

PhD Dissertation

**THE U.S. INTERVENTION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN
AFGHANISTAN (2001-2020): STRATEGIES AND OUTCOMES**

By

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Department of International Relations

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF MODERN LANGUAGES

ISLAMABAD

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AFGHANISTAN (2001-2020): STRATEGIES AND OUTCOMES**

By

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M.Phil-IR, Iqra University-Islamabad, 2017

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in International Relations (IR)

To

Department of International Relations

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES



**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF MODERN LANGUAGES
ISLAMABAD**



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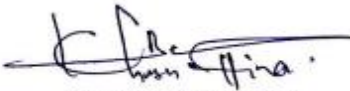
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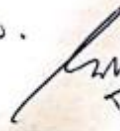
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Dedication

This Thesis is dedicated to my Maternal Grandparents.

Abstract

This thesis relates game theory as a conceptual framework to analyze the varying U.S. strategies for conflict resolution in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2020. Despite almost two decades of the U.S. intervention, Afghanistan remained unstable and lacks peace, indicating the failure of the U.S. strategy to resolve the conflict. Existing research lacks a clear linkage between the varying U.S. strategies, the reasons for the failure of old strategies, and the rationale for adopting a new strategy. This case study research adopts a qualitative approach using descriptive-explanatory design to analyze the success/failure, prospects, and challenges of the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan, specifically with reference to conflict resolution. The study identifies the independent variable as the U.S. strategy in Afghanistan and the dependent variable as conflict resolution. The initial objective of the U.S. intervention was to eradicate Al-Qaeda and its affiliated Taliban, but later expanded to include state-building projects on the Weberian democratic model.

Throughout the period of intervention, the U.S. relied heavily on military force and failed to consider the socio-economic and political realities of Afghanistan. The pursuit of a zero-sum outcome of the conflict, specifically the total defeat of Taliban and the establishment of a pro-U.S. democratic government, hindered any meaningful settlement of the conflict. Taliban's resurgence resulted in a similar zero-sum objective of unconditional troops withdrawal. However, the 2020 peace agreement between Taliban and the U.S. marked a shift in strategy towards a non-zero-sum outcome. Nevertheless, the situation of prisoner's dilemma among the U.S., Taliban, local, regional, and international stakeholders impeded conflict resolution, allowing Taliban to establish a government without sharing power with opposition stakeholders or allowing the presence of any international force. The ongoing irritants among the contending local and regional players, and the indirect influence of the U.S. via economic sanctions, created a situation of prisoner's dilemma that obstructs the conflict resolution in Afghanistan in the long run.

The study recommends further investigation of the challenges and prospects of intra-Afghan power-sharing for sustainable peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Keywords: Intervention, Conflict Resolution, Zero-Sum, Non-Zero-sum, U.S. Strategies.

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Glossary

1. **Afghan Local Police (ALP):** A community-based security force established by the Afghan government and supported by coalition forces to provide security in rural areas.
2. **Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF):** A government agency responsible for protecting development projects and infrastructure across Afghanistan.
3. **Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF):** A strategic framework developed by the Afghan government in 2017 that outlines its priorities for peace, stability, and development over the coming years.
4. **Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF):** A multi-donor trust fund established in 2002 to support Afghanistan's reconstruction and development efforts.
5. **Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF):** It is a collective term for ANA, ANP, and other security agencies
6. **Afghan National Police (ANP):** An organization that falls under the control and responsibility of the Afghan Ministry of Interior.
7. **Bagram Airfield:** A U.S. military base located in Parwan Province, Afghanistan that served as a hub for U.S. and coalition forces throughout the conflict.
8. **Bonn Agreement:** An international agreement signed in December 2001 that established a roadmap for post-Taliban governance in Afghanistan, including the creation of an interim government and the drafting of a new constitution.
9. **Camp Bastion:** A British military base located in Helmand Province, Afghanistan that served as a major hub for UK and coalition forces.
10. **Combined Joint Task Force-82 (CJTF-82):** A U.S.-led military command responsible for security operations in eastern Afghanistan, including Nangarhar and Kunar provinces.
11. **CSTC-A: Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan:** Involved in training and equipping Afghan security forces
12. **Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR):** A process aimed at disarming former combatants, reintegrating them into society, and promoting stability and security.
13. **Counterterrorism (CT):** The use of military, intelligence, and law enforcement measures to prevent, disrupt, and defeat terrorist activities.
14. **Department of Defense (DoD):** The United States government agency responsible for providing military forces to protect the security of the United States.
15. **Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF):** The collective term for the Afghan National Army (ANA), Afghan National Police (ANP), and other security agencies in Afghanistan.

16. Al-Qaeda (AQ): A militant Islamist organization founded by Osama bin Laden in the late 1980s, responsible for numerous terrorist attacks worldwide, including the 9/11 attacks in the United States.
17. Afghan National Army (ANA): The national military force of Afghanistan, established in 2002.
18. Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA): A region in Pakistan that borders Afghanistan and is a hub for militancy.
19. Haqqani Network: A Taliban-affiliated insurgent group in Afghanistan
20. High Peace Council (HPC): A government body established in 2010 to facilitate peace talks and reconciliation efforts with insurgent groups in Afghanistan.
21. International Security Assistance Force (ISAF): A NATO-led coalition of troops that provided security and stability operations in Afghanistan from 2001-2014.
22. Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI): The intelligence agency of Pakistan.
23. Loya Jirga: A grand assembly of Afghan tribal elders and leaders that serves as a traditional mechanism for decision-making and conflict resolution
24. National Solidarity Program (NSP): A community-driven development program launched by the Afghan government in 2003 that aimed to empower local communities to identify and implement their own development projects.
25. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA): The intelligence agency of the United States government responsible for collecting and analyzing information related to national security.
26. Counterinsurgency (COIN): A set of military, political, and civilian actions taken to defeat an insurgency and establish or restore government control.
27. National Unity Government (NUG): Formed in 2014 after disputed presidential elections
28. Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF): The official name of the U.S. military campaign launched in Afghanistan in 2001 in response to the 9/11 attacks
29. Operation Anaconda: A U.S.-led military operation in early 2002 aimed at clearing Taliban and al-Qaeda forces from the Shah-i-Kot Valley in eastern Afghanistan.
30. Operation Resolute Support: A NATO-led mission established in 2015 to train, advise, and assist Afghan security forces following the end of the ISAF mission.
31. Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT): A joint civil-military team established by the international community in Afghanistan to support reconstruction and development efforts in the provinces.
32. Provincial Response Companies (PRCs): A government-backed security force established in 2010 to provide security in rural areas of Afghanistan.

33. Regional Command (RC): Refers to the NATO-led military command structure in Afghanistan
34. Regional Command South (RC-South): A NATO-led military command responsible for security operations in southern Afghanistan, including Helmand and Kandahar provinces.
35. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR): Oversight agency for U.S. reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan.
36. Taliban: A militant group that ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001 and remained in conflict with the coalition forces. They now rules Afghanistan again.
37. Task Force 373: A classified U.S. military unit that conducted high-value target (HVT) missions in Afghanistan.
38. Training, Advisory, and Assistance (TAA): An overall coordinating and supportive command for inter-security organizations.
39. Train, Advise, Assist Command-Air (TAAC-Air): A U.S.-led command responsible for advising and assisting Afghan Air Force units.
40. Warlord: A term used to describe a military commander or leader who exercises significant political power in a particular region within Afghanistan.
41. United States (U.S.): A country in North America.
42. United States Agency for International Development (USAID): The U.S. government agency responsible for providing foreign aid.
43. National Directorate of Security (NDS): Afghanistan's intelligence agency.
44. North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO): A military alliance of North American and European countries established in 1949.
45. Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP): A Pakistani Taliban militant group based in Pakistan.
46. United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA): A UN-led mission established in 2002 to support the Afghan government.
47. Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA): The Marxist government of Afghanistan that existed from 1978 to 1992.
48. European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL): A mission established in 2007 to support the development of Afghan police forces.
49. Ministry of Defense (MoD): The government agency responsible for the military defense of Afghanistan.
50. Ministry of Interior (MoI): The government agency responsible for internal security and law enforcement in Afghanistan.

Introduction

The issue of Afghanistan has proven to be one of the most complex and intractable challenges in international relations. For over four decades, Afghanistan has faced both internal and external conflicts. Despite its relatively small size and population, the country's strategic location at the crossroads of Central, South, and East Asia has made it a vital player in global politics. Unfortunately, this strategic value has also made it vulnerable to foreign intervention and invasion by nations such as Great Britain, Czarist Russia, the Soviet Union, and the United States, each vying for their own strategic interests.

In the post-World War II era, the international community has invested billions of dollars in reconstructing societies devastated by war across the globe.¹ The United States has played a leading role in these interventions. These post-conflict activities are guided by a framework of conflict resolution and state-building for peace, involving a wide range of international actors working to transform "failed" or "collapsed" countries into stable and functional democracies.² The war in Afghanistan incurred substantial investments, surpassing the funds allocated even under the Marshall Plan.³ The U.S. intervention in Afghanistan, as well as Iraq, were linked to its post-September 11 foreign policy of global war on terrorism, under the premise that weak or failed countries pose a threat to global peace and security. These threats necessitated greater political and military involvement and long-term financial commitments from Western governments.

International efforts to rebuild post-conflict societies on the Weberian democratic model involve a wide range of activities, including rewriting the constitution, promoting civil and political rights, developing a free-market economy, restructuring government institutions, promoting independent civil society, and reconstructing the social and physical infrastructure, and in some cases, managing the entire region. Despite these efforts, Afghanistan remains one of the most challenging and complex issues in international relations.⁴

¹ Sverine Autesserre, and Séverine Autesserre. *Peaceland: Conflict resolution and the everyday politics of international intervention*. (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 130.

² Allegra Hernandez, "New World Order: An Examination of Interventions during Humanitarian Crises Post-WWII." PhD diss, Fort Worth, Texas, Texas Christian University, (2017): 5.

³ Catherine Lutz and Sujaya Desai. "US reconstruction aid for Afghanistan: The dollars and sense." *Providence, Watson Institute for International Studies*, 22 (2014): 5.

⁴ Jennifer Milliken, *State failure, collapse and reconstruction* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2003), 244-265.

Afghanistan remains one of the most complex and intractable issues in international relations, characterized by both internal and external conflicts that have persisted since 1979. Despite the country's small size and population, its geographically strategic location has made it a focal point of international competition and intervention, with Great Britain, Czarist Russia, the Soviet Union, and the U.S. vying for their strategic interests. In the post-World War II era, the U.S. has taken a leading role in international interventions, investing heavily in the War in Afghanistan in response to the September 11 attacks. This intervention, which lasted from 2001 until 2021, was one of the most protracted and bloody conflicts in the world.⁵ As of August 2021, the conflict in Afghanistan has resulted in an estimated 47,245 civilian deaths since 2001, with 2021 being the deadliest year in terms of civilian casualties. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has documented 1,659 civilian casualties, including 532 deaths and 1,127 injuries, in the first half of 2021 alone. Additionally, there were approximately 19,000 guerilla attacks recorded from 2001 to 2020, causing over 48,000 deaths in total. In 2021 alone, over 5,000 deaths were recorded.⁶ Despite attempts to frame the conflict as an intra-Afghan issue, the mainline of armed confrontation was between the U.S. and the Taliban. The conflict has worsened with each passing year, as shown by the increasing number of guerilla attacks and deaths, and despite military offensives from both sides, a victory through force was unlikely.⁷

The U.S. intervention in Afghanistan was undertaken with the primary goal of achieving a resolution to the conflict, a goal that is complex and multifaceted in nature. According to Ramsbotham, Oliver, Hugh Miall, and Tom Woodhouse, conflict resolution includes a wide range of activities and processes, including conflict engagement, management, transformation, and resolution.⁸ From their point of view, the term 'conflict resolution' functions as a comprehensive concept that includes all other related terms. For example, phrases such as 'conflict management' and 'conflict transformation' are not considered complete by themselves; rather, their true meaning becomes apparent when they are associated with the broader umbrella of conflict resolution, which is seen as the end goal that encompasses all such related concepts. Thus, the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan can be understood as a

⁵ Statista Research Department, "Terrorism: Number of deaths in Afghanistan due to terrorism from 2007 to 2020 | Statista". 2021. Accessed at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/251408/number-of-deaths-in-afghanistan-due-to-terrorism/>

⁶ Kate Clark, "Record Numbers of Civilian Casualties Overall, from Suicide Attacks and Air Strikes: UNAMA reports on the conflict in 2018." *Afghan Analysts Network* (2019).

⁷ Clayton Thomas, "Afghanistan: Background and US Policy." *Congressional Research Service* (2018): 9-13.

⁸ Ramsbotham, Oliver, Hugh Miall, and Tom Woodhouse. *Contemporary conflict resolution*. (Polity, 2011), 9.

multifaceted attempt to engage in and manage the conflict, transform its underlying dynamics, and ultimately work towards a settlement, all of which fall under the broader framework of conflict resolution.⁹ Engagement in a conflict refers to the active participation of parties to a conflict, which may include dialogue, negotiation, or other forms of direct interaction. In the case of Afghanistan, the U.S. engaged with various stakeholders in an attempt to understand the root causes of the conflict, establish channels of communication, and initiate a process of dialogue. The U.S. worked with Afghan government officials, tribal leaders and international partners to communicate and understand the complex dynamics on the ground. Conflict management includes efforts to contain and control conflict in order to prevent it from escalating further. This includes measures such as the establishment of a ceasefire, the establishment of buffer zones and the deployment of a peacekeeping force. In Afghanistan, the U.S. sought to resolve the conflict by supporting security forces, providing humanitarian aid, and promoting stability in certain regions. Conflict transformation aims to change the underlying dynamics of conflict by addressing its root causes and changing how parties perceive and interact with each other. This includes initiatives to address socioeconomic inequalities, promote inclusion, and encourage social change. In Afghanistan, the U.S. worked on projects to improve infrastructure, education, and governance to change the sociopolitical landscape. Conflict settlement involves reaching an agreement or resolution that provides a formal end to the conflict. The settlement may take the form of peace treaties, power-sharing arrangements, or other negotiated agreements. In Afghanistan, the U.S. supported various peace talks and talks between the Afghan government, the Taliban and other factions to reach a settlement that would lead to a cessation of hostilities. These efforts collectively contributed to conflict resolution, a major goal that included engagement, management, transformation, and settlement.¹⁰ Conflict resolution in this case refers to an integrated approach that combines these various strategies to ensure lasting peace, stability and positive change in Afghanistan.

The United Nations defines conflict resolution differently depending on the context and time. Chapter VI of the UN charter¹¹ discusses the concept of conflict resolution as pacific

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Alex Marshall., "Managing withdrawal: Afghanistan as the forgotten example in attempting conflict resolution and state reconstruction." *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 18, no. 1 (2007): 68-89.

¹¹ United Nations. "Chapter VI: Pacific Settlement of Disputes (Articles 33-38) | United Nations", 2021.. *United Nations*. Accessed at: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/chapter-6>.

means for the settlement of disputes/conflicts, while Chapter VII¹² discusses coercive means for the settlement of conflicts. The intervention in Afghanistan by the United States (U.S.) post 9/11 was a complex program characterized by numerous shifts in policies and strategies in pursuit of conflict resolution. While conflict resolution served as the central objective of the U.S. foreign policy towards Afghanistan, the U.S. strategies to address the Afghan conflict continually evolved. The strategies began with military power to defeat the Taliban and shifted towards the state-building project to pacify the conflict, and eventually towards peace talks with all stakeholders, mainly Taliban, for an exit from Afghanistan.¹³ From 2001 until 2020, the success of the U.S. in achieving conflict resolution in Afghanistan has been less than convincing. Afghanistan is the most recent case of failed interventions, following similar experiences in Angola, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Kosovo.¹⁴ Despite decades of experience and billions of dollars invested in the U.S. led international interventions, these failures occurred due to the inability to transform war-torn countries into powerful and well-governed countries with a vibrant civil society. Afghanistan is still on the verge of collapse due to increasing insecurity and violence, political division, and economic stagnation and poverty.¹⁵ These outcomes are indicative of the failure of U.S. intervention in achieving conflict resolution strategies.

Scholars who have commented on Afghanistan's conflict and the peacebuilding crisis have expressed concern about the prejudicial approach of the U.S. interventions.¹⁶ In this regard, the motivation to study this issue is to unearth the causes of the frustrating record of U.S. intervention failure in Afghanistan. Four different U.S. presidents have dealt with the Afghan conflict, and each opted for varying conflict resolution strategies that evolved over time. The initial strategy after the intervention in 2001 was military escalation against Taliban and Al Qaeda. This strategy was successful in overthrowing the Taliban regime and pushing them into Afghanistan's peripheral mountainous region. However, in 2004, Taliban

¹² United Nations. "Chapter VII: Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression (Articles 39-51) | United Nations". *United Nations*, 2021. Accessed at: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/chapter-7>.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Roland Paris, Timothy D. Sisk, *The Dilemmas of Statebuilding Confronting the contradictions of postwar peace operations* (Routledge, 2009), 7.

¹⁵ Nematullah Bizhan, "Building legitimacy and state capacity in protracted fragility: The case of Afghanistan." *Social Science Research Network (SSRN)*, (2018): 35. Accessed at: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3166985>

¹⁶ Saima Perveen, Jehanzeb Khalil, Taj Muharam, and Muhammad Ayaz. "The US Military Engagement in Afghanistan's Turmoil: An Analysis of Security Situation of Afghanistan (2008-13)." *FWU Journal of Social Sciences* 10, no. 1 (2016): 192; Derek Leebaert, *Magic and Mayhem: The Delusions of American Foreign Policy from Korea to Afghanistan*. (Simon and Schuster, 2010), 222.

counterattacked using terrorism to inflict maximum damage onto the U.S. forces. The second strategy employed by the U.S. was to seek a political solution to the conflict through statebuilding programs by engaging with the political elite from Afghanistan, excluding the Taliban. Under this strategy, the U.S. held elections and installed a constitutionally elected government in the country, invested heavily in strengthening Afghanistan's institutions, building roads and infrastructure, and providing humanitarian aid in various capacities.

During the Obama administration, the Afpak policy was propagated, which accentuated the role of regional countries. President Obama adopted a policy of peace talks with the Taliban as part of a broader strategy of exiting Afghanistan by December 2014. In the pursuit of this policy, many U.S. forces were returned in 2014, but total withdrawal did not occur. The post-2014 policy involved developing the capacity of Afghan forces and establishing long-term counterterrorism partnerships. The regional countries were encouraged to intervene and support the capacity-building of Afghan security forces. When President Donald Trump assumed office, a new South Asian policy focusing on Afghanistan was announced. The primary agenda of this policy was to put maximum pressure on Pakistan to squeeze the Taliban for a political settlement. This policy was a stricter version of the Obama administration's earlier AfPak policy towards Afghanistan and Pakistan.¹⁷ In recent times, the U.S. opted for a new strategy of peace talks with the Taliban, which ultimately led to the exit of U.S. and coalition forces from Afghanistan in August 2021. However, despite exiting Afghanistan, the U.S. pursuit of conflict resolution on their terms has failed.

After twenty years, the U.S realized that the zero-sum outcome of the game (conflict) in Afghanistan was unlikely. Under the pretext of this realization, the U.S.' latest strategy in Afghanistan was to engage with Taliban in a peace process to resolve the dispute. This was the first time both parties to the conflict were publicly in direct negotiations. Previously, the U.S. did not engage Taliban in political processes, including the Bonn process. On the other hand, Taliban were also reluctant to have condition-based talks with the U.S. in the past. However, both sides showed some flexibility in their mutual approaches in the Doha peace talks. During the peace talks, the U.S. had in mind an expected compromise (non-zero-sum outcome) over the conflict resolution in Afghanistan, but the Taliban pursued a zero-sum outcome. Some of

¹⁷ Ashley J Tellis and Jeff Eggers, *US Policy in Afghanistan: Changing Strategies, Preserving Gains* (Washington DC, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2017), 43.

the terms of the agreement were meant to save face for the U.S. and were used as a bluff by the Taliban, and hence the withdrawal was likely a zero-sum outcome for the Taliban.

Game theory models the behavior of players who strategically interact in a particular situation, such as a conflict. In this case, the U.S. and the Taliban were the primary players involved in a protracted conflict in Afghanistan. At the outset, the U.S. adopted a strategy of military escalation against the Taliban and al-Qaeda in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. The Taliban, as a weaker player, responded with asymmetric guerrilla warfare tactics. From a game-theoretic perspective, this represented a classic zero-sum game in which one player's gain was the other's loss. The U.S. and the Taliban were playing a game of conflict in which the outcome was expected to be a zero-sum outcome. However, the U.S. quickly realized that military force alone was insufficient to achieve a decisive victory over the Taliban. This led the U.S. to adopt a second strategy of state-building and political engagement with Afghan elites, excluding the Taliban. The U.S. invested heavily in rebuilding Afghanistan's institutions, infrastructure, and providing humanitarian aid. This strategy marked a shift from a zero-sum game towards a non-zero-sum game in which both parties could benefit. The U.S. offered incentives to Afghan elites to support the government's legitimacy, while the Taliban had the opportunity to join the political process and receive political recognition. However, this strategy was not enough to achieve a decisive victory over the Taliban. The U.S. and the Taliban were still in a conflict with an uncertain outcome. This led the U.S. to adopt a third strategy of engaging the Taliban in peace talks. The U.S. and the Taliban had never engaged in political processes before, and this marked a significant shift in their strategic interactions. The U.S. hoped for a non-zero-sum outcome that would involve a compromise over the conflict resolution in Afghanistan. In contrast, the Taliban pursued a zero-sum outcome in which they sought to maximize their gains at the expense of the U.S.

The peace talks were complex and challenging, and neither party was willing to concede much to the other. The U.S. offered the Taliban a face-saving exit strategy, which was essential to the U.S. public's support for the withdrawal. The Taliban, on the other hand, used this agreement as a bluff to show that they had defeated the U.S. From a game-theoretic perspective, this marked a transition from a zero-sum game to a mixed-motive game in which the outcome was uncertain.

Despite the peace agreement, the conflict in Afghanistan remains unresolved, and the Taliban's takeover of the country in 2021 underscores the limitations of U.S. strategies vis-à-

vis conflict resolution in Afghanistan. Game theory offers insights into the limitations of the U.S. strategies, highlighting the need for a better understanding of the Taliban's strategic preferences and the dynamics of the conflict. This thesis aims to critically analyze the strategies adopted by the U.S. in resolving the conflict in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2020, using the conceptual framework of game theory. The objective of the study is to identify the causes of the failure of U.S. strategies in achieving their desired goals. The study aims to provide insights into the role of game theory in explaining the strategies employed by the U.S. and the Taliban and the implications of their actions in achieving a resolution to the conflict in Afghanistan.

Statement of the Problem

The conflict between the U.S. and Taliban had worsened every passing year since Taliban regime was overthrown in 2001 till the U.S. exit in 2021. The U.S.' goal of a zero-sum game with a total military victory in Afghanistan has failed. Apparently, Taliban's aspiration for a zero-sum game with an unconditional withdrawal of the U.S. from Afghanistan has materialized. In the nineteen years of U.S. involvement in Afghanistan (2001-2020), they suffered approximately 2,400 deaths and spent around \$ 133 billion.¹⁸ Despite all this, the conflict in Afghanistan is not resolved as per the U.S. strategic objectives.

From 2001 to 2020, the U.S. had used various strategies in Afghanistan, but failed to achieve the desired goals. This makes Afghanistan conflict an interesting case study to look into factors of the U.S. intervention and its outcomes. This case study is focused on analysing the varying U.S. strategies from 2001 to 2020 and their outcomes in terms of conflict resolution in Afghanistan. The central argument revolves around the logic that the prisoners' dilemma defined American strategy towards the Taliban and Afghanistan with a similar logic on the Taliban side, and the exact failure of American conflict resolution strategy was in its non-attention to non-zero-sum outcomes and an overt reliance on the pursuit of military objectives by ignoring the Afghan ethos. The failure in achieving policy objectives vis-à-vis the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan stems from over-reliance on the military force, a strategic confusion regarding the use of coercive or political means to deal with Taliban and negligence to the ground realities in the country.

¹⁸ Clayton Thomas, *Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy in Brief* (Washington: Congressional Research Service, 2019), 1.

Objectives of the Study

This research intends to fulfill the following objectives.

1. To find out the causes and objectives of the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan.
2. To analyze the varying U.S. strategies used from 2001 till 2020 and their impact on conflict resolution in Afghanistan.
3. To evaluate the outcomes (successes and failures) of the U.S. strategies vis-à-vis conflict resolution in Afghanistan from 2001 till 2020.

Literature Review

Afghanistan continues to be the focus of scholars, politicians, policymakers, and academics and therefore there is a large amount of literature available about the country. Most of the literature focuses on exploring the causes of statehood's failure in Afghanistan and its consequences. In less than twenty-two years (1979 to 2001), two important international interventions were carried out in Afghanistan. The post-9/11 U.S. intervention in Afghanistan is viewed differently by scholars. The following part will analyze the existing literature related to the U.S. policy objectives and strategies after September 11 in Afghanistan and their impact on conflict resolution. The literature reviewed in this section is about the U.S. intervention's objectives, conflict resolution strategies, their outcomes, and the current state of the conflict in Afghanistan.

Reasons and Objectives of the U.S. Intervention in Afghanistan

In 9/11 Commission Report, *Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States*,¹⁹ the causes of the 9/11 attack and objectives of the subsequent U.S. intervention in Afghanistan were laid down. The strategic objectives of the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan were to deter terror threats in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. The 9/11 attacks were the first time after the cold war when the U.S. felt an existential threat from non-traditional threat by the non-state actors. The threat of terrorism was more terrific, as Mutually Assured Destruction's principle had previously guaranteed stability in the cold war. However, the non-state actors, who fight with martyrdom's aspiration, could not be deterred by nuclear deterrence. In the wake of the deadly 9/11 attacks, the U.S. launched a campaign against terrorism to avoid any further attacks from Al Qaeda. The agenda of the U.S.

¹⁹ 9/11 Commission, *Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States* (New York, Featured Commission Publications, 2004).

intervention in Afghanistan was to destroy safe havens for Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and thus “bringing the war to the bad guys”. The U.S. initially tried through diplomatic efforts to convince Taliban to hand over Osama Bin Laden. However, failing to do so, the U.S.’s first goal was to overthrow Taliban’s regime. Bush stated that “The United States would punish not just the perpetrators of the attack, but also those who harbored them.” So the U.S. intervention’s initial objective was to overthrow Taliban regime and destroy safe havens of Al Qaeda in Afghanistan.

In *American grand strategy after 9/11: an assessment*,²⁰ Dr. Stephen Biddle argues that the U.S. grand strategy after 9/11 was reflected in the National Security Strategy (NSS) of 2002, also referred to as the Bush doctrine. It aimed to tackle new challenges to the U.S. national security. The main focus of the NSS was to highlight the importance of the threat of terrorism. However, Dr. Stephen Biddle also says that the importance of the old threats, i.e., nuclear proliferation in the region, was equally on the agenda of the U.S. So, one of the objectives of the U.S. was to keep a check on Pakistan’s nuclear arsenals so that the terrorists may not exploit them.

In their book, Richard Lee Armitage and co-authors, *U.S Strategy for Pakistan and Afghanistan*, write about the post 9//11 U.S. policies and objectives towards Afghanistan and its neighborly Pakistan. The strategic objectives were to bring the tribal belt along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border under the law and undermine safe havens for terrorists on both sides of the Pak-Afghan border. The security of Pakistan’s nuclear arsenals was indeed a matter of concern for the U.S. Authors acknowledge the then-president Obama policy of providing aid to Pakistan’s military, building their capacity to fight terrorism effectively. However, the logistical support to the hardcore terrorists by Pakistan’s intelligence agencies remained a concern for the U.S. administration.

Zbigniew Brzezinski, in his book, *Second chance: Three presidents and the crisis of American superpower*,²¹ emphasized the importance of the Central Asian energy resources in the U.S. objectives in the region. The U.S. remained committed to getting benefits from Central Asian energy resources. Brzezinski dismissed Bush's justification for the war against the Taliban, referring to it as a strategic approach aimed at attaining energy security objectives in

²⁰ Stephen Biddle, *American grand strategy after 9/11: an assessment* (Carlisle, DIANE Publishing, 2005).

²¹ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Second chance: Three presidents and the crisis of American superpower* (UK, Hachette Book Group (HBG), 2008).

Central Asia. For the U.S., this objective could have only been possible if the threat of extremism in the region is eliminated. The 2006 NSS has clearly stated that Central Asia is on the U.S. foreign policy's priorities, which can be obtained after winning a war in Afghanistan.

Patrick Martin in his article "U.S. Planned War in Afghanistan long before September 11"²² argued that the U.S. long before decided to intervene in Afghanistan and overthrow Taliban regime. The U.S. contacted with the Northern Alliance and other opposition groups in Afghanistan well before the 9/11 incident. The special activities division of the CIA had been involved in Southern Afghanistan since 1997. The U.S. has also understood India, Russia, and Iran on coordination against Taliban regime; showing that the U.S. was long before the 9/11 incident, stretching muscles to overthrow Taliban regime. The incident of 9/11 and the subsequent reluctance of Taliban to hand over Osama Bin Laden provided an impetus to the Bush administration to initiate a military intervention in Afghanistan.

Leoni Connah, in his article, "US Intervention in Afghanistan: Justifying the Unjustifiable?"²³ argues that the term of 'just war' was misused by the U.S. to find a reason for their intervention in Afghanistan. The doctrine of just war uses two main components relating to the right or decision to wage war (*jus ad bellum*) and conduct during the warfare (*jus in bello*). Connah argues that, in the contemporary world politics and conflict resolution, the meaning or use of these two components of the just war is problematic. The concept of *jus ad bellum* requires that there must be a reasonable evidence or cause to start a war, and the decision of starting a war is to be made by a legitimate authority. In addition to that, the *jus ad bellum* requires that the right intention must be there to use force as a last resort; and only if the chances of success (the achievement of peace) are quite possible. And lastly, the use of force must be discriminate and proportionate. In the pretext of this apology of the *jus ad bellum*, there seems to be a clear misuse of the said doctrine. Now looking at another component of the just war doctrine, *Jus in bello*, the reported human rights violations and evidences of malpractices vis-a-vis financial irregularities, it is clear that the conduct of the U.S during the warfare was not good. So, the official stance of the U.S about the rational to intervene in Afghanistan lacks substance in the light of the Just War doctrine.

²² Patrick Martin, "US Planned War in Afghanistan long before September 11," *Michigan, World Socialist Web*, (November 20, 2001). Accessed at: <http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2001/11/afgh-n20.html>

²³ Leoni Connah, "US intervention in Afghanistan: Justifying the Unjustifiable?" *South Asia Research* 41, no. 1 (2021): 70-86.

The U.S. Conflict Resolution Strategies and their Outcomes

In “U.S. Policies in Afghanistan: Changing Strategies, Preserving Gains”, Ashley J. Tellis and Jeff Eggers²⁴ have analyzed the U.S. policies and strategies of conflict resolution in Afghanistan. They have concluded that despite the massive financial spending and loss of lives, much more is needed to be done for countering terrorism and attaining sustainable stability in Afghanistan. The U.S. kept on changing their strategies in Afghanistan with no considerable outcome. The security situation is still worrisome in Afghanistan as the economic growth indicators are alarming. The mistrust between Afghan and Pakistan’s government kept on widening. The Afghan government is losing control of the territory, and ISIS is increasingly penetrating in key districts. All of these issues pose challenges to the U.S. strategic interests. The authors propose some of the multifaceted strategies to bring an end to the conflict in Afghanistan. The U.S. should engage regional countries in developing a coordinated counterterrorism partnership to overcome terrorism. Simultaneously, the U.S. must engage Taliban in direct talks to arrive at the Afghan conflict’s pacific settlement. Given the longevity and severity of the conflict in Afghanistan, the U.S. needs to go forward with a policy aiming to end the conflict so that the threats of insurgency and terrorism no longer exist in the region.

One of the strategies of the U.S. in Afghanistan was to provide financial aid to the previous Afghan governments, led by Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani, for various statebuilding projects and humanitarian activities. In, *Aiding Peace? The Role of NGOs in Armed Conflict*,²⁵ Jonathan Goodhand argues that Afghanistan had been the recipient of international aid and remained a rentier state. However, ordinary citizens never got benefited from it. Similarly, the post 9/11 aid patterns in Afghanistan had not been positively used due to the same historical disconnection between the Afghan government and its people. The U.S. should have adequately worked out on the formulation of useful aid distribution patterns in Afghanistan to relieve the ordinary Afghans. The availability of U.S. assistance to ordinary Afghans would have helped the U.S. deter people’s sympathies with Taliban.

Richard Holbrooke in *Coordinated Support for Afghanistan and Pakistan*,²⁶ analyzed the AfPak strategy of the Obama administration. The AfPak strategy of the Obama

²⁴ Ashley J. Tellis and Jeff Eggers, “US Policies in Afghanistan: Changing Strategies, Preserving Gains” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (2017).

²⁵ Jonathan Goodhand, *Aiding Peace? The Role of NGOs in Armed Conflict* (Colorado, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006).

²⁶ Richard Holbrooke, “Coordinated Support for Afghanistan and Pakistan,” *Hampton Roads International Security Quarterly* 9, (2009): 28-29.

administration towards Afghanistan and Pakistan was indeed the most widely researched strategy at that time. Almost every actor involved in Afghanistan, i.e., NATO, ISAF, E.U., etc., was consulted. Even public debates were conducted to analyze the prospects of the Afghan policy. The essence of the strategy was that security would no longer be defined solely by military means. One of the Afpak strategy's controversial agendas was acknowledging the Afghan government's claims over the Pak-Afghan border with Pakistan. It was decided that the border area of both Pakistan and Afghanistan be considered as same. Hence, drone attacks on the Pakistani side of the territory were executed in greater intensity. This policy potentially altered the course of action between the U.S. and Pakistan over the actions in Afghanistan.

Christina Lamb in her book, *Farewell Kabul: from Afghanistan to a more dangerous world*²⁷ provides an analysis of how a coalition of about 48 different countries with modern kit and air power failed to bring peace in Afghanistan. She covers a period before the year 2014, and starts her analysis of the then Barack Obama exit plan of 2014. She argues that the U.S. backed the 'wrong horses' in Afghanistan which led to its defeat. The U.S. and allied forces used the notorious warlords, who kept on promoting their drugs businesses on one hand and looting the U.S. assistance on the other. Hamid Karzai was not given the full autonomy to deal with Taliban either through dialogue or force. She also blames Afghanistan's neighboring Pakistan for giving safe havens to the wanted Taliban and AL Qaeda leaders. The aforementioned reasons by Chrintina Lamb were not new to the literature, however, an interesting shift can be seen in her article published lately in 2021, "Chronicle of a Defeat Foretold: Why America Failed in Afghanistan"²⁸, where she calls the U.S. war in Afghanistan as wrong war, which she earlier called as a good war. In this article, she maintains that the war was never meant to be won militarily due to cultural realities of the region. She quotes, the then British commander in Afghanistan, Brigadier Mark Carleton Smith, who openly said that the war is not going to be won militarily. The mistake the U.S. official made was to call Mark Carleton as a "defeatist" instead of paying attention to his observations. Christina Lamb also presents some stories about the miseries of Afghan prisoners, during her visit to the Guantánamo Bay. Lamb's work provides a valuable insight into the U.S. war in Afghanistan

²⁷ Christina Lamb, *Farewell Kabul: from Afghanistan to a more dangerous world*. HarperCollins UK, 2015.

²⁸ Christina Lamb, "Chronicle of a Defeat Foretold: Why America Failed in Afghanistan." *Foreign Affairs*. 100 (2021): 174.

but she largely ignores to address the strategic confusion in the U.S. strategies as well as their insensitivity towards engagements with Taliban.

Failure of Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding Measures

An initial setback to the Afghan Taliban in 2001 was a moment of celebration for the U.S. forces; however, the latter took time to re-organize and prepare for striking back. Resultantly, the resurgence of Taliban throughout Afghanistan was no exception. In his book, Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan*²⁹ provides an insightful account of the Afghan government and international allies' failures in combating the rising attacks from Taliban. Taliban intelligently exploited the Afghan government's failures vis-à-vis bad governance and a rampant network of corruption to mobilize the public in their support. They managed to do large scale recruitment from within the Afghan citizens on the premise of fighting a just war against external interveners. The lack of consistency in the U.S. policies towards Afghanistan and the subsequent failure and incapacity of the Afghan government, further allowed Taliban to flourish and find sound grounding in Afghanistan.

After the fall of Taliban regime in 2001, the newly elected government of Hamid Karzai witnessed challenges of governance, corruption, nepotism, and lack of unity among various ethnic tribes in Afghanistan. Shehzad H Qazi's report, "The Neo-Taliban, Counterinsurgency, & the American endgame in Afghanistan,"³⁰ concludes that the success of Taliban resurgence is because of the grievances of the local Afghan population towards the Karzai government. Karzai government was indulged in structural corruption and massive political nepotism, which resulted in the alienation of many tribes of Pashtuns. The alienation of the Pashtun tribes provided an opportunity for Taliban to win the support of those tribes and secure support among ordinary citizens. The support from the local non-combatant Afghans provided Taliban with a strong intelligence base. The local population's intelligence support to Taliban remained a difficult challenge to both the U.S. forces and the Afghan government in countering Taliban activities.

²⁹ Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009.

³⁰ Shehzad H. Qazi, "The Neo-Taliban, Counterinsurgency, & the American endgame in Afghanistan" *Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU) (2011)*.

In “Afghanistan Study Group Report: Revitalizing our Efforts, Rethinking our Strategies,”³¹ James L. Jones and Thomas R. Pickering have revitalized the U.S. thinking and strategies in Afghanistan. They argued that the causes of U.S. strategies’ failure to resolve the Afghan conflict are attributed to the lack of employment opportunities for Afghans. Alternatively, the Afghans relied on poppy cultivation and illegal drug trafficking. They argued that the American led international intervention in Afghanistan has initially ignored a multifaceted approach and primarily relied on the use of force against Taliban. Failing to address the poppy cultivation provided Taliban with an economic opportunity to revive and sustain their networks. Simultaneously, unemployment, bad governance, and other domestic problems compelled non-combatant Afghans to provide logistic and intelligence support to Taliban.

The rise and sustainable resistance from Taliban against the U.S. was the consequence of domestic policy failure, but support from some external stakeholders also played an important role. Happymon Jacob, in his writing, “The Rise, Fall and the Resurgence of Taliban,”³² reflected upon the support of Iran and some elements in the Pakistan Army to the Afghan Taliban as a potential catalyst in the longevity of the Afghan conflict. Afghan Taliban remained active in dealing with international actors, namely Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and some other important actors. They had been receiving covert assistance from many international actors, which remained an important factor for their rise and resurgence. Ahmed Rashid has also written about the international support to Taliban in *Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia*.³³ He believes that Pakistan maintains historical linkages with Taliban, and they used the slogans of Islamic Jihad to undermine the nationalist sentiments in the cross-border region. Since Pakistan’s creation, some elements in Afghanistan and Pakistan are actively campaigning for Pashtun nationalism, which would undermine Pakistan’s legitimacy in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa’s tribal regions. So, international assistance to the Afghan Taliban remained an essential factor in sustaining the conflict in Afghanistan for nearly two decades.

³¹ James L. Jones and Thomas R, “Revitalizing our Efforts, Rethinking our Strategies” (Washington: Afghanistan Study Group Report, 2008), 33-37.

³² Happymon Jacob, *The Rise, Fall and the Resurgence of Taliban* (New Delhi, Observer Research Foundation, 2006).

³³ Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia* (New York, I.B.Tauris, 2002).

In another book, *Descent into Chaos: The World's Most Unstable Region and the Threat to Global Security*³⁴, Ahmed Rashid maintained that the U.S. and Pakistan have a trust deficit, one of the leading causes of failure to resolve the Afghan conflict. When the U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003, the Pakistani establishment worried about the U.S.'s commitment to the Afghan conflict resolution. Due to the lack of trust, Pakistan continued supporting the Afghan Taliban to preserve their vested interest in Afghanistan after the likely withdrawal of the U.S. troops.

Carlotta Gall is a New York Times reporter who wrote a book, *The Wrong Enemy: America in Afghanistan, 2001-2014*,³⁵ depicting Pakistan's role in the Afghan conflict. She argued that the failure of the U.S. strategies in bringing order in Afghanistan was due to Pakistan's army and ISI's role in extending all possible support to the Afghan Taliban. She maintains that Pakistan's army wanted a fragmented Afghanistan with their puppet government to be used as a strategic counterweight against its arch-rival India. Pakistan's army efforts had weakened Afghanistan and undermined the U.S. strategic objectives but simultaneously proved counterproductive for itself. She believes that Pakistan will realize the importance of a stable Afghanistan and play an essential role in the conflict resolution efforts.

Noah Coburn in his book, *Losing Afghanistan: An Obituary for the Intervention*,³⁶ focused on the development side of the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan. He criticized the U.S. strategies of statebuilding, arguing that the ground realities and local culture were ignored during the formulation and implementation of the development policies. The non-governmental organizations and research institutions produced the terminology and content that could seek funds from the U.S.-led organizations, like NATO. The U.S. policies ignored common Afghan feelings, which resulted in stretching distances between the U.S. forces and the local population. Ignoring Afghan's feelings is considered one of the causes of the support that Taliban got from the local non-combatant Afghans and paved the way for their resurgence. Noah also argues that the corrupt local Afghan government (then Karzai government) is also responsible for the failed U.S. strategies for conflict resolution in Afghanistan.

³⁴ Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos: The World's Most Unstable Region and the Threat to Global Security* (London, Penguin, 2009).

³⁵ Carlotta Gall, *The Wrong Enemy: America in Afghanistan, 2001-2014* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014).

³⁶ Noah Coburn, *Losing Afghanistan: An Obituary for the Intervention*, (California, Stanford University Press, 2016).

Geoffrey Swenson in his article “Why U.S. Efforts to Promote the Rule of Law in Afghanistan Failed”³⁷ argues that the U.S. strategy of promoting ‘rule of law’ in Afghanistan failed due to the questionable strategic choices and dubious assumptions about the conflict. The U.S. spending on the Statebuilding program which included uplifting the Afghan criminal justice system, increased from 2009 to 2014 under Obama presidency; however, the outcome was a failure due to a comprehensive yet inchoate approach. The paper identifies structural problems in the execution of the U.S. policies; the execution was problematic as the U.S. effort reflected fundamental failures in timing, strategy and coordination. Aid was sparse during the crucial initial period and lately increased but focused on unnecessary and unwanted legislative reforms. The paper is indeed an insightful reflective essay, explaining the causes of the U.S. failure in Afghanistan, however, it lacks a theoretical lens to further generalize the outcomes of the conflict.

