Karzai's votes; leaving him short of the fifty percent needed to win outright.⁷ After the result of the investigation, Hamid Karzai announced the second round of elections between him and Abdullah Abdullah, who came second in the first round of elections. However, Abdullah Abdullah withdrew himself from the elections later on because he believed that his withdrawal was in the best interest of Afghanistan.

In 2010, one hundred and fifty thousand NATO troops were deployed in Afghanistan. Yet they were unable to sweep off Taliban from Afghanistan mainly because of two reasons: one is the unpopularity of Afghan central government and non-acceptance of NATO in the local population of Afghanistan, and the other is the presence of alleged safe havens of Taliban militants in Pakistan. Due to this, Taliban were able to carry out surprise insurgent attacks and inflict losses upon the invading NATO forces in Afghanistan. It was not easy for NATO to maintain a stronghold in Afghanistan due to the rising insurgency. In November 2010, NATO

6 Peter Graff, "Complaints of Afghan Election Fraud Pour In", *Reuters*, August 28, 2009, <https://www.reuters.com/article/instant-article/idusis11764020090828> (accessed October 15, 2020)

7 Dexter Filkins, "Karzai Rival Prepares for Afghan Runoff Vote", *The New York Times*, October 21, 2009, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/22/world/asia/22afghan.html> (accessed October 15, 2020)

announced the withdrawal of its combat forces from Afghanistan by year 2014. But NATO was not ready to leave without a negotiated political agreement with the Taliban. Although their negotiations in 2011 and 2012 failed badly yet NATO continued shifting of security responsibilities to Afghan forces and started the process of gradual troops' reduction in Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, an important development had taken place in January 2012 as the Afghan Taliban reached a preliminary agreement to open a political office in Doha, Qatar to facilitate peace negotiations with the US to end the war in Afghanistan. In December 2011, the U.S. Vice President Joe Biden had signaled the US approval for the office as he stated that Afghan Taliban were not an enemy of the US and did not represent a threat to America as long as it stayed away from harboring al-Qaeda terrorists.⁸

In 2014, the tenure of Hamid Karzai came to an end and constitutionally he did not qualify for another presidential election. So, in 2014 presidential elections, Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani contested for the office of Afghan President. Unfortunate for Abdullah that he lost another presidential election but again he demanded a recount of votes. Strangely again luck was on Abdullah side and almost two million votes for Ghani were found fraudulent, which prompted both contenders to claim victory. In the end, an agreement was signed between Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani that Ashraf Ghani would take the office of Afghan President and Abdullah Abdullah would take the newly created Chief Executive Office. This new office was proposed by the United States to maintain political stability in Afghanistan.

The first challenge for Ghani's presidency was the withdrawal of NATO forces as the Taliban were regaining their strength in Afghanistan. However, the US troops remained in Afghanistan to train Afghan security forces. To stabilize Afghanistan, the US and Ghani administrations began many negotiation talks with Taliban and other militant groups. In 2016, Ghani administration witnessed first success as Hizb-I Islami accepted the constitution of Afghanistan and renounced violence. Hizb-I Islami was the second-largest militant group in Afghanistan after the Taliban.

As the Taliban were regaining their power in Afghanistan, they started to challenge the legitimacy of the upcoming parliamentary elections of 2018. Taliban did everything they could

⁸ "Taliban Strikes Preliminary Deal for Qatar Office", *VoA News*, January 2, 2012, <https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/taliban-strikes-preliminary-deal-qatar-office> (accessed October 15, 2020)

to cancel the 2018 parliamentary elections. Despite all the challenges thrown by Taliban, the 2018 parliamentary elections took place and its result was released in May 2019.

Meanwhile, the US maintained diplomatic relations with the Taliban to negotiate an agreement which would be acceptable for all parties. The US wanted to minimize its spending and attention towards Afghanistan so that it could work on its economy to counter China's economic growth. In December 2018, the United States, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia set a meeting with the leaders of Taliban in Abu Dhabi to enhance the peace process. After some days the US announced the withdrawal of thousands of its troops from Afghanistan, giving indications for its intentions to leave Afghanistan. In February 2020, U.S. and Taliban officials signed a peace deal that aimed to wind down the war in Afghanistan after more than 18 years of fighting. The deal called for the U.S. troop levels to fall to 8,600 within 135 days, from about 13,000, and for all U.S. forces to withdraw in 14 months if the accord held.⁹ However, the US President Joe Biden, who came in power after the victory in 2020 US Presidential elections, extended the deadline of complete US withdrawal from Afghanistan from May 1, 2021 to September 11, 2021. The US had not consulted Afghanistan's central government in these peace talks and its withdrawal policy left the Afghan government in a complete shock.

On September 28, 2019, the presidential elections were held in Afghanistan, leaving Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah the leading contenders for the office of Afghan President. On December 22, 2019, the electoral commission released results of the elections after delaying it twice. Again Abdullah Abdullah remained unfortunate and Ashraf Ghani became the president of Afghanistan for the second term by securing more than fifty percent votes.¹⁰

After deeply getting engaged, both militarily and financially, in Afghanistan, the US under domestic pressure and the international compulsion announced to withdraw from Afghanistan by 2014 but this withdrawal announcement was without any concrete withdrawal plan. Even the US withdrawal policy had been switching around a dilemmatic situation of withdrawal or drawdown.

⁹ Eltaf Najafizada, and Nick Wadhams, "U.S., Afghan Taliban Ink Peace Deal to Wind Down 18-Year War", *Bloomberg*, February 29, 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-02-29/u-s-to-reduce-forces-in-afghanistan-if-taliban-deal-holds-Itv> (accessed September 19, 2020)

¹⁰ "Afghanistan Presidential Election: Ghani Set for Second Term after Initial Results", *BBC News*, December 22, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-50883812> (accessed October 15, 2020)

The war in Afghanistan and the US withdrawal policy have direct implications for Pakistan. Pakistan had been an important player in both Afghan wars. As the war of 2001 continued for more than 20 years Pakistan suffered in parallel as politically, economically, and at the most priority in its internal and regional security. While joining this US led global war on terror, Pakistan paid huge cost for being the US ally. In the first decade of 21st century, Pakistan faced the curse of terrorist attacks and suicide bombings as a reaction from Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Pakistan's security environment became non conducive for tourism, diplomatic channels and foreign investment. The unsuitable security situation in the country hindered the inflow of any foreign business and investment; causing Pakistan major setback economically. At the diplomatic level, Pakistan also had to face extensive criticism being called as fundamental terrorist state. India also tried to manipulate Pakistan's complex situation at international level in the context of Kashmir freedom movement. Also, India went to any extent to alienate Pakistan from its neighbors and the world in large.

US withdrawal plan from Afghanistan has many implications for the regional security, and both for Pakistan and Afghanistan. To divergent interests of all the stakeholders with this withdrawal policy will enter into another confrontational phase and instability. Pakistan being a partner in this war and a facilitator to the US is more vulnerable to security apprehension after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. The US indecisive withdrawal policy and known conclusive peace negotiations will have negative implications for Pakistan. Pakistan's western border and tribal belt would face another series of violence and militancy by the terrorists. Similarly, if post-US Afghanistan goes into the hands of the Taliban, there would be an uncertainty about Taliban's view of Pakistan. This research examines the circumstances challenges, and implications of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, and also how Pakistan is going to be affected with this withdrawal.

Core Argument

Afghanistan is situated in a very important geostrategic position. Any disturbing event in Afghanistan has disturbed the regional balance and affected its neighbors. The US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and its military and economic engagements have profound impact on South Asian region in general and in Pakistan in particular. The US, after almost two decades of its presence in Afghanistan, now intends to withdraw from Afghanistan. But this withdrawal is yet dubious with no clear agenda of post withdrawal from Afghanistan. It is argued that the

US unplanned withdrawal will leave serious implications for Pakistan, particularly for its security concerns.

Statement of the Problem

The US wants to withdraw from Afghanistan to increase its focus on its economy to counter ongoing trade war with China. USA has spent millions of dollars, lost its soldiers and time in Afghanistan. If the US withdraws from Afghanistan without any agreement with Taliban, all of its efforts in Afghanistan would rust. The US withdrawal from Afghanistan remains a dilemma as yet there is no clear policy, particularly after the delay in withdrawal by the Biden administration, and the deal is tied between the US and Taliban creating a deadlock between them. However, the aftermath of its withdrawal from Afghanistan and the implications for Pakistan can be predicted. The purpose of this thesis is to evaluate the challenges linked to the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and to evaluate the challenges and vulnerabilities for Pakistan. Another purpose of this research work is to understand the vacuum created by the US withdrawal and how other world powers will see and fill that vacuum and how this power struggle in Afghanistan will affect Pakistan. The research also focuses to bring about the viable options for both Pakistan and Afghanistan for the secure future relationship.

Objectives of the Study

This thesis ascertains following objectives:

- To examine US foreign policy in Afghanistan in post 9/11 era.
- To evaluate Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan vis a vis its security concerns
- To analyze the US withdrawal policy from Afghanistan and its related challenges.
- To elucidate the security implications that Pakistan face after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan.
- To highlight the prospects of future Pak-Afghan relations.

Literature Review

To fulfill the objectives of research I have gone through several books and research papers. The review of that literature is given below.

Muhammad Nasrullah Mirza and Yasir Malik write in their article that over a long time, the Taliban have overwhelmingly developed an impact, and their stature is being well recognized; applying more weight on Washington's future introduction in Afghanistan. In the scenery of moves taking place in Afghanistan's political scene, the predictable future has revived the prospects of peace. Even though peace process is continuously moving advance, however, both sides are hesitant to compromise on each other's terms. President Trump's approach to Afghanistan has been wavering and it is continuously changing alternatives to bring the Taliban to their terms in a broadly recognized political system for peace. The chosen arrangement activities set more challenges and fewer openings for peace in war-ridden Afghanistan. The new situation requires a comprehensive, well-crafted and compromising structure to be concocted, with the comprehensiveness of all stakes and issues included in this delayed struggle. Assessing and analyzing President Trump's key arrangement towards Afghanistan, the paper points to investigate the endgame in Afghanistan.¹¹

Deepshikha Shahi wrote in her book "Understanding Post-9/11 Afghanistan: A Critical Insight into Huntington's Civilizational Approach" that the 9/11 and the consequent war on terror have misleadingly strengthened the thought of a world based on a 'civilizational' clash. Whereas post-9/11 Afghan society shows up to be disturbed with strife between so-called Islamic-terrorist and secular-democratic powers, the requirement for an elective understanding to clear the way for peace has ended up foremost. The book employs a basic hypothetical point of view to highlight the political and financial components fundamental to the so-called civilizational strife in post-9/11 Afghanistan. It illustrates how a post-Islamic humanist talk has the potential, to not as it was carved the way for peace in the midst of unsafe trap between legislative issues and religion in post-9/11 Afghanistan, but to vindicate Islam of its unjustified denigration within the modern world.¹²

Ejaz Hussain and Muhammad Jahanzaib wrote an article in the University of Heidelberg, which endeavors to clarify the suggestions of withdrawal of outside military strengths from Afghanistan from 2014 onwards. The suggestions for territorial security and economy are clarified with the assistance of proposed judicious choice show which, it is set, is pertinent to the case of Afghanistan. Methodologically, the authors use qualitative strategies

¹¹ Muhammad Nasrullah Mirza, and Yasir Malik, "President Trump's Strategy in Afghanistan: The Way Forward to Normalcy," *A Research Journal of South Asian Studies* 34, No 2 (2019): 353-366.

¹² Deepshikha Shahi, *Understanding Post-9/11 Afghanistan: A Critical Insight into Huntington's Civilizational Approach* (Bristol: E-International Relations, 2017), 12-15.

approach to gather essential information in terms of interviews. The article ponders at testing its speculations; specifically regarding the need for political arrangements within the post-war period and collaborations among territorial powers, which can offer assistance in accomplishing peace and financial soundness. As a result of its model-guided experimental examination, the article finds the post-withdrawal circumstances in Afghanistan to be more complicated. This complexity may be resolved emphatically only if the locked-in performing actors favor the political arrangements. In case not, it would lead to more showdown and, subsequently, chaos indeed would pass to South Asia.¹³

Siegfried O. Wolf wrote a book “The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor of the Belt and Road Initiative”. One of its chapter bargains with the developing interaction between Beijing and Kabul and the proposition for the broadening of the CPEC into Afghanistan. It expounds on the current directions inside Chinese-Afghan relations and sheds light on Beijing’s rising engagements in Afghanistan. In this setting, the chapter gives uncommon consideration to Afghan-Pakistan relations, the re-emergence of the Taliban and the role of both the US and India within the locale. It contends that a potential CPEC broadening into Afghanistan poses principal challenges to Afghans. More concretely, the potential integration of Afghanistan into the bigger Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) appears to further degenerate the conditions of the Afghan individuals. A major engagement of Beijing in Afghanistan inside the BRI framework would most likely work as a source for strife instead of soundness and would assist in weaken territorial coordination.¹⁴

Muhammad Ijaz Latif and Sehar Sabir write that Afghanistan; the Heart of Asia, being found at the cross-roads of tri-regional intersection offers a buffer as well as a test case for the great powers to exhibit and demonstrate their potential. India and China are both yearning for alteration in their worldwide status. Practicing approach of non-interference has high-stakes in Afghanistan. The worldwide community is trying to find unused partners to expect more mindful part in Afghanistan. How China and India bargain with such weight, and their external approach standards will decide their control status in the worldwide framework. China's security reason and its commercial engagement with Afghanistan, and India's desire to get access to Central Asia clear the way towards such understanding. Administration of their

¹³ Ejaz Hussain, and Muhammad Jahanzaib, “Afghanistan: The Western Withdrawal and its Implications for Security and Economy”, *Heidelberg Papers in South Asian and Comparative Politics*, No 76 (2015): 4-8.

¹⁴ Siegfried O. Wolf, *The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor of the Belt and Road Initiative* (Belgium: South Asia Democratic Forum, 2019), 261-280.

shared connection is exceptionally significant for peace in Afghanistan and for the entire region.¹⁵

NSI's Afghanistan Inequality Report: 2019, analyzes datasets on wealth and status distribution in Afghanistan. It finds that despite the poverty, Afghanistan does not have acute overall inequality except in the field of agricultural land ownership, which exposes this segment of the Afghan society to risk acceptance. Moreover, the urban rural divide in Afghanistan predominantly hampers the country's modernization process. The poor rural population, which is prone to risk acceptance, is ripe for Taliban recruitment. The urban-rural inequality stimulates significant concern to the US interests in Afghanistan's stability, because it undermines the legitimacy of Afghan government. Lessening the disparity in rural areas will enhance the popularity of the legitimate Afghan government on one hand and would discourage the Taliban's recruitment process. It would also serve to minimize the growth of informal and black economies of Afghanistan. The report maintains that China shares the similar interests to the US in Afghanistan. China also believes in promoting political stability and undermining terrorism in Afghanistan. Beijing will also be concerned about the Urban-rural disparity as it would impede Chinese agenda of integrating Afghanistan into the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The report argues that Russia is least concerned about Afghanistan's inequality as compared to China or the US. It states that risk acceptant population serves Moscow as it helps in undermining the US presence in Afghanistan, but it is also unfavorable for Russia in the context that it increases the chances of terrorist activity within the geopolitical periphery of Russia.¹⁶

Shahram Akbarzadeh and Niamatullah Ibrahimi write that Iran got a critical reception after the toppling of the Taliban administration in Afghanistan by the US led military expedition in 2001. The modern Afghan government sets up agreeable ties with Iran, permitting it to grow its political, financial and social impact within the nation. On contrary, Iran has given critical bolster to the Taliban in their campaign to brutally upend the political, social and financial firms within the nation. The article analyzes the basic residential and territorial security flaws that contribute to these conflicting conducts. It offers an insight on how the rise of the Islamic State-Khorasan in 2014 effected Iran's plausible arrangements towards the Taliban. The paper contends that Tehran sees the Taliban as an instrument to disturb the impact

¹⁵ Muhammad Ijaz Latif, and Sehar Sabir, "Great Power Perspective towards Afghanistan: India, China Creeping Competition in the Heart of Asia", *Journal of Political Studies* 26, No 2 (2019): 187-202.

¹⁶ Weston Aviles, "Afghanistan Inequality Report", *NSI Journal* (2019): 1-14.

of other actors in Afghanistan. It argues that the instrumentalisation of the Taliban is likely to be counterproductive for Iranian security within the long run because it stimulates Afghanistan's other actors and undermines Iran's long-term interests in Afghanistan.¹⁷

Dr. Umbreen Javaid and Rameesha Javaid contend in their article that Pakistan and Afghanistan are geopolitically and geo-strategically interlocked with each other, therefore, the increasing Indian influence in Afghanistan would be a matter of grave concern for Pakistan. The undertakings in Afghanistan specifically influence Pakistan due to shared social values and conventional ties; thus, Pakistan's vital interest lies in a solid and steady Afghanistan. However, the strife situation between conventional rivals in South Asia- India and Pakistan are coming to the front with a new dimension in Afghanistan. In this manner, India is attempting to accomplish a significant soft part in Afghanistan and make its nearness legitimized there to reach its broader destinations utilizing Afghanistan. Although, Indian presence in Pakistan's western neighborhood is contributing to socio-economic infrastructure and civil, military and political administrations of Afghanistan, yet it could be a source of fear and uneasiness for Pakistan as India may use this presence to undermine Pakistan's interests. The paper analyzes the level of cooperation and impact of India in Afghanistan and its implications for Pakistan.¹⁸

Muqarrab Akbar profiles the beginning of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014 and the resultant challenges and suggestions for the regional stability. The startling rebellion of Taliban and aggressors after 10 years long time of war on terror has convinced Americans to partner with all stakeholders of Afghan issue for a way better future of Afghanistan and worldwide security. The paper analyzes the causes of US withdrawal from Afghanistan. The paper critically analyzes the concerns of Pakistan and Afghanistan in the post-US withdrawal environment in Afghanistan.¹⁹

Sidra Rehman Mughal and Nazir Hussain argue that the US exit procedure 2014 from Afghanistan has entered one of its last stages. The US has, as of now, reduced its troops in Afghanistan, in spite of the fact that there were certain changes in the US policy after Trump came into control. But still, there's an approaching perplexity which exists with respect to the

¹⁷ Shahram Akbarzadeh, and Niamatullah Ibrahimi, "The Taliban: A New Proxy for Iran in Afghanistan?", *Third World Quarterly* 41, No 5 (2020): 764-782.

¹⁸ Dr. Umbreen Javaid, and Rameesha Javaid, "Indian Influence in Afghanistan and its Implications for Pakistan", *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan* 53, No 1 (2016): 11-14.

¹⁹ Muqarrab Akbar, "US Withdrawal from Afghanistan: Implications for Pakistan", *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences* 35, No 2 (2015): 1109-1119.

repercussions of the occasion. Besides, Pakistan too will be influenced in more than one ways. The US is creating a vacuum upon which numerous territorial and foreign powers have set their eyes on. India, Iran, China and Russia are all planning to be a portion of the post-US withdrawal Afghanistan but this might only produce more precariousness. Additionally, it will have extreme security, political and vital repercussions for Pakistan. The picture which comes to the intellect is aiming to be of an eternal circle of security complexes for Pakistan after the withdrawal.²⁰

Research Questions

1. How was US policy towards Afghanistan transformed after 9/11?
2. What was Pakistan's foreign policy towards Afghanistan in post 9/11 Era?
3. What challenges US faced with its 2014 withdrawal policy?
4. What are the security implications of US withdrawal policy for Pakistan?

Theoretical Framework

Afghanistan's geographical location has attracted the great powers throughout the history to further their agenda. The struggle for power over Afghanistan between Great Britain and USSR, and the arrival of USSR in 80's are its examples. The 9/11 twin tower attacks in the US changed the shape of the world politics. After the incident, the US and allied forces attacked Afghanistan where an unending war kicked off in 2001. Since 2001 to date, the war continues and has been proved the most expansive war in terms of finance in the history of mankind. US ambitions and the realist agenda with its coercive attitude is much clear in Afghanistan either it was during the cold war or in post 9/11.

US policy towards Afghanistan since 1979 had been a practical manifestation of Classical Realism Theory. The Theory of Realism focuses on the conflictual and competitive side of the inter-state relations. Realism's roots can be traced in some of the primitive writings, particularly in Thucydides' history of the Peloponnesian War between 431 and 404 BC. Thucydides' two thousand years old writings can vaguely be labelled 'realist' due to the fact that IR theory did not exist until the twentieth century. However, an in-depth analysis of the thought patterns and behaviours of the ancient world and the modern world by the theorists,

²⁰ Sidra Rehman Mughal, and Nazir Hussain, "US Withdrawal from Afghanistan: Implications for Pakistan", *Journal of Political Studies* 24, No 2 (2017): 485-497.

points out several similarities between them. International Relations theorists believe in existence of a timeless theory that spanned throughout the recorded human history- called the 'realism' theory.