Research Gap

The literature review highlights several gaps in the existing literature on the U.S. intervention and conflict resolution in Afghanistan. The literature review points out that most of the literature was produced in the first decade of the 21st century, which means that there is a lack of updated analysis of the conflict in Afghanistan. This is a significant gap in the literature, given the longest conflict in Afghanistan, and the need for a more comprehensive and up-to-date understanding of the situation.

Another gap in the literature is the lack of coherence in the U.S. strategies in Afghanistan since 2001. The U.S. changed strategies for conflict resolution, but the linkage between reasons for the old strategies’ failure and the new strategy’s rationale and objectives had not been studied comprehensively. Therefore, there was a need for a more in-depth analysis of the reasons why certain strategies failed and why new strategies were adopted.

Moreover, the literature mostly focuses on individual causes of the failure of conflict resolution approaches, which fails to identify the multiple causes of conflict resolution failure in Afghanistan collectively. Therefore, there was a need for more research that identifies the

³⁷ Geoffrey Swenson, "Why US efforts to promote the rule of law in Afghanistan failed." *International Security* 42, no. 1 (2017): 114-151.

various causes of the failure of conflict resolution approaches in Afghanistan collectively to find a comprehensive multidimensional solution.

The existing body of research acknowledges that the complex cultural and historical background of Afghanistan has been a key factor in determining both the development of the conflict and the direction of efforts to resolve it. However, there is a notable gap in understanding exactly how these factors influenced the strategies employed by the United States. In addition, there is a lack of research on the underlying cultural and historical aspects that should be taken into account when developing conflict resolution strategies in this context. One factor contributing to this gap is the limited familiarity of scholars with the deeply rooted Afghan spirit, as evidenced in the literature. In this study, the researcher has a clear advantage in having a close, first-hand understanding of Afghan culture, society, and the complex dynamics of tribal politics. This indigenous perspective provides the study with a unique perspective to delve into these unexplored dimensions, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive and insightful analysis of the role of cultural and historical factors in shaping US strategy and informing the formulation of effective conflict resolution strategies.

The application of game theory in analyzing the U.S. strategies and conflict resolution in Afghanistan is an area that has not been explored extensively in the existing literature. Game theory is a tool used to analyze and predict the behavior of players in a strategic situation, and it can be applied to the conflict in Afghanistan, which involves multiple players with differing interests and strategies. Game theory can help in understanding the strategic decisions of the U.S. government and other actors involved in the conflict, such as the Taliban, the Afghan government, and regional and international players. For instance, game theory can be used to analyze the decision-making process of the U.S. government in choosing between different military strategies or negotiating with the Taliban. It can also be used to predict the response of other actors to the U.S. strategies, such as the Taliban's reaction to a military surge or a peace deal. Moreover, game theory can help in identifying the optimal strategies for conflict resolution that could lead to a sustainable peace in Afghanistan. By analyzing the interests and strategies of the different actors, game theory can help in identifying the potential cooperative solutions that could benefit all parties involved. Overall, the application of game theory in analyzing the U.S. strategies and conflict resolution in Afghanistan is a potential gap in the existing literature that could provide valuable insights and recommendations for policymakers and scholars.

Lastly, the literature review pertains to the absence of a comprehensive and integrated study that can establish the linkages between the various strategies adopted by the U.S. and their corresponding outcomes. It is crucial to address this gap because such an analysis can help in developing more effective and sustainable approaches for conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Afghanistan. Without a comprehensive understanding of how different strategies are connected and how they affect conflict resolution, it is difficult to evaluate the success or failure of particular approaches. Moreover, without this understanding, it is challenging to design new strategies that can address the underlying causes of conflict in Afghanistan effectively. Therefore, bridging this gap in the literature by conducting a combined study of the U.S. strategies and their outcomes and reasons for success or failure can contribute significantly to the development of more effective conflict resolution and peacebuilding approaches.

Overall, the literature review highlights several gaps in the existing literature on the U.S. intervention and conflict resolution in Afghanistan. A more comprehensive and updated analysis of the conflict was needed, along with a more in-depth understanding of the reasons for the failure of conflict resolution approaches and the linkages between various strategies. This thesis aims to fill a significant gap in the existing literature by providing a comprehensive analysis of the U.S. strategies employed for conflict resolution in Afghanistan. While prior literature has presented the U.S. led international intervention as a means of resolving conflict in Afghanistan, the historical pattern of interventions has contributed to the instability of the region. Therefore, it is crucial to explore the U.S. led international intervention as a key factor in the failure of conflict resolution in Afghanistan.

Research Questions

Core Question

1. Why did the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan fail to produce a tangible outcome with reference to conflict resolution?

Supportive Questions

1. Why the U.S. did intervene in Afghanistan and how is it related to conflict resolution?
2. How did the U.S. pursue conflict resolution in Afghanistan?
3. How unsuccessful was the U.S. in resolving conflict in Afghanistan?

Research Methodology

This thesis constitutes a qualitative case study which aims to analyze the challenges, successes, and failures of the U.S. intervention and conflict resolution in Afghanistan. Specifically, the study's independent variable pertains to the U.S. strategies in Afghanistan since the 9/11 attacks, while the dependent variable is conflict resolution. The study also considers intervening variables such as the impact of local Afghan government and regional and extra-regional actors on conflict resolution. Drawing on secondary data sources, including official documents, books, journal articles, NATO publications, reports by the American Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), and research studies by leading institutions and think tanks such as the Research and Development (RAND) Corporation, and Brookings Institute, the research employs a qualitative explanatory design to derive conclusions about the U.S. overall strategy. Additionally, academic studies published in international peer-reviewed journals are used to explain the objectives, strategies, and outcomes of the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan. To supplement this data, the study also incorporates information from official reports of Congress and other organizations, local and international newspapers, and interviews with subject experts to gain further insights into the U.S. strategies and outcomes vis-à-vis conflict in Afghanistan, including recent peace talks.

This study employs a descriptive and explanatory research design, utilizing qualitative research methods. The explanatory research design is concerned with elucidating the interrelationship between various concepts and ideas in order to comprehend the causes, reasons, and outcomes of the phenomenon under study. This type of research not only describes the observed phenomenon, but also endeavors to provide answers to questions regarding why and how it occurs. Within the explanatory research design, research questions are employed to guide the analysis of relevant literature and documents. This study describes the causes of U.S. intervention, the strategies employed post-intervention, and the outcomes in relation to conflict resolution in Afghanistan. Furthermore, it seeks to explain the factors that contribute to the protracted nature of the conflict and the failure of U.S. strategies. In light of historical difficulties in stabilizing Afghanistan, this study examines the impact of U.S. intervention on Afghanistan's conflict resolution from 2001 until 2020.

For data collection, this study employs a descriptive and explanatory research design, drawing on document analysis, archival record review, and historical analysis to interpret

data.³⁸ The study's primary method of data collection is document analysis of selected sources. Bowen defines document analysis as a systematic approach to obtaining and evaluating both printed and electronic documents for relevant data.³⁹ Document analysis of multiple sources provides researchers with a confluence of evidence that increases reliability and decreases biasedness.⁴⁰ Archival record review is another method of data collection used in this study, involving research on available records and documents related to the problem under consideration.⁴¹ Government records, public records, survey data, service records, charts, and maps are commonly used types of archival records.⁴² The study uses data collected from online public resources and government collections, including leading online archival sources such as the U.S. Archival Library Information Center, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, Congressional Archives, and the White House Archives. Historical analysis, defined as the study of comparative societies over time, is the third method of data collection employed in this study.⁴³ Official government documents provide a good source for historical analysis, and the study uses historical analysis of sources related to past interventions and conflict resolution strategies in Afghanistan. Interviews with subject experts are the fourth method of data collection used to gain insights into the U.S. strategies and outcomes vis-à-vis conflict in Afghanistan.

Under the auspices of the realist school of thought, the conceptual framework of game theory is used for the thesis's management. Game theory's conceptual framework of Cooperative games with a non-zero-sum outcome and non-cooperative games with a zero-sum outcome under a constant prisoner's dilemma and bluffing is used for the analysis of the U.S. strategies and their impact on conflict resolution in Afghanistan. The U.S. strategies in Afghanistan are analyzed under the guiding attributes/ variables of Game Theory. Game Theory explains the strategic interaction patterns and aspirations among players of the conflict. Game theory is widely used in different academic disciplines; it is equally applicable in explaining interaction among various parties in the conflict. The outcome of a conflict

³⁸ Glenn A Bowen, "Document analysis as a qualitative research method." *Qualitative research journal* 9, no. 2 (2009): 27.

³⁹ Ibid, 28.

⁴⁰ Robert K Yin, "Case study research: Design and methods (Vol. 5). *Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc* (2003): 103.

⁴¹ David E McNabb, *Research methods in public administration and nonprofit management*. Rutledge. 2015, 103.

⁴² Robert K Yin, "Case study research: Design and methods, 105.

⁴³ Earl Babbie, *The practice of social research*, eleventh edition. Belmont, CA: Thompson Wadsworth (2007), 338.

resolution depends upon the strategic choices of all concerning parties. In this game, every party has to consider the thinking and objectives of the opposite party. However, it is a sophisticated art to understand the mindset and approach of the opposing party.⁴⁴ Application of the Game Theory's selective conceptual framework over the Conflict Resolution situation in Afghanistan is quite relevant as many local, regional, and international players are involved. At the local level, Afghan Taliban, local warlords and the Afghan government are the main players; at the regional level, Pakistan, Iran, China, Central Asian Republics and India remain relevant actors; while at the international level, the main actor is the U.S. with the support of some NATO countries.

In this qualitative case study, the regional factor is considered an intervening variable that potentially influences the dynamics of the conflict and its resolution. To control bias and for the impact of this regional factor, the triangulation method in game theory is employed. Triangulation involves integrating multiple data sources, research methods, or theoretical perspectives to improve the validity of the results. In the context of a case study, this is achieved through data from various sources in order to get a comprehensive view of regional dynamics. This includes historical records, research papers, interviews with experts, and media reports from the U.S., regional countries particularly Pakistan and neutral regions. By including various sources, this study covers a wider range of regional influences. In addition to data sources, this dissertation uses theoretical lenses to analyze the regional factor. Game theory has provided a structured framework for modeling strategic interactions between different actors. Using game theory models, the study modeled how the decisions of regional actors affected the conflict and its resolution. In addition, the dissertation used various qualitative methods to study the role of the regional factor. Network analysis is used to determine the relationship between regional actors. In addition, after conducting separate analyzes using various methods and sources, patterns, sequences and discrepancies in the data were recorded and analyzed through discourse analysis. The convergence of the results obtained by several methods caused greater confidence in the conclusions drawn. Through the triangulation method, the case study better controlled for the influence of the regional factor on the U.S. intervention and conflict resolution in Afghanistan. By integrating multiple data sources, perspectives and methods, the study provides a more robust and subtle understanding of how regional dynamics influence

⁴⁴ Anatol Rapoport, "International Relations and game theory" In *Arms Control and Disarmament*, ed. Paolo Foradori, Giampiero Giacomello and Alessandro Pascolini, (Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 39-50.

conflict and its eventual resolution, thereby increasing the credibility and reliability of the study's results.

For data processing and analysis, descriptive and explanatory methods are used to interpret, compare, and infer the available data. The study looks for a causal relationship between the U.S. intervention and conflict resolution in Afghanistan. The following tree diagram illustrates the structure of research design of the study.

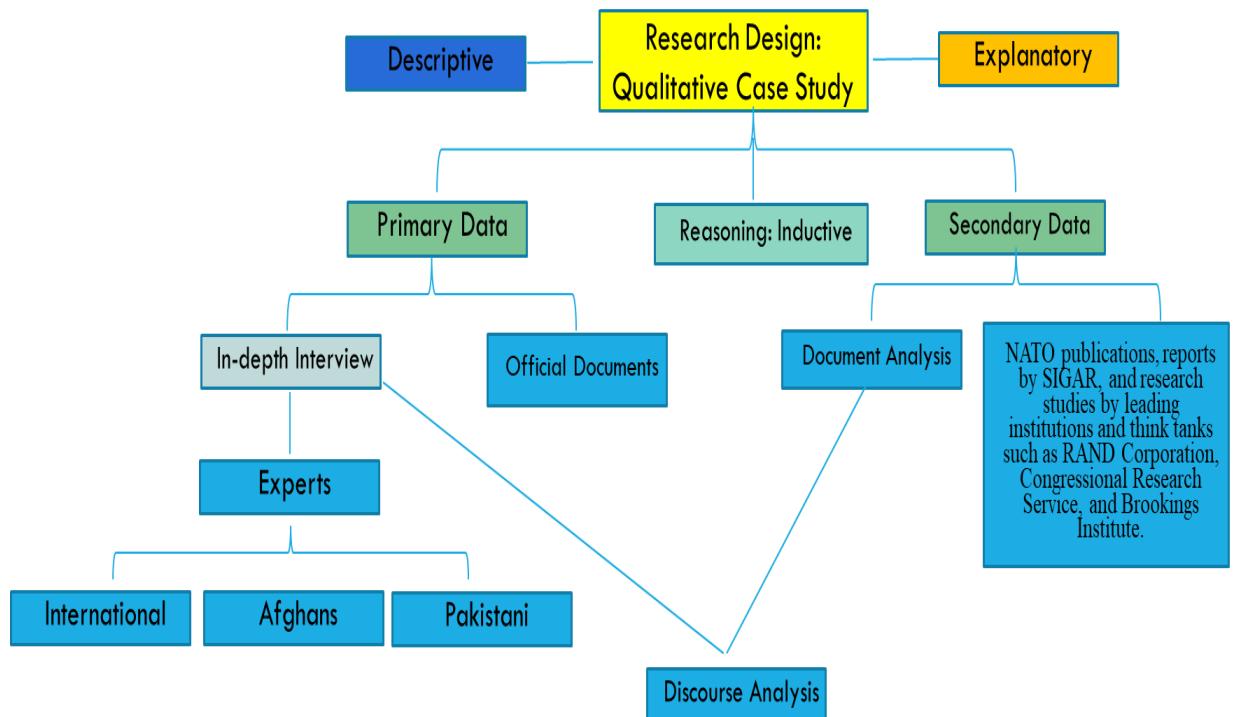


Figure 1: Research Design of the Study⁴⁵

Significance of the Study

This research work provides a significant contribution to the existing literature on the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan by filling gaps and providing a contemporary understanding of the failure of U.S. intervention and conflict resolution strategies in Afghanistan. While there are independent studies available on the various U.S. strategies in Afghanistan, this research connects the changing strategies' objectives and outcomes and provides an in-depth analysis of the U.S. strategies and their subsequent outcomes vis-à-vis conflict resolution in Afghanistan.

⁴⁵ Developed by the researcher for this particular thesis.

The study also offers an alternative perspective for understanding the U.S. led international interventions from the dominant Western literature. The Western literature sees the U.S. led international intervention in Afghanistan as an instrument of conflict resolution and statebuilding project. However, this research argues that U.S. led international intervention in Afghanistan from 2001 till 2020 had a counterproductive effect on conflict and violence.

Moreover, the study addresses the changing U.S. strategies in Afghanistan and whether they were coordinated and part of a bigger plan or disconnected and changed one after another due to their ineffectiveness. It explains the rationale for the necessity of changing different strategies by the U.S. administration.

Despite the U.S. exit from Afghanistan in 2021, the ground situations with respect to the stabilization indicators are worrisome, and establishing a peaceful and stable government in Afghanistan remains a challenge. Therefore, this study is useful for social scientists, teachers, students, and politicians alike. It provides valuable secondary data for future research on related topics.

Delimitation

Context: Conflict in Afghanistan from the U.S. intervention till exit, is the longest war in the U.S. history. This study is mainly based on the political and security situation in Afghanistan which influenced the processes of conflict resolution and state-stabilization.

Theme: The main motive/theme of the study is to analyze the U.S. strategies and their impact on conflict resolution in Afghanistan.

Time and Space: This study will cover a period of nineteen years, from 2001 to 2020. The study does not include the post-2020 developments with respect to conflict resolution in Afghanistan.

Organization of the Study

This paper is categorized into different chapters to find answers to the questions and analyze the major argument.

Introduction:

The background of the study, problem statement, study objectives, research questions, the significance, and delimitations is described in the introduction. It also introduces the methodology of the research work.

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework:

This chapter introduces the game theory's conceptual framework and its application to the topic under study. The study's Conceptual framework mainly focuses on variables of zero-sum vs. non-zero-sum games, Prisoner's dilemma and bluffing strategy of the game theory. The theory is used qualitatively for the descriptive analytical research design.

Chapter Two: Historical Background of Conflict in Afghanistan:

This chapter focuses on the historical background of the conflict in Afghanistan, starting from the Soviet Union intervention in 1979, Civil War in the post-Soviet Union withdrawal, and the U.S. intervention in 2001. The chapter highlights the conflictual history of Afghanistan to limelight the difficult political culture of the country. Since 1919, the country had hardly witnessed political consensus on the type of political system; various stakeholders shifted between religious theocracy, western democracy and communism. This chapter would help in understanding the reasons for the failure of the U.S. post-9/11 statebuilding efforts, as they largely ignored the ground cultural sensitivities in the formulation and execution of policies.

Chapter Three: The U.S. post 9/11 Strategies in Afghanistan:

This chapter describes various conflict resolution strategies used by the U.S. in Afghanistan from 2001 till 2020. It explains the durability and applicability of the U.S. post-intervention strategies with respect to conflict resolution in Afghanistan. The chapter includes analytical discussions on applicability of the varying U.S. strategies. It also establishes a correlation among the changing strategies of president, Bush, Obama, and Trump, to establish a case for the proceeding chapters about the outcomes and causes of the failure of the strategies.

Chapter Four: Outcomes of the U.S. Strategies:

This chapter includes discussion on outcomes of the post-9/11 U.S. strategies in Afghanistan. It includes both achievements and failures of the U.S. goals in Afghanistan with respect to the strategic objectives about conflict resolution.

Chapter Five: Causes of the Failure of U.S. Strategies:

This chapter analyzed different factors responsible for the Afghan conflict's longevity and the failure of the U.S. strategies with respect to conflict resolution in Afghanistan.

Findings and Conclusion:

At the end of the thesis, an overview of the previous chapters, findings of the study and recommendations for successful conflict resolution strategies in Afghanistan are described.

Operational Definitions

Strategy: It refers to the military, political, and economical means to pursue ultimate objectives/ goals in the international system. In this study, strategy refers to the U.S. policies and approaches towards conflict resolution in Afghanistan since 2001.

International intervention: This is the use of force by one state against another state's internal or external affairs. Here it refers to the U.S. military intervention in Afghanistan in 2001.

Conflict Resolution: Conflict resolution is a way for two or more parties to find a solution to a disagreement among them. The disagreement/ conflict in Afghanistan started mainly between the U.S. and Taliban in 2001, when the U.S. intervened after Taliban refused to comply with their demands vis-à-vis nexus with Al Qaeda. In this study, this term is generically used for conflict engagement, conflict management, conflict transformation and conflict settlement.

Game Theory: It analyzes the decision-making process, taking into account the aspirations, reactions, and choices of the parties involved, during their interaction on international conflict. Here game theory is used to understand the U.S. strategies and the impact on conflict resolution in Afghanistan.

Zero-Sum Game: In game theory, the zero-sum game refers to one party's gains at the precisely balanced loss of another party. This is usually called the complete victory of one side due to the complete defeat of the other side in the conflict.

Non-Zero-Sum game: Non-Zero-sum game refers to a situation in a conflict in which all concerned parties' losses or gains are not necessarily equal, and both parties may likely gain or lose.

Prisoner's Dilemma: Prisoner's dilemma is one aspect of the game theory, explaining why two rational actors may not cooperate even if it benefits both.

Bluffing: Bluffing is a strategy used in game theory to explain the deceptive behavior of a player in games.

Statebuilding: It is a process by which states increase their capacity to function well through institution building and political stability.

Failed State: This applies to those states whose political and economic systems are stagnant to such an extent that the government no longer exercises powers within the borders.

Dependency: A situation where a State or government is dependent or controlled by another state or organization.

Rentier State: This applies to the state, which depends on external revenues for all of its needs as rents from certain compromises.

Government Legitimacy: This refers to a broader recognition of the right of state power to the population.

Mixed Sovereignty: This refers to the type of sovereignty in a country where the sovereign powers of the legislative, judicial, and executive branches are shared among different stakeholders.

Decentralized Political System: This is a political system in which more authority is transferred from the central government to citizens through their representatives.

Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF): It refers to the collective security structure of the Afghan government, which includes the Afghan National Army (ANA), Afghan National Police (ANP), Afghan Commandos (CDO), Afghan Border Patrol (ABP), Afghan Local Police (ALP), Afghan Highway Patrol (AHP) and Afghan National Army Special Forces (ANASF).

Counterinsurgency (COIN): It refers to the combined military and civilian efforts to overcome and control insurgency in any particular country. In the case of Afghanistan, counterinsurgency is interchangeably used with counterterrorism.

Counterterrorism (C.T.): It refers to the strategies and actions taken to undermine and eliminate terrorism in all its forms at the local, regional, and international levels. The U.S. intervention in Afghanistan was in the pretext of the Global War on Terror, hence a counterterrorism strategy.



Figure 2: Afghanistan's map⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Cartographic Map Afghanistan, United Nation. Accessed at: <https://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/afghanis.pdf> (accessed on July 20, 2020)

Chapter One

The U.S. Intervention and Conflict Resolution in Afghanistan through the Prism of Game Theory

This chapter looks into relevance of the game theory in conflict resolution strategies with a special focus on the conflict in Afghanistan from the year 2001 till 2020. The objective is to understand and get guidance from this theoretical framework while further describing the specific case study of Afghanistan. The conflict between the U.S. and the Taliban can be analyzed through the theoretical framework of game theory and the prisoner's dilemma. Game theory is the study of how people make decisions in strategic situations, where the outcome of their actions depends on the actions of others. The prisoner's dilemma is a classic game theory scenario that demonstrates how two individuals might not cooperate even when it is in their best interest to do so. This thesis conceptual framework centers on the various U.S. strategies used in Afghanistan from 2001 till 2020 to overcome the conflict. The U.S. strategies in Afghanistan have been analyzed under the guiding attributes/ variables of Game Theory, presuming that the failure in achieving policy objectives vis-à-vis the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan stems from over-reliance on the military force, a strategic confusion regarding the use of coercive or political means to deal with Taliban and negligence to the ground realities in the country. Game Theory explains the strategic interaction patterns and aspirations among players of the conflict. Game theory is widely used in different academic disciplines; it is equally applicable in explaining interaction among various parties in the conflict. The outcome of a conflict resolution depends upon the strategic choices of all concerning parties. In game theory, every party has to consider the thinking and objectives of the opposite party. However, it is a sophisticated art to understand the mindset and approach of the opposing party.⁴⁷ With respect to this particular case study, there were different dyads involved in the Afghan conflict, the U.S., the then local Afghan government, regional states and international community at large, however, the core contending players remained the U.S. and Taliban. So, in this chapter, the game conceptual framework is focused on the varying U.S. strategies and the resultant repercussive strategies from Taliban.

⁴⁷ Anatol Rapoport, "International Relations and game theory...", 2018. 39-50.

The concept of theory refers to the interpretation of any model based on the issue being studied. When it comes to game theory, it is not simply a general theory of strategic interaction, but is also viewed as a theory of international relations. Game theory takes a position of realism,⁴⁸ acknowledging that states are the main subjects seeking to maximize their influence in the international arena. However, the game-theoretic approach is not limited to realism,⁴⁹ as the rational behavior of participants is crucial, and it is not required that key participants are only states. For instance, in the case study of Afghanistan's conflict resolution, the Taliban, a belligerent group, was a significant player, along with various other Afghan warlords.

Given the involvement of multiple local, regional, and international players, applying game theory to the conflict resolution situation in Afghanistan is relevant. At the local level, the Afghan Taliban, local warlords, and the Afghan government were the main players. At the regional level, Pakistan, Iran, China, Central Asian Republics, and India were relevant actors, while at the international level, the primary actor was the U.S., with the support of some NATO countries. Despite the conflict's complexity due to multiple players, this thesis concentrates on the U.S. strategies and the Taliban's responses to those strategies.

For a significant period of time, the conflict in Afghanistan was perceived as a zero-sum game by both local and international actors, wherein the success of one party came at the expense of the other's failure. The U.S. and the Afghan government aimed to weaken the Afghan Taliban's authority through coercive measures to establish a democratically elected government in Afghanistan. To achieve this objective, the U.S. implemented a significant military escalation strategy to defeat the Taliban and gain complete control of Afghanistan's territory. In parallel, the Afghan Taliban pursued a zero-sum game, demanding the withdrawal of all U.S. forces and the acquisition of Afghan government authority. In the pursuit of this zero-sum game, both major parties and their respective allies continued the war in Afghanistan for almost two decades. However, since this approach failed to yield the desired outcome, the U.S. altered its policy and adopted a political settlement strategy alongside its existing state-building approach for conflict resolution in Afghanistan. The Bonn agreement was a significant step in this direction, but it excluded the Taliban.

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ Robert Jervis. "Realism, game theory, and cooperation." *World politics* 40, no. 3 (1988): 317-349.

The Afghan Taliban persisted in pursuing their zero-sum game approach, employing guerrilla warfare tactics to inflict maximum damage on the U.S. and the then Afghan government. The U.S. announcement of its withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014 was viewed as a unilateral victory by the Afghan Taliban. Although the U.S. aimed to disengage entirely from Afghanistan, it retained 14,000 troops due to various factors. After 2014, the U.S. strategy evolved to establish an Enduring Counterterrorism Partnership with the Afghan government and regional allies under its regional solution approach for dealing with the Afghan conflict. On the other hand, the Taliban continued to fight and refused the U.S. offer for peace talks extended from 2012 onwards. Although the Taliban opened their political office in Doha, Qatar, in June 2013, they continued to use coercive tactics against the U.S. forces and demanded their unconditional withdrawal from Afghanistan.

The 2018 U.S. presidential election marked a significant turning point in the conflict resolution process in Afghanistan. The U.S. President Donald Trump adopted two strategies for resolving the conflict in Afghanistan. First, he applied pressure on Pakistan to constrain the Taliban by suspending financial support for the country. Simultaneously, the U.S. resumed using coercive measures such as the dropping of the "mother of all bombs" against insurgent groups in Afghanistan. President Trump hoped for a zero-sum outcome with a complete victory in Afghanistan. However, this strategy was short-lived, and the U.S. changed its approach towards a peaceful settlement, resulting in the adoption of a policy of peace talks with the Taliban and the use of a non-zero-sum strategy.

The Afghan peace talks, primarily between the U.S. and the Taliban, were a clear indication that both major parties realized that only a non-zero-sum outcome would endure in the conflict resolution process. This was the first time that both parties showed flexibility in their demands towards each other. Although the cooperative approach towards negotiations seemed to be for a non-zero-sum outcome, both the Taliban and the U.S. employed bluffing strategies to achieve their objectives. The U.S. aimed for a safe exit, preparing for the post-exit pressure on the Taliban, while the Taliban sought unconditional troop withdrawal and government control. During the Doha negotiations, Ashraf Ghani's constitutional government in Afghanistan expressed reservations about the peace talks and was uncertain about the pro-government outcome, acting as a spoiler because their survival depended on the U.S. prolonged stay. Similarly, other regional players were expected to play either a cooperative or spoiler role in the conflict resolution process. The U.S. exit in August 2021 appeared to be a zero-sum

outcome for the Taliban, but the indirect influence the U.S. can exert through economic restrictions could exacerbate the prevailing conflict situation, preventing the Taliban regime from stabilizing and enjoying peace.

This thesis aims to analyze the U.S. strategies in Afghanistan through the lens of conflict resolution using the Game Theory framework. Specifically, the study will focus on two important game theory attributes, namely the 'non-cooperative or zero-sum vs. cooperative or non-zero-sum', 'prisoner's dilemma' and 'bluffing' games. By applying this theoretical framework, the thesis seeks to identify the various U.S. strategies implemented in Afghanistan, while also providing a conceptual framework for analyzing them. Through an inductive reasoning approach, the study will examine how these strategies were influenced by the game theory attributes and how they impacted the conflict resolution process in Afghanistan. This analysis will provide a better understanding of the U.S. approaches to the conflict, and the extent to which game theory can be applied to conflict resolution in complex settings such as Afghanistan.

1.1. Conflict Resolution in Afghanistan in the light of Game Theory

In 1944, a monograph titled “Game Theory and Economic Behavior” was jointly published by Oscar Morgenstern and John Von Neumann, giving rise to Game Theory’s emergence.⁵⁰ Though mathematical in nature, but since its foundation, game theory is purposefully used in international relations. Game theory is used in both quantitative as well as qualitative research. Game theory explains different parties behavior during interaction among parties in a strategic decision making process. The theory helps understand the logic of the rational behavior of parties in a conflict. In a post-World War II era, game theory gained popularity among political scientists in the Western political literature. During the cold war’s bipolarity between the U.S. and Soviet Union, the containment policy was built upon the game theory, explaining the behavior of cold war rivals. In post-world wars and during the Cold War, game theory emerged as an alternative framework for understanding the state’s behavior. In the post-cold war era, international relations, strategic studies and political science theorists use game theory to analyze actors’ behavior in the decision-making process during international negotiation relating to conflict resolution and signing of treaties. The increasing

⁵⁰ John Von Neumann, Oskar Morgenstern, and Harold William Kuhn. *Theory of games and economic behavior (commemorative edition)*. (New Jersey: Princeton university press, 2007)

multi-polarity in world politics and complex interdependence in international negotiations has further enhanced game theory's importance.⁵¹

RAND Corporation is credited to be the launching platform for the game theorists including John von Newman who worked on the theory while working for the organization under the auspices of U.S. Air Force, for research in the usage of Intercontinental ballistic missile.⁵² RAND Corporation used Game Theory in developing the optimal atomic bombing strategy in Japan. In 1950s, the application of Game theory was more popularized and the representative of social sciences, including political science, economy, philosophy and International Relations, started using it in their research. Even many American Universities opened up analytical centres for the usage of Game theory in Social Sciences.⁵³ In the Classic monograph of 1944, *Non-zero-Sum Games or Cooperative games and Zero-Sum Games or non-cooperative games* were mainly considered.⁵⁴ The non-zero-sum game refers to those games, where the players can make decisions based on an agreement that serves to be a win-win situation for all parties. Mostly, international agreements, which are agreed upon under the principle of cooperative or non-zero-sum game, are also open for accession by other parties. In this way, the overall gains and losses of the cooperation are shared among the participating members.⁵⁵ On the other hand, Zero-Sum game refers to those when a won on one side is equal to the loss of the other side.⁵⁶ The players in a Zero-Sum game are considered as antagonistic. Generally, zero-sum games describe situations of pure confrontation in which the participants of the opposing parties goes into direct confrontation.

The conceptual framework of game theory in conflict resolution negotiations is used by many prominent authors, who used/applied the zero-sum and non-zero-sum games in different conflict resolution situations. Neumann and Morgenstern published their first monograph relating Game Theory in 1950. Few year later John Forbes Nash, one of the most prominent proponents of game theory, defended his thesis, devoted to non-cooperative games (in which coalitions between players are not allowed to form) and games with a non-zero sum (winning

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Richard Ernest Bellman, David Blackwell, J. P. Lasalle. "Application of Theory of Games to Identification of Friend and Foe." *Santa Monica: The Rand Corporation* (1949): 2-15.

⁵³ James D Morrow, *Game theory for political scientists*. (Princeton University Press, 1994), 261.

⁵⁴ Tamer Basar, "Lecture notes on non-cooperative game theory." *Game Theory Module of the Graduate Program in Network Mathematics* (2010): 3-6.

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ James D Morrow. *Game theory for political scientists*. (Princeton University Press, 1994), 78.

one side is not equal to losing the other; besides the opposite, the parties have common interests).⁵⁷ The central point of Nash's theory is the concept of equilibrium, now bearing his name. Nash equilibrium is a combination of strategies in which no player is interested in unilaterally changing their strategy. J. Nash proved that this kind of equilibrium exists for all finite games (games with a limited number of strategies for each player) with any number of players. Earlier, the idea of Nash was proved by John von Neumann and Oscar Morgenstern only for games with two participants with zero-sum.⁵⁸ Although both works were separated by only six years, in practice, in 1950-1960, most studies developed the concept of Neumann. Only in the 1970s and 1980s did Reinhard Selten supplement the Nash concept with a balance suitable for sub-games for dynamic with multi-way games having complete information.⁵⁹ This kind of games is based on the desire of the player to make rational choices at the decision making. The concept of ordinary winnings corresponding to a given set of strategies of participating players has been expanded to the "win vector." This is a multi-criteria assessment about the game outcome.

Game theory may well be compatible with a structural approach to international politics. As a general theoretical approach to international politics, it involves motivated behavior in the absence of supranational institutions of power. Thus, she emphasizes the fundamental properties of anarchy in international relations and the use of various configurations of national interests and political circumstances in situations of international cooperation and conflict.⁶⁰

The main difficulty in constructing the game model of international relations is the prioritization of each other's various behavioral strategies. The main problem here is not the lack of rational behavior in the international arena, but the correct assessment of alternatives by states. Often, the size of a country's value is inconsistent with the size of another country or the non-state actor. So, the researchers should see image factors, ethical standards, and other conditions rather than full tangible advantages.

⁵⁷ Charles A Holt and Alvin E. Roth. "The Nash equilibrium: A perspective." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 101, no. 12 (2004): 3999-4002.

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ Peter Hammerstein and Reinhard Selten. "Game theory and evolutionary biology." *Handbook of game theory with economic applications* 2 (1994): 929-993.

⁶⁰ Ibid

The 1962 Caribbean crisis was the most relevant instance of an international event to which game-theoretic model was applied.⁶¹ Many researchers analyzed the difficult international situation at the time and incorporated it into most textbooks on political science and internationalist game theory. It has been repeatedly used as a prototype simulation game for the high ranking military and political leaders in the U.S. and NATO countries. After the end of the Cold War, game theory has undergone major changes in the field of application of international relations.⁶² For the classic issues of nuclear war and arms race, a theoretical analysis of the game is carried out on ethnic conflicts, nuclear non-proliferation, humanitarian interventions, establishment of democratic regimes, economic sanctions, the world trade and globalization, and supranational institutions.

Over the past 20 years, game-theoretic models of international relations have become more complex in terms of not only the mathematical apparatus but also the political theories and empirical data used in them. In the 1990s - 2000s, game-theoretic research in the international sphere developed mainly in five main areas; first in a multi-level analysis of international negotiations, second, neorealism, the doctrine of deterrence and the arms race, third, the beginning and end of the war, fourth, international terrorism, and lastly, international organizations.⁶³

The rationale of the Cold War led to the application of a state-centric approach to the analysis of international processes in the world politics. The domestic political factors were not given much priority and hence were practically not considered. Separate work on a two-level analysis of the decision-making process came out before, for example, an article by R. Eisner on a game involving as individual players the U.S. government, the U.S. population and Vietnam.⁶⁴ However, this approach was widely used only after the work of R. Putnam and the works of Jeffrey Banks. As per him, in international conflicts, each leader must decide to aggravate the confrontation, attack the opponent or retreat. In case of retreat, the fate of the

⁶¹ Frank Zagare. "A game-theoretic history of the Cuban Missile Crisis." *Economies* 2, no. 1 (2014): 20-44.

⁶² Ibid

⁶³ Duncan Snidal, "The game theory of international politics." *World Politics* 38, no. 1 (1985): 35.

⁶⁴ R Eisner. "War and peace: a new view of the game." *Department of Economics, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, USA* (1968): 71.

politician is likely to be disregarded by the population and his role in politics becomes less important.⁶⁵

Under what regime is it easier to participate in international conflicts: under authoritarianism or democracy? Earlier, a number of authors, like K. Wright, unequivocally spoke out in favour of authoritarianism. However, subsequently, Jeffrey Banks and a number of other researchers including A. Tarar, P. Partell and G. Palmer, in their writings confirmed the “Schelling hypothesis” that it is easier for democracies to participate in international conflicts and negotiations, as there are tougher internal restrictions of a negotiating position.⁶⁶

Game theory continues to play the logical role of clarifying informal political analysis, especially neorealism, within the framework of interpretation theory.⁶⁷ It is believed that the goal of countries pursuing self-protection and survival in a world full of anarchy is to pursue foreign policy. The game theory approach allows people to more clearly demonstrate the motives of various international relations subjects.⁶⁸ Robert used game theory variables to reveal what measures the state has taken to eliminate the threat of opponents on the international stage: militarization, reaching a compromise policy or establishing alliances with other countries.⁶⁹

Following the end of the Cold War, game-theoretic concept shifted from nuclear warfare to conventional warfare. At the same time, the number of studies on negotiations has increased in the first place. Jeffrey Banks wonders under what conditions a war begin between two rational states. He argued that the war begins between two rational states due to the inability to proceed to a settlement of the conflict; the inability to exchange reliable information about each other; and the indivisibility of the good, because of which there was a disagreement.⁷⁰ Before Jeffrey Banks study, the key emphasis was on negotiations with the aim of preventing war, recently, on negotiations to end hostilities by mutual agreement of the parties. One of the first in this sense was the work of D. Wittmann, subsequently, J. Wagner

⁶⁵ Robert D Putnam. “Diplomacy and domestic politics: the logic of two-level games.” *International organization* 42, no. 3 (1988): 427-460.

⁶⁶ Ahmer Tarar. “International bargaining with two-sided domestic constraints.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 45, no. 3 (2001): 320-340.

⁶⁷ Robert. “Realism, game theory, and cooperation...: 300-340.

⁶⁸ Robert Powell. *In the shadow of power: States and strategies in international politics*. (Princeton University Press, 1999), 775.

⁶⁹ Ibid

⁷⁰ James D Fearon. “Rationalist explanations for war.” *International organization* 49, no. 3 (1995): 379-414.

considered negotiating peace between unequal rivals, and S. Werner studied the specific conditions of the truces reached.⁷¹ A significant part of the research is devoted to the role of international mediation. Game model shows how the mediator helps to achieve equilibrium points.

The events of September 11, 2001, provoked a surge of attention to the problem of international terrorism, including from the viewpoint of game theory. A number of researchers, i.e., T. Sandler, H. Lapan, W. Enders, etc., used game theory to assess the substitution effect, which is about the willingness of terrorists to respond to counter-terrorism measures with terrorist acts of lesser or greater force.⁷² A new topic for research was the analysis of the vulnerability of buildings and structures in the context of international terrorism. In this case, game-theoretic models were used, similar to those used to calculate losses from intercontinental ballistic missiles.⁷³ A separate problem was the motivation of terrorists, primarily Al-Qaeda. In this regard, B. O'Neill's analysis of the role of honour and dignity in motivating the behaviour of ethnic groups, from which many leaders of the terrorist groups came out, is noteworthy.⁷⁴ A number of researchers, through game theory, have also studied the question of whether to negotiate with terrorists.⁷⁵ One of the main goals of terrorism is also to disrupt the peace talks.

After the end of the Cold War, the use of veto power in the U.N. Security Council has been significantly reduced. Through this body, the U.S. and its allies have been legitimizing their military operations. E. Voeten analyzes how to achieve positive voting results in the U.N. Security Council. V. Kerby and F. Gobler, as well as O'Neill, conduct a game-theoretic analysis of the urgent issue of reforming the U.N. Security Council membership system. The works of G. Garrett and G. Tsebelis, D. Felsenthal and M. Machover are devoted to the analysis of the decision-making system in the European Union, including using the Shapley-Shubik and Banzhaf indices. Through the use of repeatable games, G. Maggie and M. Morelli evaluate the

⁷¹ Donald Wittman. "How a war ends: A rational model approach." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 23, no. 4 (1979): 743-763.

⁷² Todd Sandler, and Harvey E. Lapan. "The calculus of dissent: An analysis of terrorists' choice of targets." *Synthese* 76, no. 2 (1988): 245-261.

⁷³ Ibid

⁷⁴ Barry O'Neill. "Mediating national honour: lessons from the era of dueling." *Journal of Institutional and Theoretical Economics JITE* 159, no. 1 (2003): 229-247.

⁷⁵ Ethan Bueno De Mesquita,. "Conciliation, counterterrorism, and patterns of terrorist violence." *International Organization* 59, no. 1 (2005): 145-176.

voting system in various international organizations, including NATO, U.N. agencies and Bretton Wood institutions.⁷⁶

It seems that the role of game theory in the domestic analysis of international relations will increase. The world is no longer unipolar before our eyes, and game theory will help answer questions about the expansion of regional security organizations like NATO, how to build relations with regional powers, what kind of policies countries will pursue within the framework of the developed/ core countries, and what are the chances of conflict resolution in Afghanistan and so on.

In the late 1960s, John Harsanyi introduced the concept of games with incomplete information and developed the concept of Bayesian equilibria.⁷⁷ He considered situations when one player has no information about the possible wins of another player, and he is forced to evaluate them (wins) probabilistically.⁷⁸ In the 1980-1990s, researchers proposed such concepts as “trembling hand” balance, own balance, strong balance, intuitive and reactive balance, evolutionarily stable strategy, and others that have not yet been widely applied in politics and international relations. An outstanding work in the field of analysis of international relations, which was largely ahead of its time, is Thomas Schelling’s “Strategy of Conflict”.⁷⁹ This is one of the first applied works where games with a nonzero-sum are considered in an unusual, at first glance, the context of US-USSR relations. The main thing, according to Schelling, is to convince the enemy to board the same boat with you, and then the enemy, in addition to the opposite, has a common interest not to overturn the boat. T. Schelling for the first time considered the concept of focal points, that is, such equilibrium points that stand out from the set of equilibria in connection with the general historical experience of the players.⁸⁰ For example, if the Afghan government and Taliban had missed to strike any deal, both the U.S. and Taliban could have been striving together to resolve the irritants for the materialization of the already concluded U.S.-Taliban peace agreement. This is because the

⁷⁶ William Kerby, and F. Göbeler. “The distribution of voting power in the United Nations.” *Models for security policy in the post-cold war era. Nomos, Baden-Baden, Germany* (1996): 221-30.

⁷⁷ John C Harsanyi. “Games with incomplete information played by “Bayesian” players, I–III Part I. The basic model.” *Management science* 14, no. 3 (1967): 159-182.

⁷⁸ Ibid

⁷⁹ Roger B Myerson, “Learning from Schelling’s strategy of conflict.” *Journal of Economic Literature* 47, no. 4 (2009): 1109-25.

⁸⁰ Ibid

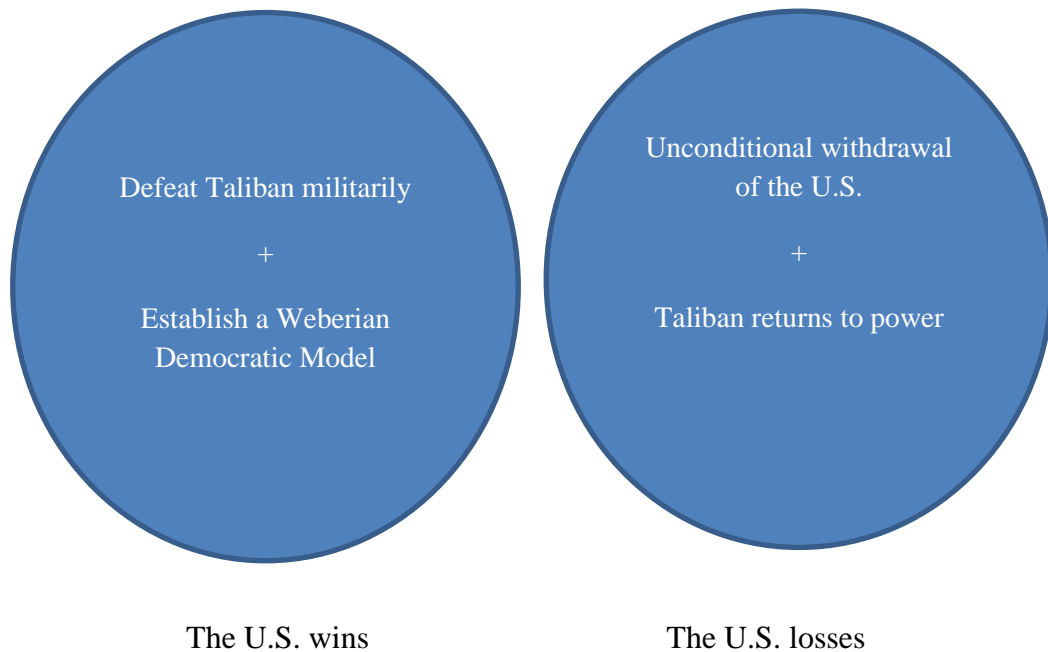
main players in the Afghan conflict are the U.S. and Taliban, while the Afghan government was used as an instrument for facilitation by the donor countries, primarily the U.S.

1.1.1. **Zero-Sum and Non-Zero-Sum Games in Afghanistan**

This particular case study follows both Zero-Sum game and Non-Zero-Sum game framework for the study of conflict resolution process in Afghanistan. The leading actors/players in the Afghanistan conflict included the U.S., Taliban, and Afghan government. In addition to the main actors, regional and extra-regional actors did play an important role (either as spoilers or catalysts) in influencing conflict resolution in Afghanistan. At the local level, the Afghan Taliban, local warlords, and the contemporary Afghan government were the main players. At the regional level, Pakistan, Iran, China, the Central Asian Republics and India were important actors. Besides the U.S. and Taliban, other local, regional and extra-regional actors played as catalysts or spoilers during the course of the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan. However, the U.S. exit from Afghanistan reflects on the fact that both catalysts and spoilers could not impact the Doha deal and the U.S. repatriation from Afghanistan. Despite an evident spoiler role by the very Ashraf Ghani government, the U.S. and Taliban did reach an agreement and acted upon vis-à-vis prisoner's release and troops withdrawal conditions. This shows that in the game was mainly between the U.S. with the support of some NATO member states and Taliban. For quite some time, the Afghan conflict had been viewed by both international and local actors as a zero-sum game where the success of either side will come at the expense of complete defeat of the other side. The U.S. and the Afghan constitutional government wanted to forcefully undermine the Afghan Taliban so that only a democratically elected government was able to have an overarching authority over entire Afghanistan. To materialize this, the U.S. adopted a massive military escalation strategy to defeat Taliban and take full control of Afghan territory. At the same time, the Afghan Taliban expected a similar zero-sum game with a complete unconditional U.S. withdrawal and subsequent seizure of power by the Afghan government. In pursuit of this zero-sum game, both parties, along with their respective local, regional and international allies, had engaged in the war in Afghanistan for nearly two decades. Failing to achieve this zero-sum game, the U.S. changed its policy and adopted a strategy of political reconciliation through peace talks with key players, in resolving the conflict in Afghanistan. And at the same time, Taliban after seeing the failure of the U.S. to withdraw its forces by December 2014 and a subsequent surge in international forces, realized that a zero-sum outcome was unlikely and hence showed some dynamism and started working for the non-

zero-sum outcome of the conflict. The recent US-Taliban peace agreement was the manifestation of the fact that the key players were seeking a non-zero-sum outcome of the conflict in Afghanistan. However, the exit of the U.S. and coalition forces indicated that Taliban had achieved a zero-sum outcome due the weak diplomatic position of the U.S. Though, the U.S. wanted some concessions in the post-withdrawal period in terms of a coalition government and permission for an oversight but failed.

Non-Cooperative or Zero-Sum Game



Cooperative or Non-Zero-Sum Game

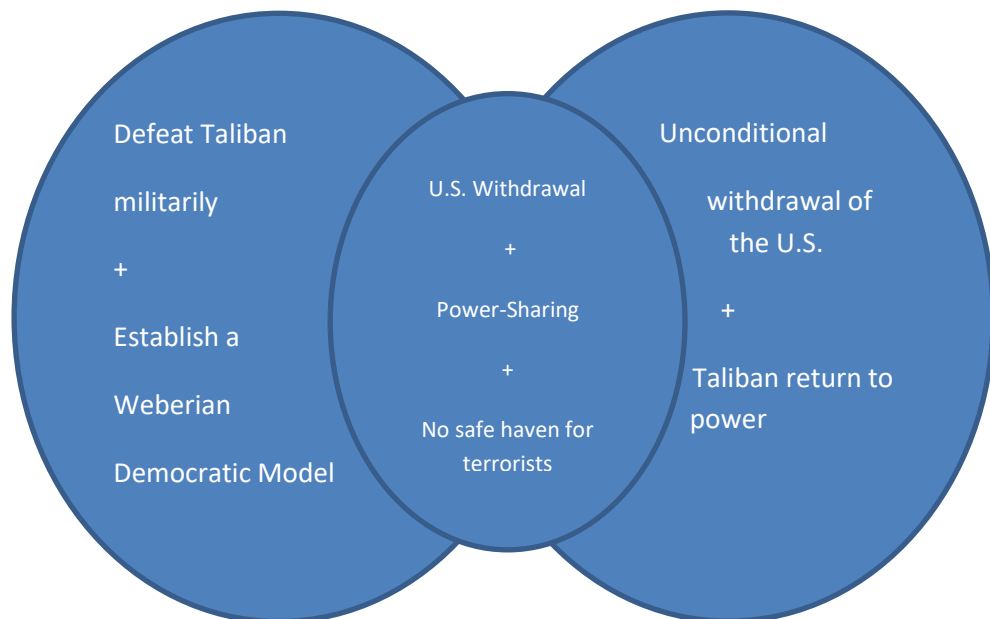


Figure 3: Illustration of Zero-Sum and Non-Zero-Sum Scenarios for Afghan Conflict

Though, the withdrawal of the U.S. forces from Afghanistan apparently shows a zero-sum outcome for Taliban, as they managed to return to power without giving any concessions to both local and international stakeholders; however, to further establish understanding on this outcome, few interviews were conducted.

In an interview with the ex-head of Counter-terrorism Authority (NACTA) in Pakistan, Mr Ihsan Ghani was questioned, if he sees the U.S. exist from Afghanistan as a zero-sum outcome for Taliban? if yes, is this outcome sustainable? He responded as “Absolutely Yes”.⁸¹ He argued that the Taliban got everything in Doha what they were seeking in 2001. With respect to the US strategic objectives, Afghanistan and Taliban are much worse than they were in 2001. In the 20 years, much could have been achieved, but due to the failure of the evolution of their governance structure, this was not attained. After the U.S. exit from Afghanistan, Afghan Taliban not as monolithic as it was in 2001 and Afghanistan situation has not settled enough to predict the future.

Responding to the same question, Mr Salman Javed said that “from IEA perspective it's a zero-sum game of outcome. From US perspective it was a short-term loss. The U.S. still holds the key to many triggering points of this region. Pakistan and Afghanistan both are bearing the brunt of sanctions, inflation and coercion tactics such as Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and UNSC resolution 1267. Unless Afghanistan isn't stable economically and governance isn't made easy, the country in particular and the region in general will remain volatile. Therefore, putting it out as a zero-sum outcome will not be wise at this stage.”⁸²

1.1.2. Prisoner's Dilemma and the trust deficit in Afghanistan

Non-zero-sum games are characterized by the lack of a clear winner and loser, and are a key area of study in game theory. The prisoner's dilemma is a well-known example of a non-zero-sum game, which was first developed by RAND employees Flood and M. Drescher in 1950.⁸³ This model has been widely applied in various fields, including international relations, international trade negotiations, international conflicts and arms races, international taxation

⁸¹ Interview with Mr Ihsan Ghani, ex-head of Counter-terrorism Authority (NACTA) in Pakistan, via email on October 13, 2022.

⁸² Interview with Mr Salman Javed, Director General- Pak-Afghan youth Forum (PAYF), via WhatsApp.

⁸³ Peter G Bennett. “Modelling decisions in international relations: game theory and beyond.” *Mershon International Studies Review* 39, no. Supplement_1 (1995): 19-52.

on multinational corporations, analysis of local conflicts, assessing prospects for cooperation within the framework of a security dilemma, and analyzing alliance competition.

The lack of trust between parties to the conflict is a fundamental aspect of the prisoner's dilemma in game theory. In the case of the conflict in Afghanistan, the Afghan government, the U.S., and the Afghan Taliban did not cooperate or trust each other to find a sustainable solution to the conflict, despite it being in their best interests to do so. This was largely due to a lack of trust and suspicion of betrayal between the parties. The Afghan Taliban vehemently denied any negotiations with the Afghan government, while the U.S. feared that the Taliban's military wings could use Afghanistan as a base for anti-American actions. Consequently, the prisoner's dilemma persisted among all the key players, and the conflict continued for an extended period of time.

Robert Axelrod laid down the basic principles for solving the prisoner's dilemma, including not betraying first, reciprocating both betrayal and cooperation, being predictable, and not struggling for scoring more points than the opponent.⁸⁴ Social scientists have concluded that self-centered individuals will strive to be kind, tolerant, and unruly for their selfish interests. An example of this is the strategic agreement between the Soviet Union and the U.S. in the field of nuclear arms control during the Cold War. The recent U.S.-Taliban peace deal is another example of this principle in action.

Despite exhausting coercive options, both sides realized that it was in their best interests to resolve the conflict. With the release of the U.S. and Afghan prisoners, the U.S. convinced the Afghan government to release five thousand Taliban prisoners, fulfilling the condition of reciprocal cooperation. The initiation of the intra-Afghan peace talks in Doha was another indication of the materialization of the earlier agreement between the U.S. and Taliban. Predictability was present in the developments towards conflict resolution among the players. Neither the Taliban nor the U.S. risked the peace talks by any proactive measures, demonstrating their commitment to the peace agreement.⁸⁵ However, the Taliban ultimately defected and secured power without sharing it with other local stakeholders through an intra-Afghan dialogue. This was a clear instance of bluffing in game theory, where players hide

⁸⁴ Robert Axelrod. "Agent-based modeling as a bridge between disciplines." *Handbook of computational economics* 2 (2006): 1565-1584.

⁸⁵ Ibid

information and intentions about actions to gain strategic advantage from their opponents during strategic interactions.

The game theoretic concept of the Prisoner's Dilemma elucidates the pervasive mistrust among parties to the conflict. Despite the mutual benefit of achieving a viable solution to the protracted conflict, the ex-Afghan government, the United States, and the Afghan Taliban failed to cooperate in a meaningful way for the past two decades. This lack of cooperation was rooted in the fundamental lack of trust among the key stakeholders. The Afghan Taliban adamantly refused any negotiations with the ex-Afghan government, which they considered illegitimate and a puppet of the United States. Despite the shared goal of resolving the conflict, both parties mistrusted each other and feared betrayal. Similarly, the United States could have saved a significant number of troops and billions of dollars if peace had been achieved in Afghanistan, but the fear of anti-US activities by the Taliban's military wings on Afghan soil hindered any attempts at cooperation.

The absence of trust in this conflict reflects the continued existence of the prisoner's dilemma, even after the withdrawal of US troops. This explains the US's reluctance to recognize the Taliban government and delay the release of Afghanistan's frozen funds. Moreover, the Doha peace deal highlights that the contending parties were seeking a non-zero-sum outcome, but the bluffing factor on the Taliban's side was not entirely evident. The Taliban had discerned the weakness in the US's diplomacy, as the latter was merely seeking a safe exit and dignified withdrawal of its troops, leading to the deflation of the Ashraf Ghani government and the eventual Taliban takeover even before the complete evacuation of US troops.

Thus, the prolonged conflict in Afghanistan illustrates how the prisoner's dilemma between the US and the Taliban persisted over the past twenty years. While cooperation could have facilitated a peaceful settlement and benefited all parties, the strategy of defection or bluffing employed by either side contributed to the continuation of the conflict and its adverse consequences. The following table illustrates the prisoner's dilemma between the two main players.

	U.S. use force (No Cooperate)	U.S. negotiates (Cooperation)
Taliban use force (No Cooperation)	Conflict sustains Loss of lives and capital on both sides	Conflict sustains but Casualties decreases
Taliban negotiates (Cooperation)	Conflict sustains and loss of lives and capital	Conflict Resolution happens

	U.S. use force (No Cooperate)	U.S. negotiates (Cooperation)
Taliban use force (No Cooperation)	-5, -5	-5, 5
Taliban negotiates (Cooperation)	5, -5	10, 10

Scenario A

Scenario B

	U.S. use force (No Cooperation)	U.S. negotiates (Cooperate but defects)
Taliban use force (No Cooperation)	Conflict sustains Loss of lives and capital on both sides	Conflict sustains but Casualties decreases
Taliban negotiates (Cooperate but defects)	Conflict sustains and loss of lives and capital	Conflict Resolution Fails

Figure 4: Prisoner's Dilemma's Scenario A and Scenario B

Scenario A shows a fictitious outcome where Taliban and the US cooperate, resulting in a settlement between the two players. If both player cooperate without defection, they both get 10 points each. Scenario B reflects the actual outcome of the conflict, where the final settlement of the conflict fails due to the defection of both sides. Apparently, from the Taliban's point of view, the result is a zero-sum result, as their main demand for the repatriation of the U.S. is being met and they return to power; however, the issue of resolving the actual differences between the two sides remained unresolved, which called into question the sustainability of peace in Afghanistan.

In this particular case of the U.S.-Taliban conflict, the U.S. States and the Taliban were the two players in a game. Each player had the option of either cooperating or defecting, and

the outcome of their actions depended on the actions of the other player. As per figure/ chart 3, In the case of both players cooperating, the outcome would have been mutually beneficial. However, in the case of one player defecting while the other cooperates, the defector would have gained an advantage, and the cooperative player would have suffered a loss. If both players defected, both would have suffered a loss.

From the Taliban's perspective, cooperation would have meant laying down their arms and accepting the authority of the Afghan government backed by the U.S., while defection would have meant continuing their armed struggle for power. From the U.S.'s perspective, cooperation would have meant providing aid and support to the Afghan government and its security forces, while defection would have meant withdrawing troops and leaving the Afghan government to fend for itself.

The U.S. and Taliban had engaged in multiple rounds of negotiations over the years, and each side had alternated between cooperation and defection. For example, the Taliban initially cooperated with the U.S. by providing intelligence on Al-Qaeda after the 9/11 attacks, but later defected by resuming their military attacks against the U.S. and the Afghan government. Similarly, the U.S. initially cooperated with the Taliban by entering into negotiations, but later defected by withdrawing troops unilaterally without a clear peace agreement, leaving the Afghan government vulnerable to the Taliban's advances.

According to the Watson Institute at Brown University, as of 2021, the conflict in Afghanistan had resulted in the deaths of more than 157,000 people, including over 43,000 civilians, 71,000 Afghan military and police, and 51,000 opposition fighters (including Taliban and other militant groups).⁸⁶ This data suggests that both sides have resorted to violent tactics, which could be seen as a form of defection in the prisoner's dilemma scenario.

According to the Congressional Research Service, as of October 2021, there were approximately 3,500 U.S. troops and 7,000 NATO troops in Afghanistan, down from a peak of more than 100,000 US troops and 40,000 NATO troops in 2011.⁸⁷ This data suggests that

⁸⁶ Neta C Crawford., and Catherine Lutz. "Human and Budgetary Costs to Date of the US War in Afghanistan." *Brown University Watsons Intitue for International & Public Affairs* (2021).

⁸⁷ Clayton Thomas, Tyler F. Hacker, Cory R. Gill, and Heidi M. Peters. *US Military Drawdown in Afghanistan: Frequently Asked Questions*. Congressional Research SVC, 2021.

the U.S. has alternated between cooperation and defection in its approach to the conflict, by increasing troop levels at times and withdrawing troops at other times.

According to a report by the U.S. Institute of Peace, the U.S. and the Taliban have engaged in multiple rounds of negotiations over the years, with the most recent round resulting in a peace agreement in February 2020. However, the agreement was not fully implemented, and the Taliban continued to carry out attacks on Afghan government forces and civilians.⁸⁸ This data suggests that both sides have struggled to establish a reputation for cooperation and to punish defection.

In game theory terms, this is known as the iterated prisoner's dilemma, where players have multiple opportunities to interact and can observe each other's past behavior. In this scenario, it is important for players to establish a reputation for cooperation and to punish defection, in order to encourage the other player to cooperate as well. Overall, the U.S.-Taliban conflict is a complex situation that cannot be fully captured by a single theoretical framework. However, game theory and the prisoner's dilemma provide a useful lens for analyzing the strategic choices and incentives of both sides in the conflict.

1.1.3. Bluffing Game Strategy in Afghanistan

In the classical theory of games, involving full information mean that concerned players are familiar with all the previous moves as well as rules of the game. This allows one to judge the intentions and capabilities of the competitor and shape the behavior in using an optimal strategy. In reality, information regarding state security is usually classified. That is why it is necessary to consider games with incomplete information, a significant role in the study of which was played by J. Harshani.⁸⁹ Let player A possess some information unknown to player B. In this regard, he has three possible strategies: hide information; transfer to player B all or part of the information; give the enemy incorrect information. In the latter case, it is misinformation that misleads the opponent about your intentions. Before the Nazi Germany attack on the Soviet Union, a non-aggression pact was signed. In card games, this kind of behavior is called bluffing. In his monograph, Neumann considers the role of bluffing in such a simple card game as poker with one distribution of 5 cards to each player and subsequent

⁸⁸ Stephen J Hadley, Zalmay Khalilzad Hesburgh, Seymour Martin Lipset, W. Scott Thompson, Allen Weinstein, Harriet Zimmerman, and J. Stapleton Roy. "United States Institute of Peace."

<https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/20130710-Hadley-SFRC-testimony.pdf> (2013).

⁸⁹ John C Harsanyi. "Games ...", 159-182.

betting. He notes that without a bluff you cannot win a large sum even with a very good deal of cards. To achieve such a win, multiple increases in bets is necessary and, if the opponent knows that the player will never bluff, he will understand after the first increases that the player has good cards and will not continue to raise his bets. At the same time, if a player is bluffing all the time with bad cards, the opponent will demand to reveal the cards at the beginning of the game. Thus, in principle, it is necessary to alternate bluffs with fair play in order to get a big win.⁹⁰ This situation was observed after Donald Trump cancelled peace talks with Taliban, after a U.S. soldier got killed in an attack by Taliban. Despite successful nine rounds of negotiations between the two parties, Donald Trump cancelled talks on the premise of the killing of a U.S. soldier by Taliban. However, both Taliban and the regional stakeholders reacted positively and kept the options open for future dialogue on the terms of the peace deal. President Trump visited Afghanistan on a short notice, where he expressed his willingness to restart negotiations with Taliban on a peace deal. This is how, the bluff used by Donald Trump was not exploited by Taliban and other regional and extra-regional players and hence realignment of the peace talks happened. Generally, Trump announcement for the cancelation of peace talks is also linked with the symbolic effect of the 9/11 anniversary. He would have received criticism from the families of the 9/11 victims for signing a deal with the terrorists, when they were about to remember their lost loved ones in the annual ceremony.

In Zero-sum games, it is mostly advantageous to conceal information regarding next move so that the opponent would not respond with an optimal strategy.⁹¹ With mixed strategies, randomization is used for this, that is, the choice of the next clean strategy using a random number sensor. In practice, they often simply hide information. Say, it is unprofitable for the enemy to know about the impending offensive. At the same time, in other cases, it is more profitable to let the enemy know about their capabilities in order to avoid his attack. For example, Israel deliberately leaked information about its possession of a nuclear bomb in order to influence Islamic Jihadist circles in Arab countries. Such a metered distribution of information beneficial for a given player is called signaling. The demonstration of new military equipment in parades is also an alarm. A detailed analysis of the use of games with signaling in political science is given in the works of Jeffrey Banks.⁹² In the recent past, Donald Trump announced South Asia policy, focusing on Afghanistan, in which he deliberately hides his

⁹⁰ Ibid

⁹¹ Jeffrey Banks. *Signalling games in political science*. (Routledge, 2013), 71.

⁹² Ibid

future intentions and information about operations in Afghanistan. He expressed that the administration “will not about numbers of troops” neither any premature troops withdrawal announcement. Unlike Obama’s ‘surge and exit’ policy, which signaled Taliban of a possible defeat of the U.S. forces and hence a resultant reaction in terms of increased military attacks against the coalition forces to ensure a zero-sum outcome, Trump administration had plans for the continuation of the old strategy without public announcement. This was indeed part of the game to hide information from Taliban, who could possibly be in confusion in their respective responses to the U.S. strategies. At the same time, the U.S. administration bombed the GBU-43/B Massive Ordnance Air Blast (MOAB), which is commonly known as the ‘mother of all bombs’ in Afghanistan, to signal the opponents of the potential power and capacity they have. This was a strong signal about the U.S. power and at the same time, peace talks were offered to Taliban, possibly to make sure that Taliban come to the negotiation table with non-zero-sum expectations. Jeffrey Banks signaling concept in the use of games is preferably for zero-sum outcomes, however, Donald Trump’s South Asia policy was meant for a non-zero-sum outcome of the game. Unlike his predecessor, Trump wanted to give signal of a strong offensive against Taliban if they continue struggling for a zero-sum outcome at the dawn of the U.S. withdrawal plans. This shows that Donald Trump did not changed the objective of complete withdrawal from Afghanistan but he just wanted to do the same in a dignified way by assuring a non-zero-sum outcome of the twenty years long war.

On the other hand, the second player, who receives less information from player A about the possible strategy, also has three strategic options; to believe the information coming from player A; secondly, not to believe and try to separate the truth from the lie; and thirdly, ignore the received information. The best possible option with player B is to wait for more information that is manifested in the actions of player A than his words. Player A, knowing this, can imitate the corresponding actions with the aim of cheating. Then player B needs to take action to make player A discover his true intentions and capabilities. For the military, this is reconnaissance in battle; for the partisans, “road checks” of a suspicious recruit. The same was done by Taliban, who in reaction to Trump’s military offensive, reacted with more military attacks in the country and took control of the key districts in Afghanistan. Taliban targeted a comparatively easy target, the local Afghan forces, who were fighting from the front. The U.S., who had already exhausted their military options in fight against Taliban, could not stand against the ongoing momentum for troop’s withdrawal from Afghanistan. The civil society in the west as well as in Afghanistan was putting pressure on the coalition forces to reach any peaceful conclusion to

avoid the loss of lives and property. So, both players successfully signaled each other of their potential strength, which led them to enter into peace talks, which again was part of the game to ensure maximum gains using negotiations tool.

R. Axelrod links the expediency of compliance with the cooperation policy to the possibility of meeting with the opponent for the second time. If the possibility of the second meeting is high, then even in the most “inappropriate” circumstances, cooperation will happen spontaneously.⁹³ For example, within NATO members, Turkey is not fully ready for an anti-Russia strategy in Syria but still cooperates and remains part of the organization. In the case of conflict in Afghanistan, for instance, Taliban had launched offensive against the Afghan government, which was an obvious ally/ partner of the U.S. government, but the U.S. response was not reciprocal. This U.S. behavior is a neo-normal, who traditionally reacts with even more intensity to any aggression against their interests. The very U.S. intervention in Afghanistan is a clear manifestation of the fact that the U.S. reciprocated to the 9/11 attacks, with an unprecedented force, despite the realization that Taliban were not directly responsible. So, R. Axelrod expediency of compliance for the joint cooperation vis-à-vis conflict resolution in Afghanistan is evident from both the U.S. and Taliban behavior.

In the analysis of international relations, games with incomplete information are used in relation to the containment and crisis response policies, in the works of James Morrow, Robert Powell, Mark Kilgour and Frank Zagar, Bruce Buen de Mesquite and David Lalman, Jeffrey Banks; and a two-level, domestic and international, decision-making process.⁹⁴

From the above discussion it is evident that the various variables of game theory nearly apply to the conflict resolution in Afghanistan. The theory provides a comprehensive framework to understand the strategies of the U.S and Taliban from 2001 till 2020. It helps in understanding the dynamics of the conflict and its potential prospects.

⁹³ Ibid

⁹⁴ Ibid

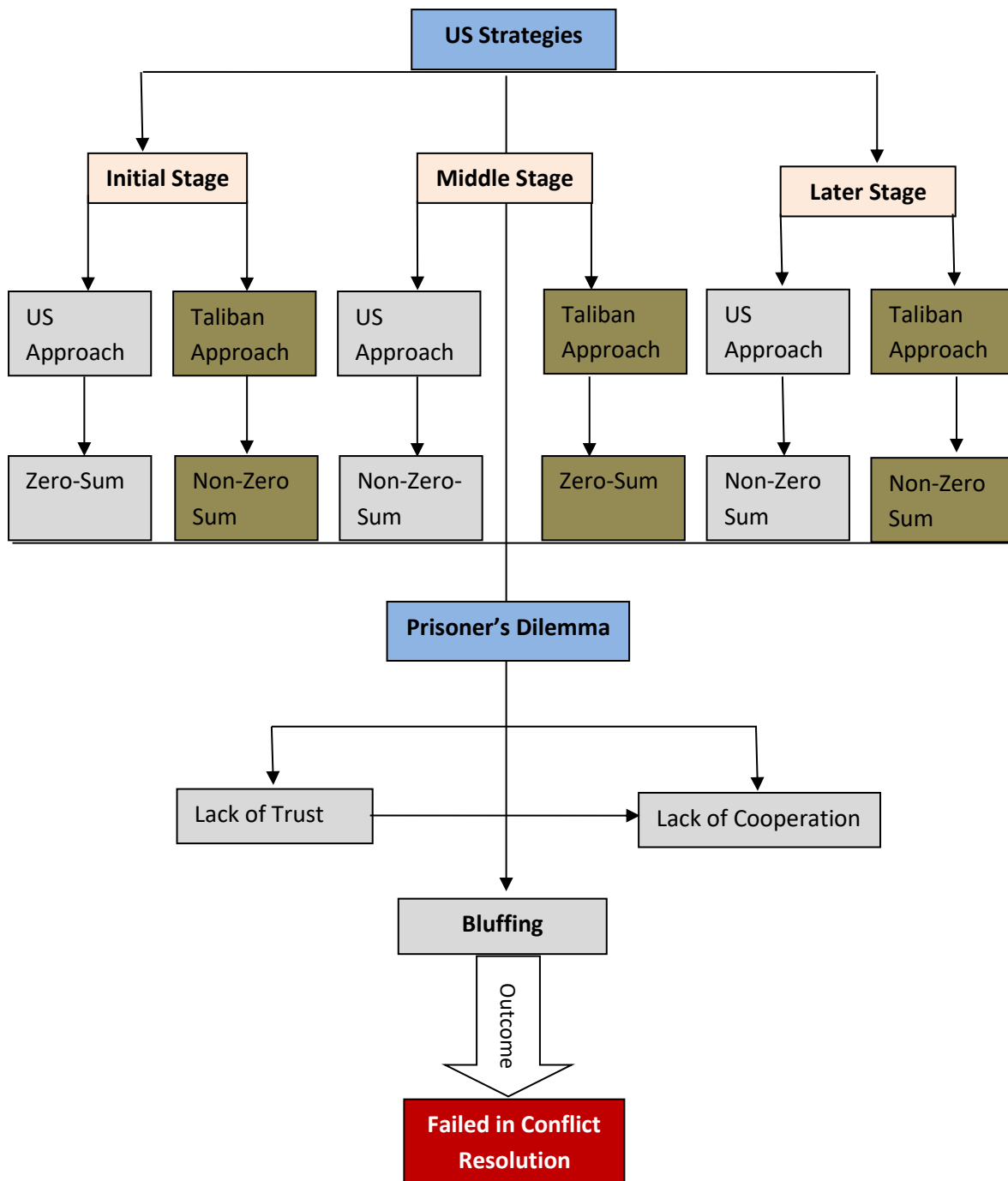


Figure 5: Game Conceptual Model for Conflict Resolution in Afghanistan⁹⁵

Conclusion

Game theory serves as a foundational framework within international relations theories to analyze the strategic behavior of all parties involved in the Afghan conflict. Despite the potential benefits of cooperation, including long-term dividends in conflict resolution, the

⁹⁵ Developed by the researcher for this particular thesis.

United States, Taliban, local Afghan stakeholders, and regional states, particularly Pakistan, fail to collaborate. Short-term costs are perceived by these parties, hindering a peaceful settlement.

In the long run, the United States could have saved significant annual costs and ensured the safety of its troops. By providing aid during the post-withdrawal period, the U.S. could have developed positive relations and supported Afghanistan's reconstruction programs. The Taliban, in turn, could have achieved stability within their country and potentially maintained power for an extended period. However, to sustain their hold on power, they would have needed to establish mechanisms for power-sharing with key stakeholders. Afghan citizens would have been able to live in a peaceful Afghanistan, free from insecurity and threats to life and property. Regional countries could have fostered geo-economic interdependencies for collective development.

However, in the short term, the United States has concerns about the Taliban's commitment to preventing terrorists from using Afghan soil against U.S. interests. Additionally, they are wary of regional powers, notably China, developing strategic relations with Afghanistan at the expense of U.S. interests. The United States also aims to avoid being labeled as a failed intervention in the country. The Taliban, on the other hand, distrust representatives of previous governments, including the Ashraf Ghani administration, fearing that compromising on their core Islamic emirate ideology would undermine their popular support. At the regional level, Pakistan perceives India's investments and growing political influence in Afghanistan as a threat to security, particularly in its troubled province of Baluchistan.

To avoid the perceived short-term costs of a peaceful settlement, the United States initially pursued a zero-sum outcome through the use of force. However, the protracted nature, economic costs, and limited results of military intervention compelled the U.S. to show readiness for a non-zero-sum outcome. Despite this readiness, strategic confusion persisted in U.S. policy towards the Taliban, as the U.S. continued to employ a bluffing strategy by simultaneously utilizing military force. The confusion surrounding peace talks and the use of military force can be seen as a manifestation of a bluffing strategy aimed at maximizing gains within the framework of a non-zero-sum outcome.

Meanwhile, the Taliban, initially open to compromise and power-sharing agreements in the early years of U.S. intervention, became more rigid due to perceived neglect and tactical gains on the battlefield. The failed 2014 troops drawdown plan and subsequent troop surge led the Taliban to show readiness for a compromised deal with the U.S. The February 2020 peace agreement between the U.S. and Taliban, though more favorable to the Taliban, also involved compromises on their part regarding their rigid ideologies and affiliation with al-Qaeda. Following the Doha peace deal with the U.S., the Taliban pretended to be ready for a non-zero-sum outcome, but their subsequent takeover of power in Kabul without reaching a power-sharing agreement with the Ashraf Ghani government revealed their bluffing approach. While this takeover appeared to be a zero-sum outcome in their favor, the prevailing prisoner's dilemma and bluffing strategy contributed to the failure of conflict resolution in Afghanistan, leaving the country grappling with economic, social, and political challenges.

Overall, various strands and concepts of game theory provide a comprehensive explanation of the trajectory of conflict resolution in Afghanistan. However, it's important to acknowledge that the U.S.-Taliban conflict is a complex situation that cannot be fully encapsulated by a single theoretical framework. Nonetheless, game theory and the prisoner's dilemma offer valuable insights into the strategic choices and incentives of both sides in the conflict. Understanding the historical background of the conflict in Afghanistan is crucial for comprehending the main strategies employed by the United States.

Chapter Two

Historical Background of Conflict and the U.S. Intervention in Afghanistan

This chapter focuses on describing historical developments related to conflict in Afghanistan, with particular attention given to pre-9/11 U.S. involvement. The goal is to provide a foundation for understanding the reasons behind the post-9/11 intervention in the country. Prior to delving into each case study, it's essential to grasp the historical background to better comprehend the current state of affairs. Consequently, this chapter aims to facilitate the analysis of subsequent chapters.

A review of Afghanistan's history regarding conflict and peace reveals that the country has struggled to establish a robust, centralized, and legitimate government. Various Afghan leaders employed different political strategies in attempts to create a stable Afghanistan, but these efforts proved unsuccessful. Some leaders heavily relied on Islam to mobilize people and foster national unity across the nation. In contrast, others aimed to model Afghanistan's governance on the secular Western democracy approach. However, both extreme forms of government approaches ultimately culminated in violence and extensive civil wars within the country.

The ongoing challenges to stability in Afghanistan are attributed to factors such as ethnic and sectarian divides, along with consistent external interference. Throughout different historical periods, various global powers sought to meddle in Afghanistan's internal affairs. This includes the British and Czarist empires during the "Great Game," the U.S. and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, and more recently, the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan in 2001, driven by a range of interests.⁹⁶

2.1. Early History of Statehood in Afghanistan

Afghans have inhabited the same territory for centuries; however, the foundations of a formal legal state were established in 1919.⁹⁷ Ahmad Shah Durrani is universally regarded as the founder of modern-day Afghanistan due to his role in ending the foreign occupation of

⁹⁶ Mohammed Nuruzzaman, "Revisiting the category of fragile and failed states in international relations." *International Studies* 46, no. 3 (2009): 271-294.

⁹⁷ Amin Saikal, AG Ravan Farhadi, and Kirill Nourzhanov. *Modern Afghanistan: a history of struggle and survival*. (Ib tauris, 2012), 43-220

Afghanistan in 1747. The year 1747 marks the conclusion of foreign dominance, and from that point onward, this region has not been directly governed by foreign powers. Throughout this entire period, local warlords and rulers effectively managed to stave off external interventions from various powers such as the Persians, the British Empire, and the Soviet Union. Afghanistan paid a steep price for resisting external intrusions, which resulted in underdevelopment across social, economic, and political sectors. Foreign intervention isn't the sole factor responsible for Afghanistan's destruction; power struggles among different warlords, civil wars, revolutions, and extremism have also contributed to the country's underdevelopment.

Afghanistan, being a mountainous country, has distinct tribal regions that are administratively guided by local traditions. As a result, Afghanistan's geography poses a significant challenge to establishing a strong central government. While Islam is a unifying factor across Afghanistan, it also holds the potential to divide Afghans, especially considering the sectarian elements within Islam that hinder full unity.⁹⁸

2.1.1. Crises Period (1919- 1928)

In September 1901, Emir Abdur Rahman, the architect of the modern Afghan state, passed away in Kabul. Through tireless campaigns, he succeeded in uniting Afghans and presenting them as a nation. With the support of the army and a nationwide taxation system, he constructed a semi-organized state known as the "Emirate of Afghanistan," out of a loose coalition of tribes, principalities, and regional rulers. Abdur Rahman's achievements provided the groundwork for the nation to maintain independence in the Hindu Kush region while Britain ruled India and Russia governed Central Asia.⁹⁹

However, Afghanistan's sovereignty bore notable weaknesses. Colonial powers had drawn the emirate's borders based on strategic considerations, often cutting across settlements of local peoples, particularly the Pashtuns. Britain retained control over the emirate's foreign policy, and Abdur Rahman's court and military activities depended on assistance from the British administration in India. Afghanistan's survival as an independent state hinged on both colonial powers, Russia and the United Kingdom, avoiding military conflict and maintaining

⁹⁸ Ibid, 71-110

⁹⁹ Martin McCauley, *Afghanistan and Central Asia: A Modern History*. 1st ed. London: (Routledge Ltd, 2016), 1-20.

the status quo. While Afghanistan professed political independence, it functioned as a British protectorate.¹⁰⁰

Habibullah Khan played a pivotal role in upholding Afghanistan's independence and establishing a centralized government. Employing a comprehensive approach, he involved local tribal leaders in regional governance, which initially helped quell local military conspiracies. However, this strategy proved short-lived, as tribal leaders eventually curtailed the rights of ethnic minorities and obstructed unpopular orders. Habibullah's reforms yielded mixed results; some local issues were addressed by government elites through these changes. He also resisted British Empire interference from India, pursuing an independent foreign policy for Afghanistan. Habibullah Khan was assassinated by a military officer in Laghman province on February 20, 1919, leading to a deterioration in the country's political climate. Consequently, the period from 1919 to 1928 is often referred to as the era of crises.¹⁰¹

Upon inheriting his father Habibullah's throne, Amanullah held an ambitious vision of modernizing Afghanistan on secular grounds. Drawing inspiration from Turkey's Kemal Atatürk governance model, Amanullah embarked on a similar national reconstruction effort. Despite challenges, he aimed to separate politics from religion, a complex endeavor in a country where religion holds deep significance. Amanullah's reign marked a time when Afghan women could appear in public without fear and travel freely to fulfill their needs. His administration promoted female education and employment. Another significant reform was Amanullah's replacement of the traditional judicial system with a modern court system modeled after Western principles, ensuring judicial independence from other branches of government. In pursuit of this goal, new civil and criminal laws were enacted for various cases. Amanullah believed that excessive military spending was counterproductive, leading him to reduce wages and other incentives. However, he failed to anticipate that such a dramatic transformation could spark a rebellious reaction. Unfortunately, he had already weakened the military by significantly reducing their allowances and privileges. Respected religious figures in Afghanistan accused him of anti-Islamic sentiment and undermining the connection between politics and Islam. Amanullah imprisoned and executed several key Mullahs and companions, including the Religious Judge of Hazrat Sahib of Shor Bazaar and Kabul.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Ibid

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 20-100.

¹⁰² Ibid

Amanullah was determined to continue the work of his predecessor, aspiring to make the country independent and modernize its shape. In 1919, Amanullah's forces marched toward the border with British India, demonstrating military preparedness that ultimately influenced the war-weary British to grant Afghanistan full sovereignty in August of that year.

Amanullah's reforms faced strong opposition from the religious community, triggering a substantial resistance movement in Afghanistan. These movements gained significant traction, forcing Amanullah to release political prisoners and allow his half-brother, Inayatullah Khan, to assume power. Despite this change, the resistance movement continued to grow, eventually resulting in the exile of the royal family. The nation's military was unable to suppress the anti-Amanullah movement, leading to the collapse of the government and creating an opening for Habib Kalakani to seize control. Kalakani formed a cabinet comprised of family and allies, thereby expanding his influence network within Afghanistan.¹⁰³

2.1.2. Conflict Period (1928-1929)

Habib Kalakani's brief rule, spanning from January 17, 1929, to October 13, 1929, marked a period of conflict in Afghanistan.¹⁰⁴ Even prior to Kalakani's reign, Amanullah's government had been contending with opposition from the religious community. Support from the nation's patronage network further exacerbated divisions along tribal, ethnic, and sectarian lines within the country. The government dismantled numerous of Amanullah's reforms, revoked the court system, entrusted it to religious scholars, closed down numerous girls' schools, and saw the destruction of a library. Many female students studying on scholarships in Turkey were summoned back, leaving their education incomplete. In contrast to Amanullah, Kalakani predominantly utilized religion to mobilize and unify the nation. However, the persistent ethnic and tribal divisions hindered his government from establishing a robust central authority with the majority's consensus.¹⁰⁵

General Sardar Mohammed Nadir Khan, commanding around 12,000 Waziri warriors, launched a military assault against the forces of Emir Habibullah Kalakani on September 18, 1929.¹⁰⁶ Through a decisive battle in Kharazia on October 5-6, 1929, he managed to defeat

¹⁰³ Martin McCauley, *Afghanistan and Central Asia...*, 2016), 5-17.

¹⁰⁴ Shahrani, M. Nazif. "King Aman-Allah of Afghanistan's failed nation-building project and its aftermath." *Iranian Studies* 38, no. 4 (2005): 661-675.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid

¹⁰⁶ Alex Marshall, "Managing Withdrawal: Afghanistan as the Forgotten Example in Attempting Conflict Resolution and State Reconstruction." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 18, no. 1 (2007): 68-89.

Kalakani's troops and assume control of the government. General Nadir Khan's forces seized Kabul on October 12, 1929. The conflict resulted in the loss of approximately 8,000 lives.

2.1.3. Post-Conflict Period (1929- 1933)

Nadir Shah, a military commander and follower of Amanullah, emerged as a prominent figure. Upon overthrowing Kalakani and assuming control of the government, Nadir Shah embarked on a mission to modernize Afghanistan by promoting education as a means to counter the dominance of religious institutions. Both King Nadir Shah (1930-1933) and King Zahir Shah (1933-1973) followed in the footsteps of these endeavors. During Nadir Shah's reign, many of the reforms were reversed, and the powers of local and religious leaders were reinstated. However, certain changes persisted under Nadir Shah, such as ensuring the equality of all citizens under religious law and emphasizing the importance of education, particularly for boys, although Pashtun tribes were exempted from it. The four major grammar schools established by Amanullah and partnered with foreign entities were permitted to continue their operations.

Nadir Shah introduced structural reforms in the country including the education sector as well. He established the first university in Afghanistan. Unlike his predecessors, who tried to monopolize power, Nadir Shah introduced a set of rules and procedures for others to join the throne. He tried to promote the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam for the legal order in the country. Since he was inspired by the Sunni Islam, his modernization plans were based on the Sunni Sharia law. The Loya Jirga was authorised to incorporate Sunni Islamic provisions into the Afghan Constitution and determine the rulers' legitimacy. Nadir Shah has made a very cautious and democratic effort to build a more representative government in Afghanistan; however, these efforts had never proven fruitful.¹⁰⁷ One of the problems with Nadir Shah's government was that the established constitution of his government had little room for the participation of minorities in the political processes. His family and friends had the maximum representation in the government, which undermined the idea of building a participatory and representative government. Whatever the intention of Nadir Shah's establishment of a democracy in Afghanistan, his tyrannical form of domination did not allow it. The end of the

¹⁰⁷ Barakat and Strand. "From Rhetoric to Reality..." 500-600.

Second World War was the beginning of the Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁸ This period also affected the national construction process in Afghanistan.