The first and foremost argument of realism theory is that the nation-state, often referred as state, is the principle actor in international relations. Other bodies such as individuals and organizations like the UN, IMF, and the World Bank also have an impactful role in international politics but their power is limited. Secondly, the nation-state acts as a unitary actor, particularly during war. Thirdly, the states are rational actors that primarily rely on rational decision-making in pursuit of their national interest. It would avoid any action that could result in weakening of the state or subject it to a vulnerable position. Realists believe that the states and their leaders, irrespective of their political persuasion, religiously practice this principle to survive in a competitive international environment. Finally, in the absence of anyone being in charge internationally, states live in a context of anarchy. States manage police forces, militaries, courts and so on for smooth running of domestic affairs and to tackle emergency situations. Since, there is no established hierarchy in international politics, need for an in charge arises at international level who could respond to emergency situations to maintain peace at world level.

Realists believe that individuals are organized into states; therefore, human nature is reflective in states' behaviour. They argue that individuals' actions are driven by appetite for power, selfishness, and their inability to trust others, and so are the states'; which lead to predictable outcomes. This could be the one reason that war has been so common throughout the recorded history. Niccolò Machiavelli, the Italian diplomat and philosopher, stressed in his 16th century book *The Prince* that the basic human characteristics influence the security of the state. He emphasized that a leader's primary concern and responsibility is to promote national security. The leader is expected to be a lion-the powerful, and a fox-the deceptive, to effectively cope with internal and external threats to his rule. Therefore, power and deception are crucial tools for the conduct of foreign policy. In Machiavelli's opinion, rulers adhere to the 'ethics of responsibility' rather than following the conventional religious morality- that is, they should be good when they can, but they must also be willing to adopt violence, when needed, to ensure the survival of the state.

The theory of realism gives acceptance to unsavoury actions like war and considers violence a necessary tool of statecraft. It stresses that the states must not hesitate to use violence

in an imperfect world when it is in their national interest. This is wholly rational in a world where the survival of the state is pre-eminent. All other political objectives lose relevance, if a state ceases to exist due to attack or internal collapse. However, the policy makers must exercise caution while making decisions on use of military power.

The proponents of realism theory religiously believe that the national interest is 'amoral' which is not subject to calculations of morality. Thomas Hobbes, the intellectual Godfather of this political philosophy, argued that humans possess an inherent urge to dominate, which also reflects in states behaviour. He maintained that if any two men, or in the arena of international politics; any two states, desired for the same thing, which nevertheless they both could not have, they become enemies and endeavour to destroy or subdue one another. In the bipolar world, both the US and the former USSR, struggled against each other to attain the status of sole super power. Their ambition to achieve absolute power in global politics became the reason for cold war with a single goal of destruction of the other. The same reason lured Soviet Union to invade Afghanistan in 1980s, and the same was the reason that governed US support to Afghan Mujahedeen.

In the backdrop of Second World War, Hans Morgenthau outlined a comprehensive international theory as he believed that society in general and politics in particular are governed by laws that are rooted in human nature. The insightful work of historical figures such as Thucydides and Machiavelli provided basis to Morgenthau to elucidate the relationship between interests and morality in international politics. Morgenthau differed with the idealists, who advocate that goodwill should dominate the relations between states and international crises should be addressed through open negotiations marked with benevolence. He outlined an approach that favoured power over morality. He advised that morality was an undesirable attribute in policymaking that should be avoided. In Morgenthau's account, every political action is directed towards keeping, increasing or demonstrating power. He argued that the policy based on the principles of morality and idealism was destined to lead to weakness – and possibly the destruction or domination of a state at the hands of a competitor.

Hans. J. Morgenthau, the political father of classic realism theory, had identified six principles of realism. These principles aptly reflect in US foreign policy, particularly related with Afghanistan. The principle, argued by Morgenthau, the politics was based on human nature and psychology, therefore the political theory was based on human psychology and human nature. After the 9/11 attacks, US President' usage of the phrase crusade against evils

to describe war on terror had generated much controversy and it was perceived a war against Islam in the Muslim world. He further argues that politics could be understood on the basis of rationale rather than on moral and religious grounds. And national interest of a nation was largely dependent on power that it possessed. So Power was the ultimate aim for states. Classical realists see the international arena as a competitive and hostile stage where power is the main currency. Power is a relational concept; one does not exercise power in a vacuum, but in relation to another entity. Second, power is a relative term; calculation needs to be made not only about one's own power capabilities, but about the power that other state actor possess. At time when Al-Qaeda crashed into the twin towers, due to the systemic impulses, the USA attacked Afghanistan to preserve the power at whatever the expense is. However, its sense of powerful stature in the international arena compelled it to overlook the capabilities of its adversaries i.e. the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. Although, Taliban and Al-Qaeda fighters were much weaker as compared to the US and they lacked the technological advancement too, yet they dented the strength of the latter by resorting to guerrilla warfare and stretched the war to two long decades. There is also a possibility that the US failed to assess the outcome of the disproportionate use of military force in Afghanistan, which may have caused blowback and resentment in the region. This resentment led to the rise of non-state actors against the US. This failure in correct assessment of the adversaries' capabilities proved costly for the US in terms of time, manpower and logistics.

Morgenthau believes that there could never be a parallel between the moral laws which govern the universe and moral aspirations of a state, therefore all political actors pursue their national interests. This principle provides an insight to the US aspiration for the invasion of Afghanistan. The US attack can possibly have a linkage with Washington's desire to control the Central Asian pipelines. Moreover, it was in the interest of the US to maintain presence in the region to keep a check on its rivals- Russia, China and Iran. The Afghan war is part of this militarization of the US global hegemony.

Morgenthau further argues that national interest of a state is not fixed. It varies from time to time and also from one environment to another environment. Enemy of today can be friend of tomorrow, and friend of today can be enemy of tomorrow. Pakistan, which was one of the only three countries alongside UAE and Saudi Arabia that had recognised Taliban's regime, turned against the militant group in the changing environment and became US allies in

the War on Terror. Similarly, the US and Mujahedeen were allies in war against Soviets but become adversaries after the split of the USSR.

Morgenthau argues that universal moral principles could not be applied on state actions and these principles change from time to time. A State cannot always practice the principle of morality as these are practiced by an individual. An individual can sacrifice his comfort, liberty or freedom for morality but a State can't. The US, which harboured and supported the Mujahedeen against the Soviets in 1980s, fought against the same two decades later.

The political sphere was an autonomous sphere and political thinkers think in terms of national interest just like an economist thinks in terms of economic utility or a jurist thinks in terms of legal principles. The basic aim of a state in international politics is to protect the state at all costs. But in course of providing for one's own security, the state in questions will automatically be fuelling the insecurity of other states. Certain allies of the US that were part of the US led War on Terror in Afghanistan gradually left Afghanistan when the war became more of a burden on their national interests. Similarly Pakistan is accused of helping Afghan Taliban against Afghan government despite being a US ally. The policy makers in Islamabad apparently viewed Afghan Taliban as a potent ally against the non-receptive Afghan government.

Research Methodology

The approach used in this research is Qualitative research based on secondary data resources. The data was obtained from published material in the form of newspaper articles, journals, books and online resources. The research is descriptive and analytical in nature. Taking into account the US previous policy, history, the intensions, and actions of various successive administrations since 9/11, the research analyzed the US future course of action in Afghanistan after its withdrawal. Previous researches on history of conflicts in Afghanistan, decades long conflictual relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, and role of regional powers in Afghanistan in Cold war and post-cold war eras were studied and analyzed to predict the future of Pakistan and Afghanistan in the post US-withdrawal era.

The thesis used controlled case studies of Afghan wars between 1979 and 2021 to gain insights into the US and NATO's plans to leave Afghanistan. The thesis investigated economic, political, social and religious effects of these wars on Pakistan and Afghanistan. Furthermore,

the thesis traced the effects of the defeat of USSR in Afghanistan on the ensuing civil war in Afghanistan by analyzing previous researches on the topic. The thesis also qualitatively analyzed the secondary data on the role of regional powers like India, Iran and Pakistan in Afghanistan in first and second Afghan wars. The research articles by experts on Afghanistan were thoroughly analyzed during the writing of this thesis. The reports by international organizations on economic development of Afghanistan, foreign aid, crime, and corruption in government departments of Afghanistan were analyzed to unearth the causes behind rising Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan.

Delimitations

This study aims to understand the United States withdrawal from Afghanistan and its possible implications in the region, most particularly for Pakistan. Although, this research talks about the overall implications of the US withdrawal for Pakistan in general but the effect on ‘Security’ is especially focused.

Organizational Structure

“Introduction “contains an overview of the research proposal, research methodology, research questions of the topic, and the literature review. It briefly describes conflicts in Afghanistan in the recent past and the present, the US led NATO invasion of Afghanistan, and the resultant installation of democratic government in the country. It also draws a brief picture of possible implications of the US withdrawal for Pakistan.

Chapter One “9/11 and the US Invasion of Afghanistan: Historical Background” explains the invasions of Afghanistan by the USSR and the US. It explains the causes behind the First Afghan War i.e. the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the resultant birth of US-backed Mujahedeen in Afghanistan. It highlights the power struggle between Mujahedeen groups, the Afghan civil war and emergence of Taliban in Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal. It explains the events behind US Invasion of Afghanistan and draws a connection between First Afghan War with the US War on Terror in Afghanistan.

Chapter Two “Pakistan’s Afghan Policy: An Overview “briefly analyzes the relations between modern day Pakistan and Afghanistan in colonial times. It sheds light on relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan since the inception of the former in 1947 and highlights the factors that governed the state of relations between these two countries over the

past seven decades. It assesses Pakistan's involvement in Afghanistan during the two foreign invasions of Afghanistan and the Afghan civil war. It also describes the rationality behind Pakistan's policy decisions regarding Afghanistan and explains the role of regional politics in Pak-Afghan relations.

Chapter Three “US Long Term War in Afghanistan and its Withdrawal Policy” describes the US invasion of Afghanistan and the changes it brought to the country in the aftermath of 9/11. It explains the new US approach towards Afghanistan, the economic and defense contributions it made to the country, and support for the democratic process in the war-affected nation. It also outlines NATO and the US exit strategy from Afghanistan.

Chapter Four “Analyzing US Withdrawal Policy from Afghanistan” highlights the ongoing peace negotiations in Afghanistan and the challenges to the US-Taliban dialogues process. It explains the phases of the negotiations process, the narrative of both sides and the possibility of the US exit from Afghanistan. It also describes the options for engagement and the practical measures for completion of the peace process in Afghanistan.

Chapter Five “US Withdrawal and its Implications for Pakistan” concludes the debate regarding implications of the US withdrawal for Pakistan. It presents Pakistan's viewpoint and role in the US-Taliban peace dialogues. It mentions different factors that may haunt Pakistan after the US exit from Afghanistan. It illustrates the role of regional powers in the post-US withdrawal Afghanistan and its impact on Pakistan's national security and national interest. In the light of Pak-Afghan decades-long bitter relations, it also analyzes the likely politico-religious and demographic impacts that Pakistan may face after the US exit from Afghanistan.

President Biden's Withdrawal Policy from Afghanistan illustrates the key points of the Biden's withdrawal policy. It encompasses the views of pro and anti-withdrawal policy critics. It also highlights the reactions of **Afghan Government, The Taliban, and Pakistan** to Biden's changes in the withdrawal policy.

The Conclusion presents a summary of the thesis. It presents events that revolved around the Afghan wars in the past four decades. It illustrates the possible regional dynamics in the post-US withdrawal era and its implications for Pakistan. The **Findings** highlights the major findings of the research thesis, while, **The Way Forward** carries the recommendations for Pakistan regarding its future Afghan policy after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan.

CHAPTER 01

9/11 AND THE US INVASION OF AFGHANISTAN: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In 1973, Mohammad Daoud Khan overthrew his cousin King Zahir Shah and declared Afghanistan a republic. Daoud regime, which proved to be increasingly repressive to its people, lost the little support it had in the Afghan masses regime in next few years. Meanwhile, Moscow signaled Afghan communists that it was willing to back a revolt against Daoud regime. By 1977, the leadership of the Afghan Communist Party, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), had started brewing concrete plans to oust Daoud Khan. In this regard, PDPA actively began recruiting among the Afghan military, many of whom were trained in the Soviet Union. By 1978, the PDPA had succeeded in expanding its support base within the Afghan Army by 100 percent.²¹ On 26 April, 1978, Daoud Khan ordered the arrest of mainstream PDPA leadership, which led the Afghan communists to launch a coup against the regime. The following day, pro-communist units of Afghan Army stormed the Presidential palace, killing Daoud and his family members. PDPA leader, Nur Mohammad Taraki, assumed the charge of Afghan President while Hafizullah Amin became Deputy Prime Minister of Afghanistan.

The PDPA coup was not a broad-based revolt and only around 600 pro-communist troops were part of the main attack. The new communist regime lacked popular support either. In order to consolidate its power in Afghanistan, the new regime resorted to ever-increasingly repressive measures like extensive executions of its opponents. By 1979, revolt against the new regime spread throughout the countryside which culminated in a major uprising in Herat in March of that year which left 5,000 dead, including 100 Soviet advisors and their families. The political chaos began to spread throughout Afghanistan by mid-1979, and ultimately on 14 September, 1979, Amin overthrew Taraki. The mounting political instability prompted Soviet Union to consider military intervention in Afghanistan to support its communist support base. Raymond Garthoff asserts that by the eve of the invasion:

²¹ A. Arnold, *Afghanistan's Two-Party Communism: Parcham and Khalq* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1983), 47.

The real Soviet fear was that Amin was neither reliable as a partner nor subject to Soviet guidance, and at the same time was ineffective in controlling the growing resistance. In desperation Amin might turn to the United States as Egyptian President Sadat and Somali General Siad had done. Alternatively, he would likely be swept away by a populist Islamic national movement. In either case the Soviet Union would lose all its cumulative investment in Afghanistan.²²

Moscow put Soviet troops in Afghanistan on alert and began to increase troop deployment along the Afghan border. On 24 December, 1979, Soviet Union made the invasion decision. The next day Soviet troops entered Afghanistan and faced little resistance. The invaders suffered only 20–30 deaths and around 300 were wounded. Soviet troops stormed the Presidential palace on 27 December and killed Amin. By the start of the New Year, the Soviets had gained control of all major cities in Afghanistan.

1.1. The First Afghan War

The Afghan war and internal conflict dates back to 1979, when Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan to curtail insurgency by rebels against the communist Afghan government that had risen to power after a coup in April 1978. These rebels, also known as Islamist guerillas or Mujahedeen, included former soldiers of the Afghan Army, exiled Islamists in Iran and Pakistan, and private militias of various disgruntled political groups. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan paved way for an armed conflict between the US backed anti-communist Mujahedeen and the soviet soldiers.

After the deposition of Daud regime in a coup by Afghan communists, the US President Jimmy Carter endeavored to maintain ties with the new Taraki government. The Carter Administration was unsure about the ideological proximity of the new regime with Communism. Even after revelation of true nature of the new regime, the US administration asserted that they should prefer a “restrained” policy toward Taraki regime to keep the Afghans away from the Soviet Union. However, US redrafted its policy towards the new regime after killing of its Ambassador Adolph Dubbs during a rescue operation, who had been kidnapped in February 1979. The Afghan government had refused to lend a supportive hand to the US investigators over the envoy’s death. Carter then decided to curtail US aid and allowed CIA to channel \$500,000 to antigovernment groups in Afghanistan.

²² R. Garthoff, *Detente and Confrontation: American Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan* (Washington DC: Brookings Institute, 1984), 921.

By December 1979, US had received intelligence that the Soviets were ready to invade Afghanistan. Carter had already seen the fall of Tehran to anti-US Islamic clergy by 1979, and fall off Afghanistan in the hands of Soviets would further constrain US policy goals in cold war era. Thereby, the Soviet attack on Afghanistan angered the hawks and doves in the US administration, forcing it to devise a sea change in US policy toward the Soviet Union. Carter remarked in an address on 23 January, 1980 that:

“An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.” The President further announced that “verbal condemnation is not enough. The Soviet Union must pay for its aggression.”²³

Carter subjected the Soviets to economic sanctions, boycotted the 1980 Moscow Olympics and approved covert military support to Afghan mujahedeen. The US assistance to the mujahedeen witnessed a sharp acceleration after election of Ronald Reagan as US President in 1980. Reagan promulgated his doctrine, which illustrated that US would provide military support to those who risk their lives from Afghanistan to Nicaragua to confront Soviet aggression. To implement the Reagan Doctrine in Afghanistan, the US President signed National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) 166 in March 1985, under which CIA was authorized to extend support to the mujahedeen with “all means available.”²⁴

In the next decade, US increased military support to the mujahedeen from \$ 122 million in 1984 to \$ 250 million in 1985, and further raised it from \$ 470 million in 1986 to \$630 million by 1987.²⁵ The CIA supplied wide range of weapons to the rebels, including Stinger missiles in May 1986. It also provided intelligence support to the Mujahedeen against Soviets in form of communications intercepts and satellite imagery. The US also secured support from its allies like Saudi Arabia and Gulf countries to coordinate financial assistance to mujahedeen. By the mid-1980s, non-US aid to mujahedeen had reached about \$ 300 million per annum.²⁶

The war on ground had reached an impasse by 1985. The Soviets had deployed around 100,000 troops in Afghanistan while the mujahedeen had a numerical strength of around

²³ Jimmy Carter, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Jimmy Carter: 1980-81* (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1982), 194-200.

²⁴ Alan J. Kuperman, “The Stinger Missile and U.S. Intervention in Afghanistan”, *Political Science Quarterly* 114, No. 2 (Summer 1999): 219-263.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Marvin G. Weinbaum, “War and Peace in Afghanistan: The Pakistani Role”, *Middle East Journal* 45, No. 1 (Winter 1991): 71-85

250,000 fighters.²⁷ However, Soviets achieved the military parity because of its dominance in air power against the mujahedeen. The introduction of the Stinger missile drastically altered the course of war for the Soviets as mujahedeen destroyed 279 Soviet aircrafts between 1986 and 1989 with US stinger missiles.²⁸ Besides, Afghan air force also remained at receiving end between 1986 and 1989 with losing 94 planes, and 57 helicopters. The missiles compelled the Soviets to redesign its strategy and utilize high-level bombing and abandon some aerial missions. This provided greater freedom to the mujahedeen in terms of designing operations.

The growing losses, both in terms of manpower and logistics, forced Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to start dialogues with the US over withdrawal from Afghanistan. These talks concluded in shape of Geneva Accords in April 1988, which endorsed Soviet withdrawal in February 1989, and an end to military intervention in Afghanistan by both rival superpowers. On 15 February, 1989 the last Soviet troops withdrew from Afghanistan, putting an abrupt end to the superpower rivalry in the country. The US and the Soviets continued supplying arms to their sympathizers even after the withdrawal in order to prevent the opposing sides from gaining ascendancy in Afghanistan. This aggravated the civil war and prolonged the fighting.

By December 1990, the superpowers agreed to end their involvement in Afghan conflict. The Gulf War further endorsed the need for ending arms transfers as Islamists supported Saddam Hussein, to the dismay of the Saudis and Pakistanis. Russia, the US, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan reached to a final agreement in December 1991, however, neither any major Afghan group nor the pro-Soviet Kabul regime, had participated in the discussions.

1.2. Post-Soviet Withdrawal Era

Although Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989, yet the infighting continued between the Mujahedeen and the Afghan government, which ultimately led to ouster of the latter in 1992.

The Mujahedeen groups, who came from different backgrounds, were united against the common enemy i.e. Soviet Union during 1980s, but had deep differences embedded in ethnic, linguistics and religious perspectives.²⁹ The historical rivalries among these groups

²⁷ D. Cordovez, and S.S. Harrison, *Out of Afghanistan: The Inside Story of the Soviet Withdrawal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 199.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ “Blood-Stained Hands: Past Atrocities in Kabul and Afghanistan’s Legacy of Impunity”, *Human Rights Watch* <https://www.hrw.org/report/2005/07/06/blood-stained-hands/past-atrocities-kabul-and-afghanistans-legacy-impunity> (accessed August 12, 2020)

further aggravated the problem and Mujahedeen groups increasingly began to fight each other for political gains in post-Soviet war era.

In early 1990s, a new armed movement started to thrive under the name Taliban (Pashto word for students) that was comprised of former Afghan Mujahedeen and was joined by younger Pashtun students of Pakistani seminaries.³⁰ The movement gained public support by promising stability and rule of law in Afghanistan after four years of infighting (1992–1996) between rival mujahedeen groups. Taliban invaded Kandahar in November 1994, and by September 1996 they had snatched control of Kabul- the capital, from Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani, an ethnic Tajik, whom Taliban perceived as anti-Pashtun and corrupt. The same year Taliban leader Mullah Omar declared Afghanistan an Islamic Emirate and by 2001, he was able to gain control over nearly 90 percent of Afghan territory.³¹

During the tenure of Taliban in Afghanistan, the country faced an upsurge in violation of human rights and crimes against religious minorities were also on peak. Taliban had presented an extremist image of Islam to the whole world by adopting a strict interpretation of Islamic Sharia or Jurisprudence. They subjected women, girls, and some ethnic groups including Hazaara Shia community to extreme laws. Besides, Afghan people also lived their life in poverty during the Taliban regime.³²

Jihadist elements and groups from Muslim world fancied Taliban controlled Afghanistan, which was being governed under strict Sharia laws. The members of Jihadist groups like Al-Qaeda began shifting to Afghanistan during Taliban regime. The latter too deemed no harm in providing sanctuaries to these extremist elements, particularly Al-Qaeda affiliates, in Afghanistan due to shared ideological bonding. The Taliban, who rose to power from the ashes of post-Soviet civil war in Afghanistan, provided sanctuary to al-Qaeda for its operations.³³

On 15 October 1999, the United Nations Security Council had adopted Resolution 1267, under which it created Al-Qaeda and Taliban Sanctions Committee. The committee declared the two Islamic groups as terrorist outfits and imposed sanctions on their travel, funding, and arms shipments. The UN move followed a period of ascendancy for al-Qaeda and

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Random House Inc, 2005), 140.