2.1.4. Crises and Post Crises Period (1933-1973)

Afghanistan, however, benefited from the East-West conflict. For a long time, the government was so competent in the blocks that both sides offered generous development aid. The U.S. and Germany built roads, power plants, vocational schools, and equipped factories. The Soviet Union focused on the material and personnel modernisation of the armed forces and highways and natural gas deposits. Based on foreign aid, a period began called the “Golden Years”; at least they were golden years for foreigners and Kabul’s inhabitants. The overall economic situation improved. There were new learning and employment opportunities. The country was so stable in 1959 that the lifting of women’s veil obligation faced little resistance.¹⁰⁹

During this time, however, the foundations of later disastrous development were laid. The help of the foreign countries improved Afghanistan’s economic fate but made it dependent. Foreign donors financed about 40% of public expenditure. The projects were supposed to yield income; however, most of them had to be supported by the Afghan government budget. Part of the aid, even the Soviet military aid, consisted of cheap loans that had to be repaid. Civil servants, teachers, farmers, day labourers, and small traders hardly benefited from the foreign aid. At the end of the 1960s, the economy began to stagnate, and the state budget shrank.¹¹⁰

During the Cold War, both the U.S. and Soviet Union supported Afghanistan through economic aid for infrastructure projects to win their support. From 1950 to 1960, dual aid helped democratize Afghanistan. After the imperial family stepped down Muhammad Daoud, the country implemented a more liberal constitution. Power was decentralized to ensure that the central government does not exploit authority. Due to the realisation of reforms in the country on the basis of democratic model, there emerged disagreements and conflict between the new authorities and traditional forces. During the 1950s and 1960s, Afghan students studying in international universities as well those enrolled at Kabul University were encouraged to work with the government to minimize dependence on the traditional illiterate

¹⁰⁸ Ibid

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

¹¹⁰ Shahrani, M. Nazif. “King Aman-Allah of Afghanistan's failed nation-building project and its aftermath.” *Iranian Studies* 38, no. 4 (2005): 661-675.

stakeholders.¹¹¹ Besides, the new constitution has a clause that prevents Daoud from retaining his power again. This had led Daud to establish relations with the Soviet Union and launched a coup in 1973 to regain power in Afghanistan. After that, he carried out many reforms to establish Afghanistan in the footsteps of representative democratic governance. At the time of Daoud and Shah Regimes, power was broadly decentralized; however, the patterns and procedures were not democratic. Daoud was not democratic, so he used authoritarian practices to represent the country's people. The government failed to establish a federal or integrated mechanism for population participation.¹¹²

Despite the small scale of national construction and democratisation efforts in the 1960s, they created a group of intellectuals who promoted modernisation in Afghanistan by promoting education. In this regard, scholars, both outside and inside Afghanistan, have raised the need for boys' and girls' education in Afghanistan. The era of the 1960s witnessed the spread of Western governance in major cities in Afghanistan, which caught the attention of traditional conservative groups, who were inspired by the religious ideology. However, this time, Afghanistan's modernization was different from the previous attempts. The Islamic scholars with acceptability of modernity tried to seek a middle ground and compatibility between the Islamic teachings and the western democracy. The modern Islamic scholars tried to launch a coup in 1975 but failed. In the next few years, modern Islamists were still disappearing in Afghanistan, and the ruling elites have adopted a policy of repression to keep people at bay from taking part in the political processes in the country. When the Islamic modernists failed in their effort to ouster Daud, more coercive measures were taken by the government to impose checks on the activities of the communist leaders and their supporters. The actions rather proved consequential as the communists made violent acquisitions in 1978, which led to the intervention by the Soviet Union in 1979. After the Soviet intervention, rulers tried to introduce large-scale reforms to modernize the country, which were traditionally unacceptable to their Islamic leaders. The country's religious leaders called for a Jihad against the current government and Soviet troops. The prolonged and fierce war between the Soviet army and the jihadist organisation had significantly destroyed Afghanistan, whose economic progress was already stagnant. Since 1979, the country's development is halted.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Ibid

¹¹² Barakat and Strand. "From Rhetoric to Reality..." 500-600.

¹¹³ Astri Suhrke, "Reconstruction as modernization: the 'post-conflict' project in Afghanistan." *Third World Quarterly* 28, no. 7 (2007): 1291-1308.

Consequently, it can be concluded that the early state-building work was unstructured and lacked a general public consensus. All efforts to establish national unity in the country resulted in further increase in the ethnic, tribal, and sectarian differences. Strife for the two extremes; shaping Afghanistan secular and religious country simultaneously, failed. Decentralisation was not based on true federalist principles, resulting in the rise of local rebellions. All of this led to a crisis of power legitimacy in Afghan politics, which has enabled foreign forces to come to the country to implement the international agenda of nation-building.

2.2. Soviet Union Intervention

On April 27, 1978, as a result of the revolution in Afghanistan, a Socialist People's Democratic Party (PDPA) came to power and proclaimed the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA). The country's supreme authority was the Revolutionary Council, headed by the Secretary-General of the Central Committee of the PDPA Nur Mohammed Taraki signed the treaty of friendship and neighbourhood cooperation with the former USSR on December 5, 1978. In October 1979, Taraki was assassinated by conspirators led by his deputy, Hafizullah Amin, who declared himself the new head of state. Under Amin, who strengthened his power with the help of mass repressions, the PDPA, whose ideology did not find a broad response among the people of Afghanistan, who mainly professed Islamic values, was losing its popularity more and more. A civil war broke out in the country, the so-called Mujahideen (freedom fighters) of various Islamic opposition groups began an armed struggle with the socialist government. Weapons and ammunition were supplied to them by NATO member countries, the Arab monarchies of the Persian Gulf, Pakistan, Iran, and China to the training camps in Pakistan and Iran's territory Mujahideen were undergoing combat training.

Since the 1950s, Soviet military, economic and technical experts were working in Afghanistan. With their help, the modernisation of the armed forces, hydroelectric power plants, factories, and other industrial facilities were carried out. After the socialist government took office, the Soviet Union had significantly increased its representation in Afghanistan. Between April and September 1979, the DRA's leadership repeatedly appealed to the Soviet leadership to send a large military contingent to the Republic to defend against external aggression. By the end of 1979, the country's situation was so complicated that the PDPA system was threatened with a decline. The Soviet Union feared that this might lead to an increase in Western countries' influence on the southern border of the Soviet Union and pose a threat of instability in the Central Asian Soviet Republics. Besides, the Soviet leaders

believed that changing Afghanistan's head is necessary because Hafizullah Amin was suspected to be associated with the CIA. Moscow relied on one of the opponents of Amin, the former Afghan ambassador to Czechoslovakia, Babrak Karmal.¹¹⁴

On December 12, 1979, the Secretary-General of the Central Committee of the CPSU, Leonid Brezhnev, and the Special Committee of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPSU decided to send Soviet troops to Afghanistan to provide international assistance to the Afghan friendly people against bad neighbours. The possibility of the country's anti-Afghanistan operation created favourable conditions. The reason for this decision was Article 4 of the "Soviet-Afghan Friendship Treaty of December 5, 1978, and Article 51 of the "UN Charter" (About the National Self-Defence and Objection Foreign aggression rights). According to the Soviet Defense Minister's instructions on December 24, 1979, the Soviet army will be stationed in the DRA, with a garrison and supervision of essential facilities.¹¹⁵

On December 25, 1979, along the Amu Darya River bridge near Uzbekistan's Termez city, the 108th Soviet Motorized Rifle Division entered Afghanistan, directing towards Kabul. Simultaneously, the military-transport aircraft with personnel and military equipment of the 103rd airborne division crossed the Soviet-Afghan border.¹¹⁶ Soviet paratroopers quickly established control over the administrative facilities of the Afghan capital. On December 27, special units of the Armed Forces of the USSR and the KGB of the USSR conducted Operation Storm-333 in Kabul to storm the palace of the PDPA Secretary-General Hafizullah Amin, during which he was killed. Babrak Karmal, the highest state and party leader of Afghanistan, was proclaimed loyal to the Soviet leadership.

On January 14, 1980, the U.N. General Assembly adopted a resolution protesting "foreign armed intervention in Afghanistan," calling for the immediate and complete withdrawal of Soviet troops from the DRA territory. On January 20, the U.S. President Jimmy Carter boycotted the Summer Olympics of 1980 held in Moscow. in response to the intervention of Soviet troops into Afghanistan (61 countries boycotted the game). During the entire period of the participation of Soviet troops in the Afghan conflict, the U.S. assisted

¹¹⁴ Milton Bearden, "Afghanistan, graveyard of empires." *Foreign Affairs* (2001): 17-30.

¹¹⁵ Olga Oliker, *Building Afghanistan's Security Forces in Wartime: The Soviet Experience*. (Rand Arroyo Center Santa Monica CA, 2011). 34-95

¹¹⁶ Ibid

Mujahideen with various modern weapons, including recoilless guns and Stinger anti-aircraft missiles.

2.2.1. Geneva Agreements and the Soviet Union withdrawal

In April 1985, the Soviet leadership began taking measures to reduce the military personnel of the OKSV in light of the perestroika process in the USSR and the proclamation of the policy of renouncing the use of force in international relations. In February 1986, Mikhail Gorbachev announced a plan for the phased withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. Shortly afterwards, Babrak Karmal was replaced with the Ministry of Security's former head, Mohammad Najibullah. Under his leadership, a new constitution was adopted, in which there was no room for communism and socialism, and Islam was proclaimed the state religion.¹¹⁷

On September 20, 1986, the first six OKSV regiments were withdrawn from the DRA. In 1987, the Afghan government, led by Mohammad Najibullah, formulated a new policy of "national reconciliation", inviting the opposition to cease hostilities and sit down at the negotiating table. However, the leadership of the Mujahideen refused to negotiate, declaring war to a victorious end. The remaining Soviet troops continued to support the DRA government.

On April 14, 1988, in Geneva (Switzerland), agreements were signed between the foreign ministers of Pakistan and Afghanistan with the United Nations' mediation and guarantees of the U.S. and Soviet Union. The USSR undertook to withdraw its contingent from Afghanistan within nine months; the U.S. and Pakistan had to stop supporting Mujahideen. By the time the agreements were signed, the USSR's contingent in Afghanistan had reached a hundred thousand people.

The Soviet troops withdrawal from Afghanistan was carried out in two stages. The withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan was carried out in two phases. Some 50,000 soldiers were sent back from Ghazni, Gardez, Kandahar and Lanshkarga in West, Jalalabad in the East, Faizabad and Kunduz in the north-eastern part of the country between May 15 and August 15, 1988. The rest of the troops were withdrawal in the second stage from December

¹¹⁷ In interview with Juman Khan Sufi, who is a historian and focuses on duranline and pashtunistan issue between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

1988 to February 15, 1989. In October 1991, the Soviet leaders decided to stop providing military assistance to the Afghan government. In April 1992, the Najibullah regime collapsed and he was assassinated. Resultantly the power was transferred to the Transitional Committee of the Jihadists to declare Afghanistan's Islamic State. In November 1994, Taliban radical Islamist movement entered the country's armed struggle, and later Taliban occupied Kabul and announced the establishment of their own rule in Afghanistan, which they called as Islamic emirate of Afghanistan.

2.3. Conflict during Taliban's Rule (1996-2001)

After the Soviet army was fatally defeated by a traditional religious group (Mujahideen / Taliban), Taliban created a de facto government in Afghanistan (Suhrke, 2007). The appearance of Taliban in Afghanistan aroused many opinions and forecasts in the world press and the Afghan diaspora's print media regarding their role in the conflict, the ultimate goals and plans. Some authors argued that Taliban are not an independent political force, but only a military vanguard, paving the way for the throne of former king M. Zahirshah.¹¹⁸

Others, clearly pretending to be accurate, argued that Taliban did not claim power at all. Their "liberation mission" would be completed as soon as they restore order in the country and transfer power to a legally elected government. Still, others expressed doubts about Taliban's professional ability to cope with government and urged them to transfer power to the "technocrats", who were in exile. According to Khan Baba, Taliban did not transfer power to the technocrats and started taking more interest in power politics. This was a sort of discouragement to many mujahideen, who primarily fought for social reformation rather than taking over government.¹¹⁹

Within a year, since Taliban took over Kabul, many of the predictions mentioned above did not come true. Taliban did not become an instrument for the return of the former monarch to power. Instead, they managed to capture most of Afghanistan and announce a new state entity in the country's history - the Islamic Emirate. At the initial stage of Taliban's rule in the country, the objective was to establish a truly Islamic caliphate on the principles of Islamic sharia. Many Afghans were not ready for such stricken version of Islam all of a sudden. Even

¹¹⁸ Brian Glyn Williams, "Soviet Rule, the Mujahideen, and the Rise of Taliban." In , 125-183.(Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 100-123.

¹¹⁹ In interview with Khan Baba, who fought against the Soviets and currently resides in Islamabad as refugee.

during the Prophet Muhammad (saw) God's commandments were implemented in phases, keeping in mind the human nature.¹²⁰

During Taliban's rule, the statebuilding efforts and socio-political reforms continued on the basis of Taliban's interpreted Islamic Sharia law. Islamic Sharia law kept on gaining influence in local politics and Taliban leader Mullah Omar took coercive measures to make people follow the country's law. In general, the focus of Taliban government was on theology and the establishment of a true Islamic society. Islamic teachings were spread to purge Afghan citizens. The challenges of solidarity in the country were solved through Islamization programs by peaceful and coercive means. Mullah Omer was the first in Taliban ranking and played an essential role in giving commands for decision-making. During their rule, Islam remained the only source of legitimacy for its supremacy and power. To avoid fragmentation and separation of local politics, Taliban used coercive measures to suppress anti-government voices and put people under their organizational structure.¹²¹

Taliban's coercion led to a brain drain, and educated citizens fled the country. Therefore, Taliban government further destroyed the country by applying strict Islamic law. Women were not allowed to get the modern education, thus limiting their role in the society to household. Moreover, the coercive measures under Taliban rule discourage investors and hence undermined nationwide construction work in the country. They discouraged the statebuilding programs on the basis of western democratic model and hence compromised the any potential international assistance. Non-governmental organizations in the country were rare and subsequently assembled under the strict rules of Taliban. Taliban were also hostile to the U.N.'s national construction tasks and even refused to negotiate with the international community on this issue.

Taliban's rule proved catastrophic for nation-building efforts due to widespread ethnic conflicts on power issues in Afghanistan. Taliban did not adopt an inclusive strategy that would give confidence to all races, sects and tribal groups, but they advanced their agenda through coercive measures. At the same time, their rule was seriously disputed by leading world powers because of massive human rights violations and failure to fulfil international obligations. Therefore, the entire period of Taliban's rule in Afghanistan was ineffective and destructive

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ In interview with Juma Khan Sufi, who is a historian and focuses on duranline and pashtunistan issue between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

for conflict resolution and statebuilding. The September 11 attacks and Taliban's refusal to secede from al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, led to direct conflict with world powers, which resulted in NATO intervention in Afghanistan in 2001.¹²²

2.4. Pre-9/11 U.S. Policies in Afghanistan

Informally, the United State and Afghanistan established diplomatic relations after the treaty of Rawalpindi in 1921. However, officially, the U.S. designated their Tehran based Minister Plenipotentiary, William Harrison Hornibrook, as non-resident envoy to Afghanistan. The first U.S. legation in Kabul was established in June 1942. Though Afghanistan showed neutrality during the second world, it enjoyed diplomatic relations with the U.S. The proceeding part of this chapter will critically analyse the varying U.S. strategies from the Cold War until the post-9/11 U.S. intervention in Afghanistan.

2.4.1. The U.S. policies during the Cold War

Afghanistan maintained neutrality during the Cold War, but it enjoyed dual add from both the U.S. and Soviet Union. During the Cold War, Afghanistan remained central in the U.S. foreign policy due to its cold war policies. After the Soviet troops entered Afghanistan in 1979, the territory turned into a battleground for the indirect confrontation between the cold war rivals, the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Until that moment, it was de facto believed that there was an unspoken understanding between the two superpowers: by providing economic assistance to the Kabul government, the USSR extended its influence to the northern regions of Afghanistan and the U.S. to the southern. The Afghan leadership found it profitable to use both parties' assistance for the sake of neutrality policy, which Afghanistan adhered to under King M. Zahir-Shah (1933-1973), and the Prime Minister and then President M. Dawood (1973-1978).¹²³

The situation was sharply complicated in 1978 after the overthrow of the Republican government by supporters of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). The U.S. perceived the USSR's subsequent attempt to extend its influence over the whole of Afghanistan as a violation of the status quo. Of particular concern in the White House was the possibility of access of the Soviet Union to the Persian Gulf oil reserves. In January 1980, President J.

¹²² Astri Suhrke, "Reconstruction as modernization... 1200-1290.

¹²³ Benjamin E Goldsmith, Yusaku Horiuchi, and Takashi Inoguchi. "American Foreign Policy and Global Opinion: Who Supported the War in Afghanistan?" *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49, no. 3 (2005): 408-429.

Carter (1977–1981) expressed that any external force attempt to gain control of the Gulf region will be perceived as an attack on the U.S. of America’s vital interests. The attack will be repelled by all necessary means, including military force.

To deter the “Soviet threat” in the Middle East, Washington sought to use the Muslim Jihad and Chinese factor. Strengthening the position of the Soviet Union in the Middle East was also not wanted in Islamabad. Pakistan understood the entry of Soviet troops into Afghanistan as a sign of expanding Soviet-Indian cooperation against its interests. The creation of Mujahedeen was the outcome of protests in the Muslim world against the USSR’s military action in Afghanistan. Pakistan, Arab countries and China supported Afghan Mujahideen in their freedom struggle against the Soviet Union. With the help of Pakistan, China, and the Middle East’s Muslim countries, in the 1980s, Washington opted for military and financial support for the Afghan armed opposition.

2.4.2. The U.S. policies during the Soviet Intervention

The entry of Soviet troops into Afghanistan in December 1979 led the White House into confusion. It was perceived as an unprecedented invasion of the USSR in the affairs of a neutral state. In one of his first speeches in January 1980, J. Carter stated that the USSR invasion in Afghanistan had changed his attitude towards the Soviet Union more than anything else over the years of my tenure”. The White House decided to curtail the policy of pragmatic cooperation with the Soviet Union, which lasted throughout the mid-1960s and 1970s. Opponents of the confrontation course led by Secretary of State S. Vance (1977-1980) were forced to resign.¹²⁴

The then U.S. president, Carter, announced his intention to establish cooperation with any state, ready to join the U.S. fight with the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. He expressed his objectives that his government will strengthen our political and military ties with other states in this region. He convinced the Muslim countries leadership that there are no irreconcilable contradictions between the U.S. and any Islamic state. He assured Muslim countries that the U.S. respect Islam and are ready to cooperate with all Muslim countries. A pragmatic approach was also chosen for foreign policy communication with the Islamic Republic of Iran, which continued to hold American citizens hostage. Cartel administration expressed that they will convince Iranian leaders about the threat from the Soviet Union intervention in Afghanistan.

¹²⁴ Ibid

The U.S. knew that Iran's hostility makes it difficult for them to respond to Afghanistan's challenge. These statements from the U.S. were meant to strengthen coalition against the Soviet Union forces in Afghanistan.

The U.S. had indeed assisted the Afghan opposition, at least since July 1979. The CIA supported the militants in Afghanistan and the Pakistan Interagency Intelligence Agency (ISI), which had an extensive network of agents on Afghanistan's border.

Meanwhile, the internal party struggle in the PDPA in September 1979 led to the removal and assassination of M. Taraki (1978–1979) by supporters of Prime Minister H. Amin (1979). Massacre of thousands of Taraki followers swept through the country. In Moscow, this was regarded as the treacherous destruction of the Afghan revolution's cadres and figures. Besides, the Soviet leadership had reason to suspect Amin of ties to the CIA. Fearing for the April Revolution's future achievements, members of the Soviet Politburo were inclined to dramatise American politics' influence on Afghanistan's situation.

At first, the U.S. aid to Mujahideen against the Kabul government was not detrimental, but they contributed to the ongoing political development. The main reasons for the Afghan population's resentment were the vast discrepancy between the coup and the traditions of "seizure of power" developed in Afghanistan over the short hundred years of its independent development. The policy of deliberate tussle of traditions pursued by the new regime finally aggravated the discontent. Resistance to the authorities in Afghanistan was rose under nationalistic and religious slogans.¹²⁵

The military opposition to the Kabul government was motley: some were internal (Tajiks, Uzbeks), some were external (Pashtuns roaming the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan). In the south-west of the country, the Afghan Hazaras were also not wholly subordinate to the government, receiving assistance from their Shia fellow believers from Iran. In the southeast, Afghan dissidents were bordering with Pakistani Pashtuns in Peshawar, where Arab jihadists penetrated and settled.

¹²⁵ Taisiya V Rabush. "The Provision of Indirect Military Support by US Administration to the Afghan Mujahideens in the 1980s." *Vestnik Volgogradskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta. Seriya 4, Istoriia, Regionovedenie, Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniia* 22, no. 1 (2017): 81.

Pakistan factor in the U.S. policies towards Afghanistan

Soviet Union intervention in Afghanistan and Pakistan's decision to participate in the war for maintaining its territorial integrity. Pakistan was already facing a constant challenge from Afghanistan in the form of "Greater Pashtunistan" movement, which the Pashtuns on both sides of the Pak-Afghan border wanted to materialise. Pashtuns in Afghanistan comprise almost 42% of the total population, making it a majority group. On the other hand, Pashtuns in Pakistan are almost 9% of the total population but are more in number than in Afghanistan.¹²⁶ Most of the Pakistani Pashtuns are settled in the Khyber-Pakhtun-Khwa province, but some are scattered throughout Pakistan. The former tribal region in Pakistan long Afghanistan's border was economically undeveloped, and overpopulated. It remained subordinate to Islamabad but essentially lived independently. From the fragments of Afghanistan and Pakistan's territories, the Pashtuns sought to create a single state with a Kabul centre.¹²⁷

The border of Afghanistan and Pakistan was demarcated between British troops and Emir Abdurrahman Khan's units, and fixed it as the border of spheres of influence of British India and Afghanistan under the agreement of 1893. Not a single Afghan government in the 20th century recognised the border's legal status and claimed to include Pashtuns' territory in Afghanistan. The latter involuntarily found itself embroiled in Afghan domestic politics, unsuccessfully trying to promote the coming to power in Kabul of the government, ready to consolidate the border's legal status.¹²⁸

Along with the traditional leaders of the Pashtun tribes, resistance to the "invaders" was led by field commanders who advanced in the late 1970s and early 1980s, who claimed to be leaders bypassing the established power hierarchy. The effectiveness with which the young Pashtun Islamists conducted military Jihad in Afghanistan made them the primary recipients of military assistance received through Pakistani intelligence channels. Pakistan consciously prioritised field commanders over tribal leaders. They were less sensitive to the idea of "Greater Pashtunistan," devoting all their strength to Jihad against the USSR and the struggle for power with other field commanders.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Amin Saikal, "Afghanistan and Pakistan: the question of Pashtun nationalism?." *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 30, no. 1 (2010): 5-17.

¹²⁷ Goldsmith, Horiuchi, and Inoguchi. "American Foreign Policy... (2005): 408-429.

¹²⁸ In interview with Juma Khan Sufi, who is a historian and focuses on Duranline and Pashtunistan issue between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

¹²⁹ Saikal. "Afghanistan and Pakistan...", (2010): 5-17.

It should also be taken into account that the Pashtuns traditionally enjoyed influence in the middle and top command level of the Pakistani army and accounted for about 18% of the staff of the officer corps of the army and special services of Pakistan.¹³⁰ Pakistan and Afghanistan's complicated political relationship is mostly due to long-standing instability, the constant struggle between the military and civilian elites, and Islamists' extremism. These factors historically formed a complex political environment in which any Pakistani government acted, compelled to listen to the wishes of the influential part of Pakistani officers represented by ethnic Pashtuns.¹³¹

Being a critical link in the fight against Soviet troops in Afghanistan, Pakistan sought to take advantage of its new position. Islamabad was planning to turn a significant part of the military and financial assistance from the U.S. and Saudi Arabia to strengthen its regional rivalry position with India. Mujahideen got trained in militant camps to fight the "infidels" both in Afghanistan and in Indian occupied Kashmir.

In March 1980, Pakistan's President M. Zia-ul-Haq (1978–1988) rejected a U.S. offer of \$ 400 million in financial assistance, citing fears of harming its international prestige in the eyes of the Muslim world. The real reason for the refusal was dissatisfaction with the "symbolic" amount of financial assistance. After lengthy negotiations, a cooperation agreement was nevertheless concluded in September 1981. According to it, Pakistan got the opportunity to purchase forty F-16 fighters and financial assistance, amounting \$ 3.2 billion, over six years.

The Republican administration of R. Reagan (1981–1989) was concerned about the possibility of becoming embroiled in a conflict between Pakistan and India. Therefore, an agreement to assist Pakistan was accompanied by a statement that it did not mean a military alliance. The U.S. Congress, for its part, was worried about Pakistan's nuclear program, which had been gaining momentum since the mid-1970s. In this regard, the Pakistani side was informed about nuclear tests' consequences; all assistance would be ceased. The U.S. President pledged to report annually to Congress on the status of the Pakistani nuclear program. This report served as an indicator of the U.S.' willingness to put up with Pakistan's violation of the

¹³⁰ Fair, C Christine and Shuja Nawaz. "The changing Pakistan army officer corps." *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 34, no. 1 (2011): 63-94.

¹³¹ Amin Saikal, "Afghanistan and Pakistan ... (2010), 5-17.

NPT regime to fight against the USSR in Afghanistan. For the first time, Congress banned the provision of assistance to Pakistan based on a presidential order in 1990.

In the early 1980s, a general outline was developed to cooperate between the U.S., Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to train Afghan Mujahideen in Pakistan. The campaign was funded by the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, who transferred aid (an estimated sum of \$ 40 billion) to Pakistan in 1979–1989. The U.S. intelligence agents monitored the supply of American weapons to the Mujahideen and trained them to handle new weapons. However, Pakistan played a leading role in supporting the opposition, coordinating among the Mujahideen groups, providing them with organisational assistance and identifying priority allies among disparate field commanders.

This state of affairs met no objection in Washington. The expectations of the White House administration were not related to the military victory of the Mujahideen. In a memorandum from the State Department in 1980 stated: “It is likely that the Mujahideen will be able to divert about 85,000 Soviet troops for a long time and more ... [however, they are fragmented, deprived of centralised command and not able to force the USSR to withdraw troops”. The U.S. was not interested in the level of popular support for Mujahideen groups and their ability to form a government in case of victory. The fate of the Afghan Mujahideen interested Washington to the extent that they could threaten the Soviet Union. According to the head of the CIA Regional Office in Pakistan in 1986–1989, the U.S. prepared to fight the USSR until the last Afghan.¹³²

The withdrawal of Soviet troops in February 1989 did not entail an immediate fall in the power of the PDPA.¹³³ The Jihad against the “godless regime” continued, but questions of the struggle for spheres of influence between field commanders began to come to the fore. Despite the cessation of U.S. financial and military assistance, Pakistan continued to support the Pashtun militants in Afghanistan and coordinate their activities with its intelligence agents’ help. Similarly, financial receipts from Saudi Arabia did not stop. For its part, the USSR sought to create conditions for establishing cooperation with Tajik and Uzbek field commanders in Afghanistan, after the departure of Soviet troops. Iran sought to create a buffer zone on its border with Afghanistan, which supported the Hazara community’s field commanders.

¹³² Mark Galeotti. *Afghanistan: The Soviet Union's Last War*. (Routledge, 2012), 161.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

By the end of the 1980s, active external interference in Afghanistan's internal affairs continued for more than ten years. As a result of the 1978 coup, the traditional power system based on a balance of interests of various tribes was destroyed. The tradition of high autonomy of the tribal leaders led, to the fact that Kabul's central government for centuries was forced to reconcile their interests to preserve a single state. The civil war from 1978–1989 led to the first roles of field commanders and Arab participants in Jihad, who took the place of tribal elders.¹³⁴ External intervention strengthened their power and contributed to the continuation of the Civil War after the withdrawal of Soviet troops.

2.4.3. Post-Cold War Era Policies (after the Soviets withdrawal)

The success of the Geneva talks led to a change in American politics about the situation in Afghanistan. Under the pretext of promoting “self-determination of the Afghan people”, the U.S. headed for the overthrow of the pro-Soviet DRA regime. Deputy Secretary of State D. Kelly at Congressional hearings in 1990 confirmed: “We believe that a stable political settlement [in Afghanistan] is impossible while Najibullah remains in power.”¹³⁵

In 1988, the post of the special representative of the U.S. president to the Afghan opposition was established. His tasks included finding ways to overcome differences between field commanders in Afghanistan. A debate broke out between the CIA and the State Department about which Afghan field commanders should play a leading role in the post-war settlement. The CIA advocated for Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (Pashtun), who enjoyed the full support of Pakistan. At the same time, diplomats insisted on Ahmad Shah Masoud (Tajik), with whom the U.S. maintained contact without Pakistan. The final decision to support one of the field commanders was not made. During a congressional hearing in June 1989, a State Department spokesman outlined the administration's official position, arguing that the neither of the opposition groups are supported to the detriment of the others.¹³⁶

In the early 1990s, Washington gradually distanced itself from Afghan issues. At congressional hearings in March 1990, deputies from the Democratic Party spoke for the first time that Afghanistan's post-war reconstruction would require significant resources and time. Congressmen argued for non-interference, arguing that, even if we knew what to do in this

¹³⁴ Ibid

¹³⁵ Tom Lansford, *A Bitter Harvest: US Foreign Policy and Afghanistan*. (Florence: Routledge Ltd, 2017), 146-148.

¹³⁶ Ibid

situation, we most likely could not have supported our interest in Afghanistan long enough to achieve an acceptable result.

Against this background, in April 1992, Mujahideen troops captured Kabul and overthrew the government of M. Najibullah. In the territories controlled by the opposition, the Islamic State of Afghanistan (IGA) had been proclaimed. The U.S. President George W. Bush (1989-1993) praised these events as signs of progress resulting from American policies to help end the war by helping the Afghan people's self-determination. The day after the Mujahideen took over Kabul, the state department issued a statement in which it expressed support for the new government and expressed hope for early stabilisation of the country's situation¹³⁷. The U.S. officials outlined in the most general terms the wishes of the new leadership of Afghanistan: not to threaten political stability in the region, especially on the border with Pakistan and Central Asian states, and not to contribute to the spread of Islamism. Thus, the U.S. recognised the legitimacy of Taliban regime and established diplomatic relations with it. In June 1992, negotiations were held to resume the work of the American embassy in Kabul.¹³⁸ However, the fighting that soon began between the Mujahideen prevented these plans. The U.S. diplomatic contacts with warring factions began and were carried out by the American consulate in Peshawar, Pakistan.

The White House administration's reflections on the place of "new Afghanistan" in the imperatives of American foreign policy inevitably led to the conclusion that, according to adviser George W. Bush, "our goals in Afghanistan are quite limited." Peter Thomsen, the former U.S. ambassador to the Afghan opposition, spoke out against a narrow understanding of the tasks in Afghanistan, urging not to give up political assets obtained at a high price".¹³⁹ However, the U.S. policy towards Afghanistan in the 1990s was not based on significant national interests, instead of Pakistan's relations. While the U.S. attention was drawn to events in Europe, and the Pakistani nuclear program dominated bilateral relations, Benazir Bhutto (1993-1996) decided to use the opportunity to implement its plans in Afghanistan.

The principal hopes were assigned to the head of the Pashtun detachments from G. Hekmatyar. In the mid-1980s, Hekmatyar was supported by Pakistan's intelligence. Despite

¹³⁷ Ralph H Magnus, "Afghanistan in 1996: Year of Taliban." *Asian Survey* 37, no. 2 (1997): 111-117.

¹³⁸ Kenneth Katzman, "Afghanistan: post-war governance, security, and US policy." (Washington, Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, 2008), 3.

¹³⁹ Ibid

financial and military support from the government of Pakistan, Hekmatyar enjoyed freedom in his actions. Since the beginning of the 1990s, the party of G. Hekmatyar actively joined the armed struggle for power in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, even then, Islamabad feared that the field commander might get out of control and refuse to fulfil the mission entrusted to him - to consolidate the Afghan-Pakistani border's legal status.

With the Gulf War outbreak in 1991, Hekmatyar came out in support of Saddam Hussein due to inspiration from the 'Muslim unity' ideology. The U.S. sharply condemned Hekmatyar and pulled away from Pakistan's policy of supporting him. At a hearing in the U.S. Congress in 1991, Under Secretary of State J. Kelly suggested that in the future not to connect our expectations with Hekmatyar. On October 2, 1992, the U.S. State Department condemned Hekmatyar's decision to use force against the Afghan government and called them as acts out of personal ambition. The U.S. further stated its clear opposition to forces that use violence to influence the political process, which seems central to the resolution of the Afghan conflict."¹⁴⁰

Meanwhile, the Pashtun troops of Hekmatyar's successful actions in the intra-Afghan struggle led in March 1993 to the signing of the Peace Agreement on the Separation of Powers between the President and the Prime Minister, in Islamabad by the eight largest Mujahideen leaders groups.¹⁴¹ Pakistan was expecting the legalisation of the Pak-Afghan border under Hekmatyar's leadership in Afghanistan. As per the agreement, Hekmatyar became Afghanistan's prime minister. However, seemed less interested in the legal consolidation of the Pak-Afghan border status. The lack of interest in the legalising the Pak-Afghan border caused sharp discontent in Pakistan. It caused a shift in Islamabad's interests in 1994 from Hekmatyar to Taliban comprising Pashtun youth of southern and southeastern Afghanistan. By its nature, the movement resembled Islamic revolutionaries in Iran and professed a radical form of Sunni Islam. Later it became known as Taliban.¹⁴²

Under the slogans of establishing order under Sharia law, the movement quickly expanded its supporters. In early 1995, Taliban armed forces launched an offensive against the coalition government of the Mujahideen. Within a few months, Hekmatyar's troops were defeated. In September 1996, Taliban occupied Kabul without a fight and proclaimed the

¹⁴⁰ Olivier Roy, "Taliban: A strategic tool for Pakistan." *Pakistan—Nationalism Without a Nation* (2002): 149-160.

¹⁴¹ Khalid Manzoor Butt, and Azhar Javed Siddqi. "Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations from 1978 to 2001: An Analysis." *South Asian Studies* 31, no. 2 (2020): 733.

¹⁴² Ibid

Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan in the controlled territories. Former DRA President M. Najibullah was executed. The ISA government, led by B. Rabbani, took refuge in the north of the country, and G. Hekmatyar fled to Iran began training for new units from among Afghan refugees.¹⁴³

Taliban regime received recognition from only three countries, namely Pakistan, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia. These countries began to provide financial and organisational assistance to the new Islamic regime. A diplomatic mission of the Kabul government of Taliban was also opened in Turkmenistan.

2.4.4. Regional factor in the U.S. policies towards Afghanistan

In the mid-1990s, the U.S. strengthened its perception of the Afghan situation in the context of the Central Asian region's problems. The famous American political scientist Fiona Hill wrote in 2001: "U.S. policy towards the Caucasus and Central Asia over the past decade has been marked by a clear lack of a trunk line."¹⁴⁴ Weak interest in the region's affairs made it difficult for the U.S. to become familiar with its real problems and emerging opportunities in Central Asia.

Middle Eastern and Central Asian regions were central to American politics in the mid-1990s on the agenda for the politico-diplomatic and economic isolation of Iran, accused by Washington of supporting terrorists and creating nuclear weapons. The second goal of U.S. foreign policy in the region was to gain access to the Caspian basin's oil resources, the volume of which was estimated at 200 million barrels. The third priority was to strengthen the independence of the newly formed Central Asian states from Russia. The implementations of all three areas of U.S. political strategy in the region were closely linked with the stabilisation of Afghanistan's situation.¹⁴⁵

In August 1996, the U.S. Congress approved the sanctions against Libya and Iran "Law on Sanctions against Iran and Libya, which left no possibility for creating an energy infrastructure connecting the Caspian Sea's energy-bearing regions and the Persian Gulf across

¹⁴³ Ibid

¹⁴⁴ Fiona Hill, "A Not-So-Grand Strategy: U.S. Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia Since 1991", *Brookings*, (2001): 17. Accessed at: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/a-not-so-grand-strategy-u-s-policy-in-the-caucasus-and-central-asia-since-1991/>

¹⁴⁵ Rashid, "Afghanistan: Ending the policy quagmire..." 395-410.

Iran. Seeking to secure the future transportation of hydrocarbons in the Caspian Basin, the U.S. National Security Council in 1995-1996, proposed to develop new routes for the delivery of Caspian oil, located as far as possible from the borders of Iran. The projects of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and the Central Asian gas pipeline were created. The latter was supposed to connect the gas fields of Turkmenistan with the ports of Pakistan while passing through Afghanistan's territory.

In July 1997, Under Secretary of State S. Talbott announced the start of a policy to stabilise the Central Asian region to develop the Caspian deposits. Terrorism, religious and political extremism was named among the leading regional threats. In July 1998, the post of special ambassador for the Caspian basin's energy resources was created in the State Department. At the same time, the U.S. initiated financial and humanitarian assistance programs for Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. It began to study the use of Taliban factor to ensure the safe exports of energy products through Afghanistan.¹⁴⁶

2.4.5. The U.S. policies during Taliban rule

The first contacts of the American representatives with Taliban were made in 1995. The U.S. Islamabad Embassy reported to Washington that Taliban are striving to establish a unified government in Afghanistan and restore peace. At the same time, there were reports of gross violations of human rights in territories controlled by Taliban. There were growing fears that radical Islamism would spread to the neighbouring republics of Central Asia. Traces of the attack at the World Trade Center in New York in 1993 were linked to Afghanistan.¹⁴⁷ It was widely circulated in media that, the capture of the Muslims guilty of the attack in New York, was the final and saddest chapter in the history of one of the greatest successes of American foreign policy of the 1980s - the victory of Islamic resistance over Soviet troops in Afghanistan. The U.S. was aware of the danger of turning Afghanistan into a safe haven for terrorists and at the same time did not impede Pakistan, which sought to establish a loyal government in Kabul. Washington realised that part of the new round of civil war responsibility in Afghanistan lies upon the U.S.. Therefore, establishing lasting power on Afghan soil with allied Pakistan's participation was seen as the lesser of evils. Besides, Washington counted on Islamabad's assistance if the Afghan regime would pose a significant terrorist threat. Concerning

¹⁴⁶ Ibid

¹⁴⁷ John V Parachini, "The World Trade Center Bombers (1993)." *Toxic terror: Assessing terrorist use of chemical and biological weapons* (2000): 185-206.

Afghanistan's situation in the mid-1990s, the U.S. took a wait-and-see attitude and did not rush to take the anti-Taliban opposition side. The American press picked up ideas thrown by the White House. After Taliban seized the Afghan capital, the *Washington Post* issued a cautious commentary, arguing that Afghanistan's militias can end the anarchy.¹⁴⁸ They maintained that the Afghan government, with Taliban's domination, would be the preferred alternative torn by the coalition's contradictions.

In August 1997, Afghanistan's embassy in Washington was closed due to the lack of a functional government and the ongoing disagreements regarding Afghanistan's U.S. representation.¹⁴⁹ A State Department statement emphasised that the embassy's closure in Washington does not mean a break in relations. To fast-track the stabilisation process in Afghanistan, all parties to the conflict were invited to the U.S. without diplomatic status in the U.S.. A more significant concern about the events in Afghanistan was shown in neighbouring countries. In October 1996, an emergency meeting of the heads of Russia, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan's prime minister was held in Alma-Ata. Turkmenistan did not participate in the meeting in connection with the declared neutrality of the country in 1995. At the meeting, the joint statement expressed concern over Afghanistan's events and promised an adequate response to actions that undermine stability on the Central Asian States' southern borders. The general concern over Taliban's coming to power brought together Russia and Iran's foreign policy positions on the Afghan issue.¹⁵⁰

The U.S. continued to see Afghanistan as a "failed state," burdened with significant humanitarian problems. During the 1990s, Washington gave priority to the United Nations in resolving the Afghan conflict.¹⁵¹ The central negotiating mechanism in the U.N. structure was the 6+2 group, which included Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, China, Pakistan, the U.S. and Russia. The group's activities were complemented by the Special Representative of the U.N. Secretary-General for Afghanistan. His responsibilities included finding ways to reconcile the warring parties and alleviating the humanitarian crisis.

¹⁴⁸ Zalmay Khalilzad, "Afghanistan: Time to Reengage", *Washington Post*, October 7, 1996: Accessed at: [washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1996/10/07/afghanistan-time-to-reengage/300b1725-8d30-4b98-a916-03f7b588bb2c/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1996/10/07/afghanistan-time-to-reengage/300b1725-8d30-4b98-a916-03f7b588bb2c/)

¹⁴⁹ Katzman, "Afghanistan: post-war" (2008): 48.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid

¹⁵¹ Lansford, *A Bitter Harvest... 2017*, 148.

2.4.6. Energy Factor in the U.S. policies towards Afghanistan

Some experts linked Washington's tolerance of the new Islamic movement in Afghanistan with the expectation of Taliban's ability to stabilise the country. The U.S. interests in the energy sector, in particular, to carry out the construction of the Central Asian Gas Pipeline. Since 1995, the American company Unocal has lobbied for this project.¹⁵² The State Department's support has sought to reduce political and military risks to obtain a World Bank loan.

In October 1997, Unocal and the Delta Oil Company (Saudi Arabia) initiated a group's creation to construct a gas pipeline. By this time, the company had already agreed on implementing the project with Turkmenistan and Pakistan's governments. However, hopes for an early agreement with Taliban regime did not materialise. The series of negotiations between Unocal and the U.S. Department of State with Taliban leaders and stakeholders in Pakistan's leadership did not allow for firm agreement to start the project. Taliban were in no hurry to sign the agreement, prompting Unocal to raise the offer price and threatening to start negotiations with competitors. Taliban's inconsistent position led to the oil company's attempts to agree with the Northern Alliance representatives. At a Congressional hearing in 1998, Unocal's vice president confirmed that it maintains the same relationship with all Afghanistan factions.¹⁵³

In August 1998, unsuccessful negotiations on a pipeline project were still ongoing when a message came about the bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. The blame for the attacks was laid on the terrorist organisation of Saudi millionaire Osama bin Laden, who settled in Afghanistan in 1996. Prospects for constructing the Central Asian gas pipeline were also complicated by a new round of tensions between Pakistan and India related to nuclear weapons' mutual test in May 1998. Recognising the futility of continuing the project under the new conditions, in December 1998, the Unocal Company withdrew from the group to construct the pipeline due to a drop in confidence in stabilising Afghanistan's situation and its relations with Western countries.¹⁵⁴ One of the reasons for this withdrawal was Osama bin Laden's presence, not far from the Afghan Kandahar. Osama Bin Laden was the 17th child out of 52

¹⁵² Citha D Maass, "The Afghanistan conflict: external involvement." *Central Asian Survey* 18, no. 1 (1999): 65-78.