³³ “The US War in Afghanistan: 1999-2020”, *Council on Foreign Relations*, <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-war-afghanistan> (accessed November 19, 2020)

its chief Osama Bin Laden, who guided the terror group from Afghanistan and Peshawar, Pakistan, in the late 1980s, to Sudan in 1991, and back to Afghanistan in the mid-1990s.³⁴

Taliban movement had faced severe armed resistance from former Soviet era Mujahedeen, who had gathered under Northern Alliance. The Northern Alliance, also known as the United Islamic Front for Salvation of Afghanistan (UIFSA), became active in 1990. It was a coalition of militias with a shared goal of toppling the Taliban government across Afghanistan. The alliance consisted of various ethnically and religiously distinctive disparate groups of rebel movements, who fought defensive battles against Taliban militants. The Northern alliance was primarily comprised of three non-Pashtun ethnic groups- Uzbeks, Tajiks, and the Hazaara. The group has had several notable leaders, the most prominent being Ahmad Shah Massoud- an expert of guerilla warfare and commonly known as the Lion of the Panjshir.

Ahmad Shah Massoud was assassinated by al-Qaeda operatives disguised as journalists on 9 September, 2001. The killing of Massoud served a serious blow to the anti-Taliban group. Experts on Terrorism believe that Massoud's assassination was a pivotal factor behind the protection of Osama Bin Laden by the Taliban after the 9/11 attacks. Expert Peter Bergen later calls Massoud's assassination "the curtain raiser for the attacks on New York City and Washington, DC."³⁵ In 2001, United States of America (USA) launched War on Terror in Afghanistan in response to the attack on World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, ousting Taliban from power.

1.3. The US Invasion

On 11 September, 2001, 19 militants of Al-Qaeda network hijacked four US commercial planes and used them as weapons of mass destruction against US civilian and military installations. The militants stormed two of these hijacked planes into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, while the third plane was crashed into the Pentagon building in Washington. The fourth plane crashed into the ground in Pennsylvania, killing all passengers aboard. These attacks were the first acts of foreign aggression on mainland US soil since the Pearl Harbor strikes in 1941. These tragic events, which killed thousands in US, marked the start of US War on Terror against Al-Qaeda operatives in Afghanistan.

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

On October 7, 2001, the US and British forces, in alliance with NATO and support from Pakistan, began aerial strikes on Taliban regime, who had refused to hand over Al-Qaeda Chief Osama Bin Laden to USA. The other countries like France, Germany, Australia, and Canada provided logistical support to the U.S, whereas Anti-Taliban group Northern Alliance provided troops to fight Taliban militants on ground. U.S titled this operation as War on Terror.³⁶

The major goal behind the war against Afghanistan was to hunt down Al-Qaeda Chief Osama bin Laden, whom Taliban government had given protection since 1996. A few weeks before the war, the USA and the United Nation Security Council (UNSC) had demanded Taliban to hand over Osama Bin Laden to U.S for trial in American courts. After considering the US offer, Taliban proposed a counteroffer to the US and UNSC that they were willing to give up on Osama Bin Laden, provided that he would be tried in an Islamic Court. US rejected the offer and termed it un-satisfactory. Ultimately, the second Afghan War or the War on Terror started with the airstrikes against the Al-Qaeda installations in Afghan cities including Kabul, Kandahar, Jalalabad, and Mazar-e- Sharif. The US coupled these airstrikes with humanitarian supplies for the Afghan civilians through other planes.

The Taliban named the war, which the U.S started, as the War on Islam to get sympathies and acceptance from Muslims and jihadist groups across the world. Al-Qaeda supported Taliban in the war and declared Jihad against the infidels. In a statement to Al-Jazeera Network, the leader of Al- Qaeda said “we are going to do an attack on entire non-Muslim world”.

After destroying the Taliban defense, the U.S abridged air operations and started ground war with assistance from its allies. US established its superiority in the war and the officials of Taliban regime and its forces vacated Kabul after a month of initiation of war. On 12 November 2001, Kabul had fallen. By December 2001, most of the Taliban installations had been captured and hundreds of their leaders went underground. The Al-Qaeda militants took shelter in the mountains region of Tora Bora. In the meantime, the Northern Alliance forces with the support from the U.S., engaged the Al-Qaeda militants in battles. The Al-Qaeda chief and Taliban officials manage to escape to neighboring country Pakistan. The U.S military succeeded in

³⁶ Jayshree Bajoria, “India-Afghanistan Relations”, *Council on Foreign Relations*, July 22, 2009, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/india-afghanistan-relations> (accessed January 10, 2020)

capturing the Taliban and Al-Qaida hideouts by the mid of December but there were no sign of Osama bin Laden and key Taliban leaders.

After the escape of Osama Bin Laden and the capture of Tora Bora shelters, the US established an Afghan council under the supervision of Hamid Karzai. Tribal elders and influential were inducted in the council. Hamid Karzai served as the interim leader and later became Afghan President in 2004. Afghanistan embraced democracy under the shadow of 10,000 U.S military troops.

However, the Taliban were never going to surrender and began reuniting in the mountains located between border region of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Taliban and Al-Qaeda militants continued their guerrilla style insurgency against the US and Afghan forces in the years come. They killed hundreds of Afghan government officials, while kidnapped and targeted the foreigners.³⁷ U.S faced severe losses both in terms of manpower and finances in Afghanistan in war on terror which has now stretched over two decades. On the other side Afghans continue to make up the largest refugee population in the world. Moreover the economy of the country was badly damaged in that war.

1.4. Conclusion

While most political observers had predicted the immediate collapse of pro-Soviet Afghan regime after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the infighting among mujahedeen groups provided breathing space to the regime until 1992. However, Afghan civil war and power struggle among political fragments continued until 1996 when a relatively new group, the Taliban, rose to power and filled the political vacuum. They were able to control approximately 90 percent of the country from 1996 to 2001. The ethnic and religious differences of the mujahedeen which caused the lengthy post-Soviet civil war reflected the tensions and political infighting of both Afghan history and the more contemporary problems that emerged during the Soviet and US occupations.

To conclude, the conflict in Afghanistan is never a new thing but unfortunately since years the Afghan soil has faced many poor consequences and disturbances. Since 1980s, the struggle of Afghans to eliminate foreign influence from their land is going on and on. However, the Afghan soil is still plagued in the 21st century because of the foreign intervention of the

³⁷ Kathy Gannon, "Afghanistan Unbound," *Foreign Affairs* 83, No. 3 (May 2004): 35-46.

USA, which the US justify on the basis of the 9/11 attacks. The US first created and funded jihadists to fight the Soviets, and then invaded Afghanistan to curb these religious extremists.

The 9/11 events gave world politics a new dimension and it witnessed a new era of war after the deadliest world wars. In this globalized war the states are collaboratively fighting for one single interest which is called the war against terrorism and all the countries believed that the terrorists had footprints in Afghanistan. Moreover, Afghanistan is a land locked country that provides a gateway to Middle East, South Asia and Central Asia, which increases its importance in global politics. It is necessary for the US to understand that its intervention in Afghanistan must have secured US mainland territory from any potent foreign threat, but it has proved to be very costly for the peace and security of Afghanistan and its people, who have been trapped in deadliest foreign wars since 1980s.

CHAPTER 02

PAKISTAN'S AFGHAN POLICY: AN OVERVIEW

Being neighbors, Pakistan and Afghanistan share a lot of cultural similarities with each other but the mutual relations between both these countries remained strained since the creation of Pakistan in 1947.³⁸ The officials on both sides have had a hawkish attitude towards each other in the past, and even in the present the trend does not change. Ever since the departure of the British from the Indian subcontinent, both countries have been unsuccessful in adjusting themselves as per the qualitative variation in the geopolitical atmosphere of the region. Ties between both countries have been unable to fit in political relations. In contrast to that, both nations have people to people contacts since centuries and the bordered areas between both countries remained important trade routes.

2.1. Historical Context: Pre-Colonial Times

The modern history of Afghanistan as a sovereign nation starts from the emergence of the Durrani Empire in 1747. After 150 years of its creation, it started having a tussle with the British Empire in South Asia from 1893. After a series of conflicts, the kingdom had to surrender Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan regions to the British Empire under the Treaty of Rawalpindi, which was negotiated by Sir Mortimer Wheelers. The boundary demarcated between both entities was named as Durand Line.³⁹ The treaty enabled British to recognize Afghan sovereignty that would not extend to the surrendered regions. The treaty divided the ethnic Pashtun population on two sides; half with the British Empire and a half with the Afghan Kingdom. Afghanistan, at that time, became a center of Great Game between Tsar Russia and the British Empire. The British feared that Czar Russia, after annexing some of the Central Asian regions, would quickly advance towards the South Asian region. Mortimer Wheeler did

³⁸ Riaz Mohammad Khan, "Overview of Pakistan's Afghan Policy and Future Perspectives", *Institute of Strategic Studies* 34, No 1 (March 2014): 1-26.

³⁹ Vinay Kaura, "The Durand Line: A British Legacy Plaguing Afghan-Pakistani Relations", *Middle East Institute*, June 27, 2017, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/durand-line-british-legacy-plaguing-afghan-pakistani-relations> (accessed March 10, 2020)

not want Russians to further move towards their colony so after successful negotiations with King Amir Abdur Rahman Khan of Afghanistan he agreed on give and take. The Afghans agreed to hand over areas i.e., Peshawar, Waziristan, Chitral, and Swat to British, and in return, they were able to acquire some strategic landscapes i.e., Nuristan and Asmara areas.

However, after a few years, the Afghans started creating disturbances in the British held territories as they began paying Pashtun tribesmen in British held areas to revolt against British Empire. From 1930 onwards, there were more than 200 braids in the tribal areas between British soldiers and the tribesmen, which further moved towards settled areas of Peshawar. To a lot of extent, the British were unable to maintain internal security but still, they kept their border intact. As Quit India Movement by Indian social activist Mahatma Gandhi along with some other political activists belonging to Indian National Congress gained momentum, and on the other hand, All India Muslim League under the leadership of Mohammad Ali Jinnah began struggling for a separate homeland for Muslims, the British Empire found it hard to maintain control over its colony.

The calls for independent India and Pakistan began echoing, which prompted British to allow both Congress and Muslim League to go for the area where they would get support for partition. At that time, Congress ally named Bacha Khan, who enjoyed a great influence in the Khyber region, was not in the favor of partition. However, Mohammad Ali Jinnah successfully persuaded Pashtuns and tribesmen to side with Muslim League. A referendum was held in Pashtun areas, in which the Pashtuns were given the option to choose between India and Pakistan.⁴⁰

Despite the boycott by Bacha Khan, the referendum remained successful and most of the Pashtun population voted in favor of Pakistan. The decision did not sit well with the Afghan regime that wanted to remerge the Pashtun areas under British control in Afghanistan. Despite writing a letter to Mountbatten, the viceroy of India, Afghan demand was ignored and rather he advised the Afghan regime to negotiate about the Durand treaty with the successor states. After the independence Pakistan considered the Durand Line as international border and committed that not an inch of Pakistani territory would be surrendered to any state.

40 Bijan Omrani, "The Durand Line: History and Problems of the Afghan-Pakistan Border", *Asian Affairs* 40, No. 2 (2009): 177-95.

2.2. Post-1947 and the US-Soviet Factor

After the departure of the British Empire, when their colony was partitioned, Afghans began developing hostility against newly emerged Pakistan and did not welcome its creation. During the United Nations Assembly in 1947 Afghanistan became the only country to vote against the resolution that called for the recognition of Pakistan as a sovereign and independent state. Moreover, in Radio Kabul the call for United Pashtuns began taking place to incite Pashtuns to struggle for reunification of all Pashtun areas from Khyber to Baluchistan in Afghanistan. Furthermore, the then King Zahir Shah of Afghanistan declared all the Durand Line agreements as null and void because he believed that the monarchy of that time was pressurized to sign such agreements with the British Empire. Most Afghan policymakers used to consider Pakistan as the product of British Empire, hence ignoring all the religious and ideological aspects behind the creation of Pakistan.

Despite some reconciliatory measure taken by both sides; such as the exchange of ambassadors from 1948 onwards along with Afghan's withdrawal of its vote against Pakistan in the UN, the relations between them remained uneasy. The Loya Jirga of Afghanistan categorically stated that it would not recognize the legitimacy of Durand Line. In summer of 1949, the tension reached at peak after King Zahir Shah delivered anti-Pakistan speeches during national day celebration of Afghanistan, and the Afghan Air Force dropped anti-Pakistan brochures in Kabul. The Afghan government began supporting the uprising in Pakistan's tribal areas by sending its irregular troops into Pakistan's territory by 1950, which was tackled by Pakistan's security forces. The assassination of Pakistan's first Prime Minister Liaqat Ali Khan by an Afghan national named Said Akbar Khan Babrak further deteriorated the relationship between the two countries.⁴¹ As a protest, Pakistan withdrew its ambassador and blocked the Karachi Port for the Afghan transit trade.

Due to its strained relations with Pakistan, Afghanistan then allied with India. This further raised eyebrows in Pakistan as it was already in a tussle with India over Kashmir issue.⁴² The policymakers in Pakistan feared that they were sandwiched between two hostile neighbors. This fear prompted them to partner with the United States as the Afghans and Indians were

⁴¹ Mohib Ullah Durani, and Ashraf Khan, "Pakistan-Afghan Relations: Historic Mirror", *The Dialogue* 4, No. 1 (March 2009): 25-64.

⁴² Umbreen Javaid, "Analyzing the Dynamics of Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations: Past and Present", *South Asian Studies* 31, No. 1 (2016): 137-147.

allied with the Soviets. Another thing that did not sit well with the Kabul regime was the implementation of One Unit policy by Pakistan Field Marshal Ayub Khan. Under One Unit all the provinces of West Pakistan including the Provinces residing at Durand Line were integrated as one federating unit. Pakistan was struggling for its survival and looked for the potential allies that would help it to counter hostile neighbors. The entrance of the US into South Asia under this scenario somehow provided relief to Pakistan as it developed military and economic ties with the US. Pakistan was awarded the membership of SEATO and CENTO. Both were the treaty organizations formed by the United States to tackle the expansion of Soviet imperialism.

The Balance of Power shifted towards Pakistan as Pakistan began acquiring advanced military technology by the United States. On the other hand, the Kabul regime was confused and wanted to match up the military capability of Pakistan.⁴³ So, by 1953, Afghanistan signed a military treaty with the Soviets, under which, Moscow agreed to sell its military and logistical aid to Afghanistan along with the Afghan forces trained by their Soviet counterparts. The dependency of Afghanistan towards the Soviet Union increased to such an extent that the Soviets began entering Afghanistan just like the British Empire entered India. From 1953 to 1978, the Afghans received economic aid more than US \$3 billion by the Soviets.

2.3. Economic Relations

The economic relations of Pakistan and Afghanistan have witnessed several ups and downs in different years starting from the independence of Pakistan in 1947 till 1965, when both states maintained complicated economic relations with each other. However during the 1965 and onwards the economic relations of both states headed towards stabilization when they signed the memorandum of understanding towards transit trade. After the war on terror, the ties between both states again got rough, however, in 2010 both states consolidated relations and agreed to become international trade partners. Moreover, Pakistan provided much technical and financial assistance to Afghanistan for its reconstruction and rehabilitation.⁴⁴

Afghanistan is a land lock state and it is dependent on its regional partners such as Iran, India, and Pakistan in order to get access to needed resources. Hence for the prosperous Afghanistan and Pakistan, it is necessary for both states to maintain cordial relationships with

⁴³ Arwin Rahi, "Why the Durand Line Matters", *The Diplomat*, February 21, 2014, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/02/why-the-durand-line-matters/> (accessed January 19, 2020)

⁴⁴ Kalsoom Hanif, "Pakistan-Afghanistan Economic Relations after 9/11", *Journal of the Punjab University Historical Society* 31, No 1 (2018): 93-106.

each other. Pakistan is the largest trade partner of Afghanistan and the bilateral trade is estimated to be 2 billion dollars. For the exports of Pakistan, Afghanistan is considered to be the third-largest lucrative market. Generally, the Afghan trade with other countries largely depends on the Karachi Port, which as per the Afghanistan Pakistan Transit trade agreement signed by both countries in 2010, is regulated by Pakistan. Apart from that Pakistan, under its technical assistance initiative, has helped Afghanistan in various projects of infrastructural development.

Pakistan has invested much on the agriculture, health, infrastructure, and capacity building of the Afghan professionals in order to train them to exploit their potential for the best of Afghanistan. Moreover, Pakistan has set up the healthcare facilities in Afghanistan including three hospitals- Jinnah Hospital in Kabul, Naib Aminullah Khan Hospital in Logar, and Nishtar Kidney Center. The infrastructure projects of Pakistan in Afghanistan include Torkham-Jalalabad Road and the donations for telecommunication and electricity systems. Moreover, it also granted around 4000 scholarships to Afghan students for studying in Pakistan.⁴⁵ Hence Pakistan maintained very active economic relations with Afghanistan. Since Afghanistan is a land locked state with no access to seawaters, the transit trade of Afghanistan had always been dependent on Pakistan since 1965. But the new agreement signed in 2010 legalized Afghanistan's trade with other countries through Pakistan.⁴⁶ Yet a significant decline has been witnessed in trade between the two countries since 2014, as commercial trade was estimated to be half than the previous years.

The possible reasons behind the decline in trade can be attributed to Afghanistan's transit shift towards Iran due to improvement of Iran's logistical infrastructure coupled with less shipping costs, and depreciation of Iranian currency against US dollar. Similarly, both Pakistan and Afghanistan face significant challenges in their security, political, and social arenas because the drawdown of NATO has left very negative impacts upon Afghanistan and Pakistan's economies.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ "Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan*, <http://mofa.gov.pk/testing-language/> (accessed December 10, 2020)

⁴⁶ Saman Zulfiqar, "Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations", *Islamabad Policy Research Institute*, October 7, 2015, <https://ipripak.org/pakistan-afghanistan-relations/> (accessed December 10, 2020)

⁴⁷ Ishrat Husain, and Muhammad Ather Elahi, "The Future of Afghanistan-Pakistan Trade Relations", *United States Institute of Peace*, August 17 2015, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2015/08/future-afghanistan-pakistan-trade-relations> (accessed December 10, 2020)

2.4. Pakistan's Intervention in Afghanistan

2.4.1. Daoud's Emergence and Soviet Invasion: In 1973, when King Zahir Shah was overthrown by Prime Minister Daoud Khan under the eyes of the Soviet Union, the idea of Pakhtunistan began taking an extreme shape as he used to refer the North Western areas of Pakistan as the lost Pashtun lands. In his interviews, he used to state that the only country that Afghanistan has its political disputes with is Pakistan, which in other words confirmed Pakistan's stance of Afghanistan's intervention. At first Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto welcomed the Daoud regime, but Daoud showed no regard and continued to harbor proxy interventions inside Pakistan. He supported Pashtun and Baloch rebels, particularly who belonged to the banned National Awami Party of Pakistan, by providing them militant training on Afghan soil. These rebels would then launch attack on Pakistani civilians and armed forces.⁴⁸

The assassination of prominent political leader Hayat Sherpao in a bomb blast in Peshawar, and another bomb attack in Quetta where Bhutto was scheduled to address, further deteriorated ties between the two countries. Bhutto raised the issue in the UN, on the other hand, the Daoud regime accused Pakistan of mistreating dissent voices. In retaliation, Pakistan began supporting anti-Daoud Islamist entities in Afghanistan under the disguise of the Muslim Brotherhood. These Islamist entities began getting guerrilla training by Pakistan, which then served as strategic assets to the US in fight against Soviets. Constant attacks by Islamist groups against the Afghan regime forced Daoud to come to renegotiate the ties with Pakistan.

After the Soviet Union sent its troop in Afghanistan, the idea of Pakhtunistan was expected to be collapsed as Daoud was assassinated. However, the new communist regime also raised the slogan of Pakhtunistan in order to gather votes of nationalist Pashtuns in Afghanistan and religious tribes residing in Waziristan. But the tribes in Pakistan did not pay any heed to the nationalist call. The Afghan intelligence agency 'KHAD' began increasing its insurgent activities inside Pakistan with the support of Soviet intelligence. Pakistan then allied itself with Mujahedeen rebels of Afghanistan against the Soviets and provided logistical support to the Islamist rebels.⁴⁹ During the 1980s, Pakistan became more involved in Afghan

⁴⁸ Ayesha Ilyas, "Snakes in Sleeves; Pak-Afghan Relations", *The News*, October 18, 2019, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/542796-snakes-in-sleeves-pak-afghan-relations> (accessed December 10, 2020)

⁴⁹ Carlos Setas, "Relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan and the Peace Process with the Afghan Taliban", *Journal of the Spanish Institute* 2, No. 2 (2013): 333-354

war than any other nation, primarily because of unsupportive Afghan regimes since inception of Pakistan, and fear of Soviet advancement towards warm waters of the Arabian Sea. Pakistan military chief, after assuming power in 1979 through a military coup, promoted the idea of the Afghan war as a religious struggle by consolidating jihadist ideology among the Afghan rebels.

2.4.2. Policy of Strategic Depth: After gaining a strategic edge towards Afghanistan after the end of the Soviet war, instead of abandoning its support towards the Islamist militants, Pakistan kept backing them. It viewed them a strategic asset which could be pitched against hostile Indian and Kabul regimes, which were perceived as a security threat by Pakistan's military establishment.⁵⁰ The premier intelligence agency of Pakistan 'ISI' put forward the policy of strategic depth, which aimed at retaining the pro-Pakistan regime at Kabul and preventing outside influence. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, and with the demise of the communist regime in Kabul, Pakistan became optimistic about having a Pakistan friendly regime in Kabul that would recognize the Durand Line as an international border.

However, within a few months, civil war broke out among the Mujahedeen rebels. At the same time, Pakistan trained some of the rebels in its established training camps and then sent them towards Indian administrated Kashmir to fight against Indian forces. In 1994, civil war again erupted and this time, a Pashtun majority religious entity known as the Taliban emerged, which was staunchly anti-western, anti-communist, and Pashtun supremacist in nature. By 1995, Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani began protesting by issuing a demarche to the Pakistani embassy, to condemn Pakistan's interference in Afghanistan.

Due to the hostile attitude of the non-Pashtun regime in Afghanistan, the relation between both the countries again deteriorated and Pakistani establishment began preferring a Pashtun majority regime that may make it easy for Pakistan to get access to newly created resource-rich Central Asian republics. By 1996, the Taliban took over Kabul, and the new regime was recognized by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and UAE only. The rival Mujahedeen comprising of ethnic Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Turkmen formed a Northern Alliance, which secured support from Russia, Iran, and India. Most of the Taliban administrators were believed to be trained in Pakistani seminaries during the Soviet war. Though it is believed that Pakistan

⁵⁰ Qandeel Siddique, *Pakistan's Future Policy towards Afghanistan: A Look at Strategic Depth, Militant Movements and the Role of India and the US* (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2011), 18.

assisted the Taliban in taking over the throne but at the same time, the Taliban like its predecessors did not recognize Durand Line as Pakistan expected.

2.4.3. Post 9/11 to Ghani's Regime: On 11 September 2001, the terrorists belonging to Al Qaeda, a Sunni fundamentalist militant organization hijacked the planes and crashed them to World Trade Centre in New York. The AL-Qaeda and its support base in Afghanistan became point of huge concern for US administration. Furthermore, the US feared that tentacles of Al Qaeda would spread in entire South Asia through the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and would overthrow the elected regimes and declare Caliphate in the captured areas. Pakistan was compelled to join the war on terror by the US, as the refusal might have isolated Pakistan globally along with enabling India to capitalize against Pakistan due to its support to the militancy in Kashmir.⁵¹ Due to the evolved consensus against terrorism, all the countries especially NATO allies of the US joined the war. Despite the common goal, the relation between Afghanistan and Pakistan remained strained. Those militants that were sheltered in Pakistan's tribal areas began waging war against Pakistan's security forces. Pakistan was pressurized by the western powers to do more against militants based on its soil as they felt that they are the main forces behind global Jihad.

After the Taliban regime was toppled, Hamid Karzai was selected the new leader of Afghan nation, who ruled Afghanistan from 2001-2014.⁵² The new president was supported by Pakistan, and it was hoped within strategic circles of Pakistan that the mutual relationship would improve but it moved towards chaos due to Karzai's pro-India approach. The security of Afghanistan drastically improved and Kabul began developing its military ties with New Delhi. The Afghan National Army was formed with the help of the US and its allies and was professionally trained by Indian military. The relation between Pakistan and Afghanistan further strained during the second tenure of Karzai from 2009 onwards due to improved strategic ties between Kabul and New Delhi, even the people to people contact between both regimes increased. After Karzai's tenure ended in 2014, a national unity government was framed in Afghanistan between newly elected President Ashraf Ghani and former warlord

⁵¹ Safdar Sial, "Pak-Afghan Relations: Emerging Trends and Future Prospects", *Conflict and Peace Studies* 4, No 1 (2011): 1-14.

⁵² Ahmed Bilal Khalil, "The Tangled History of the Afghanistan-India-Pakistan Triangle", *The Diplomat*, December 16, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/12/the-tangled-history-of-the-afghanistan-india-pakistan-triangle/> (accessed December 10, 2020)

Abdullah Abdullah. Ghani after becoming President tilted towards Pakistan to bring peace in Afghanistan.

The Ghani regime at start declined every kind of Indian help and signed an MOU of intelligence sharing between national intelligence agencies of both countries. However, after a few years, the attitude of President Ghani changed as he felt that Pakistan was not doing enough against anti-Afghan militants based on its soil. The Ghani regime began tilting towards India and began taking joint initiatives that were to be fulfilled by Karzai. In 2016, Afghanistan signed the Chabahar trade treaty with India and Iran, which aimed to reduce Afghanistan trade dependency on Pakistan by taking new transit routes of Chabahar Port in Iran. India began sending military logistics particularly the Mi-26 attack helicopter to Afghanistan for the modernization of the Afghan National Army. India also involved itself in other developmental projects in Afghanistan like reconstruction of Salma Dam.

2.5. Rationality behind Pakistan's Relations with Taliban

Pakistan's military and intelligence had been directly involved in Afghanistan since 1980s and continuously supported the insurgents in Afghanistan such as Afghan Taliban and Haqqani Network that proved to be disturbing for not only Afghanistan but also for Pakistan. Pakistan has influence on Afghan Taliban to the extent that the issues between Afghan government, the militia groups and the US cannot resolve without the presence of Pakistan. Moreover, Pakistan is also accused by India and Afghanistan that it provides safe havens to the terrorists, and the assistance of Pakistan intelligence to the Afghan insurgents have proved to be very deadliest for the US soldiers, innocent Afghan civilians, and the Afghan security persons.⁵³

However, Pakistan has its own reasons to back insurgents in Afghanistan. Primarily, Pakistan wanted to limit the Indian influence in Afghanistan. India is cultivating Pakistan origin radical guerillas in Afghanistan under the banner of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), whom it utilizes against Pakistani security forces. Moreover, Pakistan fears that it cannot take the risk of turning well-trained and experienced militants of Afghan Taliban against Islamabad as it will create severe law and order situation in the country. Moreover, if the Afghan government

⁵³ Vanda Felbab Brown, "Why Pakistan Supports Terrorist Groups, and Why the US Finds it so Hard to Induce Change", *Brookings*, January 5, 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/01/05/why-pakistan-supports-terrorist-groups-and-why-the-us-finds-it-so-hard-to-induce-change/> (accessed December 10, 2020)

gained leverage over Taliban, they will surely maintain ideal relations with India which will be fatal for the national interest of Pakistan.

2.6. Iran Factor in Pak-Afghan Relations

Relations between Pakistan and Iran are deeply rooted in history and were connected because of same religion, culture and spiritual connections. Both countries remained positive in their relations and help each other in critical times. Higher authorities of both countries also pay occasional visits to each other's country. On 22 April, 2019, Prime Minister Imran Khan visited Iran, which proved to be productive as several pivotal issues like Kashmir, trade and infrastructural development were discussed. Furthermore, Pakistan and Iran border was pronounced as the border of peace, friendship and love. Besides, around 15-20 percent of Pakistan population belongs to Shiite community, the members of which regularly visit shrines in Iran as part of their religious obligations. Hence Pakistan maintains close relations with Iran. However, Iran also has a say in the matter of Afghanistan, which sometimes collided with Pakistan's national interest. Therefore, Iran factor in Pak-Afghan diplomatic affairs is undeniable.

The first reason is USA. Iran has a history of rivalry with the US since the Iranian revolution. Iran is believed to be actively pursuing its interests in Afghanistan by supporting the armed groups against USA. Additionally, Iran also feels insecure with the presence of US forces on its eastern and western borders such as Afghanistan and Iraq. Due to its strained relations with the US, elimination of US presence around Iran is the foremost priority of Iran's foreign policy. In order to keep an eye on the activities of USA, Iran maintains its little presence in Afghanistan.⁵⁴ However, in past Iran was Anti-Taliban and it supported Northern Alliance in 1990s. But shift in regional geopolitics after 9/11 compelled Iran to pursue a risky policy of using Afghan Taliban and the Afghan government against the US interests.

Similarly, the ideological nature of Afghanistan and Pakistan as Islamic Republics and the presence of ethnic Shiite group in Afghanistan and Pakistan such as Shiite Hazara provoke an emotional concern of Iran in both states. Moreover, whenever any civil conflict arises in

⁵⁴ Roberto Toscano, *Iran's Role in Afghanistan* (Barcelona: CIDOB Policy Research Project, 2012), 3.

Afghanistan and Pakistan between the Shiite and Sunni groups, it is Iran that covertly supports the Shiite groups and instigates conflict.⁵⁵

Similarly, Iran favors the destabilization of USA and NATO security forces and often provided covert military support to the Taliban. Additionally, Iran also provides political and economic support to Karzai government to maintain good relations with Afghan government.⁵⁶ Iran also trained many Hazaara Shiites of Afghanistan and Pakistan to use them against ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

2.7. Conclusion

Pakistan and Afghanistan shared a lot of cultural and historical similarities with each other but due to hostile policies on both sides, their relations remained fragile. The security of both nations is inter-dependent to such an extent that any war type scenario in either country would have direct impacts on the other. The Soviet War and the War on Terror pushed millions of Afghans to take refuge in Pakistan. The past four decades of conflict in Afghanistan has resulted in the economic and security deterioration of Pakistan.

In current situation, it was evident that both countries would not change their respective stances. Pakistan would always consider the Durand Line as an international boundary and a settled issue while Afghan would deny its existence. The Kabul regime would continue highlighting the boundary as an unsettled issue between both countries. Moreover, India would keep exploiting the differences between Pakistan and Afghan governments for its vested interest. It would keep spreading unrest in Baluchistan and tribal belt of Pakistan with presence of a favorable regime in Kabul.

Similarly, another state which has its direct stakes in Afghan conflict is Iran. Iran is playing tactics to achieve its policy goals in Afghanistan. Iran maintains good relations with Taliban as both have a common enemy i.e. the US. Hence, it is evident that the main reasons behind the instigation of civil conflict inside Afghanistan are the regional actors.

⁵⁵ Vinay Kaura, "Iran's Influence in Afghanistan", *Middle East Institute*, June 23, 2020, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/irans-influence-afghanistan> (accessed November 10, 2020)

⁵⁶ Toscano, Roberto, *Iran's Role in Afghanistan* (Barcelona: CIDOB Policy Research Project, 2012), 3.

CHAPTER 03

US LONG TERM WAR AND ITS WITHDRAWAL POLICY

The US involved in Afghanistan immediately after the 9/11 attacks. It invaded Afghanistan with its coalition forces and ousted Taliban from power. In return, Taliban became a very violent insurgent group within Afghanistan that carried out large scale attacks and did utmost efforts to destabilize all the US-backed Afghan governments. In 2014, the coalition forces announced end to their combat mission and left Afghanistan, however, the US troops remained there and, according to the reports highlighted by BBC, it gained control over 70% domestic affairs of Afghanistan. After the years of conflict in Afghanistan, the Taliban and the Trump administration signed a peace agreement in February 2020. The US wanted a graceful exit from Afghanistan within 14 months provided that Taliban would not wage attacks against innocent civilians and would not allow Afghan soil to be used against any other country. However, the new Biden administration extended the deadline for the US withdrawal till September 2021. The US vowed that it would be back with a very huge force which no one's ever expected, if the militants did not abide by the deal.⁵⁷

The US engagement in Afghanistan after 9/11 bore some positive outcome for the Afghan society as human rights condition in the war-torn Afghanistan had started improving with the promotion of women rights, democracy, and liberties in the lives of people. Meanwhile, Taliban also showed leniency in its hardline approach in the changing environment and ground realities in order to become acceptable to Afghan people as well as outside world. For instance, Taliban extended its cooperation to allow various vaccination operations and lend the diplomatic coordination with the World Health Organization in combating the newly emerged pandemic Corona Virus also known as COVID-19.⁵⁸ By this, Taliban gave the world

⁵⁷ Lyse Doucet, "Afghan Conflict: US and Taliban Sign Deal to End 18-Year War", *BBC News*, February 29, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-54600781> (accessed October 10, 2020)

⁵⁸ Abdul Qadir Sediqi, and Orooj Hakimi, "Coronavirus Makes Taliban Realise They Need Health Workers Alive Not Dead", *Reuters*, March 18, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-taliban/coronavirus-makes-taliban-realise-they-need-health-workers-alive-not-dead-idUSL4N2BB2E3> (accessed January 10, 2020)

a gesture that they are enthusiastic towards solving global problems and maintaining their diplomatic relations with outside world.⁵⁹

The US had already spent much of its time, logistics, and human resources in a war in Afghanistan that stretched over 18 years. For instance, more than 2,400 US troops expired in this 18 years long conflict, while the US economy and reputation were also put on stake in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, Taliban, who had also suffered heavily in this two decade long war, showed aspiration for peace in Afghanistan through a peace deal with the US. However, the major hurdle, which was creating complications in Afghan peace process, was the Afghan government. Ashraf Ghani regime was initially reluctant to swap high profile prisoners with the Taliban under the US-Taliban deal but it had to give up due to the US pressure.

The political system in Afghanistan is yet to mature as the Taliban consider the current political authority of Afghanistan as the US puppet and, therefore, they refuse to sit with the Afghan government and its security forces for negotiations. With this overview, the chapter will highlight and critically analyze the US engagements in Afghanistan, impact of the shift in the US policy towards Kabul, and the new US approach towards the country after the two decade long war.

3.1. Economic Contribution of the US in Terms of USAID

USAID'S economic growth programs for Afghanistan included the loans that it provided for micro businesses, particularly for women. USAID established cultural centers for women to promote awareness among Afghan women about their rights and to encourage female education in the country. Community centers were also built for Afghan citizens to raise their standard of life. USAID also supported Afghanistan's banking sector over the years and helped the country in the licensing of commercial banks. Besides, it sponsored training workshops for certain institutions like electoral commission and civil servants. These actions were helpful in improving civil life in Afghanistan. USAID also helped the country to improve its modes of communication by establishing radio and television stations in unmerited areas of Afghanistan.

⁵⁹ Rudra Chaudhuri, and Shreyas Shende, "Dealing with the Taliban: India's Strategy in Afghanistan after U.S. Withdrawal", *Carnegie India*, June 2, 2020, <https://carnegieindia.org/2020/06/02/dealing-with-taliban-india-s-strategy-in-afghanistan-after-u.s.-withdrawal-pub-81951> (accessed October 10, 2020)

Several improvements were made in the health sector as the health facilities in Afghanistan were very poor with a high mortality rate. With the help of USAID, World Bank and European commission, Afghan Ministry of Public Health put emphasis on the health of Afghans. Studies indicate improvements in Afghanistan's health sector in the last 10 years. USAID also funded solar projects in Afghanistan to fulfill the energy needs of the country.⁶⁰ USAID also invested on the construction of road networks in Afghanistan to ease out traveling of the common Afghan, besides promoting telecommunication industry and mobile banking to produce positive and cost effective results.⁶¹ The US also aided Afghanistan in agriculture sector by enhancing its irrigation system. It established vocational centers to impart IT, engineering and administration related trainings to Afghan youth.⁶²

3.2. The New US Approach

The US had been involved in every affair of Afghanistan since 2001. It began with the very light approach of installing just 350 US operational forces in Afghanistan along with 100 CIA paramilitary entities to train the Afghan tribes and militant forces to overthrow the Taliban government in Kabul. It then gradually shifted its light approach to heavy actions by infiltrating 100,000 US troops in 2010 and 40,000 NATO soldiers hence making the Afghan land full of US puppets.⁶³ Despite the US constant efforts to control Afghanistan, the insurgents and militants' influence in Afghanistan kept increasing continuously with the constant attacks on civilian targets and the US troops and officials; leaving their life vulnerable in Afghanistan. One of the many reasons behind the constant US failure in Afghanistan was a weak and unstable government in Kabul that proved incompetent to counter the deep influence of the Taliban. Therefore, the US came up with the new approach.

The New US approach in Afghanistan contained graceful exit of the US troops from Afghanistan and for that purpose the US special envoy for Afghanistan named Zalmay Khalilzad alongside the US Secretary of State named Mike Pompeo as witness signed a peace deal with the Political Chief of Taliban named Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar in Doha in

⁶⁰ "USAID in Afghanistan: Partnership, Progress, Perseverance", *USAID*, April 15, 2012, <https://2012-2017.usaid.gov/afghanistan/news-information/press-releases/usaaid-afghanistan-partnership-progress-perseverance> (accessed October 10, 2020)

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Seth G. Jones, "The U.S. Strategy in Afghanistan: The Perils of Withdrawal", *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, October 26, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/us-strategy-afghanistan-perils-withdrawal> (accessed October 10, 2020)

February 2020. The deal is considered as the all-inclusive and maintainable nonviolent agreement between both parties that will ensure comprehensive and permanent ceasefire between them. The US-Taliban agreement insisted the Taliban to ensure that they would prevent the militants especially from Al-Qaeda from conducting attacks against the US and its allies from Afghan soil.⁶⁴ The US highlighted a schedule, in which it outlined a plan for shutting down military bases in Afghanistan, and when this agreement would be activated upon. In the reciprocity of the agreement, the Taliban officials also made clear that they would guarantee that Afghan soil would never again be used by any non-state actor that could harm the interest of any country.⁶⁵

According to the new US approach, the US and its coalition forces were to completely withdraw from Afghanistan by the end of April 2021. These US troops would involve around 12,000 soldiers. Moreover, approximately 7000 military forces from the European countries would also leave Afghanistan automatically, if the US quit its engagements in Afghanistan. Additionally, there are several countries which are fighting their proxy wars in Afghanistan. Some of them are pro-USA while others are anti-USA so, when USA leaves Afghanistan, ultimately the role of these proxy forces will also vanish gradually.⁶⁶

The US intended to leave Afghan soil because it has realized that its intervention in Afghanistan is proving to be very destructive for the US in terms of economy and human resources. Therefore, the US is gradually packing its bag for the departure from Afghanistan. However, the US must provide a sound road map for a peaceful resolution of intra-Afghan conflict before its departure. It must first settle Afghanistan's internal destabilized situation, support the infrastructural development of Afghanistan, and empower the women and youth of the country. It must provide a positive and diligent role to Pakistan because it would be an uphill task to achieve a long lasting peace in Afghanistan without the pure intentions of Pakistan.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Javaid Ahmad, "Will India Amend its Approach to Afghanistan Peace?", *Atlantic Council*, May 12, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/will-india-amend-its-approach-to-afghanistan-peace/> (accessed October 10, 2020)

⁶⁵ Rudra Chaudhuri, and Shreyas Shende, "Dealing with the Taliban: India's Strategy in Afghanistan after U.S. Withdrawal", *Carnegie India*, June 2, 2020, <https://carnegieindia.org/2020/06/02/dealing-with-taliban-india-s-strategy-in-afghanistan-after-u.s.-withdrawal-pub-81951> (accessed October 10, 2020)

⁶⁶ Thomas Parker, "Regional Implications of a U.S. Pullout from Afghanistan", *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, June 15, 2020, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/regional-implications-us-pullout-afghanistan> (accessed October 10, 2020)

⁶⁷ Asmatullah Khan Wazir, "Withdrawal of the US Troops from Afghanistan and its Implications for Pakistan-Challenges and a Way Forward", *Journal of Peace and Development Studies* 2, No1 (2012): 89-101.

3.3. Impacts of the New US Approach

The US exit strategy would severely affect Afghanistan as currently the Afghan Taliban do not retain any hold in any city of Afghanistan including Lashkar Gah, Kabul, Kandahar. But after the US exit from Afghanistan, the Taliban may confiscate Afghan government's rule from these areas. Secondly, the US exit would give an invitation to other foreign countries to extend their control in Afghanistan due to its important geostrategic location, which always made Afghanistan a center of attention. In the absence of a stable Afghan government the prevention of Afghanistan from the foreign influence seems inevitable in the post-US withdrawal era. Thirdly, after the US exit, the covert involvement of non-state actors, especially Islamic extremist militant groups like Al-Qaeda, TTP, Haqqani Network, Lashkar-e-Taiba and Salafi Jihadists, may become overt because they would perceive the US exit as their victory. They would get the chance of direct involvement in Afghanistan after the US exit. All these militia groups are allies of Taliban against European and western powers and hold indirect influence in Afghanistan. These non-state actors are the major source of threat to the world peace, and it would be a great challenge for Afghan government to stop their infiltration in Afghanistan in the post-withdrawal era.⁶⁸

Fourthly, the efforts for improvement of human rights condition in Afghanistan may face a setback after the US exit. Afghanistan's advancement in terms of women rights, democracy, and civil liberties would likely be reversed after the exit of the US. Furthermore, despite all its efforts, the US could not eliminate the fear of Taliban from the Afghan society. The Taliban remained involved in numerous attacks in Afghanistan which resulted in loss of lives of thousands of innocent civilians. Taliban are so rigid in destabilizing the Afghan political matters that they never allowed a peaceful conduct of elections in Afghanistan. They launched insurgent attacks at the occasion of every Afghan election to keep the turnout at the lowest level. So, despite the peace talks and promises, it is clear that the Taliban may not uphold the democratic process in the country and would give least regard to human rights in the post-US withdrawal Afghanistan.