¹⁵³ Sonali Kolhatkar, and James Ingalls. *Bleeding Afghanistan: Washington, warlords, and the propaganda of silence*. Seven Stories Press, 2011: 32.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

children of a Saudi construction tycoon. After his father died in 1967, Osama inherited part of his parental fortune, which totalled \$ 250 million.¹⁵⁵ At the age of 16, bin Laden joined one of the Islamic fundamentalist groups in Saudi Arabia. In 1979, he received a civil engineering diploma and, among the first Arab jihadists, joined the armed opposition in Afghanistan. Using ties at home and his fortune, bin Laden founded the Maktab al-Hidamat organisation in Pakistan at the end of 1984, which began to provide financial and organisational assistance to Arab fighters arriving in the country. An “Arab brigade” was formed from their midst (about 2,000 people), which fought in Afghanistan under Bin Laden’s leadership.¹⁵⁶

2.4.7. Al-Qaeda factor in the U.S. policies towards Afghanistan

In 1989, numerous Arab jihadists, among them Bin Laden, returned to Saudi Arabia and formed the nucleus of the radical faction opposing the ruling Saudi dynasty. Bin Laden and his associates protested against the royal family's collaboration with the United States. In 1991, Bin Laden offered his forces to counter a potential Iraqi invasion during the Persian Gulf War. However, instead of accepting, King Fahd bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud (1982–2005) authorized the deployment of a substantial American military contingent in Saudi Arabia, totaling around 540,000 personnel.¹⁵⁷ Bin Laden accused the authorities of collusion with the U.S., which had stationed forces in the sacred Muslim land of Saudi Arabia, as well as in Israel. In response, the king expelled Bin Laden from the country. Bin Laden attempted to relocate to Libya, but Muammar Gaddafi's government denied him entry due to concerns about Islamic extremism. Consequently, Bin Laden found refuge in Sudan, where he pursued business ventures and continued to provide financial support to Islamist groups in the Middle East and North Africa.

The Saudi ruling dynasty made an unsuccessful effort to reconcile with the radical opposition within their country. By the king's decree, an advisory council was assembled, comprised of individuals chosen by the monarch. This council was tasked with assessing the government's actions from an Islamic perspective. However, in April 1994, Bin Laden once more strongly criticized the policies of King Fahd, who was backing the armed opposition against the government in the Yemeni Civil War. During the same year, Riyadh revoked bin Laden's Saudi citizenship and started pressuring Sudan to extradite him.

¹⁵⁵ Ahmed Rashid, “Afghanistan: Ending the policy quagmire.” *Journal of International Affairs* (2001): 395-410.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid

¹⁵⁷ Ibid

In November 1995, May and June 1996, supporters of the radical opposition carried out attacks in Saudi Arabia, killing American citizens.¹⁵⁸ CIA analysts linked the attacks to Osama bin Laden. The White House administration started searching for a political response. Knowing that bin Laden was in Sudan, the Clinton administration joined the diplomatic efforts of Saudi Arabia and began to demand Khartoum to expel him. However, several analysts of the diplomatic department spoke out against this policy. The fear of diplomats was because of ill-conceived U.S. policy, and Bin Laden would move to Afghanistan, where, remaining out of reach, he would expand his activities.

Nevertheless, the White House insisted on Bin Laden's expulsion from Sudan, and in June 1996, he had to flee to Afghanistan, most of which was controlled by Taliban. Later, State Department officials explained the decision to exert pressure on Sudan as the U.S. sought to disrupt Bin Laden's communications and infrastructure in Sudan and make its movements vulnerable to intelligence services. However, all of this did not count on an international terrorist's speedy capture and prepared for a lengthy search. In 1996, a special department was created within the CIA, whose tasks included developing the "Bin Laden case".

In Afghanistan, bin Laden received a hospitable welcome from Taliban government, which took him as a famous participant in the Jihad against the Soviet troops (1979–1989). On Taliban territory, bin Laden was allowed to create camps for the training of Islamic militants. He later strengthened his position by marrying Mullah Omer's eldest daughter.

On August 23, 1996, Bin Laden issued a fatwa (the theologian's judgment), legitimising Jihad against the American crusaders in the oil-rich Muslim countries of the Persian Gulf. The expulsion of the American enemy, who occupied the sacred lands, is the primary duty of all Muslims after faith in God.

In May 1998, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Abdullah, tried to persuade Taliban to surrender Bin Laden to the U.S. or another state at the U.S.' request. However, Abdullah was not successful in persuading Taliban regarding the expulsion of Bin Laden from Afghanistan. Taliban's leadership did not extradite Bin Laden, a considered guest in Afghanistan, and Mullah Omar's relative.

¹⁵⁸ John Rollins, *Al Qaeda and affiliates: historical perspective, global presence, and implications for US policy*. DIANE Publishing, 2010. 6

Bin Laden's undermining of the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania meant the failure of U.S. policy towards Afghanistan after Taliban came to power. The Clinton administration had to make a difficult choice because American public opinion demanded to punish those responsible for the attacks. The country's domestic political situation, which developed under the Clinton – Lewinsky scandal's influence, also defined the limited military operations. On the other hand, the White House was not ready to admit the failure of its policy in Afghanistan and to change its position to Taliban and Pakistan, which supported it. Besides, Washington feared that Afghanistan's military action would cause a wave of protest in the Muslim world.

As a result, a dual political line was chosen. On the one hand, on August 20, 1998, the U.S. launched rocket attacks on Al-Qaida's "terrorist infrastructure facilities" in Afghanistan and Sudan and blocked bin Laden's bank accounts. President Clinton emphasised that no state support Bin Laden terrorist network, thereby separating Al Qaeda from Taliban and Pakistan. Moreover, in a sharp commentary, the White House clarified that the strikes aimed not to destroy the terrorists but only to destroy their infrastructure. On the other hand, Washington chose a negotiation strategy. Underestimating the strength of the link between bin Laden and Taliban's leadership, the White House insisted on Taliban's ruling elite to extradite an Arab terrorist. In turn, Taliban took the August bombing of Al-Qaeda camps as a blow to fellow believers and all Jihad warriors. In an interview with the Los Angeles Times, one of the movement leaders, S. Abdullah, expressed Taliban believes that the U.S. has declared war on us, thus making it legitimate to take revenge.¹⁵⁹

The U.S. air raids on Sudan and Afghanistan strengthened anti-American sentiments in the Muslim world. They contributed to Osama bin Laden's perception as a hero, a fighter against the "invaders" of holy places - Jerusalem and the Arabian Peninsula. Clinton and the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz, sought to inform Clinton about the danger of unilateral measures during his visit to Washington in September 1998. The joint statement of the two countries emphasised the importance of collective action against international terrorism.

¹⁵⁹ Peter L Bergen, *The longest war: The enduring conflict between America and Al-Qaeda*. (Simon and Schuster, 2011), 87.

Simultaneously, the Saudi dynasty sought to protect Taliban regime in Afghanistan, which was perceived as a young Sunni theocracy, an ideal state prototype. Secondly, as a possible counterweight to Shiite Iran, the struggle for regional leadership. Therefore, the joint statement's text also indirectly appealed to Iran to stop supporting the anti-Taliban opposition in Afghanistan and resolve the disagreements by peaceful means.

Almost immediately after the U.S. airstrikes on Al-Qaeda facilities in Afghanistan and Sudan, the topic of counterterrorism fell into the shadow of the Indian-Pakistani confrontation, complicated by nuclear tests by both countries in May 1998. The White House rejected the proposal to continue military attacks on Afghanistan, a supporter made by the adviser on the fight against terrorism at the National Security Council R. Clark (1998–2003). However, at the end of 1998, for the first time during the search for Osama bin Laden, the CIA received an order to destroy him.

At the same time, the U.S. turned to Pakistan to exert pressure on Taliban to extradite Bin-Laden. Pakistani government and military were aware that the U.S.-wanted Arab terrorist in Afghanistan was detrimental to Taliban regime and Pakistani interests in this regard. However, Pakistan did not seek to facilitate the early issuance of Bin Laden due to several reasons. Firstly, Islamabad did not enjoy complete control over Taliban, which still did not intend to give out its guest to the “infidels.” Secondly, Pakistan was wary of accusations of betrayal by Muslim believers at home and abroad. Many in the Muslim world spoke disapprovingly of bin Laden's actions, but most believed that co-religionists should carry out his trial. Thirdly, Islamabad perceived U.S. actions in Afghanistan as episodic and devoid of a strategic dimension. According to Pakistan's ruling circles, the U.S. did not seek to understand the essence of Afghanistan's problems. It pursued only short-term interests, such as the extradition of terrorists, allowing Islamabad to act on its policy and often mislead the U.S.. So, the Pakistani-Afghan negotiations' unsuccessful outcome over bin Laden's extradition seemed to Pakistan due to Kabul's intransigence.

During 1998-2000, the U.S. took on faith the assertion of Islamabad that Afghanistan's Taliban are not under its control. In a letter to Congress in July 1999, President Clinton confessed that repeated attempts to directly pressure Taliban and the use of the resources of border countries that influence Taliban have been unsuccessful. The U.S. continued the political and diplomatic pressure on Taliban regime, and some strict measures were taken against it. In February 1999, the CIA received permission to renew contacts with the Northern

Alliance.¹⁶⁰ On October 15, 1999 - a year after the bombing of Afghanistan and Sudan - the U.S. initiated the first U.N. Security Council resolution on sanctions against Taliban. Washington was dissatisfied with Taliban's refusal to extradite bin Laden and close terrorist training camps but did not give up hope for reconciliation in the future. The State Department was vocal in this regard that stated that the international community had sent an unequivocal message. Taliban have to choose between cooperation and isolation.¹⁶¹

This flexibility of American policy towards Taliban was mainly due to the U.S.' closest non-NATO ally in South Asia, Pakistan. In March 2000, Clinton was the first American president to visit Islamabad.¹⁶² The meeting discussed Pakistan's accession to the NPT, the settlement of the conflict with India, and the development of Pakistani democracy. However, it cannot be ruled out that during the closed part of the meeting, President P. Musharraf could present to Clinton some of the ideas that Taliban are far from the same as they were in 1994; extremism is giving way to a sober view of the world. Taliban were seeking an Islamic revolution inside Afghanistan in the way Iran did. Musharraf stated, "When they talk about the threat of the Islamic revolution's export from Afghanistan, I always ask: are you familiar with Taliban's program settings? If so, the U.S. should know that absolutely all of them aim to solve internal problems. Taliban have neither the desire nor the ability to expand. The same is evident in Turkmenistan, whose borders with Afghanistan have been guarded by Taliban for many years."¹⁶³

Washington's last argument seemed ever less convincing. The "transparent" border between Afghanistan and Turkmenistan allowed the radical Islamists in the 1990s to freely penetrate other countries of Central Asia and further into Russia. At a U.S. Senate hearing about engagement or confrontation with Taliban, it was stressed upon that with Taliban, the country would remain a "rogue state."¹⁶⁴

Listening to Pakistan's perspective on Afghanistan's situation, Washington did not fully understand Islamabad's peculiar relationship with Taliban. At a press conference in

¹⁶⁰ Brian Glyn Williams, "General Dostum and the Mazar i Sharif Campaign: New Light on the Role of Northern Alliance Warlords in Operation Enduring Freedom." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 21, no. 4 (2010): 610-632.

¹⁶¹ Ibid

¹⁶² Qutubuddin Aziz, "South Asia after President Clinton's visit." *Pakistan Horizon* 53, no. 2/3 (2000): 27-29.

¹⁶³ Ahmed Rashid, "Taliban: exporting extremism." *Foreign Affairs* (1999): 22-35.

¹⁶⁴ Robert D Crews and Amin Tarzi. *Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 112.

Islamabad on May 2000, U.S. under Secretary of State T. Pickering argued that it is hard for me to believe that Pakistan cannot play a very constructive role in bringing Bin Laden to justice, given the support that Islamabad is giving to Taliban regime.¹⁶⁵

Fearing the spread of Islamic fundamentalism and trying to prevent the strengthening of Russia's military-political positions in the region, the U.S. began to provide financial assistance to five newly formed Central Asian states annually to ensure border security. A sign of the strengthening of the U.S. position in Central Asia was Uzbekistan's granting the right to a CIA unmanned reconnaissance aircraft to fly from its territory in September 2000 to search for Bin Laden in Afghanistan. Towards the end of the 1990s, many analysts noted the beginning of the fall in the influence of Taliban regime in Afghanistan. The Pashtuns in South of Afghanistan started leaving the country, who were not ready to fight with the Northern Alliance outside the territory of their historical possessions. The development was due to Taliban's spring offensive's failure in the Northern Alliance core region in 1999. The distraction of Pakistan also facilitated Taliban's weakening to India's confrontation, which was especially acute in 1998-1999. The warring parties in Afghanistan, including Taliban, through U.N. mediation, began to prepare for the All-Afghan Assembly (Loya Jirga) in 2000 to discuss the country's future based on the interests of preserving a single state.¹⁶⁶

Under these conditions, in October 2000, a new attack of al-Qaeda against the U.S. followed - in the port of Aden (Yemen), the Navy destroyer Cole (USS Cole) was damaged. The White House was determined to launch a counterattack. The U.S. even explored the possibility of a joint military operation against Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan with Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan. However, the decision was not taken, probably due to President Clinton's reluctance to end his presidential tenure with a new war. Instead, the U.S., with Russia's participation, launched a new diplomatic initiative against Taliban, speaking in December 2000 at the U.N. Security Council in support of resolution 1333 on new sanctions. The resolution imposed an embargo on the supply of arms to Taliban; however, the Northern Alliance continued receiving military assistance.

During the discussion of the resolution, criticism of U.S. policy came from the mouth of the U.N. Secretary-General. In November 2000, Kofi Annan accused Washington of

¹⁶⁵ Jonathan Cristol, *The United States and Taliban before and after 9/11*. (Springer, 2018): 81.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid

disrupting Afghanistan's peace process, noting that U.S. policy "lacks a coherent strategy".¹⁶⁷ After a U.N. Resolution No. 1333 on sanctions against Taliban, the movement closed the U.N. office in Kabul. It withdrew from negotiations on the convening of an Afghan Loya Jirga.

The White House's enthusiasm over Taliban was associated with a revival of expectations regarding the development of energy deposits in the Caspian basin and an oil and gas pipeline through Afghanistan. Some leading officials of the republican administration, including President J. Bush, Vice President R. Cheney, National Security Advisor C. Rice, Secretary of Commerce D. Evans and others, devoted a significant part of their lives to the energy business, which influenced their horizons and formed a circle of connections in the business environment.¹⁶⁸

George W. Bush's team conducted a review of W. Clinton's foreign policy, including counterterrorism approaches. This revision was radical in form, if not substantive, and was based on the principle of anything, not just Clinton's policies. However, the continuity of the course remained noticeable. In June 2001, a counterterrorism representative proposed a military campaign in Afghanistan to destroy Al Qaeda and Taliban, but the White House rejected proposals.¹⁶⁹

The U.S. policy of "forcing Taliban to cooperate" again did not bring tangible results due to tensed relations between Islamabad and the U.S. The U.S. accused Pakistan of continued support to Taliban including the supply of arms. In April 2001, in the U.N. Security Council, Russia attempted to impose sanctions on Pakistan. However, the U.S. blocked the draft resolution, explaining this by allied relations with the Pakistani regime. However, the U.S. has stepped up its diplomatic pressure on Pakistan and Taliban. On June 18, 2001, K. Rice discussed Afghanistan's situation with Pakistani Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar. In July, representatives of the State Department through the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan N. Naik informed Taliban regime about the possibility of a missile strike in Afghanistan if non-cooperation continues. In 2001, the State Department also held a series of

¹⁶⁷ Rosemary Foot, "Exceptionalism again: The Bush administration, the "global war on terror" and human rights." *Law and History Review* 26, no. 3 (2008): 707

¹⁶⁸ Lansford, *A Bitter Harvest...*, 2017, 146.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid

negotiations with representatives of Taliban in Pakistan. This series's last meeting took place in Islamabad on August 2001, five weeks before the September 11 attacks.¹⁷⁰

The tragic events of September 2001 marked a pivotal shift in U.S. policy towards the situation in Afghanistan. Relations with the Taliban underwent a drastic reassessment, and the connection between the radical movement and Pakistan was reevaluated. During a meeting between Deputy Secretary of State R. Armitage and Pakistani intelligence chief M. Ahmed in Washington, an ultimatum was presented. It demanded that Pakistan cease its support for the Taliban and cooperate with the U.S. in combating it.¹⁷¹ When Ahmed attempted to clarify Pakistan's political motives in Afghanistan and started discussing the history of relations between the two nations, Armitage interjected with a blunt ultimatum: "The story begins today. Are you with us or not?".

Conclusion

Afghanistan has a riotous history characterized by a combination of internal and external conflicts. Within the country, political divisions among the ruling elite have revolved around different ideologies such as Western democracy, communism, and Islamic Sharia system. This struggle for power led to violence and civil wars between 1919 and 1979 as various factions attempted to establish a centralized government based on their preferred political ideology. Meanwhile, Afghanistan became a focal point for global power rivalries. Great Britain and Czarist Russia engaged in a competition over Afghanistan known as the "Great Game" in the past, while later, the United States and the Soviet Union fought a decade-long conflict on Afghan soil.

Despite external interventions and influences, the Afghan people consistently resisted foreign interference, resulting in several unsuccessful attempts at intervention. During the Cold War, the United States pursued a containment strategy against communism, leading it to engage in a successful proxy war against the Soviets from 1979 to 1989. In the post-Cold War era, the U.S. policy towards Afghanistan initially focused on oil projects in Central Asia that required transit through Afghanistan. However, the rise of Al Qaeda and its attacks on various embassies significantly shifted U.S. priorities. Al Qaeda had established ties with the Afghan Mujahideen

¹⁷⁰ Ibid

¹⁷¹ Mark Fields, and Ramsha Ahmed. *A review of the 2001 Bonn Conference and application to the road ahead in Afghanistan*. No. 8. (National Defense University Press, 2011): 17.

during the Soviet-Afghan war, and this relationship grew stronger when the Taliban took control of the Kabul administration. The U.S. designated the Taliban as a terrorist group prior to the 9/11 attacks due to their affiliation with Al Qaeda.

Understanding the historical events and political developments in Afghanistan, especially in the post-Cold War period, sheds light on the objectives of U.S. intervention in the country. The primary motive behind the U.S. involvement was to counter terrorism and subsequently establish a stable, pro-U.S. democratic government through a state-building mission. The aim was to eradicate Al Qaeda safe havens and replace the Taliban government with a democratic administration that would prevent the existence of any international terrorist organizations within Afghanistan. Therefore, the analysis of Afghanistan's historical conflict provides a foundation for comprehending the strategies employed by the United States after the 9/11 attacks.

Chapter Three

The U.S. post 9/11 Strategies in Afghanistan

This chapter is built upon a comprehensive description of distinct U.S. strategies pursued by four different U.S. presidents in addressing the conflict in Afghanistan, spanning from its intervention in 2001 until 2020. Although some U.S. strategies were reiterated by subsequent presidents, the strategies are organized chronologically according to the presidents' tenures for clarity and ease of comprehension. A thorough examination of U.S. post-9/11 strategies in Afghanistan will aid in assessing the outcomes of these very strategies in the subsequent chapter.

In the realm of conflict resolution and state-building in Afghanistan's history, the post-September 11 period is widely acknowledged as highly challenging. The process of state-building during this era encompasses three critical domains: military operations, political initiatives, and security sector reforms.¹⁷² The principal tool employed by the U.S. and its allies in Afghanistan was the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) military actions conducted under the umbrella of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). An integral aspect of OEF was that ground forces were granted authorization to combat the Taliban. This fight against the Taliban was facilitated through financial and military support to various Tajik groups in the region. Following the establishment of a stronghold in Kabul, extensive reforms were launched by the American forces, aimed at fostering state-building and national reconstruction in Afghanistan. The primary and pivotal step in the context of conflict resolution and state-building was the Bonn process.¹⁷³

In December 2001, an assembly of international political leaders, certain local Afghan political elites, and United Nations representatives convened in Bonn under U.S. leadership to deliberate upon the framework for conflict resolution and state-building in Afghanistan. Through discussions and negotiations, the participating leaders reached an agreement that outlined mechanisms at the provincial level and laid out plans for reconstructing state institutions. In essence, the Bonn Agreement marked the initiation of Afghanistan's state-building process, with a prominent role played by the United States. Under the terms of this

¹⁷² Lucy Morgan Edwards, "State-building in Afghanistan: a case showing the limits?." *International Review of the Red Cross*, 92, no. 880 (2010): 967-991.

¹⁷³ Ibid

agreement, stakeholders concurred on establishing an interim government in Afghanistan. This interim government would subsequently pave the way for the formation of a transitional government through the Loya Jirga, ahead of the 2004 presidential and parliamentary elections. To facilitate this process, an interim government and a constitution committee were established, tasked with organizing the constitutional Loya Jirga. The proposed national constitution revolved around three governmental pillars: administration, law, and justice. The introduction of a new criminal justice system was based on a blend of modern international standards, Islamic principles, and local traditional values.

The exclusion of prominent Pashtun leaders, particularly the Taliban, from all national agreements undermined the credibility of the Bonn process outcomes. The agreement engendered mistrust and estrangement within the Pashtun community towards the central government. While the Bonn process endeavored to address issues through a top-down approach, the absence or limited involvement of key players compromised the anticipated results. The exclusive participation and influence of specific groups in the Loya Jirga contributed to the expansion of their rights and opportunities, consequently solidifying Afghanistan's political stance with international political legitimacy. This power group supported the interests of elite factions across the nation, yet it failed to secure support from prominent Pashtun field commanders.¹⁷⁴ Consequently, the Karzai government struggled to fulfill the restructuring reforms for the government and the judiciary outlined in the provisions of the Bonn Agreement.

There was optimism within the international community regarding elections in Afghanistan and the anticipated positive transformations; however, security conditions remained precarious. The Taliban persisted in their conflict against the government and international forces, causing significant damage to the lives and property of ordinary Afghans. The government struggled to effectively combat illegal drug trafficking, both within and beyond its borders, which served as a major source of funding for militant activities. Moreover, Afghan government officials, including ministers, were embroiled in corruption, diverting attention away from the establishment of institutional capacities necessary to address such issues within the country.

¹⁷⁴ Amin Saikal, "Afghanistan and Pakistan..." (2010): 7-15.

Following the Bonn process, the next significant challenge for the international community was to address security sector reforms within the country. In this context, in 2002, the G8 countries reached an agreement to collectively take on the responsibility of implementing broader security sector reforms. Germany played a pivotal role in assisting Afghanistan in executing comprehensive police reforms nationwide. Military reform was undertaken by the U.S., while Italy prioritized judicial reform. The United Kingdom aimed to revamp efforts against drug trafficking in Afghanistan, and Japan assumed the task of demobilizing, disarming, and reintegrating the country's militants into mainstream politics. Security sector reforms emerged as a crucial element in Afghanistan's conflict resolution process, paving the way for the secure withdrawal of external forces from the country.¹⁷⁵ However, the goals of these security sector reforms were not fully realized, as indicated by the reduction of DDR (Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration) targets from 140,000 to 10,000.¹⁷⁶ In spite of these reform efforts, unofficial militias continued to operate under the influence of powerful figures throughout the nation. As part of the security sector reform, military reforms faced significant shortcomings and were criticized for the ethnic imbalance within the Afghan National Army (ANA). The ANA was predominantly led by generals from the Tajik and northern alliances, resulting in a marginalization of the dominant Pashtun group.

In addition to the failure of military reforms, judicial reforms also fell short of expectations. The targeted timeframe for achieving these reforms within the judiciary was not met. Some heads of government ministries exhibited a fundamental inclination to oppose secular judicial reforms. For instance, Abdur Rashid Saif, a government member with ties to the Jihad movement, held an extremist ideology rooted in fundamentalist Islam. He played a significant role in the appointment of Mullah Shahrani as the President of the Supreme Court of Afghanistan. A similar occurrence contributed to the setback in the country's security sector reform. Although security sector reforms were anticipated to be conducive to Afghanistan's conflict resolution process, the insufficient attention from the international community and resistance from influential local figures hindered the progress of these reforms.

The post-9/11 U.S. strategies in Afghanistan lacked consistency and underwent various changes. The subsequent analysis in this thesis aims to determine whether these shifting U.S. strategies were well-coordinated and presented as part of a comprehensive plan, or if they

¹⁷⁵ Lucy Morgan Edwards, "State-building in Afghanistan... 900-985.

¹⁷⁶ Sayed Zia Sais, *Who is Winning the War in Afghanistan?* (Xlibris Corporation, 2011): 11

remained isolated with no standardized direction. The distinct U.S. strategies from 2001 to 2020 are elaborated upon below.

3.1. The U.S. Strategies under Bush Administration

President Bush was the main architect of the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan. He remained determined to eliminate Al Qaeda and Taliban, the culprits of 9/11 attacks, using military force. Throughout his presidential tenure, he had shown no flexibility towards Taliban, thus excluding them from the political powersharing settlement at the Bonn conference. The detailed explanation of his strategy of major military escalation and the subsequent statebuilding programs for conflict management is given below.

3.1.1. Major Military Escalation

The 9/11 attacks brought about the worst kind of security threats to the American people. These kinds of attacks from non-state actors had no precedence in the entire history of the United States. For the first time after independence, these attacks posed existential threats to the U.S.. The then President of the U.S., George W. Bush in a speech expressed that the freedom and fear had entered the war and that the terrorist agenda was global and they wanted to redistribute and impose their respective ideology in the entire world. He formally used and emphasized on the “war on terror” strategy.¹⁷⁷

In the wake of 9/11 attacks, the U.S. initiated a “war on terror” approach in Afghanistan, which grew into a global antiterrorism strategy.¹⁷⁸ The U.S. strategy of war on terror was not limited to Afghanistan. Some reports show that the Bush administration was planning for regime change in many Middle Eastern countries, namely Lebanon, Syria, Iran, Sudan and Somalia.¹⁷⁹ The U.S. wanted to execute their plan under the democratization banner. However, due to prolonged war resulting from strife resistance from the Afghan Taliban, the U.S. could not openly support and execute their policies in Asia.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ Kenneth, Katzman. “Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and US Policy.” *Congressional Research Service*, (2017). 6.

¹⁷⁸ Thomas Ruttig, *The Battle for Afghanistan: Negotiations with Taliban*, Washington, D.C.: New America Foundation, May 2011, p. 4

¹⁷⁹ Philip Gordon, “False promises: The United States and regime change in the Middle East.” *Revue Defense Nationale* 6 (2020): 51-57.

¹⁸⁰ Ruttig, *The Battle for Afghanistan...*, 2011, p. 4

In a September 20, 2001 speech, Bush outlined the U.S. strategy's fundamentals in the "war on terror". He explained to the fellow Americans that they need to understand that not just one battle awaits us, rather a lengthy campaign that has not happened in the U.S. history is expected to hunt the American's interests. It will include delivering spectacular hits that can be seen on TV and covert operations that will remain secret even if successful. The president revealed his plans of dealing with such challenges and said that they would deprive terrorists of finances, set them against each other, and force them to run from place to place until they have nowhere to run. The U.S. would likely present demand for states that provide assistance or shelter to terrorists.¹⁸¹ A model of proactive actions was proposed.

The U.S. president Bush argued that the only way to defeat terrorism is to destroy it in its den.¹⁸² It was decided that in the first blow to terrorism, the U.S. will intervene in Afghanistan. It took the U.S. four days to make this decision. At the suggestion of Secretary of Defense D. Rumsfeld (2001–2006) and his deputy for political affairs, P. Wolfowitz (2001–2005), the possibility of attacking Iraq was also initially considered.¹⁸³ However, George W. Bush opposed this idea by saying that they will confuse all tasks in the war on terror if they hit Baghdad now. The president suggested bearing patience regarding Iraq. Nevertheless, President Bush ordered the continuation of plans to remove Saddam Hussein's regime parallel to the Afghanistan campaign.¹⁸⁴ Afghanistan was seen as the first, but far from the central area of the fight against terror. In one of his speeches, President Bush argued that Afghanistan is the beginning of our worldwide campaign, which will not stop until the world's countries stop giving refuge to terrorists or supporting terrorism on their land.¹⁸⁵ To legitimize anti-terror actions, the U.S. Congress passed the Patriotic Act on October 26, 2001, which expanded the scope for combating terrorism.¹⁸⁶

On September 17, 2001, George W. Bush ordered C. Powell to issue an ultimatum against Taliban demanding that Bin Laden be given to the U.S. and close Al-Qaeda training

¹⁸¹ Bush, George W. "Selected Speeches of President George W. Bush, 2001–2008." *The White House* (2008), 65.

¹⁸² Bush, Selected Speeches of President George W. Bush, 2001–2008, 70.

¹⁸³ Badie, Dina. "Groupthink, Iraq, and the war on terror: Explaining US policy shift toward Iraq." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 6, no. 4 (2010): 277-296.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid

¹⁸⁵ Ibid

¹⁸⁶ Alicia L Rause, "USA Patriot Act: Anti-Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing Legislation in US and Europe since September 11th." *U. Miami Int'l & Comp. L. Rev.* 11 (2003): 173.

camps inside Afghanistan.¹⁸⁷ In case of disobedience, the U.S. intended to strike at Taliban; however, Bush clarified that their goal is not to destroy Taliban, but this can happen due to their campaign in Afghanistan. In many public speeches during September-October 2001, President Bush spoke about the need to compel Taliban to give Bin Laden.¹⁸⁸ In a speech to Congress on September 20, 2001, an official ultimatum stated that they must extradite terrorists or be forced to share their fate.¹⁸⁹ On October 7, 2001, in a speech about the start of the Afghanistan campaign, President Bush spoke about the destruction of Taliban's military capabilities. These statements left room for hypotheses that the White House in 2001 could be satisfied with the quick capture or destruction of bin Laden and the top leadership of al-Qaeda. They had no intention of overthrowing Taliban regime. However, Taliban responded evasively, asking the U.S. to provide evidence of bin Laden's involvement in the September 11 attacks, which the White House perceived as a refusal to the U.S. demands.¹⁹⁰

The U.S. showed less patience and was quick about the military actions in Afghanistan. Since mid-October 2001, Washington has relied on the Northern Alliance, consisting of Tajik and Uzbek militant troops inside Afghanistan.¹⁹¹ As a result of choice favouring quick military successes, the possibilities for full participation in the post-war political dialogue in Afghanistan of the largest ethnic group, Taliban, consisting of Sunni Pashtuns, were reduced. The U.S. was expecting a zero-sum outcome of war in Afghanistan. One week after the start of the U.S. bombing against Taliban on October 14, 2001, Taliban came out with a proposal to start negotiations on Bin Laden's issue in exchange for the cessation of air raids and the provision of evidence of his guilt.¹⁹² This offer was an indication of the flexibility from Taliban and an expected non-zero-sum outcome of war in the country. However, the White House replied that the time for negotiations had passed. On October 16, a Taliban spokesman in Pakistan requested the U.S. to suspend the bombing, pointing out the possibility that moderates

¹⁸⁷ Bob Woodward, *Bush at war*. (Simon and Schuster, 2002): 300-356.

¹⁸⁸ George W Bush, "Selected Speeches of President George W. Bush, 2001–2008." *The White House* (2008): 57-79.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*: 75

¹⁹⁰ Juergen Kleiner, "Diplomacy with Fundamentalists: The United States and Taliban." *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 1, no. 3 (2006): 207-233.

¹⁹¹ Thomas H Johnson and M. Chris Mason. "Understanding Taliban and insurgency in Afghanistan." *Orbis* 51, no. 1 (2007): 72-74.

¹⁹² *Ibid*: 76-89

in Taliban government could convince Mullah Omar to extradite Bin Laden. However, the U.S. did not respond to this offer.¹⁹³

Towards the end of October 2001, the U.S. entered into operational part of the war against Taliban and AL-Qaeda and the Afghanistan campaign was named 'operation enduring freedom'. In Operation Enduring Freedom's operational plan, bombing through air force was given more importance and a minor role was assigned to the ground forces.¹⁹⁴ The ground forces were less effective in Afghanistan because the Northern Alliance was passive in supporting the U.S. ground forces. From the start of the war in Afghanistan, the American new agencies started comparing the Vietnam War (1965-1975) with Afghanistan. The Pentagon, D. Rumsfeld, visited Afghanistan and instructed the American combatants to develop a plan whereby the American themselves will take the leading role. Some fifty-five thousand US troops to be sent to the region.¹⁹⁵

In November 2001, the Northern Alliance and some independent Uzbek troops successfully occupied Mazar-e-Sharif.¹⁹⁶ The development was a surprise for the U.S. and in fact a turning point in their campaign in Afghanistan. Using this success as a springboard and getting advantage of it, the U.S. administration decided to launch a winter offensive against Taliban. On November, 13, Tajik troops took control of the capital city, Kabul, which further encouraged the U.S. forces and such development of events brought the outcome of the military conflict closer. Since the U.S. campaign's paramount task was the military defeat of Taliban and Al Qaeda, the U.S. has concentrated on financial and military support for the Northern Alliance and the bribing of field commanders, previously associated with Taliban. According to the CIA Director J. Tenet, the Afghans quickly joined the Northern Alliance and the U.S. due to the feeling that they were on the winners' side. Moreover, they were also attracted by the money; the U.S. was spending on the anti-Taliban combatants.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹³ Mona Kanwal Sheikh and Maja Touzari Janesdatter Greenwood. *Taliban talks: Past present and prospects for the US, Afghanistan and Pakistan*. DIIS Report No. 06, (2013): 5-13.

¹⁹⁴ Brett D Owens, John F. Kragh Jr, Joseph C. Wenke, Joseph Macaitis, Charles E. Wade, and John B. Holcomb. "Combat wounds in operation Iraqi Freedom and operation Enduring Freedom." *Journal of Trauma and Acute Care Surgery* 64, no. 2 (2008): 295-299.

¹⁹⁵ Scarborough, *Rumsfeld's war...* 2004.

¹⁹⁶ Brian Glyn Williams, "General Dostum and the Mazar i Sharif Campaign: new light on the role of Northern Alliance warlords in Operation Enduring Freedom." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 21, no. 4 (2010): 610-632.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid: 600- 612.

Towards the end of November, the U.S. successfully took control of another critical city Kandahar which was considered one of the core support areas for Taliban. Despite these successes, the U.S. did not succeed in capturing key Taliban and Al Qaeda leaders. Taliban combatants left urban areas and settled in the mountains to flex muscles for attacking the U.S. forces afresh. The U.S. also launched drone attacks in neighbouring Pakistan's tribal region, which complicated the military-political situation.¹⁹⁸ Since Pakistan's border region with Afghanistan was less regulated, Taliban factions infiltrated into Pakistan to get refuge. Since Pakistan was an ally of the U.S. in the war in Afghanistan, some groups within Taliban established a new organization, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) to launch operations inside Pakistan. In fall 2001, Islamabad entered troops into the territory of the tribal region for the first time in its history. At the same time, Pakistan expelled many war veterans of the country's formal Mujahideen force, including Afghans, People from the Central Asian region and Arabs.¹⁹⁹ Pakistan's administration also arrested and handed over some of the international terrorists to the U.S. upon their demand. The U.S. was pleased to welcome Islamabad's decisive action and announced the lifting of sanctions from Pakistan and the allocation of \$ 73 million to secure the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.

Upon the successful expulsion of Taliban from Afghanistan's government, there were differences in the U.S. white house administration and Pentagon regarding the roadmap of the future political regime in Afghanistan. The U.S. military officials were not interested in Afghanistan's statebuilding project, but the white house held a different position. On October 9, 2001, at a briefing at the Ministry of Defense, D. Rumsfeld stated that the U.S. should not be concerned about the post-Taliban governmental arrangements. The Afghans should decide about the kind of government they want to establish.²⁰⁰ However, the U.S. finally decided to take an active part in the statebuilding of Afghanistan.

A meeting of six-plus two group was held on November 12, 2001, in New York, where the idea of giving a leading role to the UN was repeated. The new development in the said meeting was a changed perspective towards the future of Taliban politics, and a possibility of

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Greg Smith, "The Tangled Web of Taliban and Associated Movements." *Journal of Strategic Security* 2, no. 4 (2009): 31-38.

²⁰⁰ James Dobbins, Michele A. Poole, Austin Long, and Benjamin Runkle. *After the war: Nation-building from FDR to George W. Bush*. (Rand Corporation, 2008): 91.

their return into politics in Afghanistan was considered.²⁰¹ However, it was necessary to build a state that represented an alternative to Taliban regime. The same wording was placed in the text of Clause 4 of the UN Security Council Resolution. No. 1378, adopted on November 14, 2001, confirmed the UN's assumption of the main coordinator of the statebuilding project in Afghanistan.²⁰²

On November 15, 2001, the Vice President of the U.S., R. Cheney reaffirmed the intentions, in collaboration with its coalition allies, the UN, and international organizations, to help create a reliable, stable, and representative government in Afghanistan.²⁰³ According to Cheney, the U.S. did not intend to tell the Afghans how to lead themselves because they must make these decisions. Nevertheless, the political and diplomatic actions of the U.S. had a direct impact on the future of political processes in Afghanistan. Though the U.S. favoured an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned political process, in action, they proved contrary to their words.

The U.S. policy was not in favor of a total reliance on the Northern Alliance and hence in November 2001, the U.S. sought to convince the Northern Alliance members not to enter Kabul.²⁰⁴ However, the Northern Alliance did not followed instructions from the White House and entered Kabul.²⁰⁵ The control of the Northern Alliance's capital was seen as a threat by the U.S. administration.

A general reluctance among the Northern Alliance leaders compelled many tribal elders, with the help of Pakistan, to unite a group of Zahir Shah's followers in an effort to minimize the political risks. Islamabad was ready to support the candidacy of ex-king Zahir Shah, a Pashtun by nationality, to head the post-Taliban Afghan government.²⁰⁶ The then Pakistan's president, Musharraf, hoped to consolidate the legal status of the border between

²⁰¹ Mark Fields, and Ramsha Ahmed. *A review of the 2001 Bonn Conference and application to the road ahead in Afghanistan*. No. 8. (National Defense University Press, 2011). 12-14.

²⁰² James, Dobbins, Michele A. Poole, Austin Long, and Benjamin Runkle. *After the war: Nation-building from FDR to George W. Bush*. Rand Corporation, 2008. 93

²⁰³ Ibid: 45.

²⁰⁴ Milan Vaishnav, "Afghanistan: The Chimera of the 'Light Footprint,'" in Robert C. Orr, ed., *Winning the Peace: An American Strategy for Post-Conflict Reconstruction*, Washington, D.C.: CSIS Press, 2004. 248.

²⁰⁵ Bob Woodward, *Bush at War*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002). 310.

²⁰⁶ Dobbins et al., *After the war...*, 2008. 93

the two countries under the new conditions and diverting Pakistani Pashtun forces to the political struggle for power in Kabul.²⁰⁷

After initially ignoring Pashtuns, the U.S. latter established contacts with individual Pashtun leaders in exile, to gain support among the anti-Taliban Pashtuns that could enter the future government of Afghanistan.²⁰⁸ Those Pashtun leaders, who declined to support the U.S. against Taliban, were sidelined through different means. In this regard, in February 2003, the U.S. officially ranked Gulbaddin Hekmatyar among the wanted international terrorists.²⁰⁹ Similarly, the Pashtun field commander Abdul Haq, who was associated with G. Hekmatyar during the Afghan Jihad against the Soviet Union, and received funding from the U.S. and Saudi Arabia,²¹⁰ had refused the CIA, to help Washington by following their directives.²¹¹ Simultaneously with Abdul Haq, a group of Hamid Karzai, a Pashtun leader based in the Pakistani city of Quetta, entered Afghanistan. The name of H. Karzai was first uttered at a meeting of the National Security Council on October 17, 2001, by CIA Director J. Tenet. Hamid Karzai was known to the CIA as a Pashtun activist who took part in armed resistance to Soviet troops and helped arrange funding for militants from the United States.²¹² Unlike Abdul Haq, Karzai from the very beginning agreed to accept American assistance and establish cooperation with American Special Forces in Afghanistan, which began to ensure its security. In November 2001, when Taliban nearly captured Karzai in Afghanistan, he was transported by helicopter from the U.S. Air Force to neighbouring Pakistan. With direct US involvement, Karzai's group managed to raise a small revolt in southern Afghanistan, presented by the American press as a significant victory for anti-Taliban forces.²¹³ The orientation toward cooperation with the U.S. discredited Karzai in the eyes of the tribal elders who perceived him as a patronage of the United States.²¹⁴

²⁰⁷ Kenneth Katzman, *Afghanistan: Current Issues and U.S. Policy*, CRS, RL30588 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service (CRS), August 1, 2003), 19.

²⁰⁸ Fields and Ahmed. *A review of the 2001 Bonn Conference...*, 2011. 11.

²⁰⁹ Kim Barker. *Taliban Shuffle: Strange Days in Afghanistan and Pakistan*. Anchor, 2011.

²¹⁰ Michael Griffin. *Reaping the Whirlwind: Taliban Movement in Afghanistan*. (London: Pluto Press, 2001). 220.

²¹¹ Steve Coll. *Ghost wars: The secret history of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet invasion to September 10, 2001*. Penguin, 2005. 332-334.

²¹² Peter L Bergen. *The longest war: The enduring conflict between America and Al-Qaeda*. Simon and Schuster, 2011. 63-67.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Dobbins et al., *After the war...*, 2008. 93-95.

The formal King of Afghanistan Mohammad Zahir Shah enjoyed broad support among Afghan Pashtuns.²¹⁵ Zahir Shah and the U.S. were equally restrained about the prospect of the return to power in Afghanistan. Not foreseeing a place in the future Afghan government for Zahir Shah, the U.S. sought to use its political resource to legitimize its actions.²¹⁶ At a hearing in the House of Representatives, C. Powell said that Zahir Shah should not become the executive head, but he must play an essential unifying role.²¹⁷

Since the U.S. was not favoring a total control to any one group in Afghanistan, there were two main questions on the Bonn conference agenda; who will be leading head the interim government and how portfolios will be distributed among various stakeholders. It was decided in the conference that the head of the administration was to choose from three candidates Hamid Karzai (Pashtun), Abdul Sattar Sirat (Uzbek), and a former President of Afghanistan Burhanuddin Rabbani (Tajik).²¹⁸ On behalf of C. Powell, the U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, D. Dobbins, during the meeting, held consultations with representatives of Russia, Pakistan, and Iran.²¹⁹ It turned out that Karzai's candidacy did not cause any objection. However, Abdul Sattar Sirat won in the preliminary vote due to his proximity to the king and non-involvement in the civil war events of the early 1990s. At the same time, his candidacy aroused rejection among the Northern Alliance leaders, for whose sympathies Rabbani and Karzai fought. Abdul Sattar Sirat could not count on the alliance's support because of his proximity to the king. The Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Lahdar Brahimi, persuaded Abdul Sattar Sirat to withdraw his candidacy, on December 5, 2001, and hence, H. Karzai won the election.²²⁰

On December 22, 2001, the interim cabinet was formed due to the U.S.' desire to overcome difficult political cleavages in the country, and the power was divided between the

²¹⁵ Maryam Mastoor. "Us Strategy towards Post-Taliban Afghanistan: Analysing the Efforts for State Building." *Regional Studies* 28, no. 3 (2010). 4.