At the present, the Taliban's only concern is the US exit from Afghanistan. Their current cooperation with the US is perceived as a temporary settlement. It is believed that Taliban

⁶⁸ Seth G. Jones, "The U.S. Strategy in Afghanistan: The Perils of Withdrawal", *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, October 26, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/us-strategy-afghanistan-perils-withdrawal> (accessed October 10, 2020)

would revert to their authoritative activities in Afghanistan, once the US leaves. After the US exit, its allied forces would also quit Afghanistan, leaving the incapable Afghan military the wholly solely in charge of Afghanistan's security. It is estimated that contemporarily around 60,000 full time Taliban fighters and militia groups are engaged in fighting against the Afghan security forces.⁶⁹ It is feared that Afghan security forces may collapse at the hands of much experienced Taliban fighters after the US exit, and the country may fall into the clutches of another civil war.

Lastly, the exit of the US will also undermine the American interest as well. In order to maintain its status of super power, the US needed to maintain its presence in the South Asia and Afghanistan was the best place. By maintaining its presence in Afghanistan, the US could closely watch Russia, China, Iran, India, Pakistan and Central Asian states. The US control over the region would take a back seat after its exit from Afghanistan.⁷⁰

3.4. NATO Withdrawal Policy

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was established in 1949 as an intergovernmental military alliance to counter the soviet expansion. However, after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 the purpose of NATO became useless. In recent years, it has revised its purpose to support peacekeeping operations. It comprises of 29 member states and every member is obliged to support any member state against foreign aggression.⁷¹

NATO had established a mission in 2003 known as the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) which included around 130,000 military personnel from 51 NATO allied countries.⁷² These troops collectively allied with the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) and supported the ANDSF by improving its capabilities to fight against enemies. NATO mission and ISAF not only supported Afghan military, but it also contributed largely to the reconstruction of war-torn Afghanistan through 28 multinational

⁶⁹ Thomas Parker, "Regional Implications of a U.S. Pullout from Afghanistan", *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, June 15, 2020, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/regional-implications-us-pullout-afghanistan> (accessed October 10, 2020)

⁷⁰ Sidra Rehman Mughal, and Nazir Hussain, "US Withdrawal from Afghanistan: Implications for Pakistan", *Journal of Political Studies* 24, No 2 (2017): 485-497.

⁷¹ Gemma Mullin, "Keeping the Peace: What is Nato and What Does it Stand for?", *The Sun*, December 4, 2019, <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/2194667/nato-defence-spending-country-article-50-cost/> (accessed July 23, 2020)

⁷² "U.S. Relations with Afghanistan", *US Department of State*, July 8, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-afghanistan/> (accessed October 10, 2020)

Provincial Reconstruction Teams.⁷³ ISAF proved the longest and most challenging mission of NATO to date. Until 2011, ISAF and Afghan forces collaboratively fought the militants. ISAF started the transition of security related operations to Afghan security forces in 2011, which was completed in December 2014. With this transition, ISAF ended its operations in Afghanistan and the Afghan security forces assumed the charge of the security of the country. In 2014 the ISAF officially withdrew from Afghanistan.⁷⁴

Meanwhile, NATO launched the Resolute Support Mission (RSM) in January 2015 in order to advise, train, and assist Afghanistan's law enforcement agencies to build their counterterrorism capacity. Under RSM, around 10,000 troops from 36 NATO allies and partner countries were deployed in Afghanistan by April 2021.⁷⁵

In July 2018 a summit in Brussels was conducted by NATO in which the operational allies of Resolute Support Mission (RSM) decided to modify and improve the financial sustainment support for Afghanistan till 2024 and agreed to engage in the long term traditional partnership with the country. However, after the recent February 29, 2020 accord between the US and the Taliban, which were followed by intra-afghan dialogues between Afghan Taliban and Afghan government, the NATO allies appreciated the peace initiative in Afghanistan and vowed to decrease RSM's military existence in Afghanistan to adjust accordingly with the accord.⁷⁶ In April 2021, the Allies and their RSM partners agreed to start pulling out their troops from Afghanistan from May 1, 2021. The plan is to complete the orderly, coordinated and deliberate drawdown of all US and RSM troops within a few months.

3.5. The Agreement with the Taliban

After the September 11, 2001 attack, the US military has been officially engaged in the affairs of Afghanistan to bilaterally counter the menace of terrorism. The US was committed to maintaining peace and stability in Afghanistan and maintained the military pressure on the Taliban to reverse, disrupt and degrade their dominance. The US had been engaging around 14,000 troops in Afghanistan since 2018. These troops served to counter-terrorism unilaterally

⁷³ "NATO and Afghanistan", *NATO*, October 13, 2020, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_8189.htm (accessed October 29, 2020)

⁷⁴ "U.S. Relations with Afghanistan", *US Department of State*, July 8, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-afghanistan/> (accessed October 10, 2020)

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ "NATO and Afghanistan", *NATO*, October 13, 2020, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_8189.htm (accessed October 29, 2020)

or bilaterally with the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) whereas around 8,000 troops fought in front line with the NATO alliance.⁷⁷

However, the US indulgence in this war remains the worst decision ever because it cost more than \$2 trillion money along with the lives of more than 2400 American troops while more than 20,000 troops got injured. Still the US is investing millions of dollars on the medical disability of its soldiers.⁷⁸ To settle this dispute the US had to sign a pact with the Afghan Taliban on February 29, 2020. The pact highlighted following major points:

- The Afghan-Taliban and the US came up with the deal to reduce the ongoing violence in Afghanistan. A ceasefire should be conducted after the intra-afghan negotiations that will be held between the Taliban, and Afghan government.⁷⁹
- The US agreed to the Taliban that it will pull out its soldiers from Afghanistan within 14 months. The number of troops will be reduced to 8,600 from 12,000 within 135 days of the deal.⁸⁰
- Taliban guaranteed that Afghan soil would not be used by non-state actors for launching attacks against other countries including the US.
- The US agreed to set free 5000 Taliban prisoners in chunks by releasing 200 prisoners per week. The process will start from the mid of April 2020.⁸¹

During the negotiations, the Taliban overtly opposed direct dialogues with Afghan government, deeming it the puppet of the US. However, Taliban had realized that, in order to reach any possible agreement with their foreign enemies, they would have to surely resolve their conflict with Afghanistan's official government via Intra-Afghan dialogues.⁸² The US government stressed Taliban for protecting women rights in Afghanistan. It was expected the matter would come under discussion in Intra-Afghan Dialogues.⁸³

⁷⁷ "U.S. Relations with Afghanistan", *US Department of State*, July 8, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-afghanistan/> (accessed October 10, 2020)

⁷⁸ Lindsay Maizland, "U.S.-Taliban Peace Deal: What to Know", *Council on Foreign Relations*, May 2, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/us-taliban-peace-deal-agreement-afghanistan-war> (accessed November 16, 2020)

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

3.6. Elections in Afghanistan

The most critical element in the political stability of Afghanistan lies in the legitimacy, transparency, and honesty of the Afghan governance. The US tried to lower down the Taliban involvement in the country's politics after the 2001 attack, however, the corruption and fraud in the Afghan politics remained a key concern. Begin with the 2001, when Hamid Karzai was in the government and then Ashraf Ghani took the office in 2015, the corruption in different departments of the Afghan government posed mammoth problems to Afghan people. The country ranked among the most corrupt nations in the world, i.e. 172/180, according to a report of Transparency International in 2018.⁸⁴

The elections in Afghanistan in the past two decades went through numerous difficulties. Only 2.2 million Afghans out of the total 9 million registered voters chose to vote for their representatives in Afghan Presidential elections in 2019. The turnout remained low in all the four elections since 2004. The polling stations were attacked and for months the election results were kept on pending.⁸⁵ The Taliban indulged in the brutal killing of innocent voters and openly criticized and condemned the Afghan government, whom they never considered legitimate. Taliban created a sense of fear among people to keep them away from polls. According to a report published by the United Nations, the Taliban's violent activities took the lives of more than 85 people while wounded around 373 civilians in the September 2019 elections in Afghanistan.⁸⁶

In the latest presidential elections of 2019, the candidates witnessed a delay in the announcement of results. The head of the Afghan Election Commission apologized for the delay and blamed the technical errors for late announcement of the results. However, the delay in announcement of the result was commonly perceived as a fraudulent effort to manipulate the results. Lack of transparency in Afghan politics and corruption in the political spheres in the past two decades contributed majorly to the instability in Afghanistan.⁸⁷ Similar fraudulent

⁸⁴ Weston Aviles, "Afghanistan Inequality Report", *NSI Journal* (2019): 1-14

⁸⁵ Susannah George, and Sayed Salahuddin, "Afghan Presidential Elections: Outcome Remains in Limbo as Results are Delayed", *The Washington Post*, October 19, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/afghan-presidential-election-remains-in-limbo-as-results-delayed/2019/10/19/559f4b44-f12b-11e9-bb7e-d2026ee0c199_story.html (accessed December 8, 2020)

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

practices were witnessed in 2014 elections, which had drifted away the voters from the electoral process.⁸⁸

However, Afghanistan's Independent Election Commission (IEC) had declared the 2019 elections as one of the most fair and transparent elections of the country since 2001. However, the voter turnout remained very low as compared to the previous three elections, as people were afraid to come out to vote due to the fear of insurgents' attacks.⁸⁹ Ashraf Ghani won the elections by gaining 50.64% of the total votes while his opponent Chief Executive of Afghanistan Abdullah Abdullah had secured 39.52% of the votes. Abdullah Abdullah termed the results as rigged and refused to accept the outcome of the elections. On the other hand, Ashraf Ghani rejected the accusations of electoral rigging and declared himself as the President of Afghanistan.⁹⁰

3.7. Post-Election Deals

The political conflicts in Afghanistan are unsettled since 2001 because of the huge instability, corruption, and non-acceptance of the legitimacy of the government of Afghanistan. Taliban never recognized the legitimacy of Afghan official government and labeled it the US puppet. Similarly, the Afghan leaders with authoritative feudal mindset are reluctant to accept the authority and legitimacy of their political opponents. In the latest Presidential elections of 2019, this mindset was evident when Abdullah Abdullah refused to accept the victory of Ashraf Ghani and decided to form his own government after declaring himself the winner.⁹¹

Similar situation had arisen after 2014 Presidential elections when Abdullah Abdullah had rejected Ashraf Ghani's lead. To control the political crises at that time, the US stepped up to resolve the dispute between the two leading contenders for Afghan Presidency. The US designed a power-sharing agreement, under which Ashraf Ghani was appointed the President

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Masood Saifullah, "Was the Afghan Presidential Election a Success?", *Deutsche Welle*, September 30, 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/was-the-afghan-presidential-election-a-success/a-50642031> (accessed October 10, 2020)

⁹⁰ "Afghanistan Presidential Election: Ashraf Ghani Re-Elected", *BBC News*, February 18 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-51547726> (accessed October 10, 2020)

⁹¹ Ibid.

of Afghanistan while Abdullah-Abdullah was designated as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Afghan government.⁹²

After 2019 Afghan Presidential elections both Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah claimed victories and took oath as Afghan President in separate ceremonies. This created a political crisis in Afghanistan, which prompted the US to pressurize both parties for resolving the political dispute. Ultimately, both opponents agreed to a new power-sharing agreement.⁹³ Under the terms of the power-sharing deal, Ghani and Abdullah agreed to have an equal share in the government. Abdullah was appointed Chairman of the National Reconciliation High Council and members of his team were inducted in the cabinet. In effect, Abdullah, as Chairman of National Reconciliation High Council, was tasked to lead a broader Afghan team representing political leaders, women, and civil society members to talk to the Taliban to bring the four decades of war to a close. This power-sharing agreement is dubbed as the major positive gesture in stabilizing the politics of Afghanistan as the US viewed the political tensions between the two rivals as a hurdle in the peace reconciliation efforts towards Taliban.⁹⁴

Abdullah and Ghani's power sharing alliance would generate long term benefits for Afghanistan provided that both officials cooperate generously with each other even after the US withdrawal. The US would eventually leave Afghanistan in coming months, so Afghan government must stabilize itself in the meantime for the better future of Afghanistan. Intra-Afghan dialogues are one mature way in this regard. To cope up the emerging threats in the post-US withdrawal situation, Afghanistan must rely on political settlements between Afghanistan's domestic stakeholders.

However, one negative consequence of foreign withdrawal can be that the government of Afghanistan may ultimately collapse. Currently the Afghan government is working efficiently to some extent with the foreign financial aid, which is likely to reduce drastically once the foreign troops withdraw from Afghanistan. Hence, the survival for the instable Afghan government would become a difficult task. Recent history of Afghanistan also reflects that the

⁹² Vinay Kaura, "Rival Afghan Leaders Strike a Power-Sharing Deal, But There are Plenty of other Obstacles on the Road to Peace", *Middle East Institute*, May 20, 2020, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/rival-afghan-leaders-strike-power-sharing-deal-there-are-plenty-other-obstacles-road> (accessed November 10, 2020)

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

foreign-backed governments of Afghanistan could not sustain for long after the occupation was over.⁹⁵

3.8. Conclusion

The history of Afghanistan was marked with serious tribal rivalry and instability. The geostrategic location of Afghanistan attracted all the major political players to involve in the country and fulfill their political interests. In the last four decades, all the non-state actors tried to maintain their hegemony in the country with support of regional countries. This situation in Afghanistan took a new turn in the recent years as the US adopted a new approach in Afghanistan i.e. the graceful exit from Afghanistan. However, the US could not practically achieve a scenario for graceful exit because it faced clear defeats from Taliban at many fronts. Starting from its Operation Endure Freedom in 2009, the US had decided to destabilize Taliban and wanted to annihilate them completely, however, it failed to achieve the goal.

In 2014, the US allied forces left Afghanistan knowing that they were wasting their time and resources in Afghanistan, however, the US differed with their approach at that time. The wrong decision and analysis of US regarding Afghans led to the serious consequences as it lost many of its soldiers and wasted much of its economy in fighting Taliban and restructuring of Afghanistan at the same time. But still the Taliban were very rigid. Taliban's rigidness and authoritativeness was depictive in low turnout during Afghan elections. They had instilled fear among the citizens and as a result only 2.2 million Afghans had casted vote in the recent elections of 2019. The electoral turnout manifested that regardless of the US much-reconstructing efforts and military operations against Taliban, the people in Afghanistan still held fear of the militants. The subsequent political crisis under the noise of electoral rigging further drifted away the confidence of common Afghans on democratic process. Although the political crisis was resolved after the US intervention, such political settlement would be hard to achieve after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan.

The only hope regarding the peaceful solution of Afghan problem mostly lies within Afghanistan. Different stake holders must come together to achieve peace in the country. The US was aware of the ground realities, and hence, it served as a broker in establishing power-

⁹⁵ Thomas Parker, "Regional Implications of a U.S. Pullout from Afghanistan", *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, June 15, 2020, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/regional-implications-us-pullout-afghanistan> (accessed October 10, 2020)

sharing formula and stability agreement among the Afghan President and Chief Executive Officer of Afghanistan after 2014 and 2019 elections. However, the success of this power-sharing agreement would be solely dependent upon the political maturity and fairness of both leaders that how they work devotedly for the stability and development of Afghanistan. The US has also realized that Afghan government and Afghan Taliban must achieve peace with each other for the prosperity, stability and progress of their nation and, therefore, it stressed on intra-Afghan dialogues.

CHAPTER 04

ANALYZING 2014-US POLICY OF WITHDRAWAL FROM AFGHANISTAN

The destination to peace in Afghanistan came across many hurdles and witnessed many ups and downs and U-turns, which stretched this journey to a very long struggle of twenty year. This long and brutal war deprived thousands of innocents from their lives, while adversely affected the economies of Afghanistan and the United States. Although, the Biden administration has announced the US withdrawal from Afghanistan by September 2021 yet the path to peace is surrounded with uncertainties, partly because both parties have a history of distrust on each other. Besides, the intra-Afghan negotiations between Afghan Taliban and Afghan government, and parallel fighting between them could also go on for years. The intra-Afghan dialogues may feature unstable deals that may easily collapse due to powerful spoilers, the loss of interest by the United States, and interference of regional powers or international players. Any military and political coup d'états i.e. the aggressive actions taken by critical segments to remove the running government via illegal or violent means⁹⁶ would also serve as potent threat to intra-Afghan deals.

In 2017, the US National Security Strategy launched a new initiative which intended to show a continuous commitment to support the government of Afghanistan and the whole nation. It also committed the support to Afghanistan till the complete elimination of terrorism from the country. For this purpose, the US involved Afghan government in the peace process through intra-Afghan dialogues and portrayed the negotiations with Taliban as a window of opportunity for Afghans towards peace and reconciliation.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Naddine Olafsson, "When Military Coups D'état Become Acts of Social Justice", *E-International Relations*, January 17, 2020, <https://www.e-ir.info/2020/01/17/when-military-coups-detat-become-acts-of-social-justice/> (accessed October 10, 2020)

⁹⁷ Isabel Green Jonegard, "The Implications of a US Withdrawal from Afghanistan: Four Scenarios", *Swedish Defence Research Institute*, June 26, 2019, <https://www.foi.se/report-summary?reportNo=FOI%20Memo%206771> (accessed December 8, 2020)

With reference to the peace in Afghanistan, the Taliban always adopted a stance that the Afghan land would see peace only after withdrawal of international forces. This approach of Afghan Taliban seems a lame excuse to justify their violent acts. The 2020 peace deal of Afghan Taliban with the US clearly depicted this stance of the former.⁹⁸ The Taliban got succeeded in convincing the US that as long the international forces are in Afghanistan the peace in Afghanistan would be under constant threat, therefore, the international forces should withdrawal from Afghanistan as soon as possible.⁹⁹

4.1. Terrorist Outfits on Afghan Soil

Taliban and other non-governmental factions on the Afghan soil continued their fight in the post-9/11 Afghanistan in order to maintain their dominance in the country. Moreover, the inefficiency of the unstable Afghan government, and the deeply rooted political and social division among the citizens provoked the emergence of insurgents on Afghan land. It proved to be highly complex for weak Afghan governments to stop the spread of these non-state actors on Afghan soil. It was unable to track the exact composition of this insurgency, which had started to flourish on Afghan soil in post- US invasion period. However, it was clearly evident that the insurgency was very destructive and these guerilla forces were gradually regrouping in entire Afghanistan by year 2003 with the prominent dominancy at the Eastern and Western parts of the country.¹⁰⁰

In order to counter these insurgent forces and annihilate them completely from Afghan soil, the USA and NATO forces needed to plunge in Afghanistan that resulted in a very costly and deadliest war on Afghan land. Moreover the effect of this war was also spilled over to Pakistan and it experienced very deadliest consequences in terms of vast terrorist attacks that made the country's social, political and economic situation very fragile.¹⁰¹

With the reemergence of insurgents on the Afghan soil following 9/11 events, many different international players got the opportunity to covertly utilize Afghanistan for the fulfillment of their vested interests. Pakistan allegedly backed Taliban militants against Afghan government, while India supported and trained the Pakistani origin militants on Afghan soil to

⁹⁸ Secunder Kermani, "Crossing Divides: Can Taliban and Afghan Leaders Share Peace?", *BBC News*, July 6, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-48866392> (accessed December 8, 2020)

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Roohullah Rahimi, *Afghanistan Exploring the Dynamics of Sociopolitical Strife and the Persistence of the Insurgency* (Ottawa: Pearson Peacekeeping Centre, 2008), 1-38.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

spread terrorism in Pakistan. Similarly, the cross-border attacks between Pakistan and Afghanistan were also heavily noticed in the post-US invasion era. Moreover, the US had maintained its presence in Afghanistan in order to keep an eye on all the nearby states. Afghanistan acted as Heart of Asia for the US, which provided it the opportunity to observe the activities of Russia, China, Pakistan, India, Iran and Central Asian states. Another stakeholder which emerged in the war of Afghanistan was Iran, which had a history of hostility with the US. Hence all these players were interconnected with each other and pursued their interests by playing the covert politics that suited their national interests.¹⁰²

4.2. The US-Taliban Talks

The US failed efforts and role in Afghanistan reminded the US about its experience in Vietnam. Likewise Vietnam the US lost several soldiers and its economy also suffered heavily.¹⁰³ The US efforts to install democracy in Afghanistan, improve the condition of women and minorities, eliminate corruption and bring development in the war-torn country failed badly because Taliban overpowered the US. Taliban were dominant in every sector of Afghanistan. They had banned girls' schools and waged attacks during elections to prevent people from voting which resulted in low turnout in all Afghan elections. Similarly, the corruption in Afghan government and maladministration acted catalysts for Taliban insurgency to grow. Resultantly, the politics, military and economy of Afghanistan could not be stabilized.¹⁰⁴

The Taliban fighters fought continuously in Afghanistan against the US forces and their own Muslims brothers. The reason behind this rebellious attitude was that they considered the Afghan government as a US puppet and deemed a fight against the Afghan officials necessary to end the US and other international players' involvement in Afghanistan. The unending two decade long war had also surfeited some of the Taliban fighters. For instance, a Taliban fighter named Khanjar spoke to the BBC in an interview "I get tired of this war, but now that I'm in

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Mussarat Jabeen, Muhammad Saleem Mazhar & Naheed S. Goraya, "US Afghan Relations: A Historical Perspective of Events of 9/11", *South Asian Studies: A Research Journal of South Asian Studies* 25, No. 1 (January-June 2010): 143-173.

¹⁰⁴ Mujib Mashal, "Taliban and U.S. Strike Deal to Withdraw American Troops From Afghanistan", *The New York Times*, February 29, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/29/world/asia/us-taliban-deal.html> (accessed December 8, 2020)

it, I can't leave. It is my job.... And since the government is the puppet of Americans, so it is our duty to fight them".¹⁰⁵

Under Trump administration, it was the US' exclusive goal to achieve peace with the Taliban and sort out the difference between Afghan government and the Taliban. The Trump administration had many reasons to withdraw from Afghanistan by signing a treaty with the Taliban. Like, it wanted to end this two decade long war that brutally harmed the US interest.¹⁰⁶ Secondly, the US wanted to preserve its image as a world power that brought peace in Afghanistan.¹⁰⁷ Thirdly, it was an election year in America and the Trump administration wanted to carry out the graceful exit of their soldiers, who were stuck in Afghanistan for years. This would save President Trump from domestic criticism and improve his political image among the US citizens.¹⁰⁸

The US-Taliban dialogues have a long history. Both Clinton and Bush administrations talked to the Taliban to get them to widen their government and to get their approval for construction of Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan gas pipeline by American companies. A UN mission was also formed to persuade the Taliban for negotiations; however it was dissolved after a suicide bomber of Al-Qaeda blew a US Navy ship in Yemen in 2000, commonly known as the USS Cole attack. The US contacts with the Taliban in the late 1990s were sporadic, and mostly made by the US oil companies. However, the US did not completely cut off its contacts with the Taliban even after attacks on the US embassies in Tanzania and Kenya by the Al-Qaeda in 1998.

The US continued negotiating with the Taliban in the first half of 2001. It invited a number of Taliban officials to Washington in March of that year in order to influence Taliban on Bin Laden issue and to persuade them to facilitate US firms in gaining access to Central Asian oil reserves. However, the negotiations stalled in July 2001. The last contact between the Taliban and the US officials was reported in August 2001, when US Assistant Secretary of State for Central Asian Affairs, Christina Rocca, met with the Taliban's ambassador to Pakistan, Abdul Salam Zaeef. The US ended its contacts with the Taliban immediately after

¹⁰⁵ Secunder Kermani, "Crossing Divides: Can Taliban and Afghan Leaders Share Peace?", *BBC News*, July 6, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-48866392> (accessed December 8, 2020)

¹⁰⁶ Michael Kugelman, "How the US and Afghanistan can Jump-Start Talks with the Taliban", *Aljazeera*, May 31, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2020/5/31/how-the-us-and-afghanistan-can-jump-start-talks-with-the-taliban> (accessed December 8, 2020)

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

9/11 when former US President George W. Bush made a statement that the US would not talk with the terrorists. In October 2001 the invasion of Afghanistan was effectuated. The US policy of no negotiations with the terrorists remained in-effect till March 2009, when the newly elected US President, Barack Obama, showed willingness for negotiations with the moderate elements within the Afghan Taliban.¹⁰⁹

In November 2010, direct contact between the US officials and the Taliban representatives began in Munich, Germany, with facilitation of German and Qatari officials. The US held preliminary dialogues with the Taliban in Doha in February 2011 to swap five Guantanamo prisoners in exchange for an American soldier. Another round of the preliminary talks was held in Germany in May 2011. The negotiations continued and the Taliban representatives again met with the US officials in Qatar to discuss confidence building measures. They also discussed about a possible prisoners transfer. Although the Afghan and Pakistani governments were not directly involved in the talks yet they reluctantly accepted the dialogues. However, in March 2012 the negotiations between the Taliban and the US ended majorly because they had differences over the supervision of the Taliban commanders in Qatar, who were to be freed from Guantanamo Bay.¹¹⁰ However, President Barack Obama was committed for drawdown of the US troops from Afghanistan and announced a timetable in May 2014 for withdrawing most of the American soldiers from the country by the end of 2016.

In August 2017, President Trump announced that he originally wanted to pull out American soldiers from Afghanistan but would take a decision about the withdrawal after considering the conditions on the ground in order to prevent creation of a vacuum for terrorists in Afghanistan. He commented that a political settlement with the Taliban was far off at that stage. However, the Taliban escalated attacks against the US and Afghan government in the following year to foil Trump administration's plan of deployment of the US troops across rural Afghanistan that would assist Afghan security forces to decimate the Taliban's income means.

However, the US and the Taliban resumed negotiations in late 2018, which gained momentum in February 2019 when the talks in Doha entered their highest level. The negotiations between the U.S. special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad and top Taliban representative

¹⁰⁹ Mona K. Sheikh, & Maja T.J. Greenwood, *Taliban Talks: Past, Present and Prospects for the US, Afghanistan, and Pakistan* (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2013), 7-42.

¹¹⁰ Mussarat Jabeen, Muhammad Saleem Mazhar & Naheed S. Goraya, "US Afghan Relations: A Historical Perspective of Events of 9/11", *South Asian Studies: A Research Journal of South Asian Studies* 25, No. 1 (January-June 2010): 143-173.

Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar focused on withdrawal of the US troops from Afghanistan in return for the Taliban's promise that it would block international terrorist groups from operating on Afghan land. However, the talks faced yet another blow in September 2019 when President Trump abruptly broke off peace negotiations with the Taliban just a week after Khalilzad announced that the US and the Taliban have agreed on a peace deal in principle. The US President canceled his secret meeting with the Taliban officials after killing of an American troop in a Taliban attack. On contrary, the Taliban announced that it was committed to continue peace talks and the cancellation of the dialogues by the US would result in more number of the US deaths. Despite several ups and downs, the US administration and the Taliban officials finally reached a peace deal and signed an agreement in Doha in February 2020 which called for complete withdrawal of the US forces from Afghanistan by May 2021. The new Biden administration has postponed the withdrawal of the troops till September 2021, a decision which the Taliban have rejected and termed it a violation of the US-Taliban 2020 agreement

4.3. The Failed Negotiations

Since years the afghan government had been trying to bring the Taliban on the mediation table but a sound negotiation deal could not occur. The Intra-afghan negotiations remained a proposition because Taliban never recognized the legitimacy of the US-backed Afghan government. The Taliban, due to their violent power, overpowered the US and afghan governments and maintained control over a large portion of Afghan territory.

Afghan Taliban had always been portrayed as extremely violent entity in the western world and international media. However, they remained engaged in several initiatives for the good of Afghanistan. Both, Afghan government officials and Taliban, repeatedly demanded removal of foreign intervention in Afghanistan's internal matters. They wanted to sort out their internal differences and curb out the useless violent acts which yield benefits for no one in Afghanistan. But the efforts to resolve Afghanistan's problem failed every time as no side showed leniency, and no one was willing to compromise on its self-interest. The process to resolve Afghan issues also lacked honest and loyal efforts. Afghanistan is trapped in the corruption and bad governance. Whenever any honest effort was made to settle the Afghan conflict, something bad arose and disturbed the peace.

As in 2005, Afghanistan launched a reconciliation initiative known as Tahkim-e- Solh, which was aimed at strengthening the peace in Afghanistan by reconciling with former Taliban loyalists. However this program failed due to the lack of seriousness, and corruption in Afghan government. This reconciliation program was again revived after five years but still no positive gains occurred. However, these reconciliatory moves hinted a gesture that like Afghan government, the Afghan Taliban also wanted peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan.¹¹¹ In the later months of 2010 the Tahkim-e-Solh program was replaced with the Afghanistan Peace and Reconciliation Program (APRP) with an aim to initiate peace negotiation between the Afghan government and the Taliban. To achieve this purpose Afghanistan High Peace Council was also formed. Unfortunately, that peace program could not succeed too because of the Taliban's distrust on the council leader named Burhanuddin Rabbani, who was once affiliated with anti-Taliban Northern Alliance. Moreover, different crises like assassination of Burhanuddin Rabbani further contributed to the failure of the reconciliatory initiative.¹¹²

In 2012, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran jointly conducted a conference in which they decided to free the Afghan land from foreign players as soon as possible, and drafted a roadmap towards peace. However that document was never fully approved and practiced because its draft granted Taliban a little hold to govern little territory of Afghanistan. In 2012 a think tank of Paris known as Foundation for the Strategic Research started an initiative to organized Track II dialogues between the Afghan Government and the Taliban. The meeting, also known as the Kyoto meeting, showed that the participants were willing to sort out the Afghan problem.¹¹³

It is believed that conflict in Afghanistan is basically an asymmetric conflict between the insurgent groups of Afghanistan and the Afghan government that enjoys the support of its international allies. The relations between both rivals got worsen due to their lack of understanding of each other. If these groups negotiate on one unanimous point and promise to fulfill their bilateral arrangements, the security situation of Afghanistan can be improved.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Mona K. Sheikh, & Maja T.J. Greenwood, *Taliban Talks: Past, Present and Prospects for the US, Afghanistan, and Pakistan* (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2013), 7-42.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Mona K. Sheikh, & Maja T.J. Greenwood, *Taliban Talks: Past, Present and Prospects for the US, Afghanistan, and Pakistan* (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2013), 7-42.

¹¹⁴ Roohullah Rahimi, *Afghanistan Exploring the Dynamics of Sociopolitical Strife and the Persistence of the Insurgency* (Ottawa: Pearson Peacekeeping Centre, 2008), 1-38.

4.4. The Afghan Government-Taliban Initiative

After, the US-Taliban 2020 agreement, the Government of Afghanistan demanded the complete ceasefire from Afghan Taliban and asked them to join officials of Afghan government on table as part of intra-Afghan dialogues, which were committed in the agreement. Taliban agreed to conduct a meeting with the Afghan Government, whom they had previously considered as the US puppet. In an interview published in Aljazeera, a senior Afghan Taliban spokesman gave statement regarding participation in intra-Afghan dialogues that Taliban were participating in the dialogues as most of their reservations had been addressed.¹¹⁵

After the latest deal both the US and the Afghan officials believed that US departure from Afghan land would not create future troubles and it would not lead to the breakdown and uncertainty in Afghanistan as it had occurred decades ago after the soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan.¹¹⁶ The worrisome possibility of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan is that it would create a vacuum and regional players like Pakistan, India, China and Russia may likely step in to fill this void. In the absence of the US, the weak Afghan government would not be able to control drug paddling and the opium cultivation in the country may see a sudden rise. The narcotics trafficking would result in channeling of more funds to the militant outfits and ultimately more violence in Afghanistan. Moreover, there is a fear of increased militants' infiltration in Afghanistan from across the world, which would further deteriorate the security situation in the country and ultimately the inflow of refugees towards the neighboring countries may increase. Such a situation may create further instability and crises in the region.¹¹⁷ However, if the regional player act responsibly and cooperate with Afghanistan, further devastation of the country can be avoided.

4.5. The Practical Measures

The US took several practical measures to bring peace in Afghanistan and avoid political chaos in the country. For instance it remained successful in convincing the Afghan

¹¹⁵ "Afghan Government Demands Complete Ceasefire with Taliban", *Aljazeera*, January 18, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/1/18/afghan-government-demands-complete-ceasefire-with-taliban> (accessed December 18, 2020)

¹¹⁶ Tharoor, Ishaan, "Trump's Taliban Deal and the Weight of History", *The Washington Post*, March 1, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/03/02/trumps-deal-with-taliban-comes-after-legacy-us-hubris/> (accessed July 18, 2020)

¹¹⁷ Dawood Azami, "Afghanistan War: What Could Peace Look Like?", *BBC News*, July 14, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-47733079> (accessed July 18, 2020)

Taliban for a limited ceasefire, and made them to sit with the Afghan Government for negotiations. It tried to persuade the Taliban through 2020-peace deal to reduce the violent insurgent attacks on innocent citizens and international and national security forces. Similarly, the political leadership of Afghanistan, on the recommendation of the US, signed power-sharing agreement after the 2019 presidential elections to prevent further political instability in the already war-torn country. It forced Afghan government to release 5000 Taliban prisoners from Afghan jails to keep the 2020-deal with the Taliban intact.

The Afghan elites showed little interest in the peace agreement between the US and the Afghan Taliban. For instance, President Ashraf Ghani had first dropped and later delayed the deal on Taliban prisoner release to foil the 2020-agreement. On the other hand, the Taliban were insistent that they would indulge in the Intra-afghan peace dialogues only after the release of their prisoners by the Afghan-government.¹¹⁸

Despite all these practical steps, the US is still in doubt that whether Afghan Taliban would keep their promises after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan or the 2020-deal was a vague trap for the US to expel its troops from Afghanistan.¹¹⁹ Moreover, Taliban considered the Afghan government as puppet of the US and showed reluctance in negotiating with it. Taliban rather preferred to negotiate directly with the US whereas the US wanted to act as a mediator between the Afghan Government and the Afghan Taliban.¹²⁰

4.6. Concerns over the US-Taliban Deal

Since the signing of the deal in February 2020, it has received several criticisms. The deal is being dubbed as a hidden backdoor arrangement between the Taliban and the US; the real story of which is still a secret. The US was being criticized for continuous fulfillment of all the demands of the Taliban despite the fact that Afghanistan had not witnessed any reduction in violence since the signing of the deal. A report in The New York Times noted that the US was sharing its deployed forces location in Afghanistan with the Taliban under the 2020-

¹¹⁸ Adnan Qaiser, "U.S.-Taliban Peace Deal: Beneficiaries and Spoilers, Part 2", *The Geopolitics*, April 22, 2020, <https://thegeopolitics.com/u-s-taliban-peace-deal-beneficiaries-and-spoilers-part-2/> (accessed September 7, 2020)

¹¹⁹ Michael Kugelman, "How the US and Afghanistan can Jump-Start Talks with the Taliban", *Aljazeera*, May 31, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2020/5/31/how-the-us-and-afghanistan-can-jump-start-talks-with-the-taliban> (accessed December 8, 2020)

¹²⁰ Secunder Kermani, "Crossing Divides: Can Taliban and Afghan Leaders Share Peace?", *BBC News*, July 6, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-48866392> (accessed December 8, 2020)

agreement so that the Taliban avoid executing attacks on them and ensure their safety.¹²¹ This showed the amount of power the Taliban enjoyed over the US in Afghanistan.

While the Taliban's political office was finalizing its February 2020 deal with the US, the Taliban leaders remained in frequent contact with their al-Qaeda counterparts to consult them on the terms of the deal and assured them that they would not be betrayed.¹²² This was all being done when the Taliban were pledging before the US that they would not allow Al-Qaeda members to operate from Afghan soil. Al-Qaeda frequently supports the Taliban leaders but the Taliban elite always deny this fact. Rather, the Taliban claimed that they were taking practical measures to distance themselves from Al-Qaeda. However, the full cut off of Al-Qaeda's financial and military support to Taliban would be difficult to achieve in the short-run.¹²³ If Taliban seriously want to become a legitimate power in Afghanistan and are interested to earn a reputation in International community, they seriously need to highlight their concerns towards the global counter terrorism efforts.¹²⁴

4.7. Options for Engagement

In the contemporary situation, four major actors- the US, Pakistan, the Official government of Afghanistan and the Afghan Taliban- are actively engaged in Afghanistan peace process. All these actors do not retain any long-term sound policy to bring a long lasting peace in Afghanistan. They are critically engaged in Afghanistan with regard to a peaceful settlement of the prevailing crisis. Additionally all the four players want to gain competitive advantage over each other and also want to fulfill their vested stakes in Afghanistan.¹²⁵ For instance, Pakistan is pursuing the policy of wait and watch that how the future of Afghanistan shapes up. It is exerting its importance in the Afghan peace process to maintain its stance that Pakistan's presence is vital for a successful settlement of Afghan dispute. The political leadership of Afghanistan has made huge investment in Afghanistan and it also does not want to lose its political stature in Afghanistan after the US withdrawal. Therefore, it is interested in maintaining peace with the Taliban. The Afghan Taliban, on the other hand, are interested

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Susannah George, "Behind the Taliban's Ties to al-Qaeda: A Shared Ideology and Decades of Battlefield Support", *The Washington Post*, December 8, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/taliban-al-qaeda-afghanistan/2020/12/07/79d4bddc-3414-11eb-9699-00d311f13d2d_story.html (accessed December 17, 2020)

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Asmatullah Khan Wazir, "Withdrawal of the US Troops from Afghanistan and its Implications for Pakistan-Challenges and a Way Forward", *Journal of Peace and Development Studies* 2, No1 (2012): 89-101.

in regaining their lost rule in Afghanistan, which seems an impossible task in the presence of the US troops in the country. Whereas, the US wants to pull out its troops from Afghanistan so that it can focus on its economy, which is getting drained due to huge war spending.¹²⁶

The US presence in Afghanistan is vital for the US interest due to Afghanistan's geostrategic location, but it is badly trapped as the Afghan Taliban are unwilling to accept its dominance and hegemony. They overpowered the US in the war on terror and badly dented its economy; therefore the US was left with no option but to leave Afghanistan gracefully. However, the US has the option to maintain peace and good relations with the Taliban in post-withdrawal era because only the Taliban can fulfill the US interests in Afghanistan.

The US intends to come back to Afghanistan in future, if it serves its interest. Its intentions are clear by President Trump's statement that the US would return to Afghanistan with full force in case of any future attack against the US interests. Therefore, it should not fully withdraw its security forces from Afghanistan and rather leave some residue to have future engagement in Afghanistan.

4.8. Conclusion

The war in Afghanistan proved an unwinnable decision for the US. Afghan land was prone to wars since history, but it was evident that no foreign power could ever succeed in overpowering Afghans and faced worse defeat on their land. Soviet disintegration was the clear lesson for everyone, but unfortunately the US indulged itself in Afghanistan, apparently without a clear strategy. Hence it threw away a lot of its resources in Afghanistan and gained little in return.

The citizens of Afghanistan have suffered the most in the past four decades due to the prolonged destabilized situation in the country. The women were among the most affected communities as the autocratic rule of Taliban had suppressed their rights. The rigid Taliban were the dominant faction in Afghanistan but they showed little inclination towards practical measures to ensure peace in Afghanistan. Several efforts were made for achieving peace in the country but no peace process could succeed due to the corruption and administrative failures

¹²⁶ Ibid.

of the Afghan government. The only way out for a peaceful Afghanistan is the honest reconciliation between Afghan government and Taliban.

CHAPTER 05

POST-US AFGHAN POLICY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PAKISTAN

Pakistan and Afghanistan have deep rooted relations since history because both states have commonalities regarding cultural, historical, social and ethnic ties and both states considered each other as “Twin Brothers.”¹²⁷ However several crises like Greater Pakhtunistan idea, Durand Line dispute, Soviet-Afghan War, Pakistan’s alleged support to the Taliban militants, USA war on terror, and Indian role in Afghanistan complicate the relationship between these states; creating deep-rooted mistrust between them. Pakistan always tried to maintain good bilateral relations with Afghanistan; however, it also aspired for a friendly government on its western border that could undermine the Indian influence in Afghanistan. Secondly, Pakistan wanted to suppress or sort out the Durand Line dispute, which is only possible with support of friendly regime in Afghanistan. The Durand Line is a long porous border between Afghanistan and Pakistan with 2,640 Km length. This border line was established after an agreement between Mortimer Durand of British India and Amir Abdur Rahman Khan of Afghanistan in 1893.¹²⁸ However, Afghanistan has never accepted the legitimacy of Durand Line since the creation of Pakistan in 1947.

The tribal region along Durand Line served as a buffer zone between the USSR and British India and the Britain gave a special status to this region, which was later named Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) by Pakistan. After the partition of British India, Pakistan maintained the status quo at Durand Line and erstwhile FATA, which was being governed under the same Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR) that was introduced by the British. However, in year 2018, Pakistan’s National Assembly abolished FCR and merged the erstwhile FATA in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, renaming them as tribal districts. The areas along Durand Line have strategic importance;¹²⁹ therefore, Afghanistan never accepted the legitimacy of the Pak-Afghan border line till day.¹³⁰ Since the inception of Pakistan,

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

Afghanistan remained an important element of Pakistan's foreign policy from 1947 till 1979 due to Afghanistan's stance on Durand Line as well as its take on Greater Pakhtunistan.