²¹⁶ US Congress House Committee on International Relations, *US Diplomatic Efforts in the War Against Terrorism, 107th Congress, First Session, October 24, 2001*. US Government Printing Office, 2001.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Fields and Ahmed. *A review of the 2001 Bonn Conference...*, 2011. 5-6.

²¹⁹ Griffin. *Reaping the Whirlwind...*, 2001). 28-31.

²²⁰ James F Dobbins. *After Taliban: nation-building in Afghanistan*. Potomac Books, Inc., 2008. 90.

Northern Alliance and H. Karzai, while the interests of other groups were infringed.²²¹ The Bonn process next agenda was to held elections in Afghanistan.²²²

On December 20, 2001, the United Nations, in the light of UNSC resolution No. 1386, sent about 4,500 International Security Assistance Force to ensure security in Kabul and its suburbs.²²³ The U.S. was determined to send more troops to conduct military operations, but wanted other countries to provide peacekeepers.²²⁴ In a way, the U.S. wanted to avoid more U.S. troops in Afghanistan, somewhat deviated from Americanization of the Afghan war, an exclusive role without any compromise.

In the early stages of the post-war period in Afghanistan, the U.S. did not pursue to expand the scope of ISAF. Firstly, Washington had no desires to have involved partners in the neighbourhood. Secondly, they did not expect an escalation of tensions in Afghanistan due to retaliation from Taliban. The U.S. associated Afghanistan's main problems with the surviving members of al-Qaeda and Taliban in the adjacent area with Pakistan. To overcome potential challenges from the surviving members of Al-Qaeda and Taliban, the U.S. initiated anti-terror campaigns in the border area between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

3.1.2. The Statebuilding Program

After more than twenty years of war, Afghans' profound resolution of social and political issues is not part of the U.S. plan. Contrary to the Afghans' proposal to implement a plan similar to the Marshall Plan in Afghanistan, the U.S.' first phase is to meet the population's significant humanitarian needs, rather than rebuild the country. As early as 2002, members of the White House government began to talk about Afghanistan's imminent transition to self-sufficiency.²²⁵ The United Nations International Conference in Tokyo was held in 2002, where a plan to provide economic aid to Afghanistan was agreed.²²⁶ It was expected a sum of \$4.5 billion would be allocated for Afghanistan's reconstruction and early implementation of several infrastructure projects, i.e. construction of natural gas pipelines, reconstruction of roads and

²²¹ Bonn Agreement. "Agreement on provisional arrangements in Afghanistan pending the re-establishment of permanent government institutions." *United Nations* (2001).

²²² Fields and Ahmed. *A review of the 2001 Bonn Conference...*, 2011. 5-6.

²²³ Naomi Weinberger. "Civil-Military Coordination in Peacebuilding. The Challenge in Afghanistan." *Journal of International Affairs* (2002): 255.

²²⁴ Mastoor. "Us Strategy towards Post-Taliban Afghanistan...", 2010). 4.

²²⁵ Weinberger. "Civil-Military Coordination...2002: 273.

²²⁶ Ibid: 265.

irrigation networks. The United Nations Security Council adopted a resolution (Resolution no:1401) on March 28, 2002, to establish a United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), responsible for raising funds for the country's reconstruction.

Making a significant financial and organizational contribution to the UN mission's work, the U.S. simultaneously implemented many of its programs in Afghanistan. During the visit of H. Karzai to the White House on January 28–29, 2002, a decision was made to assist Afghanistan in creating a national army.²²⁷ President Bush called this decision as a significant innovation in US policy. Following the meeting, a joint statement also spoke of direct US \$ 297 million in funding for projects to train Afghan teachers, publish textbooks for schools, vaccinate children, and provide humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan's starving people. Despite the significant importance of these measures to stabilize the situation, there was a lack of a sincere strategy and determination of the U.S. to take a leading role in state building in Afghanistan.

As the U.S. diverted its attention to new goals in the so called 'global war on terror' at the end of 2002, the U.S. policy in Afghanistan focused on implementing infrastructural projects designed to use Afghanistan as a link between Central and South Asia in the future. On September 12, 2002, the U.S., Japan and Saudi Arabia announced the construction of a highway in Afghanistan, connecting Kabul with Kandahar and Herat, worth \$ 180 million.²²⁸ They proposed establishing a transportation hub in Afghanistan connecting Central and South Asia, the Caspian basin region and the Far East. On December 27, 2002, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan's leaders signed an agreement to construct a \$ 2 billion Trans-Afghan gas pipeline on the U.S.'s auspices of special interest. Its route was from the Turkmen gas field Davletabad-Donmez along the Herat-Kandahar route in Afghanistan and Quetta-Multan in Pakistan leading to the Indian town of Fazilka on the border with Pakistan.²²⁹

The U.S. Freedom Support Act of December 4, 2002, laid down certain objectives for supporting statebuilding and democratic development in Afghanistan.²³⁰ The first key objective was to eliminate the military threat to US troops and their allies in Afghanistan and the reduction in the likelihood of a new transformation of the country into a source of

²²⁷ Katzman. "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance ...2010. 51.

²²⁸ Peter Marsden. "Afghanistan: the reconstruction process." *International affairs* 79, no. 1 (2003): 97.

²²⁹ Martha Brill Olcott. "International gas trade in Central Asia: Turkmenistan, Iran, Russia and Afghanistan." (2004). 19.

²³⁰ Katzman, *Afghanistan: Current Issues and U.S. Policy...* 2003), 30.

international terrorism. The second objective was to minimize Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis, particularly among Afghan refugees in neighbouring countries. The third objective was to enhance further struggle against drug production and trafficking in the country. The fourth objective was to assist in forming the representative and democratically elected government in Afghanistan, respecting the rights and freedoms of the citizens. The fifth objective was to support statebuilding projects in Afghanistan. Finally, to provide additional resources at the Afghan Ministry of Women's Affairs's disposal for uplifting the fate of women in Afghanistan.

The U.S. course on building an exemplary democracy in Afghanistan was discussed in the Loya Jirga in Kabul on June 10–12, 2002. The meeting brought together about fifteen hundred delegates from the Afghan tribes to elect Afghanistan's president for the next two years. Most of the participants sympathized with the former king, who was about to run for office and hoped for ending the arbitrariness of field commanders.²³¹ However, this was prevented by the special representative of the U.S. president for Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, who first delayed the start of the Loya Jirga by three hours and then transferred the same to the next day on the premise of clarifying the position of the Zahir Shah. Meanwhile, Khalilzad persuaded Zahir-Shah not to stand as a candidate for president, rather support Karzai, and as a result, the next day, 1,200 delegates voted for Hamid Karzai.²³²

On June 19, 2002, H. Karzai announced the interim government's composition, in which the leaders of the Northern Alliance and other field commanders were given wide representation.²³³ These appointments were made contrary to many Loya Jirga members' protests, who pointed to the Mujahideen's crimes and their unsuitability for public administration tasks. According to Khalilzad, the new government's composition reflected a balance between the desire for peace in Afghanistan, on the one hand, and justice, on the other. Hamid Karzai repeated the words of an American diplomat in an interview with a British media and said that first Justice in our time had become a luxury; we must not sacrifice the world for it, so first peace and stability, then justice.²³⁴

The U.S. supported the Northern Alliance on the distribution of powers in the new government. The State Department hoped that the Northern Alliance military units would

²³¹ Griffin. *Reaping the Whirlwind...*, 2001). 28-31.

²³² Katzman. "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance ...2010. 10.

²³³ Edwards, "State-building in Afghanistan...", 2010. 975.

²³⁴ Edwards, "State-building in Afghanistan...", 2010. 979-988.

ensure security in the country until the end of forming a professional army that would not hinder the creation of conditions for the stable development of Afghanistan's political processes. At the same time, the U.S. military spoke out in favour of the complete transfer to the field commanders duties towards the formation of local armed forces and their training. Resultantly the U.S. approach of military strength and statebuilding were grasped together. Therefore, the groups of US military instructors in Afghanistan were kept small numbers which proved ineffective in the short and medium-term vis-à-vis anti-Taliban operations.

The American commanders began training the national army of Afghanistan in May 2002. By this time, Afghanistan had more than forty divisions and twelve brigades of about seven hundred thousand troops. However, the given numbers of Afghan armed forces were only in documented records, but in reality, nominally two hundred thousand soldiers were in the standing force, who were mainly comprised of the Northern Alliance units. In 2002, the Minister of Defense, M. Fahim state that the military department incurred expenses for the maintenance of this huge army. In the initial phase of the Afghan National Army formation, the country was divided into zones of influence between field commanders.²³⁵ The leading role was given to Hamid Karzai, who controlled only Kabul and its environs with the direct assistance from ISAF. The interests of field commanders who controlled some key ministries in the Afghan government were not in total agreement over the principle policies of statebuilding. One of the key issues, over which differences arose, was the Northern Alliance force's demobilisation. After the provisional administration's election, the Northern Alliance's armed units were declared as illegal armed groups and were made subject to demobilization. The President of Afghanistan planned to create a professional army of nearly sixty thousand men, an air force of eight thousand, border troops of twelve thousand and a police force of seventy thousand people. However, the government failed in achieving this objective despite assistance from international donors. The UN mission for the disarmament and demobilization of the formal Mujahedeen also failed to achieve significant results. As part of the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration program held in 2003, about one lac small arms were purchased from the Mujahedeen, which was only 5% of the total ammo they received since 1980's.²³⁶

²³⁵ Traian Maghercă. "The Evolution of the Afghan National Army from 2001 to the Present." *Bulletin of "Carol I" National Defence University (EN)* 4 (2019): 31-36.

²³⁶ Seth G. Jones, *Reintegrating Afghan Insurgents*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, OP-327-MCIA, 2011a, p. ix.

Under the U.S. statebuilding project, the new Afghan regime was emerging as one of the most centralized governments globally; while Afghanistan's historical conditions required the decentralization of power.²³⁷ It can be considered one of the worst mistakes of the U.S. policymakers who ignored Afghans' political culture and history in the formulation and implementation of Afghanistan's governance system. Mr Karzai relied on field commanders who sought independence within their spheres of influence in their respective regions and ministries. Simultaneously, the interests of specific tribes were overlooked, and the will of tribal elders had no influence on public policy, which resulted in resentment among the citizens. Thus, with the U.S.'s help, the Afghan government strengthened the power of field commanders and did not allow the reestablishment of the classical system of power in Afghanistan. Afghanistan's real problems were overshadowed by the struggle against al-Qaida and Taliban, who were considered solely responsible for the instability. The U.S. administrations fight against terror' was conducted on priorities of most wanted terrorists according to the list, which included about thirty people. Whenever there was an incident of the killing of a prominent al-Qaeda leader or Taliban President Bush used to report the "war on terror" in Afghanistan and the Middle East. It is also reported that President Bush used to keep track of al-Qaeda and Taliban's losses in a special diary, crossing out the names of terrorist leaders and re-listing them in case of incorrect information about their destruction. Focusing mainly on the destruction of 'wanted people' the U.S. overlooked the complex picture of Afghanistan's power relations. The discontent of Afghan tribes with the all-powerfulness of field commanders increased and a struggle started between the field commanders and tribal elders for spheres of influence.²³⁸

Diplomatic documents regarding bilateral relations between the U.S. and Afghanistan and documents from the White House and the U.S. Congress regarding the Afghan situation in 2002 and early 2003, always included winning notes and not the policy failures. Towards the end of 2003, it seemed that, in Washington, they consider their work in Afghanistan finished. In joint statements made during visits to the White House of H. Karzai, the U.S. called on Afghanistan to adhere to the deadlines for statebuilding laid down in the Bonn Agreements,

²³⁷ Astri Suhrke, "Waging war and building peace in Afghanistan." (*International Peacekeeping* 19, no. 4, 2012): 478-491.

²³⁸ In informal interview with Dr Jonathan Schroden about the U.S. strategies in Afghanistan. Dr Jonathan Schroden is a military operation analyst and focuses on Afghanistan.

and promised Afghanistan assistance, with the help of NGOs from both countries and the business community, and also through civic exchanges.

The development of Afghanistan's political processes was evaluated in Washington based on the goals of the global war on terror. A 2003 Congressional hearing on Afghanistan in Afghanistan noted that if the U.S. can help Afghanistan become a stable democracy, they need to win more allies. It was also agreed at large in the hearing that the U.S. policy in Afghanistan demonstrates the U.S. approach to a post-war settlement in Iraq to the World; therefore, the reputation of the U.S. is at stake, and the U.S. administration must understand that defeat will have particularly adverse consequences for the war on terror. However, President Bush was not fully convinced to invest in Afghanistan's democratization, rather mainly focused on eliminating terrorists. On June 15, 2004, leaders of the U.S. and Afghanistan, in a joint statement recognized that international assistance cannot and should not last forever and that private investment and market mechanisms should be the locomotive of the country's economic development.

Given the end of the American Afghanistan Freedom Support Act in 2006, the Hamid Karzai administration proposed to agree on strategic partnership between the two countries. According to a document signed on May 23, 2005, the U.S. and Afghanistan announced cooperating on a partnership in building democracy, economy, and military sectors in Afghanistan. However, the statebuilding efforts in Afghanistan turned into a series of compromises that only created problems but due to the personal aptitudes of H. Karzai and his administration, as well as US Ambassador to Afghanistan Z. Khalilzad, the omnipotent warlords were gradually pushed to the sidelines of political life. At first, Mujahideen leaders were removed from key provinces' management, then part of their troops were demobilized. To compensate for the warlords/ formal field commanders, the central government offered posts in the national government and legislative bodies.

In early 2002, as part of the statebuilding and reconstruction plan, the U.S., with donor countries' assistance, established advanced units, uniting up to 500 military and civilian specialists to train Afghan forces. Slowly the U.S. shifted all ground operational tasks to the local Afghan forces under the command of NATO. With US commanders' help, the local Afghan forces initiated indiscriminate operations against Taliban and ISIS, which received widespread criticism from numerous humanitarian organizations operating in Afghanistan. They argued that the U.S. used humanitarian programs to achieve military objectives, not for

Afghanistan's overall reconstruction and statebuilding projects.²³⁹ It also concerned the local population that the military operations were carried out in relatively peaceful regions. This damaged the reputation of all the international forces as well as humanitarian organizations operating in Afghanistan. As a result of the change in perception, in 2004, the local Afghans killed twenty-four employees of international NGOs in Afghanistan, which led to the withdrawal of Doctors without Borders from the country after 24 years of work.

From 2005 to 2006, the White House has carried out several government shifts to smooth out US policy's negative impact on the country's international prestige.²⁴⁰ In 2006, a new version of the National Security Strategy was laid down where the most acute defenders of the concept of unilateral actions were smoothed out.²⁴¹ It was also clarified that the essence of the preventive action strategy as directed exclusively against terrorists, was to be enhanced. This was a major policy shift in the U.S. global campaign against terrorism. The most consistent defenders for a unilateral approach to conflicts in the Middle East and Central Asia were dismissed from their official ranks to get a face-saving among coalition partners about the unilateral decisions. However, the amendments through a new strategy did not change the fundamental nature of the U.S. strategy. The course towards the U.S.'s leading military and political dominance in the war in Afghanistan was maintained during the second republican administration of George W. Bush and the idea of democratization of the Greater Middle East.

As part of reconciliation and peace talk's policy, the troops' continuing reduction led to a softening of the U.S. position on a political settlement with Taliban. At the end of September 2008, secret negotiations were held in Mecca between the Afghan government and Taliban leadership under the patronage of King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia.²⁴² During the talks, Taliban publicly stated that they were no longer al-Qaeda allies; thereby giving US Secretary of Defense R. Gates an incentive to support the negotiations. The foreign policy doctrine of democratization was adjusted towards greater pragmatism in the last year of the Republican administration of George W. Bush. In July 2008, a new version of the National Defense

²³⁹ Simone Haysom, and Ashley Jackson. "You don't need to love us': Civil-Military Relations in Afghanistan, 2002–13." *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 2, no. 2 (2013). 1-16

²⁴⁰ Mohammad Rasouli, "The US Approach to Peacebuilding in Afghanistan: A Comparative Analysis of George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump Administration Policies in Afghanistan." (2020). 13-15.

²⁴¹ Katzman. "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security..." (2017). 531-643.

²⁴² Guido Steinberg, and Nils Woermer. "Exploring Iran & Saudi Arabia's Interests in Afghanistan & Pakistan: Stakeholders or Spoilers-A Zero Sum Game? Part 1: Saudi Arabia." *Barcelona Centre for International Affairs*, (2013): 3.

Strategy was released, in which the long war against extremist movements was proclaimed the main mission of the U.S. for the foreseeable future. Instead of relying on an elected coalition, it was proposed to establish close and trusting relationships with both old allies and new partners in the war in Afghanistan. Finally, the need for the U.S. superiority in anti-Taliban operations was declared. However, the talks did not bear any fruitful results. Taliban's demand for an unconditional troop's withdrawal was not acceptable to the U.S., nor the Afghan government.

3.2. The U.S. strategies Under Obama Administration

President Obama had to deal with the war in Afghanistan which at that time became more complicated due to successful resurgence of Taliban fighters. He came up with different approach by giving more importance to regional countries in the Afghan conflict. Thus, President Bush penchant for unilateral actions by ignoring regional and extra-regional stakeholders in the policy formulation was replaced by President Bush regional approach. President Obama acknowledged the importance of Taliban as an important stakeholder in Afghanistan's politics and hence initiated negotiations for political settlement with Taliban. However, he used bluffing strategy by increasing the number of ISAF troops on ground. The increase in international forces resulted in increased rebellion, as Taliban reacted with more attacks against the security forces. Without reaching any consensus with Taliban, President Obama announced the exit date for the international troops from Afghanistan, which did not materialized. The detailed explanation of the U.S. strategies under President Obama administration is given below.

3.2.1. AfPak Strategy and Regional Approach

Then-US President Barak Obama provided the AfPak strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan. This policy was the manifestation of the fact that the U.S. sees the security of Afghanistan beyond its borders.²⁴³ Now, Afghanistan's security is tied to the wider region. This shows that the U.S. is now seeking regional policy intervention in Afghanistan.²⁴⁴

²⁴³ Ishtiaq Ahmad, "The US Af-Pak strategy: challenges and opportunities for Pakistan." *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 37, no. 4 (2010): 191-209.

²⁴⁴ Vinay Kaura, "The Trump Administration's Afghan Policy: Implications for Regional Security." *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs* 26, no. 3 (2017): 92-108.

The term AfPak was probably first coined by Richard Holbrook, who stated that “first of all, we often call the problem AfPak, as in Afghanistan Pakistan. This is not just an effort to save eight syllables. It is an attempt to indicate and imprint in our DNA the fact that there is one theater of war, straddling an ill-defined border, the Pak-Afghan border, and that on the western side of that border, NATO and other forces are able to operate. On the eastern side, it's the sovereign territory of Pakistan. But it is on the eastern side of this ill-defined border that the international terrorist movement is located”.

The AfPak strategy was multifaceted, but its main objective was to equate Pakistan with Afghanistan. The U.S. emphasized Pakistan's role in fighting terrorism in safe havens in the tribal region adjacent to the Pak-Afghan border. Overall, Obama's strategy for conflict resolution in Afghanistan focused on involving the countries of the region in the political process. In fact, the most important of the countries in the region is Pakistan.

The U.S. has also encouraged Afghanistan's neighbouring countries to support Afghanistan by assisting the conflict resolution efforts and reconstruction projects. Ironically, both the U.S. and Russia agree on the common goal of achieving peace in Afghanistan. China is another growing economy globally, which is deeply concerned about peace in neighbouring strategic Afghanistan. Pakistan and Iran has territorial and religious bondage with Afghanistan, and are home of millions of Afghan refugees.²⁴⁵ Almost every Central Asian country is concerned about peace and security in Afghanistan because it affects their trade, politics and culture. India is yet another growing power in the region and enjoys good relations with Afghanistan. Despite varying strategic interests in Afghanistan, almost every regional country has consensus on sustainable peace in the country and region at large.

On November 2, 2011, the U.S. administration pledged Afghanistan's neighbours for non-interference during an Istanbul conference, known as the Istanbul Declaration.²⁴⁶ The conference was meant to ensure that regional countries do not take sides with any of Afghanistan's local warring parties. The same commitment from the regional countries was again ensured at the Bonn Conference on December 5, 2011. On June 14, 2012, a ministerial conference was held at Kabul, popularly known as the Heath of Asia Ministerial Process.²⁴⁷ Fourteen regional countries attended the conference, an equal number of supporting countries

²⁴⁵ Diane Tober, “Introduction: Afghan refugees and returnees.” *Iranian Studies* 40, no. 2 (2007): 133-135.

²⁴⁶ Ahmed Rashid, *Pakistan on the brink: The future of America, Pakistan, and Afghanistan*. Penguin, 2013.

²⁴⁷ Fields and Ahmed. *A review of the 2001 Bonn Conference...*, 2011.

and eleven regional and international organizations. The Heart of Asia ministerial process ensured recommitment to the earlier Istanbul conference, whereby regional countries will avoid siding with the warring parties.

Moreover, the role of regional countries in uplifting Afghanistan's economic fate and reconstruction efforts were discussed. The participants also agreed on joint fighting against terrorism and drug trafficking. In continuation of the same regional approach, another Heart of Asia conference was held in Islamabad in December 2015. The same conference was again held in the Indian city of Amritsar in December 2016. Such like conferences continued for exploring regional peace with a focus on Afghanistan.

Afghanistan also sought to enhance interdependency with the regional countries through regional organizations like South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). Afghanistan's main objective is to increase its economic activities in the region, thus lowering dependence on International donors. A regional Economic Cooperation Conference (RECCA) was called in Istanbul in November 2016 and Ashkhabad, Turkmenistan in 2017 sort out economic independence for Afghanistan. Many other initiatives had been taken place vis-à-vis regional solution to the Afghanistan problem, as the Regional Working Group initiative by UNAMA and Turkey, a Kabul Silk Road initiative by UNAMA, the International Contact Group on Afghanistan and a Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) led by Pakistan, China, Afghanistan and the U.S. etc. Though the outcome of such conferences did little to uplift Afghanistan's economic conditions, they certainly reflected the importance and commitment of the regional countries towards Afghanistan.

Apart from the regional organizations, the leading regional countries, Pakistan, China, Russia, Central Asian Republics, India, Persian Gulf states, and Iran have a direct role in Afghanistan's politics. To some extent, the Middle Eastern Countries do enjoy good diplomatic relations with all parties in Afghanistan. The role of Qatar in the current peace process between the U.S. and Afghan Taliban is unprecedented. In the pursuance of the regional approach strategy towards Afghanistan, the U.S. greatly relied on those regional countries. The most important regional player in Afghanistan politics is Pakistan, who enjoys geographic, historical, religious and cultural linkages.

Pakistan

From 2004 to 2008, Taliban extended their influence to the tribal region inside Pakistan. In the South Waziristan of Pakistan, Taliban managed to create an Islamic quasi-state in whose territory where both the traditional power hierarchy based on tribal seniority and the federal government remains dysfunctional. The proportional increase in the number of suicide attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan from 2004 to 2008 testified that Taliban had come into close contact with al-Qaeda members who had taken refuge in various places in 2001. Pakistan's government stance during that period was ambivalent. On the one hand, they were under pressure from the local religious groups to avoid any military action against the terrorist. However, at the same time, the U.S. was pressuring Pakistan to take decisive actions against terrorists in the tribal region. In 2001, Pakistan took a series of measures to capture and transfer many famous Afghan terrorists to the United States. In March 2006, the U.S. and Pakistan signed a strategic partnership agreement, under which Islamabad was promised annual financial assistance amounting several hundred million dollars. However, the strengthening of ties with the U.S. did not lead to the stabilization of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. In the spring of 2006, Pakistan criticized the government of H. Karzai, accusing him of inability to control the situation in Afghanistan, which threatened Pakistan's stability, and even of preparing an attempt on the life of the Pakistani leadership. A separate cause for dissatisfaction was the resumption of direct contacts between the Kabul government and the Pashtun leaders of the tribal zone in February 2006 without coordination with Islamabad.²⁴⁸

The neighbouring country considered vital for Afghanistan's security, is Pakistan. However, there are confusions between the U.S. and Pakistan's leadership over Afghanistan's situation. It is also indicated in the ministry of defense reports that Pakistan uses agency units in Afghanistan to counter India's influence in Afghanistan. President Trump announced in a new Afghan strategy in August 2017 that "we can no longer remain silent on Pakistan's safe haven for terrorist organizations," and "In the past, Pakistan has been an important partner... It is time for Pakistan to demonstrate its commitment to civilization, order and peace".²⁴⁹

Ghani had an official visit to Pakistan in 2015 and met several Pakistani officials as part of a joint effort to improve relations. Due to productive meetings, in May 2015, Pakistan

²⁴⁸ K. Alan Kronstadt, 'Pakistan-US Relations', *US Congressional Research Service (CRS)*, May 24, 2012. 23–25.

²⁴⁹ White House Office of the Press Secretary, Remarks by President Trump on the Strategy in Afghanistan and South Asia, August 21, 2017.

began to train a small number of ANDSF officers, and the cooperation further improved as a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between Pakistan Inter-Agency Intelligence Agency (ISI) and Afghanistan's NSS Intelligence Service. Many Afghans positively perceived Pakistan's role as a centre of US support for the Mujahideen, who forced Soviet withdrawal. However, they later began to resent Pakistan as one of the three countries that officially recognized Taliban as the legitimate government in Afghanistan.²⁵⁰

Following the September 11 attacks, Pakistan's support to the US against al-Qaida was considered relatively effective by the US authorities. Following the September 11 attacks, Pakistan seized more than 700 al-Qaida people and further allowed the U.S. to enter Pakistan's airspace for their combat operations in Afghanistan.²⁵¹ In April 2008, as part of the Tripartite Commission's work, the three countries had developed consensus on to put in place the five Border Coordination Centers (BCCs), including radar nodes, to enable liaison officers to share a common vision of the border area.²⁵² The BCC process failed because, out of those five, four were set up on the Afghan side of the border while the one on Pakistan side of the border was not materialized. On May 1, 2011, the U.S. operation against Osama Bin Laden in Abbottabad, helped ease pre-existing burdens caused by Pakistan's refusal to shut down the Haqqani network. Relationships continued to deteriorate after 24 Pakistani soldiers were killed in a US air raid on November 26, 2011. Pakistan then closed border posts, suspended participation in border coordination centres and boycotted the Bonn conference in December 2011.²⁵³

The ups and downs in Pakistan-US cooperation over the conflict in Afghanistan continued since the 9/11 incident. However, Pakistan's role as a facilitator in the recent peace talks between the U.S. and Afghan Taliban is unprecedented. Post- Trump's South Asian strategy resulted in the severity of the U.S. and Pakistan's bilateral relations. However, soon, the U.S. officials, including President Trump, acknowledged Pakistan's commitment to Taliban's peace talks with the U.S.. Under Prime Minister Imran Khan, Pakistan shows positive commitments towards the successful conclusion of peace talks between the U.S. and Taliban. Mr. Khan has repeatedly insisted on the need for a peaceful settlement of the Afghan dispute.

²⁵⁰ K. Alan Kronstadt, "Pakistan: Key Current Issues and Developments", *US Congressional Research Service (CRS)*, June 1, 2010. 35–36.

²⁵¹ Robert M Hathaway, "Leverage and largesse: Pakistan's post-9/11 partnership with America." (*Contemporary South Asia* 16, no. 1, 2008): 11-24.

²⁵² Mark Schrecker, *US Strategy in Afghanistan: Flawed Assumptions Will Lead to Ultimate Failure*, (Washington DC, Joint Force Quarterly, 2010). 76.

²⁵³ Rashid, *Pakistan on the brink*, 2013. 200- 232.

Pakistan still is very relevant and can play a decisive role in the conflict resolution efforts in Afghanistan.

Iran

Iran is yet another important regional country which enjoys historical, cultural and linguistic commonalities with Afghanistan. Iran has historically acted to exert its influence over Afghanistan's western part due to Persian speaking Shia Muslims. The Persian speaking Shia Afghans look for Iran in terms of their ethno-religious linkages. During the Soviet Union intervention and post 9/11 US intervention, Iran wants Afghanistan's soil not to be used as a base for the American forces. The post 9/11 intervention in Afghanistan has posed severe threats to Iran's stability due to the Iran nuclear program's ongoing controversies. Iran fears that after getting a stable and robust position in Afghanistan, the U.S. might use it as a strategic base against Iran's activities. This is why Iran is now in close coordination with Taliban, who were previously considered a threat in Iran. After Taliban came into force, Iran was sceptical of their Sunni fundamentalist ideology and were fearful of Taliban government. However, today, Iran is supporting Taliban to ensure that the U.S. is not getting strong footings in Afghanistan.²⁵⁴ Since 2017, Iran invited Afghan Taliban representatives in many conferences and was open to the extent that they allowed Taliban to open their political office in Iran. Despite Iran's support to Taliban, they do maintain differences on religious beliefs. Iran has historically provided logistical support to the Shia armed groups in West Afghanistan. Iran continues to provide financial assistance to the Hazara community in Afghanistan, including educational scholarships. The current political turmoil in Syria has led to further reports that Iran recruited Shia Afghans to fight in Syria on behalf of Assad regime.

In the post-2015 period, Iran established good relations with both the Afghan government and Taliban. In April 2015, Afghan president, Ashraf Ghani visited Tehran and met with the Iranian president and the supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei. Afghan president assured Iranian leadership that Afghanistan would avoid becoming an arena for conflict between Iran and the U.S.. Both countries' leadership agreed on fighting ISIS in the region, particularly in Afghanistan. Both countries had earlier signed a memorandum of understanding to enhance broader economic and security cooperation in 2013. The same MOU was later materialized into a security cooperation agreement. Despite these developments, Iran never

²⁵⁴ Alireza Nader and Joya Laha. *Iran's Balancing Act in Afghanistan*. (Rand National Defense Research Inst Santa Monica Ca, 2011). 9–10.

trusted the Afghan government as the latter was completely dependent on the U.S. for economic and military assistance. It is also a fact that since 9/11, the Afghan government had never enjoyed complete autonomy in key policy decisions. In this pretext, Iran extended its support to Taliban, despite their ideological differences, to ensure that Taliban continue posing threats to the U.S. forces and may not find strong and stable standing in Afghanistan.

Despite this cooperation, both Iran and Afghanistan had earlier disputed over the repatriation of Afghan refugees. There are nearly 1.4 million Afghan refugees in Iran, of which, Iran unilaterally repatriated some fifty thousand in 2007. Afghanistan was not happy with Iran unilateral decision to repatriate the refugees. Moreover, there are disagreements between the two countries over Iran's alleged recruitment of Afghans for war in Syria and Yemen.

The U.S. appreciated Iran's move to attend a meeting of the International contact group held in Rome on Afghanistan in October 2010. In January 2010, Iran supported the U.S. stance on controlling illegal drug trafficking during a UN meeting in Geneva. Similarly, Iran attended the Kabul conference of 2010, the Bone conference of 2011 and many other related events over conflict resolution in Afghanistan.

The U.S. always welcomed aid for Afghanistan, from all countries because of the common interest, to develop the country's infrastructure and institutions. Iran pledged \$1 billion for the construction of roads, and other infrastructure in Afghanistan and more than half of that amount has already been provided. Despite Iran's economic challenges, its commitment to rebuilding Afghanistan shows its vital interests in the country and region. Iran is also working on developing the Chahbahar port in a joint venture with India, which will provide access to Afghan goods as an alternative to dependency on Pakistan. Afghanistan has already signed an agreement with Iran, allowing it to use Chahbahar port for its trade.

After Donald Trump came into office, he fulfilled his presidential promise and withdrawn from Iran's nuclear deal (joint comprehensive plan of action- JCPOA), which resulted in the deterioration of relations between the two countries. In the mid-2019, the U.S. build pressure on Iran and president Trump issues warning messages about a possible attack on Iran's nuclear installations. Simultaneously, the U.S. was engaged in peace talks with the Afghan Taliban to work out a possible pull-out plan. Iran realized that if the U.S. successfully withdraws from Afghanistan, it will be looking for another adventure in the region, which could have been Iran. Iran also knew that the U.S. would not risk another region's intervention before

withdrawing from Afghanistan. This is why Iran developed good relations with the Afghan Taliban, despite their differences, to ensure that they continue posing threats to the U.S. forces and ensuring the war's longevity. Iran seems to be interested in the maximum loss of the U.S. in Afghanistan. This is why it can be presumed that Iran's role, as a regional country, is less favourable for the U.S. in ending the conflict in Afghanistan.

Russia

Russia is another important regional country that carries influence over Afghanistan's affairs. Interestingly, both Russia and the U.S. have a consensus on many issues related to the conflict resolution and restoration of peace in Afghanistan. It is in Russia's utmost interest that religious extremism ends in Afghanistan so that a possible infiltration of terrorists to the central Asian countries is avoided. Another important aspect, which compels Russia to agree on the U.S. efforts to withdraw from Afghanistan, is that it does not want the U.S. to stretch muscles in the central Asian region. A more extended stay in Afghanistan would mean that the U.S. is enhancing its strategic relations with the central Asian republics, hence impacting the Russian backyard. The U.S. had already established its military basis in the region, which concerned Russia. So, in this pretext, Russia facilitates every measure of the U.S. vis-à-vis conflict resolution and troops withdrawal.

Since the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan, Russia facilitated the U.S. in many ways. In February 2009, Russia cooperated with the U.S. in developing the Northern Distribution Network supply line for the sake of transportation facilitation. The U.S. used this route for transporting almost half of their total ground cargo into Afghanistan. The earlier US plan to completely withdraw from Afghanistan in 2014, further enhanced Russia's involvement. Russia hosted the Afghan Taliban and other political elites in international conferences to find Afghanistan's post-US political arrangements.

Despite common interests in the region and common enemy (Mujahedeen now Taliban), Russia is aspiring for taking revenge from the U.S. by covertly supporting the Afghan Taliban. There are unofficial reports from the U.S. defence officials that Russia transported weapons including heavy machine guns to Taliban. The Russians claim that the weapons are to be used against ISIS but are used against the U.S. and Afghan security forces. Though both Russian officials and Taliban spokespersons denied such allegations, Taliban's sustained guerrilla attacks shows that some foreign assistance keeps them afloat. Despite Russian

assistance to the Afghan Taliban, it is a fact that Sunni Taliban insurgents pose threats to the Russian security as well, as they have lineages with Al-Qaeda, who had conducted attacks inside Russia. In the long run, Russia would never want Taliban to enjoy unlimited power in Afghanistan, whereby they can provide safe havens to the global terrorists.

The U.S. had previously ignored Russian efforts for conflict resolution in Afghanistan by denying attending a meeting in April 2017; however, President Trump welcomes all regional countries to establish peace in Afghanistan. Despite the U.S. refusing attitude towards Russian efforts vis-à-vis conflict resolution, the Afghan government and political groups including Taliban participated in almost every conference hosted by Russia. Other regional countries also put their weight in Russian efforts, which compelled the U.S. to accept the Russian role in the Afghan peace process.

The hidden competition between Russia and the U.S. for influence over the Central Asian states in the 2000s directly affected Afghanistan's problem. Russia cooperated with the U.S. and NATO on issues related to Afghanistan's stabilization, as in 2007, technical assistance was resumed, and 92% of Afghanistan's debt (about \$ 10.4 billion) was written off. In 2009, Russia agreed on the transit of NATO non-military cargo through its territory, opening the Northern route to deliver goods to Afghanistan for NATO. At the same time, Russia sought to establish cooperation between the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and NATO, proposing to begin cooperation with the fight against drug trafficking along Afghan borders. The U.S. continued to consider the problems of the region in a non-systemic manner. While Russia's regional initiatives were ignored, in October 2008, the Council of NATO Defense Ministers finally decided to start the fight against drug lords in Afghanistan (before that, the Afghan police performed these duties). In 2008, the U.S. military first talked about introducing an additional contingent of troops in Afghanistan. By that time, there were sixty-two thousand US and NATO troops in the country, and the Afghan army comprised of one hundred and fifty thousand people.

Many countries doubt Russia's role in resolving conflict in Afghanistan because the Afghan Taliban had never enjoyed good relations with the Russian federation. The Mujahedeen struggle against the Soviet Union intervention and Taliban's support and recognition of Chechen independence is deteriorating causes in their bilateral relations. However, it is in Russia's interest to have peace in Afghanistan because it carries the danger of spillover in the Central Asian countries, which are considered to be Russian backyard.

The Central Asian States

Due to the close proximity to Afghanistan, the Central Asian countries are directly affected by either war or peace. The U.S. has already established its bases in some of the CARs for effective operations in Afghanistan. Almost every country in Central Asia has participated in some capacity in the conflict resolution efforts. Kazakhstan, which does not share a direct border with Afghanistan, has kept alive the Afghan issue in the United National Security Council during its two-year non-permanent membership. Uzbekistan is also an active regional player. The 6+3 formula of Uzbekistan ex-president, Karimov got wider appreciations. He believed that the Afghans should resolve the Afghan problem under the UN's guidance. All regional and international stakeholders should only provide logistical support in facilitating the intra-Afghan dialogue.

At the 2010 NATO Summit, the President of Kazakhstan presented his country's response to Afghanistan's situation. He asserted on four main areas for improving the overall socio-political and security situation in Afghanistan. He maintained that the existing international coalition's support for Afghanistan is not sufficient and is required to be increased for the rehabilitation of the socio-economic situation. Further, there is a need to combat the drug threat in Afghanistan. He further stated that the stakeholders should utilize all available options, including linking varying strategies for effective conflict resolution in Afghanistan. The peace settlement process in Afghanistan also provides Central Asian countries with an opportunity to get rid of their chronic problems and make them powerful regional states. It can provide good offices both for negotiations between important external stakeholders and for intra-Afghan peace dialogue. Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan are the most appropriate states to host negotiations in the future on the settlement of Afghanistan, besides Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, due to their contentious relationship with IMU. The regional proximity and neutrality of these three countries would be advantageous in any future negotiations. At the same time, Kazakhstan holds experience in organizing important international conferences. These three countries' joint efforts will give themselves a good reputation and are considered significant regional countries.

Since independence, the Central Asian states remained passive and had lesser participation in world politics since their independence. Though the Central Asian states lie in a strategically important region but they preferred an inward-looking approach to focus more on domestic matters instead of jumping into the global power politics. The 21st century is

marked as an era of global interdependence which compels countries to engage with other countries to remain relevant in the world politics. Similarly, the Central Asian Countries are required to play their participatory role at both international as well as regional level. With respect to the role in regional matters, Afghanistan is a potential test case for the neighbouring countries. Afghanistan is not only important for the central Asian States due to their energy export projects, which could potentially use routes through Afghanistan but also a security compulsion as well. The instability in Afghanistan could directly impact the security of the Central Asian States. Turkmenistan has enjoyed comparatively better relations with Afghanistan during Taliban rule and therefore has the potential to play an active role in the conflict resolution process. Due to Turkmenistan's energy rich resources, it can enter into bilateral trade agreements, which could potentially stabilize Afghanistan economy. The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan electricity transmission (TAP- 500 KV) and Turkmenistan- Afghanistan- Pakistan and India (TAPI) gas pipeline project is the empirical evidence of Turkmenistan's potential to play a constructive role in bringing peace in the region. Moreover, other commercial activities of Central Asian states with Afghanistan are in line to replace harshness into softness.

India

Donald Trump's South Asian strategy has emphasized India's role in Afghanistan as a counterbalance to Pakistan. India has already invested in many infrastructural and security sectors of Afghanistan and seeks a strategically important role in Afghan politics. India too had concerns over the establishment of Afghan Taliban stronghold from 1996 to 2001 as the latter had associations with radical Islamic groups in Pakistan. India perceived the Afghan Taliban to be potentially harmful due to their possible support to the radical groups in Kashmir. The post-2001 Afghan establishment developed close ties with India, and a strategic partnership pact was signed between the two governments where India extended their support in training Afghan soldiers. India also provided military helicopters as an aid to the Afghan forces. From 2001 onwards many important official visits took place between the two countries. These developments were alarming Pakistan's intelligence and military leadership as they claimed that India is using Afghanistan's territory to infiltrate in Baluchistan. Given Pakistan's strategic location with Afghanistan, the U.S. had to revisit its regional approach and again endorsed Pakistan's role vis-à-vis Afghanistan. The policymakers realized it that Afghanistan's strategic position vis-à-vis Pakistan, India cannot replace Pakistan in supporting the U.S. in its

operations in Afghanistan. That is why the U.S. tried to pacify its relations with Pakistan after a deteriorating environment created by Trump's South Asian strategy.

In the past, India had concerns about Pakistan's influence in the internal matters and potential Islamic extremism emanating from Afghanistan. In response, India supported the Northern Alliance as a counterbalance to the Afghan Taliban after the withdrawal of the Soviet Union.²⁵⁵ India extended its support to such an extent that it provided shelter to many of India's leading Northern Alliance leadership. The post-2001 fall of Taliban regime in Afghanistan was in India's interest and hence it extended its diplomatic and financial support to the new Afghan government led by President Hamid Karzai. India continued its support to the subsequent Afghan government as well. Due to India's core interests, it became the fifth-largest donor country to Afghanistan. Although India claims to be involved in the civil developmental projects in line with the international statebuilding project, it does extend military aid. The U.S. president Trump has categorically called upon India to help them more in Afghanistan, particularly in economic assistance. The list of Indian reconstruction projects in Afghanistan is long; it lacks a strategic advantage due to Afghanistan's geographical proximity with Pakistan.

India's involvement in Afghanistan has been viewed with suspicion by Pakistan, which sees it as an attempt to encircle and undermine Pakistan's influence in the region. India's support for the Afghan government and its perceived alignment with anti-Pakistan factions has contributed to tensions between the two countries. This rivalry has hindered regional cooperation and peace efforts. While India had maintained a policy of not engaging with the Taliban directly, it had expressed concerns about the group's potential return to power. India's limited engagement with the Taliban had created challenges for comprehensive peace negotiations, as it had not been able to directly influence or contribute to the process. This limited engagement by India in the peace process between the U.S. and Taliban shows, India role as a spoiler in Afghanistan. India had been cautious about participating in regional initiatives involving Afghanistan, particularly those led by Pakistan or with significant Pakistani involvement. This cautious approach at times limited the effectiveness of regional cooperation efforts and hindered progress in conflict resolution.