Pakistan played a vital role in Soviet War. It considered the Soviet (now Russia) influence in Afghanistan as a strategic threat to Pakistan's interests; therefore, maintained its direct and indirect involvement in the domestic affairs of Afghanistan in 1980s. Pakistan's pursued this policy of meddling in Afghanistan's internal matters for the next three decades for two major reasons; firstly because the defense fraternity of Pakistan was insistent on installation of a friendly regime in Kabul so that the Afghan territory could be used as a source of strategic depth against India. And secondly, the policymakers in Islamabad had realized after the US invasion of Afghanistan that the situation in Afghanistan has a direct impact upon the security situation of Pakistan.

As the US is gradually progressing towards a withdrawal from Afghanistan, Islamabad is concerned that the changing environment in Kabul would pose serious challenges for Pakistan. It would leave similar vacuum in Afghanistan as was created after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 and the country may plunge in political and economic chaos. If the US succeeded in gaining rapprochement between the Taliban and Government of Afghanistan the situation in Afghanistan would gradually return towards normalcy. Such a scenario would ultimately lead towards peace in the region. If the US leaves without mediating a deal between Afghan government and the Taliban, Afghanistan may again get trapped in another civil war, which would have adverse effects on the regional peace.¹³¹

5.1. Bilateral Relations and Domestic Politics

Pakistan played a vital role in the recent Afghan wars. The bilateral relations with Afghanistan strained after Pakistan supported and trained Mujahedeen to fight against the Soviet Union for its vested interests. With these Mujahedeen, Pakistan fulfilled many objectives in following years. The Soviet invasion resulted in inflow of around 1.7 million Afghan refugees to Pakistan. After the 9/11 attacks, Pakistan was compelled to support the United States in war on terror.¹³² After the debacle of friendly Taliban regime in Kabul,

¹³¹ Tahama Asad, "US Withdrawal from Afghanistan: Implications for Pakistan", *Modern Diplomacy*, May 14, 2020, <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2020/05/14/u-s-withdrawal-from-afghanistan-implications-for-pakistan/> (accessed June 28, 2020)

¹³² Asmatullah Khan Wazir, "Withdrawal of the US Troops from Afghanistan and its Implications for Pakistan-Challenges and a Way Forward", *Journal of Peace and Development Studies* 2, No1 (2012): 89-101.

Pakistan was apprehensive that the new Afghan government having support of Northern Alliance would be receptive towards India. Pakistan feared that hostile India at the eastern border and a pro-India regime at the western would severely harm Pakistan's interests.¹³³ Therefore, Pakistan did not completely give up on its relations with the Taliban of their regime in Kabul. It kept facilitating Taliban fighters, who had been fighting against the foreign troops and Afghan government simultaneously since 2001. This irked the government in Kabul and it started supporting anti-Pakistan elements in erstwhile FATA, who were critical of Pakistan for allying with the US in the war on terror. Such series of events resulted in uneasy relations based on mistrust between the two countries. Both states remained indulged in blame game over the past several years. Afghanistan blamed Pakistan for prompting domestic wars in Afghanistan by supporting local and foreign non-state actors. Pakistan rejected these allegations, and accused that all the terrorist attacks and insurgencies in Pakistan had basis in Afghanistan.

However, Pakistan has repeatedly narrated its concerns that it could not go all against the Taliban as the effects of Afghan war would ultimately spill over to Pakistan which would hinder the peace and security of the country. Pakistan feared that the US invasion of Afghanistan would provoke the ethnic tribal groups of Pakistan to create instability inside the country on pretext that Islamabad did not play a role for the protection of their Afghan brothers against the non-Muslim western powers.¹³⁴ Pakistan's concerns were genuine as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and erstwhile FATA region of Pakistan is dominated by Pashtun population who retain a soft corner for Afghanistan because of shared religion, culture, customs and language.

Despite the similarities and differences among both states, Pakistan and Afghanistan tried to maintain balanced bilateral relations through joint ventures. These ventures would be helpful in contributing peace and development in the region and in maximizing the chances of increased economic and trade cooperation. Pakistan's efforts showed that Islamabad was not only supporting the Afghan refugees but also supported Afghanistan in several other possible ways. Like India, Pakistan invested in the reconstruction of Afghanistan to stabilize the war-torn country. It also accommodated a considerable percentage of Afghan students in Pakistani

¹³³ Qandeel Siddique, *Pakistan's Future Policy towards Afghanistan: A Look at Strategic Depth, Militant Movements and the Role of India and the US* (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2011), 18.

¹³⁴ Sidra Rehman Mughal, and Nazir Hussain, "US Withdrawal from Afghanistan: Implications for Pakistan", *Journal of Political Studies* 24, No 2 (2017): 485-497.

educational institutions.¹³⁵ Besides, it offered access of CPEC to Afghanistan to bring economic prosperity in the country.

5.2. Military and Security Situation

Pakistan's establishment especially the security elite has been one of the most significant stakeholders in Afghanistan since 1980s. In the past four decades, it spent billions of dollars on their collaborative partners i.e. the Mujahedeen, who helped Pakistani intelligence to achieve its stakes in Afghanistan. It is believed that the situation in Afghanistan would remain the same even after the US exit due to expected involvement of the regional countries in internal matters of Afghanistan. Afghanistan has not witnessed any reconciliation since the Soviet departure and rather the regional players used the Afghan soil to further their agendas and fought their proxy wars.¹³⁶

Pakistan's ISI supported the Afghan Mujahedeen and later the Taliban to install a friendly government in Kabul. It granted them the political, military, financial and logistical support in order to strengthen their position in Afghanistan. Additionally, ISI allegedly provided refuge to many Taliban leaders in Pakistan in spite of being a US ally in the war on terror.¹³⁷ Meanwhile, the US considered Pakistan as its strategic and vital ally in resolving the security issues of Afghanistan because Pakistan was much involved in the domestic affairs of Afghanistan¹³⁸ largely because Pakistan's security forces had maintained close ties with the Afghan insurgent groups especially the Haqqani Network- an offshoot of Afghan Taliban. The US and the Afghan leaders have also repeatedly accused Pakistan for supporting the insurgent groups.¹³⁹ Despite having a long engagement of Pakistan with the Afghan insurgent groups, Pakistani military establishment is still fearful of strategic encirclement of Pakistan by Afghanistan's critical ally India. India has developed close diplomatic ties with Afghanistan in the past two decades and invested heavily in the country in terms of infrastructure, road network, health, and administrative and security training of its bureaucracy. After the exit of

¹³⁵ Qandeel Siddique, *Pakistan's Future Policy towards Afghanistan: A Look at Strategic Depth, Militant Movements and the Role of India and the US* (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2011), 18.

¹³⁶ Mercy A. Kuo, "US Exit from Afghanistan: The Pakistan Factor", *The Diplomat*, September 17, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/09/us-exit-from-afghanistan-the-pakistan-factor/> (accessed November 16, 2020)

¹³⁷ Qandeel Siddique, *Pakistan's Future Policy towards Afghanistan: A Look at Strategic Depth, Militant Movements and the Role of India and the US* (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2011), 18.

¹³⁸ Dr Hassan Askari Rizvi, "Pakistan's Afghan Problem", *The Express Tribune*, November 5, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1550078/6-pakistans-afghan-problem> (accessed November 16, 2020)

¹³⁹ Clayton Thomas, "Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy: In Brief", *Congressional Research Service*, November 10, 2020, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R45122> (accessed December 16, 2020)

the US, India's diplomatic, commercial and defense engagements may increase in Afghanistan, which will be problematic for Pakistan.¹⁴⁰

5.3. Regional Dynamics

The Afghan problem is not only the issue of Afghanistan but it can also be counted as a multilateral problem. The US involvement in this region is solely aimed at keeping a check on Russia and China, thereby it supported India to balance Chinese influence in the region.¹⁴¹ Therefore, the Afghan problem has serious impacts on the regional dynamics due to the stakes of China, Russia, Iran, Central Asian Republics, Pakistan and India. Any disturbance in Afghanistan would instigate problems in these countries and the whole regions of South Asia and Central Asia would be affected with the terrorism and instability in Afghanistan.¹⁴² Therefore, Afghan problem needs to be sorted out with collective efforts to maintain regional peace.

Pakistan always wanted to accomplish its long-term interest via Afghanistan, which included elimination of Indian-influence from Afghanistan, maintaining bilateral-trade relations, gaining easy access in trade with Central Asian republics and curbing the Pashtun nationalism in the area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and erstwhile FATA. Islamabad had realized that without gaining internal stability, Pakistan would face serious conflicts in KP, FATA and Baluchistan. Consequently, Pakistan's attention would be diverted from its eastern border because of these provincial crises, and India would get chance to harm Pakistan. In order to secure Pakistani borders, it was necessary for Pakistan to get support of disgruntled elements in Afghanistan to use them as a pressure group for maintenance of internal and regional peace. Being the major players in the region, the conflicts in Afghanistan, India and Pakistan would eventually disturb the regional dynamics of South Asian politics.¹⁴³

Furthermore, the regional dynamics of South Asia forced Pakistan to divert its influence in Afghanistan to negative direction, which deliberately deteriorated the Afghan crisis.¹⁴⁴ It was Pakistan and the US who indulged Afghanistan in the interethnic and tribal wars in 1980s

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Dr Hassan Askari Rizvi, "Pakistan's Afghan Problem", *The Express Tribune*, November 5, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1550078/6-pakistans-afghan-problem> (accessed November 16, 2020)

¹⁴³ Razia Sultana, "Major Threats to Pakistan in the Wake of US Withdrawal from Afghanistan", *FWU Journal of Social Sciences* 1, 1 (Summer 2015): 1-7.

¹⁴⁴ Clayton Thomas, "Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy: In Brief", *Congressional Research Service*, November 10, 2020, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R45122> (accessed December 16, 2020)

and 1990s through their proxy actors. After the rise of Taliban in Afghanistan, Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) covertly supported them to gain power in Afghanistan, which strengthened Al-Qaeda in the country.¹⁴⁵

5.4. The US Withdrawal: Implications for Pakistan

The US invaded Afghanistan to eliminate the Taliban rule and wanted to establish fully functional democracy in Afghanistan. But unfortunately the situation in Afghanistan further deteriorated due to incompetence of government functionaries, corruption, poor economy, increased crime rate, poverty and the killing of innocents. The US always needed Pakistan to fulfill its objectives in Afghanistan. In response Pakistan also en-cashed US interests by strengthening and advancing its economic and military power with the help of the US aid. Pakistan played its cards well to squeeze maximum benefit from the US presence in Afghanistan.

The US, Afghan Government, the Taliban and lastly Pakistan are the key stakeholders of the Afghan peace process. These key players are currently actively engaged in deciding the fate of the future Afghanistan and wanting to settle this issue via peaceful means through graceful withdrawal of the US from Afghanistan.¹⁴⁶ In the past, the US had adopted a harder stance for Pakistan and insisted Islamabad to take decisive measures against the militants and the terrorist groups that are operating from its soil.¹⁴⁷ However, in 2019, Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan met with President Trump in Washington. The key point of Imran Khan's visit to Washington was to make deals regarding Afghan war. During their media talk, President Trump repeatedly hinted that the US was interested in making deals with Islamabad, provided that Pakistan persuade Taliban political office at the Doha U.S.-Taliban peace negotiations to finalize a deal with the US. If Pakistan lived up to the US expectations, Washington may rescue Islamabad from its prevailing economic crises. Such a deal may help achieve short term goals for Pakistan and the U.S., but it will be at the expense of just and lasting peace in Afghanistan, as well as at the expense of long-term U.S. security interests in

¹⁴⁵ Mercy A. Kuo, "US Exit from Afghanistan: The Pakistan Factor", *The Diplomat*, September 17, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/09/us-exit-from-afghanistan-the-pakistan-factor/> (accessed November 16, 2020)

¹⁴⁶ Asmatullah Khan Wazir, "Withdrawal of the US Troops from Afghanistan and its Implications for Pakistan-Challenges and a Way Forward", *Journal of Peace and Development Studies* 2, No1 (2012): 89-101.

¹⁴⁷ Isabel Green Jonergard, "The Implications of a US Withdrawal from Afghanistan: Four Scenarios", *Swedish Defence Research Institute*, June 26, 2019, <https://www.foi.se/report-summary?reportNo=FOI%20Memo%206771> (accessed December 8, 2020)

the region.¹⁴⁸ However, the political elite in Afghanistan screamed out at such deals that Pakistan and the US were bargaining the fate of Afghanistan in their own perspectives.

One of the greatest challenges which Pakistan would face after the US withdrawal is connected with the law-and-order situation in Pakistan. The presence of militant group known as TTP on Afghan soil with the consent of Afghan government would be a constant security threat for Pakistan. The Afghan Taliban have an organized hierarchy whereas TTP do not retain any such organized structure. After the US withdrawal, TTP terrorists may gain further advantage in Afghanistan due to their ideological proximity with the Taliban. Such a scenario would be horrific for the peace in Pakistan, particularly in the tribal region. Secondly, Pakistan believes that the role of Indian intelligence agency Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) is curtailed in Afghanistan due to the presence of US troops and CIA on Afghan soil. After the US withdrawal, RAW, with a pro-India regime in Kabul, will get an open opportunity to disturb Pakistan's peace. Therefore, in order to overcome all these issues Pakistan should design a neutral policy concerning Afghanistan's internal politics that serve Pakistan's interest after the US withdrawal.¹⁴⁹

The US withdrawal may initiate another civil war among private militias, ethnic communities and politico-religious groups in Afghanistan. The country has several pressure groups like Pashtun dominated Taliban, Tajiks that were part of Northern Alliance, Persian speaking groups from the west of Afghanistan, Uzbek groups from the north of Afghanistan, and Shiite Hazaara community of central Afghanistan which retains ties with Iran. These groups have a history of bitterness with each other. Pashtuns make the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan who are around 42 percent of the total population, followed by Tajiks who are at 27%, Hazaara at 9%, Uzbeks at 9% and other groups who have a population of around 13 percent. Tajiks, Hazaara and Uzbeks were encompassed in Northern Alliance against the Pashtun dominated Taliban during the Afghan civil war in 1990s. Hence the civil war among these groups may erupt again after the US withdrawal. This would have a spillover effect on the region, particularly Pakistan and Iran, as they have a significant number of Shiite Hazaara

¹⁴⁸ Mercy A. Kuo, "US Exit from Afghanistan: The Pakistan Factor", *The Diplomat*, September 17, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/09/us-exit-from-afghanistan-the-pakistan-factor/> (accessed November 16, 2020)

¹⁴⁹ Khansa Qureshi, "Repercussions and Options for Pakistan after US Withdraws from Afghanistan", *Strategic Foresight for Asia*, October 24, 2019, <https://strafasia.com/repercussions-and-options-for-pakistan-after-us-withdraws-from-afghanistan/> (accessed October 10, 2020)

community. Additionally, Pakistan would further affect from Afghan infighting as the Pashtun group is also present in Pakistan.¹⁵⁰

5.5. The Indian Factor

India considers Afghanistan as one of the most potential allies strategically and financially. It has invested largely in Afghanistan for development of infrastructure, reconstruction of institutions, strengthening of democratic government and uplifting of Afghan security forces to ensure an ideal relationship with Afghanistan.¹⁵¹ India is making large investments in Afghanistan so that it could be used against Pakistan. The critical factor of India's involvement in Afghanistan from the perspective of Pakistan is that India's intelligence agencies are covertly operating in Afghanistan. Indian agencies are channeling finances and weaponry to anti-Pakistan groups, who maintain safe havens in Afghanistan with the approval of Afghan government. India is not only exploiting the extremist religious groups like TTP to fight against Pakistan but also it is also instigating insurgency in Baluchistan through Baloch militant organizations like Baloch Liberation Army. These groups are continuously destabilizing Pakistan's security situation. India has succeeded to some extent in creating smooth insurgency in Baluchistan through the Baloch rebels. It is provoking them to relentlessly fight against Pakistan for separation of Baluchistan. However, the insurgency of Baluchistan would die its natural death, or at least slow down with the US departure as it would be hard for a weak Afghan government to sustain its support for anti-Pakistan elements on Afghan soil. Ultimately, India would be compelled to limit its covert activities against Pakistan. The US exit from Afghanistan is likely to prove more fruitful for Pakistan while complicated for India.¹⁵² Moreover, India does not hold any historical, cultural, and linguistic role with Afghanistan; therefore, it is believed that the withdrawal of international forces from Afghanistan may lessen the efficacy of anti-Pakistan activities by India from Afghanistan soil.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Thomas Parker, "Regional Implications of a U.S. Pullout from Afghanistan", *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, June 15, 2020, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/regional-implications-us-pullout-afghanistan> (accessed October 10, 2020)

¹⁵¹ Qandeel Siddique, *Pakistan's Future Policy towards Afghanistan: A Look at Strategic Depth, Militant Movements and the Role of India and the US* (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2011), 18.

¹⁵² Asmatullah Khan Wazir, "Withdrawal of the US Troops from Afghanistan and its Implications for Pakistan-Challenges and a Way Forward", *Journal of Peace and Development Studies* 2, No1 (2012): 89-101.

¹⁵³ Mussarat Jabeen, Muhammad Saleem Mazhar & Naheed S. Goraya, "US Afghan Relations: A Historical Perspective of Events of 9/11", *South Asian Studies: A Research Journal of South Asian Studies* 25, No. 1 (January-June 2010): 143-173.

Pakistan has played an active role in the recent Afghan peace process. On contrary, India was not involved, which made India feel left over. However, the US wants Indian presence in Afghanistan in order to suppress the China's economic expansion. The US think tanks believe that Indian investment in Afghanistan would boost Afghan economy on one hand and would gain India access to the Central Asian republics on the other. Such a scenario will help India expand financially and through this expansion India will be able to contain China.¹⁵⁴ However, India has to pass through Pakistan to gain access to Central Asian republics, therefore, New Delhi has to ensure that it does not use Afghan soil against Islamabad. Meanwhile, Pakistan has to maintain ideal relations with regional countries particularly Afghanistan in order to subdue India's influence. The path to good relations with the Afghan government and its people is relatively easy for Pakistan due to its shared religious, cultural and linguistic ties with Kabul.¹⁵⁵

However, despite the expected favorable outcomes, Pakistan still needs to remain highly conscious of the Indo-Afghan strategic alignment because it poses a clear threat to Pakistan. Pakistan cannot afford to have hostile governments at the eastern and western borders at the same time. Besides, the growing presence of India in Afghanistan will ultimately dilute Pakistan's involvement in Afghanistan.¹⁵⁶

5.6. Pakistan's Recent Stance on the Afghan Reconciliation Process

The government of Pakistan under the command of Prime Minister Imran Khan is showing a very positive gesture towards the reconciliation peace deals of Afghanistan. Pakistan has agreed to maintain a very especial and collaborative relation with Afghanistan that would be based on mutual interest, respect, trust, and transparency. The policymakers in both countries have realized that their mutual collaborative partnership is vital for the fulfillment of their interests and it will allow them to exploit new opportunities.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ Tahama Asad, "US Withdrawal from Afghanistan: Implications for Pakistan", *Modern Diplomacy*, May 14, 2020, <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2020/05/14/u-s-withdrawal-from-afghanistan-implications-for-pakistan/> (accessed June 28, 2020)

¹⁵⁵ "US Exit Strategy for Afghanistan: What are the Implications for Pakistan", *Center for Public Policy and Governance*, February 4, 2010, <http://cppg.fccollege.edu.pk/us-exit-strategy-for-afghanistan-what-are-the-implications-for-pakistan/> (accessed December 8, 2020)

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Naveed Siddique, "Pakistan Will Do Everything Possible to Reduce Violence in Afghanistan, Says PM Imran on Maiden Kabul Visit", November 19, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1591240> (accessed November 29, 2020)

Similarly, the government of Pakistan has shared its vision that both countries have to collaboratively work to identify the threats and efficiently tackle the enemies that are covertly deteriorating both states peace. Moreover, the partnership between both states would grant each other the opportunity to broaden their economic relationship and trade dependency by providing each other secure routes with permissible movement of people, goods and services. Hence with pure intentions, they would open up the opportunities for development of both states.¹⁵⁸

5.7. The Pashtun Question

The Pashtun question in Afghanistan issue remains a multidimensional factor as the problem is truly geopolitical and ethnic in nature. It is a fundamental aspect of Afghan nationalism but at the same time it also poses difficulty to the nation-building in Pakistan due to a large number of Pashtun populations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan provinces. During the Soviet war, analysts in Afghanistan highlighted on many occasions the alleged biased support of Pakistan to non-Pashtun Mujahedeen rebels against the Pashtun majority communist regime in Kabul. After the Soviet withdrawal, they incited Afghans that Pakistan was equipping Pashtun dominated Taliban against the Tajik majority Mujahedeen headed by Ahmad Shah Massoud. This proposition led to hatred and prejudice against Pakistan particularly among the Tajik, Uzbek and Hazara communities in Afghanistan.¹⁵⁹ It is a known fact that the Kabul regime, since the independence of Pakistan, has been laying territorial claims of tribal areas marked by Lord Durand. Afghanistan considered these areas as a strategic asset with the shared ideological and cultural aspects.