²⁵⁵ Kenneth Katzman, "Afghanistan: post-war governance, security, and US policy." (Library of Congress Washington Dc Congressional Research Service, 2008), 7.

China

China is a growing economy in the World and has vested interests in every corner of the World. China's immersion in Afghanistan is based mainly on securing access to the region to smooth its Belt and Road project. Moreover, China is further interested in the mineral resources of Afghanistan as well. China is in the process of establishing roads and railways connectivity within the region. It had linked itself with the Central Asian countries and is now making China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). China has expressed its desire to make other regional countries part of this road project, which India has denied and Afghanistan is not secure.

The second most important purpose of its involvement in Afghanistan is that China wants to contain the Islamic Militancy threat. China is deeply concerned about its own Uighur population, a minority Muslim group living in Xinjiang province. China has employed a war model to deal with any kind of Islamic militancy inside China, due to which it is widely criticized for human rights violations as well.²⁵⁶

China is playing a proactive role of a mediator in the Afghan reconciliation process. In the post-2012 era, China signed various security agreements with Afghanistan to commit to the Afghan military forces' training and aid. In 2014 ministerial conference of Istanbul process in Beijing, China offered to train some 3000 Afghan bureaucrats and an additional grant of \$330 million. Interestingly, China enjoys good normal relations with both the Afghan government and Taliban. Taliban visited China after Ashraf Ghani ended his China visit to participate in the Heat of Asia (Istanbul Process) ministerial conference in Beijing. China is using Pakistan as a bridge between their interaction with Taliban.

Despite being a U.S. closed ally, Afghanistan chief executive Dr Abdullah Abdullah supported China's position over the South China Sea and urged parties to resolve the dispute through pacific means. Afghanistan also realizes China's influential position at both regional and extra-regional politics, thus welcomes its role in the country's peace process. China remained part of many conferences hosted by the Moscow government to materialize peace

²⁵⁶ Zhao Huasheng. "China and Afghanistan: China's interests, stances, and perspectives." *Russian Studies* 5, no. 3 (2012). 3–4.

among various stakeholders in Afghanistan. Many analysts conceive China's engagement in Afghanistan as economically driven, but geo-economics cannot be separated from geopolitics.

Gulf States

Gulf countries have an important role in Afghanistan due to historical and religious connections. Saudi Arabia had a key role in the Soviet-Afghan Jihad and still considerably influenced the Afghan Taliban. United Arab Emirates (UAE) too, has good relations with Taliban. Both Saudi Arabia and UAE granted de facto recognition Taliban government in 1996. Qatar, which is in the opposite block in the present division between Muslim countries, is also playing an important role in the peace talks between the U.S. and Afghan Taliban. Qatar has also opened its good offices for the peace negotiations. So, the Persian Gulf States are much relevant in the conflict resolution efforts in Afghanistan. The late American ambassador, Holbrooke insisted on making a multilateral task force to investigate and stop financial aid from the Gulf States to the Afghan Taliban. This was a reflection of the fact that the Gulf States are involved with the Afghan Taliban. Many of the infrastructural developments in Afghanistan are funded by the Gulf States with a leading role of Saudi Arabia.

Both Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and UAE, which previously recognized Taliban government, are now supporting Afghanistan's US and NATO operations. Saudi Arabia allowed the U.S. to use its airbase in their land against Afghan Taliban and UAE offered air support (six F-16) to the NATO operations. The UAE government also provided \$250 million in aid for various reconstruction projects in Afghanistan. A bomb attack killed six UAE's diplomats at the time when the UAE officials were meeting to discuss their role in the statebuilding program at the Qandahar governor guest house. The attack was a significant blow to the UAE efforts in the reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan.

Presently, Qatar is playing a pivotal role in facilitating both the U.S. officials and Afghan Taliban in their peace talks. The Qatari government played an essential role in the release of some key US prisoners from Taliban. Qatar's role is expected to bring a breakthrough in the ongoing peace efforts between the warring parties in Afghanistan. Qatar has opened a political office for Taliban to communicate with the world. Other Gulf countries are also involved in some capacity in the politics of Afghanistan. Bahrain is also participating in the conflict resolution efforts inside Afghanistan. In January 2009, Bahrain sent nearly a hundred security personals to help Afghan security forces overcome insecurity situations in the country. Bahrain

forces stayed in Afghanistan till 2014. Oman was also contributing to the peace efforts in Afghanistan. In October 2017, Oman hosted the 6th meeting of Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) over Afghanistan's matters. So, almost every Persian Gulf country was having a role in the U.S.'s conflict resolution efforts.

3.2.2. Peace Talks, Exit Plan and Reliance on the Local Forces

The longevity of the U.S. mission in Afghanistan resulted in increasing domestic pressure on the U.S. administration to come out of the endless war. However, the U.S. could not end the war in Afghanistan with no results and without taking, the Afghan government, local and international allies, into confidence. Finding a middle way, the U.S. administration adopted a new strategy of making enduring counterterrorism partnerships with regional countries, initiating peace process with Taliban and shifting Afghanistan's war burden on the local Afghan security forces, thus setting environ for gradual repatriation of the U.S. forces. The newly elected president of the U.S., Barack Obama, in his inaugural address in 2009, stated that his goal is to forge peace in Afghanistan gradually. Essentially, Washington headed for a way out of the armed conflict through reconciliation with Taliban on preserving a conditionally democratic regime in Afghanistan. The deviation from the main course of counterterrorism toward democratization along the American lines was, on the one hand, a sign of an understanding of the archaic conditions of Afghanistan that had strengthened in the White House, and on the other, the expansion of the Afghan political space, which could, under certain conditions, include representatives of the armed opposition.

In initial years of the U.S. intervention, Taliban's position regarding the total US withdrawal was not so rigid and hence was more flexible for a non-zero-sum solution of the conflict. However, the euphoria of the tactical successes they achieved in 2006–2009 created a feeling of near-victory in them, hence hoped for a zero-sum outcome of the game. In 2008, Taliban leader Mullah M. Omar proposed that the international forces freely withdraw troops from Afghanistan without any conditions; however, Taliban did not become masters of the situation.²⁵⁷ The U.S. under B. Obama's rule intended to strengthen its position for future bargaining with Taliban on the terms of reconciliation by intercepting a military initiative to combat them in the short term, similar to how the U.S. managed to seize the initiative in the armed confrontation in Iraq from 2007 to 2008. In April and October 2009, additional

²⁵⁷ Steve Coll, "Looking for Mullah Omar," *The New Yorker*, Vol. 87, No. 45, January 23, 2012.

contingents of US troops of about thirty thousand troops were deployed in Afghanistan's Southern and Eastern regions. By analogy with the Iraqi operation in 2007, a new phase of the military operational campaign in Afghanistan was initiated where changes were carried out under General D. McKiernan's leadership replacing S. McChrystal. In 2009, the post of special presidential representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan was created, which symbolised the shift in American foreign policy from Iraq to Afghanistan. R. Holbrooke was appointed on the said position. Obama administration had made some progressive change in the conceptual approach to the situation in Afghanistan. Under Holbrooke's recommendations, the U.S. president adopted the concept of Af-Pak, which implied the unification of Afghanistan and Pakistan into the framework of a common conflict situation and the development of a unified action strategy for it. The purpose of operations in the region was clarified and narrowed, which from now on was to eliminate the conditions for al-Qaeda's actions against the U.S. and its allies. Thus, the conditions were prepared for the political separation of al-Qaeda from Taliban, one of the prerequisites for starting Taliban's negotiation process. The general meaning of the changes was to find a way out of the political impasse in which the U.S. found itself in Afghanistan since the end of the 2000s. However, Taliban insurgencies kept on increasing and were expecting a Soviet Union type results vis-à-vis withdrawal of Afghanistan's US troops.

Given Taliban's ever-strengthening position and their less dynamic approach towards negotiations, the U.S. entered into various counterterrorism partnerships with regional countries and more specifically with the Afghan government itself. In general, military operations by the government and terrorist activities by Taliban were simultaneously going on in the country, which neither of the parties could change in their interests; thus fading away of the hopes for a zero-sum outcome for either of the two sides. With the support of NATO forces, the Kabul government-controlled large cities, but sporadic hostilities continued on the periphery. Despite the absence of major defeats, the U.S. and NATO leadership realized that the situation could not be reversed by military means. The psychological motive also played an important role. Washington and its allies understood that a military victory in Afghanistan could be ensured at the cost of significant material, human, and most importantly, reputational losses. The level and scale of violence that guaranteed the suppression of Taliban's armed opposition have always exceeded the alliance's willingness to apply to the violence systematically. The liberal approaches to violence in military practice and political life that dominated Western society sharply reduced public support for any course to escalate the war. In this sense, the episode with the resignation of the commander of the American contingent in

Afghanistan S. McChrystal is indicative, showing dissatisfaction with the small number of troops sent to the country and the restrictions imposed by Washington on the actions of coalition forces. In July 2010, McChrystal made an unflattering statement to the White House in the press and accused senior officials of the administration - in particular, Vice President J. Biden - of being soft-headed.²⁵⁸ The disciplinary call of the general to Washington followed, during which President Obama accepted his resignation. McChrystal's sudden departure marked the beginning of a period of personnel problems in Afghanistan's senior military posts. The powers of the commander of the coalition forces in Afghanistan passed to D. Patraeus, who had a reputation as a military man, prone to the nuanced choice of means of influencing the situation. Patraeus's name was associated with the American forces' success in the Iraq conflict in 2006-2008 and expected similar achievements in Afghanistan. However, Patraeus did not have time to prove himself in Afghanistan, as in 2011, President B. Obama appointed him director of the CIA. The post of leader of the coalition forces was passed to General J. Allen, who retained it until February 2013. However, he had to lose his position over a scandal, where he was accused of disclosing official information in correspondence with reporters.

Realizing the difficulties of a military way out of the conflict, starting in 2009, R. Holbrooke came forward with the initiative to begin direct secret negotiations between the U.S. and Taliban leadership. According to information available to the press, in mid-2010, negotiations were in a preliminary stage, and Washington's position in the negotiations was not comprehensive. The first phase of the negotiations aimed to assess Taliban's political ambitions and find out the cleavages inside Taliban ranks and who in the movement's leadership was ready to compromise with NATO and the Kabul government and on what conditions. The U.S. representatives were authorized to discuss the prospects for coalition forces in Afghanistan and the softening of conditions for Taliban prisoners in US prisons. In December 2010, the main negotiator from the U.S. side, R. Holbrooke died. However, the course towards dialogue with Taliban was continued, reflecting the White House's strategic determination to achieve reconciliation with Taliban.

In February 2011, the U.S. Secretary of State, H. Clinton, officially announced the U.S.' change in Afghanistan's settlement position. In her speech to members of the Asian Society, she commented on the proposed compromise and argued that it is not easy under public

²⁵⁸ James P Pfiffner, "Decision Making in the Obama White House." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (2011): 244-262.

pressure to carry out reconciliation with such a fierce opponent as Taliban; however, diplomacy would be a simple affair if one had to negotiate only with friends, so ending the war requires something else. Meeting American voters' expectations and indirectly prompting Taliban to become more compliant, the White House set a deadline for 2014 to withdraw US and NATO combat units from Afghanistan. This was considered as the biggest strategic change towards complete disengagement.

Against this background, there was a significant increase in the cooperation between NATO and the Russian Federation. At the NATO summit in Lisbon in November 2010, a package of agreements was concluded between the parties regarding Afghanistan's operation. In particular, agreements were reached on the sale of a consignment of Mi-17 transport helicopters to Kabul and the return transit of NATO cargo through Russian territory, including by rail. Experts associated this agreement with the upcoming withdrawal of US and NATO forces from Afghanistan and the alliance's desire to save on logistics transfer. However, it was also noted that the Lisbon Summit demonstrated the fact that Russia's contribution to the NATO operation in Afghanistan was comparable to what other major Alliance countries that participated in the war did.

The U.S. did not want to give a free hand to Taliban in the post-withdrawal period. They wanted to sign some agreements on enduring counterterrorism partnerships with the local stakeholders to restrain any misadventure by the terrorist. An important circumstance related to the withdrawal of NATO troops from Afghanistan was forming an international regime to counter threats, such as terrorism, drug trafficking, ethnic separatism and religious extremism, emanating from Afghanistan. To establish such a regime, the U.S. had to win the confidence of the regional stakeholders. From the U.S. involvement in Afghanistan, there were confusions and lack of trust among Afghanistan neighbouring countries. The U.S. actions were decisive for folding the contours of the future regime. In a significant number of cases, American influence hindered multilateral cooperation on a non-aligned basis. Although apart from Pakistan, Afghanistan's neighbouring states did not have close allies of the U.S., the latter nevertheless sought to establish their own rules of interaction, which excluded equal cooperation and was unacceptable for some countries, including Russia, China and Iran. Effective opposition to the threats emanating from Afghanistan depended on the U.S. readiness to cooperate with these countries.

In the backdrop of the withdrawal policy, four approaches determined the U.S. approach in the formation of an international regime in connection with the situation in Afghanistan. Firstly, a bet on unilateral actions by Washington and free hands in relation to any problems that arise. This feature of politics supplanted from the sphere of thought over the fact that in addition to the already existing common security challenges for Afghanistan's neighbouring states, the U.S. provoked new ones by its actions. The second feature was the U.S. desire to rely solely on the help of traditional allies in Europe and Asia and the services of newly acquired partners in the region, whose loyalty was bought by generous assistance programs. This circumstance structured international efforts in Afghanistan according to the will of the United States. It allowed Washington to ignore other opinions about the Afghan situation, including those belonging to neighbouring states. The U.S. ally, Pakistan, had its reasons for not wanting the involvement of Iran, China and Russia in the Afghan situation and, in turn, was in no hurry to lobby for multilateral cooperation. The third feature of US policy has been the distorted perception of many regional security issues related to ethnic separatism, religious extremism, and drug trafficking. Many regional processes in the states of Central Asia, western China, Iran and even Pakistan in Washington by inertia were seen as a confrontation between tyrannical regimes and freedom-loving rebels. The last, fourth feature of the American approach to the problem was a tolerant attitude towards many acute regional security threats emanating from Afghanistan, associated with the remote geographical location of the U.S. from the epicentre of these threats. After the relative stabilization of Afghanistan's situation due to the introduction of an additional military contingent in 2009, the U.S. in 2011 headed for the gradual withdrawal of its troops and giving a leading role to the Afghan government in the war.

The new strategy's goal was to transfer hostilities' conduct to the Afghan armed forces and withdraw American troops by 2014. The decisive stage in the implementation of this program began in 2013 when in most Afghan provinces, the fighting forces' leadership was passed into the Afghan commanders and local armed forces' hands. This change was not without repercussions as the number of government casualties has increased dramatically, making the 2013 autumn military campaign the bloodiest since the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan.²⁵⁹ In February 2013, General J. Dunford had become the commander of American and coalition forces in Afghanistan, who was also directed to play a significant political role;

²⁵⁹ Raymond Millen, "Aligning a Counterinsurgency Strategy for Afghanistan." *Small Wars Journal* 4, no. 6 (2009): 1-14.

to deter President Karzai from disparaging steps regarding American plans and provide popular support for the unpopular war on the home front in the USA. Both directions of the political struggle were difficult, but victory in the domestic political arena in the U.S. played a paramount role. The main goal of the U.S. strategies vis-à-vis conflict resolution in Afghanistan had long ceased to focus on public attention, rather was overshadowed by other issues that required responses from the White House. Against the backdrop of an acute debt crisis, the U.S. political establishment had decided to reduce military spending for the next decade.²⁶⁰ The need to continue the costly war in Afghanistan was displeasing. By mid-2013, the number of American soldiers killed in this longest-running US war exceeded 2,100, while further 19,000 were injured. That was the time when public support among the U.S. citizens for the war in Afghanistan greatly reduced.

The war in Afghanistan started becoming liability for the U.S. and their continuing weak support for the war resulted in the strengthening position of Al- Qaeda. By 2013, Al- Qaeda in Afghanistan has ceased to pose a significant threat to the Afghan government and coalition forces. Though at the U.S.'s initial military campaign in Afghanistan, Al- Qaeda was pushed towards peripheries in Afghanistan. Hence, none of the major Al-Qaida attacks outside the region have been planned in Afghanistan in the early 21st century. In May 2011, as a result of a special CIA operation in Pakistan, the leader of al-Qaeda, Osama bin Laden, who was taking refuge in Abbottabad, was killed.²⁶¹ Despite these successes, the U.S. military establishment insisted on participating in the Afghan conflict after 2014. The policy makers proposed it in the U.S. to maintain a presence in the form of five military bases and about nine thousand people in Afghanistan to support the Afghan army's logistics, intelligence, and technical actions against Taliban. The overall goal of the U.S. military and civilian authorities in Afghanistan was to avoid the appearance of military defeat and, if possible, to ensure US political achievements in Afghanistan. However, contrary to the Pentagon's opinion, the White House continued to consider the possibility of a complete withdrawal of American troops at the end of 2014. This was prompted not only by the American public's position but also by the growing resistance from within Afghanistan.

In early 2010, the partnerships between the U.S. and Afghanistan faced difficulties due to the two partners' changing priorities. The reason was the frequent cases of erroneous defeat

²⁶⁰ Ibid

²⁶¹ Bowden, Mark. *The finish: The killing of Osama bin Laden*. Atlantic Monthly Press, 2012.

by American forces of civilian gatherings and war crimes of certain American military personnel and Washington's desire to reach an agreement with Taliban leadership to bypass Kabul.²⁶² U.S. peace talks with various Taliban factions have been ongoing since 2010; while the Afghan government was conducting negotiations since 2008.²⁶³ Washington and Kabul negotiated alternately and jointly, and sometimes parallel to each other. Over several years, various possible ceasefire options have been negotiated but no major development took place. In Afghanistan, the High Peace Council (HPC) was created, headed by ex-president B. Rabbani but he died as a result of the assassination attack in 2011,²⁶⁴ which unsuccessfully negotiated with the influential Taliban leader G. Hekmatyar. However, in the end, the Allies concluded that negotiations with small groups within Taliban will not work; rather a large-scale ceasefire would be helpful which can be negotiated with the top leadership (shura) of Taliban. The main obstacle to this was Taliban's strong reluctance to deal personally with H. Karzai and his immediate cabinet.²⁶⁵ Due to Taliban reluctance to negotiate directly with Hamid Karzai, the U.S. started direct negotiations with Taliban, which caused a sharp protest in Kabul. Unhappy with the lack of transparency in the process of negotiations between the American representatives and Taliban leadership in Qatar, President Karzai blackmailed Washington with a threat to disrupt the signing of an agreement with the U.S. on the long-term presence of American troops in the country.²⁶⁶ However, this did not stop B. Obama, who desired to achieve a lasting truce with Taliban and the prospects for a legitimate change of power in Kabul during the 2014 presidential election. Despite Obama's keen interest in signing a deal with Taliban, the hopes for a peaceful withdrawal faded.

Taliban's position in Quetta on reconciliation with the U.S. remained ambivalent; however, there was a broader will for a political settlement. Taliban's formula was ready to accept looked like, turning Taliban into a legitimate political force in Afghanistan through national reconciliation under Islamic slogans without a hint of Taliban's defeat in the war. Washington and Kabul's demand to adopt Afghanistan's constitution as a starting point for negotiations was rejected by Taliban, who insisted on negotiations without preconditions. The

²⁶² Audrey Kurth Cronin, *When Should We Talk to Terrorists?* Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, Special Report No. 240, May 2010, p. 1.

²⁶³ Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Afghanistan in 2012: Limited Progress and Threatening Future," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 53, No. 1, January–February 2013, p. 27.

²⁶⁴ Clark, Kate. "Death of Rabbani: Where is the Evidence?'" *Afghanistan Analysts Network* 13 (2011).

²⁶⁵ Ibid

²⁶⁶ Karen DeYoung, Peter Finn, and Craig Whitlock, "Taliban in Talks with Karzai Government," *Washington Post*, October 6, 2010.

ground for compromise was gradually ripening and Taliban leadership was in agreement with the condition of disengagement from al-Qaeda, which were mainly responsible for creating preconditions for the destruction of the Islamic state in Afghanistan in 2001. Despite the unwillingness to deal with H. Karzai, Taliban were ready in principle to interact with the political force, which he headed.²⁶⁷ The Shura of Taliban in Quetta also had no fundamental objections to Afghanistan's constitution in force, within the framework of which it was possible to reach a compromise on these and other issues, Taliban called the All-Afghan Assembly of Loya Jirga. Materials from in-depth interviews with Taliban leadership representatives suggested that Taliban were ready to discuss the possibility of a long-term US military presence in Afghanistan, provided that they did not interfere in the country's affairs. Moreover, they provided for the future possibility of transforming US military assistance into economic assistance.²⁶⁸

Despite positive developments with respect to negotiations with the U.S., Taliban faced an inter-groups rivalry over disagreements.²⁶⁹ Some prominent groups such as the Haqqani network and supporters of H. Hekmatyar did not participated in the U.S. dialogue with Taliban leadership in Quetta. At the same time, there was evidence that the Haqqani detachments were associated with the well of regional stakeholders, who were providing logistical support to the group. However, it was believed that the authority of Taliban leader Mullah M. Omar was still unquestioned among ordinary Taliban and that his call to end the war upon an agreement with the U.S. would be respected and executed. With the approaching deadline for troop's withdrawal from Afghanistan, the U.S. found it difficult to conclude any meaningful agreement with Taliban, as the year 2014 was also an election year in Afghanistan next government.²⁷⁰

The 2014 presidential elections in Afghanistan, did not guarantee the success of a political settlement in the country. Unlike the U.S., Taliban had no reason to rush and soften their position, as they were enjoying tactical advantage in the battlefield. Under such conditions, the U.S. thought it useful to enter into security partnerships with the local Afghan

²⁶⁷ Ibid

²⁶⁸ Kenneth Katzman, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, June 25, 2013, p. 40.

²⁶⁹ Rod Nordland and Alissa J. Rubin, "Taliban's Divided Tactics Raise Doubts Over Talks," *New York Times*, June 25, 2013.

²⁷⁰ Bernet Rubin, in Interview on "The Afghan Quandary: Should We Leave? Can We Leave?" by the John Sloan Dickey Center for International Understanding at Dartmouth College, 2020. Accessed at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p10W12iz-iM&list=LL&index=183&t=8s>

forces. The effectiveness of the state institutions created in Afghanistan over ten years was not strong enough to positively support the country; Kabul could not provide economic and social stabilization in the country.²⁷¹ However, with the assistance of NATO countries, the Kabul regime managed to create large internal security forces and an army, which together totalled up to three hundred and fifty thousand men. Despite the massive challenges and high losses in the battles with Taliban, the local Afghan combat force made it possible to guarantee the central government's military invulnerability in Kabul. The financing of the Afghan army and police was carried out mainly at the expense of international assistance, provided that the U.S. could continue to count on retaining the elected government in Afghanistan. An indirect consequence of the formation of stable armed forces in Afghanistan was the emergence of a strong Afghan military establishment. Putting the burden of Afghanistan security on the local forces relaxed the U.S. from domestic pressure over constant casualties in the U.S. forces. From 2014 onwards, the international coalition forces were involved in secondary assistance to the local Afghan combatants; hence, they avoided direct confrontation with Taliban. The U.S. exit strategy's ultimate failure in 2014 led the policymakers to come with a regional solution to end the conflict in Afghanistan.

3.3. The U.S. Strategies under Trump Administration

In his election campaign, President Trump promised to end the American longest war in Afghanistan. Contrary to that, he relied on military force and expressed, in South Asia Policy, commitment to fight with Taliban without announcing any deadline in advance. However, he soon entered into talks with Taliban, ending with a peace deal in February 2020. So probably the earlier South Asia policy was meant for bluffing to ensure that Taliban show flexibility in the negotiations. The detailed explanation of President Trump strategies is given below.

3.3.1. South Asia Policy and Pressuring Pakistan to End War

President of the U.S. Donald Trump announced his new strategy, South Asia Strategy, for Afghanistan in August 2017. In this strategy, Trump tried to exert extra pressure on Pakistan to stop supporting Taliban factions inside Pakistan. The new South Asian strategy was widely appreciated both inside Afghanistan and in the U.S. because it was majorly against Pakistan's

²⁷¹ Richard Hogg, Claudia Nassif, Camilo Gomez Osorio, William Byrd, and Andrew Beath. *Afghanistan in transition: looking beyond 2014*. The World Bank, (2013): 140-145.

role in sustaining Afghan insurrection. Trump South Asia strategy includes Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and the Central Asian states and further extends into Southeast Asia.

In South Asia strategy, Trump stated that the hasty withdrawal from Afghanistan would incentivize terrorists to flood back into the country to launch attacks against the U.S. and allies. Therefore, the promise that Trump made during election campaign about the withdrawal of all US forces will not be materialized immediately. Moreover, Trump categorically stated that his administration is committed “to break their will, dry up their recruitment, keep them from crossing our borders, and defeat them handily”. Trump further stated that ““From now on, victory will have a clear definition: Attacking our enemies, obliterating ISIS, crushing al-Qaida, preventing Taliban from taking over Afghanistan, and stopping mass terror attacks against America before they emerge.” This statement was an indication towards the militarization of the U.S. strategy in Afghanistan again.

It was also stated in the new South Asia strategy that Pakistan must stop providing safe havens to the terrorists. Pakistan was warned of losing much if it continues harboring terrorists and criminals. Going further about Pakistan, Trump in his policy announcement said that “It is time for Pakistan to demonstrate its commitment to civilization, order and to peace.” Expressing dissatisfaction with the role of Pakistan, Donald Trump appraised India and announced to work jointly for shared objectives in the region. This was indeed a change in strategic orientation, emphasizing on India’s role in Afghanistan in particular and the region in general. Trump also emphasized on more assistance from the allied powers to help bear the economic costs of war in Afghanistan.

An essential factor in this strategy was the uncertainty and no prior warning towards the U.S. attacks against Taliban and ISIS. Some attacks were also carried out against the insurgent groups in Afghanistan, giving a message of renewed US intentions to defeat anti-government groups through coercive means. In this regards, the mother of bombs was also dropped in Afghanistan. Despite all this, sooner the U.S. realized that forceful solution to the Afghan conflict is unlikely and they shifted to try pacific means and hence started negotiations with Taliban.

3.3.2. Peace Talks with Taliban

The peace talks between the U.S. and Afghan Taliban were started with the mediation of neighbouring countries, whereby Qatar provided good office. The then US secretary of state Mike Pompeo appointed an official representative, Zalmi Khalilzad- an Afghani American, to negotiate with the Afghan Taliban. Zalmi Khalilzad held various meetings with the government of Afghanistan and Pakistan to receive their support. Pakistan had already faced international pressure after Trump's South Asian strategy blamed their role in the Afghan conflict; hence Pakistan offered assistance in facilitating peace talks with Taliban.²⁷² Zalmi Khalilzad successfully held about nine rounds of negotiations with the Afghan Taliban in Doha but was unable to conclude any agreement because of Donald Trump's sudden call for the cancellation of negotiations on the premise of the death of an American soldier by Taliban in Afghanistan. Before the Talks' cancellation, Zalmi Khalilzad stated in various interviews that they agreed in principle with Taliban over the final agreement.²⁷³ The key provisions in the supposedly agreed-upon agreement included the timeline for the withdrawal of the U.S. troops from Afghanistan, reduction in violence, and the guarantee that Taliban will not allow transnational terrorist organizations to breed in Afghanistan.

Despite the cancellation of peace talks by the U.S. president, Afghan Taliban showed their readiness for Talks' resumption with the U.S. officials. Simultaneously, Taliban warned of more bloodshed in case the peace efforts fail.²⁷⁴ Taliban response was widely appreciated as they appeared to be hard-liners in the negotiations but showed maturity in international politics. Afghan Taliban had previously used diplomatic sources to urge the U.S. to end the war in Afghanistan, claiming to be unjustly launched. Showing democratic gesture, Taliban sent a letter to the American people directly, explaining the American war's nature from their perspective.²⁷⁵ Donald Trump's announcement of the cancellation of negotiations with Taliban was widely criticized because the rationale was not convincing. In 2019, Taliban had already killed almost seventeen American soldiers, but negotiations were still underway. Taliban never

²⁷² Mujib Mashal and Eric Schmitt, "White House Orders Direct Taliban Talks to Jump-Start Afghan Negotiations," *New York Times*, July 15, 2018.

²⁷³ U.S. Special Representative Zalmay Khalilzad, Twitter, March 12, 2019. Available at <https://twitter.com/US4AfghanPeace/status/1105513781705302016>.

²⁷⁴ Shanthie Mariet D'Souza, "Peace Making in Afghanistan: Future Pathways." *Institute for strategic, political, security and economic consultancy (ISPSW)*, No. 650, 2019: 2.

²⁷⁵ "Letter of the Islamic Emirate to the American people!" February 14, 2018. Available at: <http://apps.washingtonpost.com/g/documents/world/taliban-attempts-to-appeal-to-us-audience-in-new-letter/2770/>

agreed to a ceasefire during the negotiations; neither was this a precondition. In such circumstances, during his short visit to Afghanistan, President Trump announced that he would resume negotiations with Taliban again, and this time he hoped for better results. Zalmi Kalilzad again visited Afghanistan and Pakistan to restore momentum in peace talks with Taliban.

Since the beginning of war in 2001, all players in the war in Afghanistan were looking for a zero-sum outcome of the war, but neither achieved this optimistic goal.²⁷⁶ The longest and ever-expanding violence in Afghanistan compelled all players to accept that a zero-sum outcome is less likely. On February 22, 2020, the two sides agreed to a seven-day ceasefire as a precondition to the signing of the peace deal in Doha.²⁷⁷ Finally, on February 29, the two sides signed a historic peace deal in Doha. The Afghan government was not happy with the agreement and President Ashraf Ghani rejected the terms of prisoners exchange; however, later on, he accepted the terms and released nearly five thousand Taliban prisoners in phases.

Though the peace agreement between the U.S. and Taliban was widely celebrated as a major success with respect to the conflict resolution in Afghanistan but challenges were there to derail the materialization of the agreement's conditions. The prospects of intra-Afghan peace negotiations and the potential U.S. withdrawal policy were complicated in the foreseeable future.

²⁷⁶ Ishaque et al., *Prospects of Enduring Peace in Afghanistan...* (2017): 146-161.

²⁷⁷ Thomas Ruttig, "First Breakthrough toward Peace? The seven-day 'reduction of violence'", *Afghanistan Analysts Network*. (2020). Accessed at: <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2024729.html>

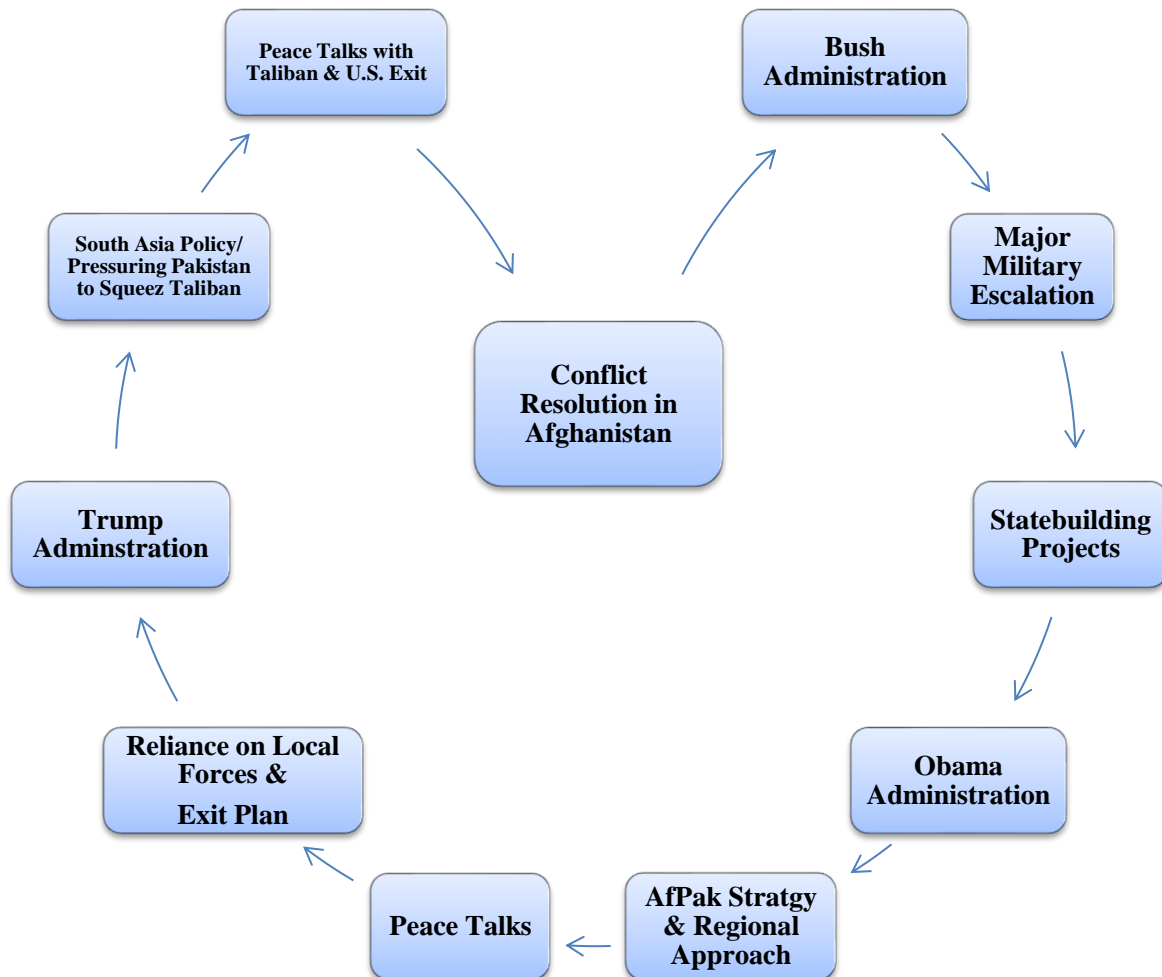


Figure 6: Conceptual model for varying U.S. strategies in Afghanistan²⁷⁸

3.4. The U.S. Strategy under Biden Administration

On November 3, 2020, the 59th presidential election was held in the U.S. Joe Biden won the U.S. presidential race in American history's most controversial election. In his presidential campaign, Joe Biden supported the policy of ending American wars and the repatriation of American troops. However, being an ex-vice president, the U.S. troop's withdrawal under Joe Biden was expected to be more responsible and gradual, which actually

²⁷⁸ Developed by the researcher for this particular thesis.

did not happen.²⁷⁹ Joe Biden is quoted in the 2008 military surge, having a dissented voice against the military surge.²⁸⁰ Afghanistan's government had expressed concerns about Donald Trump's hasty withdrawal plan and wanted a more favorable troops withdrawal plan after ensuring peace and stability in Afghanistan. Joe Biden, who believes in the American global leadership role in protecting human rights and supporting democracy, was widely expected to consider the Afghan government concerns regarding political settlement with Taliban, but that was not the case and the troops withdrawal was carried out without giving much consideration to the concerns of the Ashraf Ghani government.

On the other hand, Taliban wished for Donald Trump's election victory in the hope that he would honor the peace agreement of February 29, 2020 after winning the election. However, Trump's failure created doubts among Taliban and therefore they started pushing the Biden administration to abide by the Doha agreement. Taliban skepticism was based on the fact that they were quite uncertain about Joe Biden intentions regarding the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan about which they had developed consensus with the Trump administration. However, the response from Joe Biden to the Afghan conflict was not much different as he came to know about the ground realities of the Afghan conflict when he served as the vice president under Obama administration. Contrary to the tough South Asia policy of Donald Trump, Joe Biden saw the role of the regional countries in a different way.

Unlike Trump, who pressurized and accused Afghanistan's regional countries specifically Pakistan of harboring Taliban extremists, Joe Biden decided to deal more diplomatically through dialogue to bring stability in Afghanistan. Pakistan remained a major U.S. ally in the region, and Joe Biden looked forward towards Pakistan for its cooperation in the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. Consequently, Joe Biden dealt with Taliban through pacific means for resolving the differences instead of again relying on war model. Previously, Barack Obama's presidency where Joe Biden was a vice president, the U.S. administration tried to hold serious negotiations with Taliban from 2012 to 2013.²⁸¹ Joe Biden had always favored a diplomatic solution to the Afghan conflict and even dissented President Obama troops surge policy in 2009.²⁸² The then hard-liner Taliban expected a zero-sum game, and

²⁷⁹ Shubhangi Pandey, and Sushant Sareen. "Between a Republic and an Emirate: The Future of Afghanistan." (2020): 4.

²⁸⁰ Sanaa Bhatti Vika, "The Essence of Obama's War: The Decision-making Behind President Obama's Afghanistan Surge." thesis, *University of Oslo*, 2020: 47.

²⁸¹ James P Pfiffner, "Decision Making in the Obama White House... 244-262.

²⁸² Ibid.

hence the negotiations during Obama presidency failed. The experience of the failed negotiations in the past was a lesson for Joe Biden administration to retain a hard-earned agreement with Taliban.

Despite expectations from the Biden administration of a respectable withdrawal, the troops withdrawal was considered as chaotic and shame exist in the history of the U.S.²⁸³ The Biden administration had honored the Doha agreement by fulfilling most of its provisions except the deadline, which was extended for about three months. The extension in the troops withdrawal deadline is linked to the potential efforts by the Biden administration to carry out a respectable withdrawal. However, on the contrary, the threat of possible worsening security conditions for the international forces has led a hasty troop's withdrawal from Afghanistan, which proved a politically unpopular decision. The longest U.S. intervention in Afghanistan, costing around \$2 trillion dollars, 2300 soldiers being killed and wounding another 20,000, ended in shock and shame.

With respect to the local Afghan security forces, President Biden argued that the Afghan forces could withstand Taliban because they outnumber the Taliban fighters and have modern weaponry. However, the Taliban's quick and decisive victory disproved this argument. The 300,000 Afghan security forces collapsed just days after the Taliban took power. A billion-dollar arsenal belonging to Afghan troops also passed into the possession of the Taliban after their surrender. President Biden was criticized and reprimanded for his humiliating withdrawal from Afghanistan. Though, he was the authority to allow the troops withdrawal and could be blamed for the mismanagement during the withdrawal, but the factors behind Taliban's victory over the Ghani government had been already established. The political analysts were already convinced that the Afghan government cannot resist Taliban after the U.S. security guarantees are withheld. The U.S. had been in search of a safe exit from Afghanistan since Obama's administration. The U.S. earlier exit plans and the Doha agreement had given the Taliban a psychological advantage against the opponent in their strategic game plan. This was due to which the U.S. withdrawal and a resultant transfer of power to the local Afghan security forces increased Taliban's readiness to fight and retake Afghanistan. Taliban psychological advantage coupled with their military strength persuaded the U.S. to engage them in political negotiations and make concessions from a weaker position. Taliban being in the position of strength and the

²⁸³ Muhammad Riaz Shad, and Sajid Iqbal. "From Intervention to Exit: An Analysis of Post-9/11 US Strategies in Afghanistan." *Margalla Papers* 25, no. 2 (2021): 32, <https://margallapapers.ndu.edu.pk/site/article/download/70/45>

U.S. concessions putted a psychological pressure on the Ashraf Ghani government and the local security forces, resulting in the surrender with almost zero resistance.²⁸⁴

The mismanagement of the U.S. exit from Afghanistan was also due to the deadline which President Trump administration agreed in the Doha agreement. The Biden administration feared a risk of military reaction from Taliban in case of further delaying the withdrawal of international forces. Broadly, it was not the Biden administration that was majorly responsible for the shame exit but the earlier U.S.-Taliban peace deal under the Trump administration, which favored the Taliban militarily and politically. Politically, the agreement set a strict deadline for completing the withdrawal of the U.S. troops from Afghanistan without realizing an intra-Afghan political settlement. President Ashraf Ghani did not wanted to share power with the Taliban due to the fear of being sidelined. Militarily, the agreement established a ceasefire between the U.S. and the Taliban, leaving Afghan forces alone to fight the Taliban. With this advantage, the Taliban stepped up their offensive against the Afghan security forces, which had lost morale due to the foregoing factors. One of the provisions of the U.S.-Taliban agreement about the intra-Afghan negotiations also suffered and did not materialized before the completion of the withdrawal of international forces.

The post-withdrawal peace in Afghanistan and the guarantee that the U.S. do not involve militarily again would potentially depend on the success of an intra-Afghan political settlement. Though Taliban seems to enjoy the zero-sum outcome of their twenty years war against the U.S. and allied powers and would not be accepting a powersharing mechanism with other stakeholders in the country but in the long-run, the economic challenges and international isolationism could compel them to accommodate the stakeholders from opposition in the powersharing in government. So, the Joe Biden administration could likely support any sort of peace talks between Taliban and the Afghan stakeholders for powersharing in Afghanistan.

Conclusion

President George W Bush initiated military offensive against Taliban and Al Qaeda expecting a zero-sum outcome through force. Taliban in early years of the U.S. intervention were ready for negotiations and were expecting a non-zero-sum outcome. However, the U.S. was not ready for talks with Taliban. After getting quick initial military success by overthrowing Taliban regime, the U.S. declared ‘mission accomplished’ and further expanded

²⁸⁴ Ibid: 33.

their mission in Afghanistan by starting a statebuilding program. After 2003, Taliban managed an impressive resurgence using guerrilla warfare tactics which negated the U.S. earlier claims of 'mission accomplishment'. President Obama administration continued with the military offensive strategy but soon shifted from conflict management to conflict resolution by initiating negotiations with Taliban. Parallel to talks with Taliban, the U.S. announced troops drawdown policy which signaled Taliban of a potential zero-sum outcome in their favor. Both sides had to cancel the talk's amide deteriorating security conditions, resulting in failed troops withdrawal plan rather further influx of international troops. In the post-2014 deadliest clashes between the U.S. and Taliban paved the way for real negotiations as both sides realized that only a non-zero-sum outcome is workable. The peace talks between the U.S. and Taliban in Donald Trump presidency finally reached an agreement in February 2020. The U.S. strategies from 2001 till 2020 manifest a strategic confusion about talks with Taliban, who remained the most relevant and strong player/ party in the conflict. The U.S. ignored Taliban from all political processes mainly the Bonn process, in early nine years of conflict in Afghanistan. lately, they engaged with Taliban but it was not a favorable time for talks as Taliban sensed victory. The 2020 peace agreement between the U.S. and Taliban is apparently a non-zero-sum outcome of the conflict but it clearly favors Taliban more than the U.S. Taliban coming to power without giving any share in power to the key local stakeholders shows bluffing strategy and hence turns the outcome into a zero-sum game. Based on the discussion on the U.S. strategies in Afghanistan, it can be generalized that, there existed a strategic confusion in the U.S. strategies from 2001 till 2020, resulting in the fiascoes vis-à-vis the U.S. policy objectives. It is presumed that the outcome of such agreement would have been different if the U.S. managed to engage with Taliban after initial military offensive in 2001. The description of varying U.S. strategies under four different presidents, it is more convenient to study and understand the outcomes.