From 1947 until now, the Pashtun question remains a source of conflict between the two countries. As the 1947 referendum only allowed the Pashtun population of British India to either choose between India and Pakistan, so the Kabul regime always had an official stance that the referendum does not hold any credibility as it was a unilateral step taken by the British without consensus with Afghanistan. Moreover, Afghanistan claims that Pashtuns were not asked in the referendum if they wanted to join Afghanistan; therefore, majority of the Pashtuns boycotted the referendum.¹⁶⁰ From the time of King Zahir Shah to President Ashraf Ghani, the

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Frederic Grare, "Pakistan Afghanistan Relations in the Post-9/11 Era", *Carnegie Papers* 72 (October 2006): 4-18.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

Afghan claim of not recognizing the Durand Line has always been the bone of contention between the two countries. However, the first communist dictator of Afghanistan Nur Muhammad Taraki, after negotiating with Zia-ul-Haq, agreed to recognize Durand Line as an international border on the condition that Pakistan would halt its support to Mujahedeen, but all went in vain.

5.8. Demographic Implications

The presence of Shiite population in Pakistan and Afghanistan is inseparable as Shiites roughly make 15 to 20% of their population. They are mostly present in Tajik and Hazara ethnic minorities in Afghanistan.¹⁶¹ The landscape of minority presence, ethnic group clashes, Shiite-Sunni divisions and the religious intolerance in Pakistan and Afghanistan are almost same. Both countries often get victimized of sectarian violence. The Sunni extremist militant groups operate in both countries and are responsible for sectarian conflicts inside Pakistan and Afghanistan.¹⁶²

It was observed in the history that the people of dominating ruling group in Afghanistan were found discriminating against the Shiite community and they were discouraged to hold their religious gatherings. Furthermore, the king Zahir Shah of Afghanistan and his government put many Shiite leaders behind the bars. Similarly, the Shiites kept their gatherings secret and confined them to their homes during the Taliban regime.

The Shiite-Sunni debate in Afghanistan gain prominence during the Soviet war when the Sunni fighters of Afghanistan went to Pakistan for training while the Shiite fighters went to Iran. At that time, both Shiite and Sunni fighters of Afghanistan were collaboratively fighting in the name of Islam for one single cause; to free their homeland from infidel Soviets. However, after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, the ethnic rivalries in Afghanistan between different ethnic communities such as Pashtuns, Uzbeks, and Tajiks started thriving, which resulted in the four years long civil war. As a result the regional players such as Iran and Pakistan directly stepped in and fueled more violence and destruction to the country.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Waheed Massoud, "Why Have Afghanistan's Shias Been Targeted Now?", *BBC News*, December 6, 2011, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-16045209> (accessed November 10, 2020)

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

Similarly, due to the divisions between Sunni dominated groups and Shiite community of Afghanistan, the country has transformed itself as a battleground for sectarian wars. The main stakeholders of these wars are Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan and the US. There is a linkage between them as Afghanistan and Pakistan are the Sunni dominated regions while Iran is predominantly a Shiite state. Moreover, the US is the main opponent of Iran and is tilted towards Saudi Arabia, who has ideological differences with Iran. So these countries are playing their games on a chess board called Afghanistan according to their vested interests.¹⁶⁴

Moreover, a probable infighting in Afghanistan after the US exit would affect Pakistan due to the sectarian composition of its population. Additionally, the US and Saudi Arabia may eventually support the Sunni dominated groups of Afghanistan whereas Iran would support Shiite group of Afghanistan. The Shiite militant groups of Pakistan will align themselves with the Shiite community in Afghanistan while the Sunni militant groups will come to secure their Sunni brothers. Resultantly a state of chaos may emerge.¹⁶⁵

5.9. Conclusion

Peaceful and smooth exit from Afghanistan must be among the foremost priorities of the US and Pakistan as any destabilizing event would worsen the regional situation. As the US withdrawal is approaching near, it is hoped that the neighboring countries would play a part in curtailing the influence of non-state actors in Afghanistan and strengthen the Afghan government. Afghanistan's neighboring countries need to realize that the stability of the region is directly connected with the stability of Afghanistan. It is necessary for Pakistan to design its future policies regarding Afghanistan in a manner that support peace and development in its western neighbor.

Moreover, Pakistan's role in the post-soviet Afghanistan is often characterized as negative. The Afghan political elite is critical of Pakistan and it oversees the Islamabad's role and contribution towards Afghanistan in the past when Pakistan provided refuge to millions of Afghans and also contributed effectively in terms of human and military resources in fight against the Soviets occupants. Due to the toxic diplomacy of India in recent past, Afghanistan

¹⁶⁴ Vinay Kaura, "Iran's Influence in Afghanistan", *Middle East Institute*, June 23, 2020, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/irans-influence-afghanistan> (accessed November 10, 2020)

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

considers Pakistan its rival and sees India as its strategic ally which gives India a competitive advantage.

Pakistan needs to adopt a new policy in the changing international environment and in the perspective of its domestic situation. Pakistan had been facing several challenges on domestic front since 2001; terrorism and insurgency being the major ones. The grievances of Pashtun and Baloch sub-nationalists have grown over the years, which gave India an advantage to exploit the situation in its own favor. Therefore, it is important for Pakistan to address the issues of its own audience first before indulging in Afghanistan.

PRESIDENT BIDEN’S WITHDRAWAL POLICY FROM AFGHANISTAN

The US President Joe Biden has announced his policy on Afghanistan in April 2021. His policy is a continuation of President Trump’s initiative of troops’ withdrawal from Afghanistan with a slight change in the schedule for the exit. President Joe Biden extended the deadline for the complete troops’ pullout from Afghanistan from May 1, 2021 to September 11, 2021. Joe Biden reiterated his commitment for the withdrawal and stated that he was the fourth US President to preside over a US troop presence in Afghanistan but he would not pass this responsibility to a fifth.¹⁶⁶ He opposed the cycle of extending or expanding the US military presence in Afghanistan on a mere hope to create ideal conditions for the withdrawal. In his remarks, Biden said that the 9/11 attacks cannot explain why the US forces should remain in Afghanistan 20 years later.

The Biden administration reiterated that it would remain deeply engaged with the Afghan government and continue its commitment to the Afghan people. It would work with other countries through economic, diplomatic, and humanitarian means to ensure protection of the gains made by Afghan women.

President Joe Biden seems more committed to the US withdrawal than his predecessors. His administration has a more realistic view of the on ground situation in Afghanistan. It has realized that the US cannot settle Afghan infighting through military means. The Biden administration has stated that military force would neither resolve Afghanistan’s internal political challenges, nor it would end Afghanistan’s internal conflict.¹⁶⁷ President Biden does not seem interested in prolonging the US stay in Afghanistan. He noted that the US has spent

¹⁶⁶ Catherine Putz, “Biden Announces Plan for US Exit from Afghan War, Urges Attention to Future Challenges”, *The Diplomat*, April 15, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/04/biden-announces-plan-for-us-exit-from-afghan-war-urges-attention-to-future-challenges/> (accessed April 29, 2021)

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

two decades and billions of dollars in Afghanistan waiting for right moment for the exit. His Afghan policy suggests that he is likely to continue with his pullout plan from Afghanistan.

President Joe Biden views the challenges that the US would face in next 20 years as far more complicated than the two decade old Afghan war. He believes that the US must focus on tracking and disrupting terrorist networks that spread far beyond Afghanistan; shore up U.S. competitiveness to face an increasingly assertive China; work on advancement of emerging technologies; and defeat the Covid-19 pandemic.

The opponent of the pullout lambasted at President Biden for taking the easy way out from Afghanistan. They termed the decision disappointing and suggested that the Biden administration should have opted for conditions-based approach rather than choosing calendar-based schedule for the withdrawal from Afghanistan. They argued that the US should keep a small contingent of its forces in Afghanistan as it would not bear much cost in terms of economy and human loss as the US had not faced any combat deaths in past several months. On the other hand, the cost for leaving Afghanistan is comparatively high as it would see revival of terrorism, spike in repression by Taliban and dent US reputation.

The critics of the US-withdrawal policy decry that the US exit would potentially reverse social and political progress of Afghanistan, particularly for women, and the country may once again become a breeding ground for the terrorists. However, they fail to explain that how the presence of a small U.S. military contingent in Afghanistan would prevent either of those propositions from happening. Their advocacy for the US stay in Afghanistan loses further ground when the ground situation in Afghanistan is examined. The Taliban have largely ceased assaults on the U.S. troops after the February 2020-deal but it paced up attacks on the Afghan government forces. Meanwhile, a terrifying surge in targeted killing incidents has resulted in an increase in assassinations of journalists, human rights activists, and others, many of them women- all while the U.S. troops are present in the country.

Afghan Governments Stance on Biden's Policy

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani has weighed in at the Biden's Afghan policy. He asserted that Afghanistan would respect the US decision and work with the U.S. partners to

ensure a smooth transition. However, the other lawmakers in Afghanistan have repeated their concerns of an impending civil war.

The Taliban's Reaction to Biden's Policy

Biden administration's decision to delay the US withdrawal from Afghanistan was unilateral, which irked the Taliban. They rejected the change in schedule for the US exit and declared it violation of their peace deal with Trump administration. They have already warned the US that there would be consequences if Washington did not fulfill its commitment regarding the withdrawal by May 1, 2021. Taliban were scheduled to participate in US-backed Istanbul Conference in April 2021, which was part of efforts to end the war in Afghanistan and sketch out a possible political settlement of Afghan problem. The meeting would also include the government of Afghanistan, United Nations and Qatar. But the Taliban refused to attend any summit on Afghanistan's future until all foreign forces leave the country. This was a big blow to the Afghan Peace Process.

Pakistan's Response to Biden's Policy

Pakistan's Foreign Office responded to Biden's Afghan policy that the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan should coincide with the progress in the peace process or in other words the foreign forces should stay in Afghanistan till some tangible progress is made in the peace efforts, particularly the intra-Afghan dialogues.¹⁶⁸ Meanwhile, Pakistan has started efforts for mediation between the US and the Taliban regarding the new date for the withdrawal. Pakistani security officials are trying to convince Afghan Taliban to rejoin the peace process otherwise the Taliban leadership may witness some tough actions from Pakistan.¹⁶⁹

Pakistan must exercise caution while exerting pressure on the Taliban to start negotiations with the US so that it does not cost its relations with the Taliban. After all Taliban are a ground reality and Islamabad cannot afford to turn them hostile against Pakistan, particularly when the government in Kabul is not very receptive towards Pakistan. India had

¹⁶⁸ Kamran Yousaf, "Pakistan Backs Responsible US Troop Withdrawal", *The Express Tribune*, April 15, 2021, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2294930/pakistan-backs-responsible-us-troop-withdrawal> (accessed April 29, 2021)

¹⁶⁹ Hamid Mir, "Enough is Enough-Pakistan not Happy with Afghan Taliban", *The News*, April 28, 2021, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/827112-enough-is-enough-pakistan-not-happy-with-afghan-taliban> (accessed April 29, 2021)

also tried to build relations with the Afghan Taliban recently but the Taliban leaders avoided direct engagements with them. India intends to send its forces to Afghanistan after the possible US withdrawal and wants Taliban that they should not attack its troops in the country.¹⁷⁰ Moreover, President Biden has asked other countries in the region to support Afghanistan, especially Pakistan, as well as Russia, China, India and Turkey. Pakistan must bargain with the Biden administration that India would not get any security role in Afghanistan in the post-US withdrawal era for genuine prevalence of peace in the region and particularly in Afghanistan.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

THE CONCLUSION

Afghanistan enjoyed an important geostrategic location, which gave the country an important role in international politics. However, the same geostrategic location was the cause of many problems that Afghanistan faced in the recent past. From colonial times to cold war and post-cold war eras, the world powers used Afghanistan to further their hegemonic agendas. The country served as a Buffer Zone during the Great Game between Russia and British Empire. In 1979, the communist USSR invaded Afghanistan to strengthen the communist regime. The capitalist USA, with assistance from its allies like Pakistan, channeled funding and weaponry support to Afghan Mujahedeen to dwindle the Soviet regime. Ultimately, the USSR suffered heavily at the hands of the US backed Mujahedeen and eventually left Afghanistan in 1989. Afghanistan suffered a civilian war between Mujahedeen groups after the soviet withdrawal. Taliban turned out victorious in the civil war and established government in 1996. During the Taliban regime, Al-Qaeda established itself in Afghanistan due to ideological proximity with the ruling group. On September 11, 2001, Al-Qaeda militants blew up twin towers in New York, which prompted the US to attack the same Mujahedeen, which it had once funded and equipped against the Soviets. In the past four decades, Afghanistan suffered the most than any of the invading forces. The two Afghan wars destroyed the country's infrastructure, economy, and socio-political system. The divide between various ethnic and politico-religious groups in Afghanistan widened in these wars.

Although, Pakistan and Afghanistan shared religious and some cultural similarities, the two countries had hardly enjoyed cordial relations at government to government levels. After the inception of Pakistan, the Afghan governments refused to accept the legitimacy of the Durand Line and sponsored Pakistani sub-nationalists to fan Pashtun nationalism in KP. Besides, Afghan governments had been more inclined towards India rather than its neighbor Pakistan. Resultantly, Pakistan had to look for options to install a friendly regime in Kabul. After the end of Soviet War, Afghan Taliban overpowered other rival Jihadi groups in Afghanistan and established their government. They were receptive towards Pakistan due to the religious bonding. Ultimately, Pakistani policymakers came up with the idea of Strategic Depth against its much larger adversary India. However, this friendly regime in Kabul lasted

for less than a decade, as the events of 9/11 had changed the dynamics of global politics. Pakistan had to retract its support for Taliban regime, and the US installed a new democratic government in Afghanistan after the invasion of the country. To the dismay of Islamabad, the Afghan governments had been more cordial towards India than Pakistan since the US invasion.

After the invasion, the US and its allied NATO countries invested heavily in infrastructure, economy, military and political system of Afghanistan. Yet these efforts could not produce the desired result for the US in Afghanistan. The political conflicts in Afghanistan remained unsettled since 2001 because of the huge instability, corruption, and non-acceptance of the legitimacy of the Afghan government by various groups, particularly Taliban. The US and NATO forces faced armed resistance from Taliban. In 2014, US allied forces left Afghanistan; however, the US differed with their approach at that time. The wrong decision and analysis of the US regarding Afghans led to the serious consequences as it lost many of its soldiers and wasted much of its economy in fighting the Taliban guerillas. Ultimately, the US had to opt to negotiate with Taliban's political office in Doha, Qatar for a graceful exit from Afghanistan. In February 2020, the US and the Taliban signed a peace deal that called for the U.S. troop levels to fall from about 13,000 to 8,600 within 135 days, and for all U.S. forces to withdraw in 14 months if the accord holds. In return, Taliban guaranteed that Afghan soil would not be used by terrorists to attack the US or its allies.

The regional countries like Russia and China would possibly interfere in Afghanistan to fill the vacuum left by the US withdrawal. China's primary focus is Belt and Road Initiative, for which it needs a stable region. Moreover, China is anxious about presence of East Turkistan Islamic Movement in Afghanistan, which calls for the annexation of Uyghur Muslims dominated Xinjiang Province from China. Russia would also be a potent player as Afghanistan bordered with the former oil rich Russian states. Meanwhile, Russia has expressed desire to become part of CPEC project, which would give it access to warm waters. Therefore, Pakistan may face diplomatic challenges in maintaining a balance in its relations with regional countries like China and Russia and the global power the US, as the interests of the former two states collide with the latter.

Afghan government had yet not been able to exercise control on entire country despite full support of the US. It is feared that Afghanistan may fall into another civil war after the US withdrawal; therefore, efforts for the intra Afghan dialogues have been geared up. Pakistan, which desired for intra-Afghan peace negotiations for a stable western neighbor, was cautious

to pressurize Afghan Taliban for talks with the Afghan government. Pakistan has rightful concerns that it cannot afford the enmity of Afghan Taliban, who have war fighting experience of over four decades. The deterioration of its relations with Afghan Taliban would benefit no one but Afghanistan based anti-Pakistan terrorists and Indian intelligence.

Given the history of bitter relations between the governments in Kabul and Islamabad, Pakistani policymakers are concerned over Indian role in Afghanistan. Pakistan fears that India would use its influence on Afghan political elite to undermine Pakistan's interests. Islamabad is concerned about harboring of anti-Pakistan militant groups in Afghanistan by Afghan and Indian intelligence. Pakistan is somewhat right in its assessment that India would use these Afghanistan based militants to destabilize Pakistan's economy and law and order situation.

Besides, the sectarian militant outfits may rise in Afghanistan in the post US withdrawal era that would instigate Iran to meddle in Afghanistan. Iran's interference in Afghanistan would provoke Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to become a stakeholder in Afghanistan. This sectarianism would affect the Shia community in Pakistan on one hand, while pose problems for the Pakistani government to maintain balance between its ties with KSA and Iran on the other.

FINDINGS

- Any disturbing event in Afghanistan in the past has disturbed the regional balance, and affected its neighbors. It would remain the same in case of future events as well.
- US would prefer to keep its minimum presence in Afghanistan to keep a check on China and Russia, particularly on China's Belt & Road Initiative and CPEC projects.
- Russia and China would try to fill the vacuum created by the US withdrawal by supporting a favorable regime in Afghanistan to further their agenda of regional stability and hegemony.
- If Afghan Taliban, under their new government, subject Afghan people to similar extreme laws that existed in their pre-9/11 regime, Pakistan would be under immense diplomatic pressure by the US and other countries to reconsider its relations with Taliban government.
- Since 1947, Afghan governments, except the Taliban regime, were unwelcoming towards Pakistan and remained inclined towards India.

- Given the role of Pakistan in the two Afghan wars, Afghan political elite, its defence fraternity and civil society considered Pakistan a cause of various domestic problems of Afghanistan.
- Afghan Government never accepted the legitimacy of Durand Line. On contrary, Pakistan would always consider the Durand Line as an international boundary and a settled issue. Afghan stance on Pak-Afghan border would keep posing problems to the relations between the two countries in the post-US withdrawal era.
- Pakistan largely remained at the receiving end in Afghan wars and its economy, security and socio-political structures suffered the most.
- Many tribes in KP and erstwhile FATA turned against Pakistan for supporting the US in War on Terror. Resultantly, a wave of terrorism entered Pakistan. Several terrorist organizations established their camps in Afghanistan. These camps would be a point of main concern for Pakistan in post-US withdrawal era.
- Regional countries like India and Iran would exert influence in Afghanistan to achieve their vested interests.
- In the backdrop of hostile nature of Pak-Afghan relations and Afghanistan's closeness with Pakistan's decades old rival India, the US withdrawal policy from Afghanistan has direct implications on national security of Pakistan.
- India would try to continue using Afghan soil in post-US withdrawal era. It may attempt to normalize its relations with Taliban government so that Afghan soil can be used to destabilize Pakistan. It would be a great challenge for Pakistan to keep Afghan Taliban away from Indian influence. Meanwhile, India would keep financing political, sub nationalist, and religious extremist groups like Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM), Baluchistan Liberation Army, and TTP respectively to challenge economic stability and territorial integrity of Pakistan.
- Shia communities make a considerable portion of Pakistan and Afghanistan's population, which makes Iran a potent stakeholder in Afghanistan. Shia theocratic regime in Iran has staunch rivalries with Salafist Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Both these countries would hesitate to intervene in Afghanistan in the post-US withdrawal era, and fight a proxy war by supporting Shia and Sunni groups on Afghan soil.
- Pakistan anticipates that it would be a direct victim of this proxy war as anti-Shia extremist groups like IS-Khorasan and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi would not confine their activities to only Afghan Shia population. Pakistani Shia population, particularly

Hazaara community would also be a prime target of these Afghanistan based terrorist groups.

THE WAY FORWARD

- Pakistan needs to carefully draft a new Afghan policy in the post-US withdrawal era which can serve its interests without hurting the interests of Afghanistan and other world powers.
- Pakistan should maintain a balance in its diplomatic relations with international powers like the US, China and Russia without compromising its national interest, which is deeply embedded in China's Belt & Road Initiative and CPEC projects.
- Pakistan must ensure that it does not become a proxy of world powers in Afghanistan in future.
- Pakistan should maintain cordial ties with Afghan Taliban. It must diplomatically resist to any effort by world powers, if any, to overthrow Taliban government as it would further push Afghanistan in an era of endless violence. It is expected that Taliban, if remain in power for some years, would gradually give up extremist views and transform themselves into a moderate force to fit in world arena.
- Pakistan needs to carefully exert its influence on Afghan Taliban to persuade them to adopt a political approach for resolution of internal conflicts in Afghanistan. Armed struggle may not be a sustainable option in the post-withdrawal era as it would lead to further destruction of already war-torn Afghanistan.
- Pakistan should work to improve its image in Afghan political elite. People to people contacts must increase to develop cordial relations between the two nations.
- The policymakers in both countries need to realize that their interests are interconnected. Pakistan must facilitate landlocked Afghanistan in trade with other countries to bridge the trust deficit.
- Pakistan must invest on Afghan Army, and civil society to curtail Indian influence in Afghanistan.
- Pakistan should accept Iran as a stakeholder in Afghan peace process. Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan must cooperate for betterment of their countries.
- Pakistan should negotiate a peace deal with anti-Pakistan militant groups present on Afghan soil through Afghan Taliban to achieve long lasting peace.

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