Chapter Four

Outcomes of the U.S. Strategies in Afghanistan

After a comprehensive description of the U.S. strategies in the preceding chapter, this chapter contains the study of the different outcomes of the same strategies. The outcomes identified in this chapter further establishes the notion that the U.S. strategies were not coordinated neither focused on conflict settlement in Afghanistan. It is reiterated here for understanding that the term ‘conflict resolution’ is used in this thesis to comprehensively refer to conflict engagement, conflict management, conflict transformation and conflict settlement.²⁸⁵ On the pretext of the outcomes of the U.S. strategies, it is safe to argue that the U.S. strategies were designed to deal with conflict engagement, management, transformation but least with the conflict settlement. The explanation of the various outcomes of the U.S. strategies in this chapter will help in analyzing the causes of the failure of the U.S. strategies in the next chapter.

Afghanistan is a rugged country, as many world powers tried their might to control its territory but failed. Great Britain and the formal czar empire struggled for the same cause but accepted their inability to get-over Afghanistan. The formal Soviet Union had acknowledged its failure in Afghanistan in less than a decade by withdrawing troops in 1988/1989.²⁸⁶ However, after nearly twenty years, the U.S. has still not entirely accepted its defeat. Failing to achieve strategic objectives, the U.S. and its allies failed just as magnificently with their military intervention that began in autumn 2001 as the USSR did before. The Soviet Union, after signing the Geneva accord claimed that they brought progress in Afghan society; the U.S. make similar claims since the fall of Taliban regime in 2001.²⁸⁷ The claim in both cases falls short of reality as both lost expensive wars against the poorly equipped local fighters. To the question of the outcomes of the U.S. strategies, Dr Asfand Yar replied, “If we analyze the two decades of U.S. involvement, it is clear that the U.S. has failed to resolve the conflict. That is apparent from the fact that Afghanistan is still effectively at war. The war, of course, has seen ups and downs; the U.S. has had nominal tactical successes but for the most part it’s a story of

²⁸⁵ Ramsbotham, Oliver, Hugh Miall, and Tom Woodhouse. *Contemporary conflict resolution*. (Polity, 2011), 9.

²⁸⁶ Tad Daley, “Afghanistan and Gorbachev’s Global Foreign Policy.” *Asian Survey* 29, no. 5 (1989): 496. Accessed September 17, 2020. doi:10.2307/2644534.

²⁸⁷ Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into chaos: the US and the failure of nation building in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia*. Penguin, 2008.

political and strategic failure. However, since 2018, there has been a change. One can make a defensible argument that the U.S. policy has become more effective at bringing the conflict to an end because America has scaled back its ambition and taken a more pragmatic view of what can and can't be achieved in Afghanistan, and how much it matters to American security. As a consequence, we see a clearer articulation of political goals by the American leadership as well as a strategy that is better tailored to achieve those goals. It is not perfect, certainly not in execution, but it's better than before. Obviously, with this new strategic approach America is taking on more risks such as the possibility of civil war following American withdrawal and resurgence of al-Qaida in Afghanistan -- which can lead to more conflict in Afghanistan, not less -- but it also looks like US policymakers involved are developing some nominal mechanisms to manage those risks".²⁸⁸ Dr Omar Sharifi responded to the same questions as, "Generally, it has been relatively unsuccessful. The threat of Afghanistan becoming a safe heaven for violent extremist groups is still real. There is absolutely no guarantee for Afghanistan not going back into a conflict (in case of permanent U.S military and diplomatic withdrawal) between the nationalist forces and Taliban and their Pakistani allies. However, as long as the Afghan government have international support, and Taliban transform itself from a militant into a political group, and continued international and regional investment, there is a healthy chance of resolving the conflict in the country".²⁸⁹

3.1. Outcomes of the Bush Administration Strategies

President Bush is the main architect of the U.S. war in Afghanistan. He relied heavily on the military escalation against Taliban and Al-Qaida to achieve strategic objectives. Broadly, Bush strategies comprised of 'major military escalation and the statebuilding program'. The outcomes of the Bush administration strategies in Afghanistan are explained below.

3.1.1. The fall of Taliban Regime

When the Afghan Taliban denied the U.S. to hand-over Al-Qaeda leaders, the U.S. intervened in Kabul and waged a full-scale war against Taliban and their affiliate Al-Qaeda. On October 7, 2001, the U.S. and its British allied forces started aerial bombing, targeting

²⁸⁸ Interview with Asfandyar Mir, a Postdoctoral fellow at the Center for International Security and Cooperation, Stanford University.

²⁸⁹ Interview with Dr Omar Sharifi, a former Senior Research Fellow and Director of the American Institute of Afghanistan Studies, Kabul.

Taliban centres in Kabul and adjacent areas.²⁹⁰ The U.S. and Britain bombed Taliban targets on Afghan territory, initiating a military operation called Operation Enduring Freedom. Military facilities of Taliban and al-Qaeda in Kabul, Kandahar, Herat, Jalalabad, and several other cities and regions were bombed. Several ground operations were carried out with the support of the Northern Alliance. Within a short time, all major cities of the country were liberated from the control of Taliban. The U.S. forces and the Northern Alliance initiated an offensive in the Mazar-i-Sharif in November 2001.²⁹¹ The joint military offensive was a significant blow to Taliban as hundreds of its fighters were killed and nearly five hundred arrested. Taliban in Mazar-i-Sharif met a severe setback because the local Shia population was supporting the Northern Alliance and U.S. forces as Taliban carried out a massacre against the Shia community from 1998 till 2000.²⁹² Despite such support, the U.S. and the Northern Alliance forces under General Dostum took many days to get total control of the area. Many Jihadists from the regional countries entered Mazar-i-Sharif in aid to Taliban fighters. The siege and subsequent bombardment of the Sultan Razia School is one such example of the strife resistance from Taliban fighters.²⁹³ However, the aerial bombardment ultimately gave a significant shock to Taliban and its affiliates; however, this was a good shock for the U.S. coalition forces. Mazar-i-Sharif city had strategic importance as it provided supply routes and an airstrip for the U.S.²⁹⁴

The fall of Mazar-i-Sharif was a success story for the U.S. and its allies, but disagreements vented between the U.S. and the Northern Alliance. The latter entered Kabul contrary to the wishes of the U.S. Nevertheless, the U.S. still kept on aerial bombing against Taliban in aid to the Northern Alliance. Since Taliban regime was not prepared or capable of countering aerial warfare, the Kabul regime collapsed on November 13, 2001. The U.S. successfully pushed Taliban away from the capital city towards peripheries because the Northern Alliance combatants supported them on the ground. An immediate alternative to the U.S. in Afghanistan, for governance, was the Northern Alliance, who took control of the Kabul

²⁹⁰ Benjamin S Lambeth, *Air power against terror: America's conduct of operation enduring freedom*. Rand Corporation, 2001: 100.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.* 394-395.

²⁹² *Ibid.*: 119.

²⁹³ Christopher Noel Koontz, ed. *Enduring voices: Oral histories of the US army experience in Afghanistan, 2003-2005*. Vol. 70. Department of the Army, 2008: 498-507.

²⁹⁴ Lambeth, *Air power against terror...*,(2001): 118-120.

on November 13, 2001.²⁹⁵ The Northern Alliance made swift progress in winning a war against Taliban, who were subsequently weakened by the U.S. aerial bombing campaign.

In a series of conflictual events, the U.S. finally pushed Taliban and Al-Qaeda into the Afghanistan peripheral mountainous region. Some key Al-Qaeda leaders were killed in U.S. air raids in 2001. A prominent Al-Qaeda leader, Muhammed Atef, was also killed, who was considered the deputy of Osama bin Laden.²⁹⁶ The actual defeat or resistance from Taliban was over in less than two months after the U.S. intervention. However, the ground operations were carried out to haunt Al-Qaeda and Taliban leadership.

From the start of 2002, the U.S. forces concentrated their anti-terror operations in the South and East of Afghanistan. This region provided support to Taliban due to ethnic Pashtuns tribes, who provided logistical support for Taliban. In January 2002, some 5000 US troops were deployed in the country, which increased to eight thousand by August 2002.²⁹⁷

After the U.S. succeeded in their initial operations, they sought to get U.N. support for their Afghanistan's operations. In this regard, the first U.N. Security Council resolution (No. 1368) was passed in the 4370th meeting on September 12, 2001. This resolution was another success to the U.S. in Afghanistan on the front of International Law. Another resolution (No. 1373) was passed on September 28, 2001, in the 4385th meeting of the U.S. Security Council resolution, providing further legal cover to the anti-terror operations.²⁹⁸ The resolution asked member countries to stop supporting terror groups and criminalized terror financing. This resolution also provided an impetus for other powers to become part of Afghanistan's U.S. coalition forces.²⁹⁹

The fall of the Taliban regime in 2001 was the result of a combination of factors, including military intervention by the United States and its allies, support from local Afghan groups opposed to the Taliban, and the internal weaknesses of the Taliban regime. Following the 9/11 attacks in the United States, the U.S. government demanded that the Taliban regime

²⁹⁵ Ibid. 20.

²⁹⁶ Peter L Bergen, *The Osama bin Laden I know: An oral history of al Qaeda's leader*. Simon and Schuster, 2006. 151.

²⁹⁷ Katzman. "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance...", (2017): 28.

²⁹⁸ Ibid. 6.

²⁹⁹ Erling Johannes Husabø, and Ingvild Bruce. *Fighting terrorism through multilevel criminal legislation: Security Council Resolution 1373, the EU framework decision on combating terrorism and their implementation in Nordic, Dutch and German criminal law*. BRILL, 2009: 379-459.

turn over al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, who was believed to be hiding in Afghanistan. When the Taliban refused, the U.S. and its allies launched a military campaign that quickly drove the Taliban from power. This military intervention was made possible by support from local Afghan groups who opposed the Taliban and by the internal weaknesses of the Taliban regime, which had been facing challenges to its authority even before the U.S. intervention. The fall of the Taliban regime marked a turning point in the conflict in Afghanistan, but the challenges of post-conflict stabilization and reconstruction proved to be formidable.

3.1.2. Establishment of an Interim Government

There were disagreements between the U.S. and the Northern Alliance about the governance mechanisms in Kabul. So, along with the military offensive against Taliban, the U.S. needed some kind of pro-US government in Kabul. Hence, an inter-Afghan consultative process started in Bonn from November 27 till December 5 in 2001.³⁰⁰ With ups and downs, the conference finally agreed on relying on some provisional arrangements for power-sharing until the establishment of permanent government bodies/institutions. The Bonn agreement of 2001 got more importance after receiving approval from the United Nations Security Council under resolution number 1383. The agreement's central theme allowed provisional administration under Hamid Karzai to function until a transitional administration replaces them within six months.³⁰¹ The transitional administration was also led by Hamid Karzai for the next eighteen months, after which a new Loya Jirga was convened for the adoption of a new constitution for Afghanistan.

The efforts for the establishment of an interim shows that the U.S. was in need for a pro-US government in Kabul after the military offensive against the Taliban in 2001. As there were disagreements between the U.S. and the Northern Alliance about the governance mechanisms in Kabul, an inter-Afghan consultative process was initiated in Bonn. The conference agreed on provisional arrangements for power-sharing until the establishment of permanent government bodies/institutions. The agreement was approved by the United Nations Security Council under resolution number 1383, making it significant. The agreement allowed for a provisional administration under Hamid Karzai to function until a transitional administration replaced it within six months. The transitional administration was also led by

³⁰⁰ Bonn Agreement. "Agreement on provisional arrangements in Afghanistan... (2001)

³⁰¹ Ibid.

Hamid Karzai for the next eighteen months, after which a new Loya Jirga was convened for the adoption of a new constitution for Afghanistan.

Overall, the establishment of an interim government highlighted the importance of the Bonn agreement of 2001 in establishing a provisional administration in Afghanistan and paving the way for the establishment of permanent government institutions. The agreement allowed for a smooth transition from a Taliban-controlled government to a more democratic form of government led by Hamid Karzai, but the ultimate aim of the U.S. to keep Taliban out of power did not materialize as they started resurging in the aftermath.

3.1.3. The escape of main Target- Al-Qaeda

The U.S. aircrafts started bombing main centres and training bases of Al-Qaeda on October 7, 2001.³⁰² Within weeks of operation initiation, Al-Qaeda members/ leaders and Taliban were seeking refuge for their lives as they could not resist aerial attacks. The U.S. president Bush's desire to apprehend Osama Bin Laden, either dead or alive, seemed to be achievable but the premature celebrations of victory by the U.S. provided A.L. Qaeda with an opportunity to escape to the safe sanctuaries.³⁰³ After achieving initial successes on the ground, the U.S. started shifting their focus from operations against Al-Qaeda to the statebuilding project in Afghanistan. More energy was spent on managing elections and forming a democratic government in the country. With the U.S.'s support, Hamid Karzai was elected as an interim leader and then Afghanistan president. During these developments, the U.S. missed its strategic objective to kill or capture Osama Bin Laden. After meeting the initial setback, Taliban approached Hamid Karzai and expressed a desire for the dispute's political settlement.³⁰⁴ The offer for political settlement from Taliban shows that in the early years of the U.S. intervention, Taliban were ready for a non-zero-sum outcome. However, the U.S. was expecting a zero-sum outcome with an unconditional defeat of Taliban.

Osama Bin Laden successfully escaped the American hunt and took refuge in neighbouring Pakistan, where; he continued to inspire fanatics throughout the world.³⁰⁵ His

³⁰² Malou Innocent, and Ted Galen Carpenter. "Escaping the 'Graveyard of Empires': A Strategy to Exit Afghanistan." *Cato Institute White Paper*, September 14 (2009).

³⁰³ Ibid

³⁰⁴ Ayesha Tanzeem, "VOA Exclusive: Ex-President Hamid Karzai Discusses Prospects for Afghan Peace", *Voice of America (VOA) South and Central Asia*, October 23, 2020. 09:16- 19:30. <https://www.voanews.com/south-central-asia/voa-exclusive-ex-president-hamid-karzai-discusses-prospects-afghan-peace>

³⁰⁵ Innocent, and Carpenter. "Escaping the 'Graveyard ...", 2009.

charismatic personality/ role attracted funding worldwide, which helped Taliban reorganize themselves for an uprising against the intruders (the U.S. and allied forces) in Afghanistan. Generally, it is assumed that the U.S.'s failure to capture/kill Bin Laden altered the progression of conflict, resulting in the longevity and severity of violence in Afghanistan. This failure in the U.S. goals increased in the vulnerability of the U.S. national security, as Osama Bin Laden continued to inspire global terrorist organizations.³⁰⁶

The escape of Bin Laden was considered a significant failure by the U.S. forces. The U.S. administration claimed that the intelligence reports about Bin Laden location were inconclusive.³⁰⁷ However, later on, interviews with some key officials and through the government's unclassified record clarify that Bin Laden's location in Tora Bora was within the range of U.S. intelligence.³⁰⁸ In his autobiography, a retired U.S. commander, Lt. Gen Michael DeLong expressed that Bin Laden was present in the Tora Bora caves during the U.S. aerial operation.³⁰⁹ A second most credible source is the account of U.S. Special Operation Command's official history which reports that Osama Bin Laden was present during the U.S. operations.³¹⁰

Finally, on May 1, 2003, the then U.S. secretary of defence, Donald Rumsfeld declared victory over Taliban. He announced the end of combat operation, hence the end of the strategy of major military escalation. Earlier, President Georg W Bush expressed the same by calling it 'mission accomplished' in Iraq and Afghanistan. Afghanistan's president, Hamid Karzai expressed satisfaction over the strategic shift in the U.S. policy and concluded that "we are at a point where we have moved from major combat activity to a period of stability and stabilization and reconstruction activities".³¹¹

The escape of Osama Bin Laden is identified as a significant failure by the U.S. forces, and the U.S. administration initially claimed that the intelligence reports about Bin Laden's location were inconclusive. These untrue narration of stories by the U.S. administration

³⁰⁶ John Kerry. *Tora Bora Revisited: How We Failed to Get Bin Laden and why it Matters Today: a Report to Members of the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, John Kerry, Chairman: One Hundred Eleventh Congress, First Session, November 30th, 2009*. Vol. 111, no. 35. US Government Printing Office, 2009: 1-19.

³⁰⁷ Johanna McGeary, M. Forney, and T. McGirk. "HUNTING OSAMA." *Time* 158, no. 25 (2001): 42-47.

³⁰⁸ Ibid

³⁰⁹: Kerry, *Tora Bora Revisited...* (2009): 3.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Edwards, "State-building in Afghanistan...", 2010. 979-988.

highlight the contradictory claims made by U.S. officials regarding the mission's success. For examples, Donald Rumsfeld declared victory over Taliban and announced the end of combat operation, hence the end of the strategy of major military escalation. Earlier, President George W. Bush expressed the same by calling it 'mission accomplished' in Iraq and Afghanistan. Afghanistan's president, Hamid Karzai expressed satisfaction over the strategic shift in the U.S. policy and concluded that "we are at a point where we have moved from major combat activity to a period of stability and stabilization and reconstruction activities". Such claims suggests that there was a lack of a coherent and successful strategy on the part of the U.S. forces in Afghanistan. Despite the presence of intelligence about Bin Laden's location, the U.S. forces failed to eliminate him. Furthermore, the U.S. officials' contradictory claims regarding the mission's success reveal the lack of clarity and transparency in the U.S. government's approach towards the conflict. The failure to eliminate Al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan despite the major military escalation and the declaration of victory suggests the limitations of the military approach towards the conflict.

3.1.4. The Bonn Process

The overall framework for the execution of statebuilding in Afghanistan was set in the Bonn agreement. The main focus of the Bonn Agreement was meant to create a centralized government, with maximum powers over all provincial matters. Its goal was to create a durable national institution, represented by all regions and groups with the exclusion of Taliban. However, the intention to create a strong government at the center gave more powrs to individual military leaders and political elites who then dominated national institutions. Resultantly, some ethnic groups in the country were marginalized and devoid of national politics. Thus, the agreement focused only on Kabul, undermining the basic democratic principles of inclusive participation.

International assistance from the international community, in the form of financial aid, technical support and other political sustenance, was very crucial in the conflict resolution efforts in the years 2004 and 2005. With the help of this support from international donors, the Bone agreement was meant to transform the governance system in Afghanistan from traditional patterns into a modern governance system based on the western style of democracy. Afghan institutions were reframed on the new patterns and a lot of money was poured in, but due to structural corruption, the efforts did not materialize. For example, the first Jirga conference held in an emergency in 2002 presented a mixed model of the processes of elections,

representation, transition in political representation, and governance model in Afghanistan. The hybrid or mix model was purposeful to adapt to the existing socio-cultural ethos through the modernized democratic model of governance. On the basis of this new hybrid model, the Bonn agreement gave way to the conduct of elections and the establishment of new institutions in the country. Despite the Bonn agreement coming into effect, there existed difference of opinion among the participants. Even the participants were not inclusive, rather selected warlords and ethnic minorities were invited. The West largely presented the Bonn agreement as a success story but the new constitutions and institutions remained fragile and failed to demonstrate any meaningful performance. Even the statebuilding and democratization program remained less effective.

From the Bonn conference to the London conference, held in 2006, these four years witnessed major changes in the governance system. It is worth noting that over the four years from the Bonn Conference to the London Conference (2006), the governance system had undergone major changes. The creation of an interim government, the development of a new constitution, and the presidential election process are some notable accomplishments. Following the 2004 presidential election, parliamentary elections were held in 2005, which further increased the importance of the Bonn Agreement. In continuation to the political reorganization, the London Conference was held in 2006, in accordance with the Interim Afghanistan National Development Strategy (I-ANDS). The meeting was mainly aimed at establishing new relations between the international donors and partners and Afghan government. Another purpose of the London Conference was to analyze the shortcomings and achievements of the country's construction work since 2001. The meeting participants were convinced that the creation of new governance patterns and institutions in the country did not ensure the participation of all groups in the country and therefore undermine the achievement of the ultimate goal.

The failure of the U.S. to yield any desired objectives in Afghanistan is closely related to the Bonn Agreement of 2001. While the agreement represented a significant step towards establishing a democratic government in Afghanistan, its implementation faced significant challenges, and the country remained plagued by violence, corruption, and political instability. These issues have contributed to the failure of the U.S. to achieve its objectives in Afghanistan.

the exclusion of the Taliban from the Bonn Agreement negotiations was a significant factor that contributed to the failure of its success. The Bonn Agreement sought to establish a

transitional government in Afghanistan that would be inclusive and representative of all ethnic groups in the country. However, the Taliban, who had previously held power in Afghanistan, were excluded from the negotiations and were not part of the transitional government.

The exclusion of the Taliban from the Bonn Agreement negotiations contributed to the legitimacy issues facing the transitional government. The Taliban continued to mount attacks on the Afghan government and international forces, and many Afghans viewed the transitional government as being dominated by ethnic groups that had been historically opposed to the Taliban. The exclusion of the Taliban also limited the government's ability to engage with the group and seek a negotiated settlement to the conflict. The exclusion of the Taliban also contributed to the security challenges facing the implementation of the Bonn Agreement. The Taliban continued to mount attacks on the government and international forces, undermining efforts to establish democratic institutions and create a stable environment for development. The absence of a negotiated settlement with the Taliban also limited the ability of the government to achieve lasting peace and stability in the country.

Another challenge in the implementation of the agreement was corruption and governance issues, which hindered the development of democratic institutions and the delivery of public services to the Afghan people. The Afghan government struggled to build effective and accountable institutions, while corruption was endemic at all levels of government. This undermined the legitimacy of the government in the eyes of the Afghan people and weakened its ability to provide basic services and establish the rule of law.

In addition to these challenges, the U.S. and its allies also faced the difficulty of implementing a complex and ambitious development agenda in a country with limited infrastructure, low levels of human capital, and deeply entrenched poverty. The scale and complexity of the task proved daunting, and progress towards achieving development objectives was slow.

3.1.4.1. Afghan Constitution

After an initial phase of military conquest against Taliban regime and its affiliate Al Qaeda, the U.S. convened Bonn convention in December 2001.³¹² Among many other provisions, the Bonn agreement established a constitutional commission, mandated to make a

³¹² Bonn Agreement. "Agreement on provisional arrangements in Afghanistan... (2001).

constitutional draft in light of consultations with various stakeholders. It was further decided that a Constitutional Loya Jirga be convened within eighteen months to final approve the new constitution. Though many structural problems were faced initially vis-à-vis the number of commission members, their authority and responsibilities; however, eventually the constitutional Loya Jirga successfully presented a constitutional draft to President Hamid Karzai on November 3, 2003. The draft proposal was approved on January 4, 2004. The Afghan constitution of 1964 served as a guiding document for the drafting of the new Afghan constitution. The new Afghan constitution provided a presidential form of government, led by an elected president and a national legislative assembly. Since Hamid Karzai was working as an interim president; there was a need for a presidential election in the country to have a legitimate constitutional president.³¹³

3.1.4.2.Presidential Election

In pursuance of the U.S. political settlement and statebuilding strategy, the second significant challenge was the conduct of presidential elections in Afghanistan. On October 9, 2004, the presidential election was held, resulting in Hamid Karzai's victory with a clear lead of 55.4% votes.³¹⁴ Conflicting views existed over the voter's turnout ratio, but estimated three-quarters of the twelve million registered voters balloted their votes. The election process was not easy and transparent as many presidential candidates raised accusations of fraud and rigging. Nearly 15 presidential candidates announced boycott to the election on the fraud premise. However, they were convinced by the United Nations after ensuring an investigation upon their accusations by a three-panel commission.³¹⁵

The election was considered a massive success by the U.S. and allies, however many international journalists and locals claimed massive irregularities in the balloting process. The Ink used in voting could be easily removed, and hence multiple voting was done. People had multiple photographic identity cards, making it easier for unknown persons to cast votes on someone's behalf. An international journalist, Christian Parenti, claimed that the voting system was so flawed that even he could have easily voted if he desired so.³¹⁶

³¹³ Fields and Ahmed. *A review of the 2001 Bonn Conference...*, 2011. 5-6.

³¹⁴ Edwards, "State-building in Afghanistan...", 2010. 979-988.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Christian Parenti, "Who Rules Afghanistan Behind the democratic facade." *Nation-New York*- 279 (2004): 13-17.

Apart from transparency in the balloting, securing people's lives was another challenge, as Taliban tried to disrupt the election process by employing attacks on the pattern of guerrilla warfare. On election, fifteen members of the electoral management and five Afghan national army soldiers lost their lives. Despite all those challenges, the U.S. applauded the successful conduct of the presidential election and considered it as a strategic success.³¹⁷

3.1.5. Post-Election Resurgence of Taliban and Surfacing of Al-Qaeda

With the diversion of the U.S. strategic focus from military to the political side and the opening of a new military front in Iraq, the Afghan Taliban restructured themselves resulting in scaled violence.³¹⁸ By 2006, Taliban, who settled in the mountainous region of Afghanistan and partly in Pakistan's tribal zone, had regrouped their forces and came up with more intensified military operations against H. Karzai and coalition forces in Afghanistan. In March 2006, many international analysts and think tanks started calling Taliban's resurgence as a greater threat than their resistance in 2001. There was also a major tactical shift in Taliban's attacks; they modelled their techniques on the Iraqi insurgent style. Earlier, Taliban used to battle the U.S. forces in open combat, which caused them huge losses due to technical inferiority. The use of suicide attacks and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) proved effective terrorist techniques and inflicted heavy casualties on the U.S. and allied forces. Nearly sixty-four attacks of such nature were carried out by Taliban against the U.S. forces from January 2005 till August 2006.³¹⁹ This is an indication of continuous resurgence from Taliban with the support of international organization, Al-Qaeda.

In July 2006, the former U.S. Under Secretary of State R. Armitage admitted that the haste with which we started the Iraq campaign prematurely distracted the U.S.'s attention from Afghanistan's situation. This was a new stage, where Taliban turned into an amorphous alliance of anti-government forces again. Many analysts noted that a new generation of Taliban leaders was less associated with Pakistan and fulfilled their needs through drug trafficking and private revenues from the Middle East.³²⁰ By 2006, according to the Washington Post, Taliban's financial affairs had improved markedly, and the militants received about \$ 100 per head in a

³¹⁷ Ibid

³¹⁸ Sam Zia-Zarifi, "Losing the peace in Afghanistan." *Human Rights Watch* (2004): 3.

³¹⁹ Katzman, "Afghanistan: post-war governance, security, and US policy..." (2008): 30.

³²⁰ Joseph J Collins, *Understanding war in Afghanistan*. NDU Press, 2011. 14-20

month. On the other hand, the Afghan police force was getting \$ 70 per month, thus joining Taliban force was more lucrative for the local Afghan.³²¹

The growing attacks from Taliban corresponded with ever-increasing anti-American sentiments among Afghans. The U.S. was accused of sluggish statebuilding efforts and political engineering within the Afghan political elite. There were also reports of gross human rights violations in the U.S. detention camps, which further aggravated anti-American vibes among common Afghans, and hence a resultant tilt towards Taliban, who had called for Jihad against intruders in Afghanistan. Additionally, the U.S. anti-Taliban operations were mostly aerial bombardment, which resulted in collateral damages and hundreds of non-combatant Afghans suffered. Even in ground operations, civilian casualties were a repeated phenomenon, because Taliban used to hide in civilian places. For example, a U.S. military vehicle crushed many Afghans in May 2006, which erupted large scale violent anti-US riots in the country. So, one of the outcomes of the U.S. strategies was the resurgence of Taliban, which later become an unending phenomenon in Afghanistan.

³²¹ Jones, 2011, p.10



Figure 7: Civilian Casualties from 2009 to 2017³²²

3.1.6. Faultline in the Coalition

Taliban resurgence and ambiguity in the U.S. policy towards the conclusion of intervention in Afghanistan resulted in rifts among coalition partners at a NATO summit in Riga in 2006. Nearly twenty-eight countries leadership asked from removing the restriction on the use of forces in terms of how, when and where they operate. However, the U.S. did not agreed to this leverage and tensions continued. Contrarily the U.S. administration accused coalition partners of not sending more troops as the many non-governmental organizations were targeted by Taliban. They insisted to provide more troops for the safety of non-combatant members of the civil society for safe execution of statebuilding projects. NATO's secretary-general, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer asked member countries to agree on shared commitments to sustain what they already achieved in Afghanistan.³²³ He also warned of possible 'slip away' of the achievements in case of continued disagreements and lack of coordination among coalition partners.³²⁴ The NATO leadership assured the summit participants of a better political architecture and gradual shifting of security responsibilities to the local Afghan national army till 2008.³²⁵

³²² Tobias Akhtar Haque, Habiburrahman Sahibzada, Saurabh Shome, Bernard James Haven, and Taehyun Lee. *Afghanistan development update*. No. 129163. The World Bank, 2018: 1.

³²³ Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, "NATO on the Eve of the Riga Summit." *Atlantisch Perspectief* 30, no. 7 (2006): 4-7.

³²⁴ *Ibid*

³²⁵ Antonio Giustozzi, "Auxiliary force or national army? Afghanistan's 'ANA' and the counter-insurgency effort, 2002-2006", *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 18, 1 (2007): 45-67.

3.1.7. Elected Government

One of the outcomes of the U.S. strategy to fix the political system of Afghanistan was a strong central government and comparatively feeble and dependent governance in peripheries. Afghan president is having control over almost all appointments, transfers, and terminations in various government departments. Resultantly, the monopoly of power irks corruption, nepotism, and lack of accountability.³²⁶ Many tales of corruption are reported several times in international media, which shows a clear hurdle in the implementation of U.S. policies. Afghanistan has a rentier economy due to dependence on foreign aid. It is believed that the funds aimed at Statebuilding projects goes into the pockets of the local politicians.³²⁷ This is why; common Afghans felt betrayed and sidelined, hence were attracted by anti-Americanization slogans by Taliban.

3.1.8. Afghanistan as a Rentier State

Another outcome of the U.S. strategy of Statebuilding was that the country lost its consciousness of self-reliance and become so dependent on the U.S. fund that it turned into a rentier economy. At the start the international donor community was more interested in providing humanitarian assistance instead of stabilizing the national economy of Afghanistan. Even the domestic tax revenues in the country had reduced to zero and in 2002 the government received almost no tax revenue, which is already lesser than 10% of the national budget in the country.³²⁸ The situation slowly changed after the international donor community started aiding into the national economy of Afghanistan. Meanwhile, Karzai government also started reforms to accelerate the local tax revenues. Despite efforts to stimulate the local economy, the country was largely depending on the US and other allies. In 2005, the ratio of income to GDP was calculated as 5%, which was even lesser than many of the poorer countries in the world at that time.³²⁹ On one hand, the economy was shrinking and dependency on external aid was rising, on the other hand the overall expenditures of the public offices increased many fold. Resultantly, in the fiscal year 2004 and 2005, the domestic receipts accounted for nearly 8% of

³²⁶ Antonio Giustozzi, *Afghanistan: Political parties or militia fronts?*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2008.

³²⁷ Antonio Giustozzi, 2007c. 'War and Peace Economies of Afghanistan's Strongmen', *International Peacekeeping* 14(1): 75-89.

³²⁸ Fatima Ayub and Sari Kouvo. "Righting the course? Humanitarian intervention, the war on terror and the future of Afghanistan." *International Affairs* 84, no. 4 (2008): 641-657.

³²⁹ Jonathan Goodhand and Mark Sedra. "Who owns the peace? Aid, reconstruction, and peace building in Afghanistan." *Disasters* 34 (2010): 71-89.

Afghanistan total national budget.³³⁰ The shrinking domestic tax revenue ration with respect to the total budget reflects the level of dependency on the foreign aid. In 2005 and onwards, Taliban resurgence further deteriorated the economic indicators. IMF and Hamid Karzai both predicted that the trend of growing disparity in ration of domestic revenues and international aid is likely to continue for the next five years.³³¹ In the fiscal year 2004 and 2005, the economic dependency of Afghanistan on international aid remained at 90% of the overall budget of the country.³³² Hamid Karzai with the assistance of international partners tried hard to stimulate the national economy but failed miserably. One of the causes of such failures was the lack of government control on various districts due to Taliban continuing resurgence. Failing to achieve the desired goals, the international community led by the US structured the national budget into two parts, as internal and external budget.³³³ The management of internal budget was controlled by local/ national financial institutions while the external budget was used primarily under the auspices of the donor countries. With respect to the size of budget, the internal budget was much lesser than the external budget; the external budget was \$2.5 billion for the fiscal year 2004 and 2005, while the international budget was \$865 million, which was mainly used for the development and municipality costs. The external budget was used for operational costs of police, army, education, health, elections, small developmental programs and the national solidarity program (NSP). An Afghan national development strategy for the year 2006-2010 was devised under such dual budgetary framework to ensure an effective utilization of funds for various projects.³³⁴

The Bush administration's strategies in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2009 had a mixed outcome. While there were some significant achievements, such as the overthrow of the Taliban regime and the establishment of democratic institutions, there were also significant challenges and failures. One of the key achievements of the Bush administration's strategies was the overthrow of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. The U.S. led a coalition of forces that successfully ousted the Taliban from power and established a transitional government. This was achieved through a combination of military force and support for local Afghan groups opposed to the Taliban. Another significant achievement was the establishment of democratic

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Fatima Ayub and Sari Kouvo, "Righting the course?..." (2008): 641-657.

³³² Jonathan Goodhand and Mark Sedra. "Who owns the peace?..."

³³³ Richard Hogg, Claudia Nassif, Camilo Gomez Osorio, William Byrd, and Andrew Beath. *Afghanistan in transition: Looking beyond 2014* (The World Bank, 2013), 75-92.

³³⁴ Richard Hogg et al., *Afghanistan in transition*, 47-66.

institutions in Afghanistan. The Bonn Agreement of 2001 led to the establishment of a transitional government and the drafting of a new constitution. Elections were held in 2004 and 2005, and a new government was formed. These democratic institutions represented a significant departure from the authoritarian rule of the Taliban and represented an important step towards establishing a stable and democratic Afghanistan. However, there were also significant challenges and failures during this period. One of the key challenges was the ongoing guerilla attacks by the Taliban and other militant groups. Despite the initial success in ousting the Taliban, the efforts continued to mount attacks on the Afghan government and international forces, undermining efforts to establish a stable and democratic Afghanistan.

Another significant challenge was corruption and governance issues in Afghanistan. The Afghan government struggled to build effective and accountable institutions, while corruption was endemic at all levels of government. This undermined the legitimacy of the government in the eyes of the Afghan people and weakened its ability to provide basic services and establish the rule of law. In addition to these challenges, the Bush administration's focus on Iraq from 2003 onwards also diverted attention and resources away from Afghanistan, which hindered efforts to consolidate the gains made in the country.

3.2. Outcomes of Obama Administration Strategies

In 2009, President Barack Obama announced a major escalation of combat operations in Afghanistan with an additional thirty thousand troops but soon revisited the policy and hinted at the withdrawal of the U.S. troops and disengaging in Afghanistan statebuilding activities.³³⁵ Meanwhile, peace efforts were also initiated to reach an agreement with the warring groups in the country. A major incentive for peace was announced vis-à-vis the 2014 deadline for the troop's withdrawal, in February 2013, the U.S. secretary of defense Leon Panetta announced to completely withhold major combat operations in Afghanistan by mid-2013, while showing commitment providing security assistance to the Afghan government. The complete withdrawal, in all respects, was committed to be made till the end of 2016.³³⁶ In pursuance of the exit plan, the following outcomes were observed.

³³⁵ Leonard Cutler, "President Barack Obama's Counterterrorism Strategy and Legacy: The Case of Afghanistan." *PS, Political Science & Politics* 50, no. 1 (2017): 59.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*

3.2.1. Presidential Election of 2009

The second Afghan presidential election was held on August 20, 2009. Again, Mr. Hamid Karzai won with a 49.67% lead as an independent candidate.³³⁷ This was the second election under the new Afghan constitution and was largely celebrated as a success by the U.S. and allies. This election was meant to ensure the implementation of the provisions of the Bonn conference of 2006;³³⁸ therefore a major milestone in the statebuilding projects. Taliban differed with the so-called achievement of continuation of the political process and labelled the presidential election as a ‘program of the crusaders’ and rather a success of the American process in the country. Despite accusations of the American involvement and rigging in the election, Hamid Karzai won, who was not considered as a favorite candidate on the American side. The U.S. was supposedly in favor of either Ashraf Ghani or Abdullah Abdullah, who were also there in the presidential inauguration ceremony of Barack Obama, while Hamid Karzai was not there.³³⁹

Despite all odds, the successful conduct of election was a message of power to Taliban, who threatened to disrupt voting. Taliban presence in the south of Afghanistan was strong but the security agencies ensured security to the locals, who managed to cast their votes. The low turnout was a common phenomenon all over the country; however, an estimated 40 to 50% turnout was worth a success under serious security threats and lack of awareness among common Afghans.

Elections in Afghanistan were linked with a promising improvement in good governance; however, malpractices, corruption in funds, and lack of seriousness among government officials continued to hurt Afghanistan’s statebuilding efforts.

3.2.2. End of Osama Bin Laden

In 2009, Barack Obama announced troops surge in Afghanistan and recommitted to a large scale military operation against Taliban and Al-Qaeda.³⁴⁰ Though the revisit of the military escalation strategy was short-lived but based on intelligence reports, the U.S.

³³⁷ Timor Sharan, and John Heathershaw. “Identity politics and statebuilding in post-Bonn Afghanistan: The 2009 presidential election.” *Ethnopolitics* 10, no. 3-4 (2011): 297-319.

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ Ahmed Rashid, “How Obama Lost Karzai.” *Foreign Policy* 185 (2010): 6.

³⁴⁰ Kelly McHugh, “A tale of two surges: Comparing the politics of the 2007 Iraq surge and the 2009 Afghanistan surge.” *Sage Open* 5, no. 4 (2015): 2 & 10.

commandos conducted a successful operation inside Pakistan to kill mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, Osama Bin Laden.³⁴¹ The operation was conducted on May 1, 2011, in Abbottabad city of Pakistan. The episode of the U.S. commitment to punish culprits of the 9/11 incident ignited a fresh debate about the future presence of U.S. troops in Afghanistan, as the main target was achieved.³⁴² President Obama announced a new policy to withdraw U.S. troops from Afghanistan till December 2014.

3.2.3. Failed Negotiations with Taliban

In a major advancement in 2012, Taliban opened a political office in Qatar for negotiations with international stakeholders.³⁴³ This development came in compliance with a well to strike a peace deal with the U.S. However, Taliban canceled talks within two months of initiation accusing the U.S. of not showing progress on a precondition of prisoners swap. The opening of political office in Doha was not a sudden development rather some key rounds of negotiations took place between Taliban and the U.S. officials with the mediation of Germany and Qatari royal family members. For example, the first direct contact between Taliban and the U.S. happened in November 2010, when Mullah Omar representative, Tayyab Agha, met the U.S. officials in Munich.³⁴⁴ Similarly, a couple of rounds of negotiations took place in Doha in 2011. So, it could be concluded that the U.S. decided to directly negotiate with Taliban, without involving the Afghan government, in 2010. This was because Taliban never acknowledged the legitimacy of the Afghan government.

The mainstream peace process started in Doha in January 2012, where Taliban used their Qatari sponsored political office to maintain contacts with the U.S. officials.³⁴⁵ The preliminary rounds of talks were meant to agree on prisoners swap.³⁴⁶ Both sides agreed on the release of five Taliban Guantanamo bay prisoners in exchange for one U.S. soldier, Bowe Bergdahl, but the swap could not be completed.³⁴⁷ Taliban were not ready to assure the U.S. that the prisoners being released would not be participating in combat operations against the U.S.

³⁴¹ John Rollins, "Osama bin Laden's Death: Implications and Considerations." *International Journal of Terrorism & Political Hot Spots* 6, no. 4 (2011): 627-652.

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ Marc Grossman, "Lessons from Negotiating with Taliban." *Yale Global Online* (2013). 2.

³⁴⁴ Mona Kanwal Sheikh, and Maja Touzari Janesdatter Greenwood. *Taliban talks: Past present and prospects for the US, Afghanistan and Pakistan*. No. 2013: 06. DIIS Report, 2013. 14.

³⁴⁵ Ibid: 10.

³⁴⁶ Grossman, "Lessons from Negotiating with Taliban..." (2013). 2-4.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

soldiers.³⁴⁸ Moreover, there was pressure on the American administration from the civil society that the terrorists are going to be released. Resultantly, the peace talks ended with no positive outcome and since then the peace process had been on ice.

3.2.4. Drawdown of the U.S. Troops

President Barack Obama announced the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan till the end of December 2014.³⁴⁹ As per the plan, a small number of U.S. forces will remain in Afghanistan till 2016 to train the Afghan security forces and help in intelligence-based operations against the terrorists. However, the complete withdrawal of the U.S. and other international forces from Afghanistan was not materialized.

On August 5, 2014 an attack was carried out by Taliban against U.S. forces in which Major General Harold J. Greene of the U.S. Army was killed.³⁵⁰ A high-rank German brigadier general was also killed in the same incident and injuring another fifteen soldiers of international forces.³⁵¹ The Killing of a U.S. general was the first incident in forty-four years of U.S. history. The incident put massive pressure on the U.S. policymakers to withdraw from Afghanistan when the war is unfinished.³⁵² Moreover, disagreements surfaced between the U.S. Administration and local Afghan government about a security deal that would ensure the post-2014 presence of the U.S. forces in Afghanistan.³⁵³ Outgoing Afghan President Hamid Karzai denied signing any such agreement with the U.S. forces. The U.S. administration wanted immunity for the U.S. forces in Afghanistan; however, Hamid Karzai categorically stated that the Afghan municipal law will not be compromised at any cost.³⁵⁴

Disagreements over the new security agreement between the U.S. and Afghan governments got resolved when Ashraf Ghani won the presidential election. With the new leadership in Afghanistan Obama revisited his plans of complete withdrawal from Afghanistan. In November 2014, President Obama allowed the U.S. forces to participate in operations against Taliban and Al Qaeda, thus expanding their supportive role in Counter-Terrorism

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

³⁴⁹ Cutler, "President Barack Obama's Counterterrorism Strategy... (2017). 59- 64.

³⁵⁰ Katzman, and Layton Thomas. "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance... (2017): 22.

³⁵¹ Ibid. 22 & 23.

³⁵² Kenneth Katzman, "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and US Policy" (CRS Report No. RL30588). Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2014. 25.

³⁵³ Nazif M Shahrani, "The impact of the 2014 US-NATO withdrawal on the internal politics of Afghanistan: Karzai-style Thugocracy or Taliban Theocracy?" *Asian Survey* 55, no. 2 (2015): 273-298.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

operation to the offensive against Taliban.³⁵⁵ Similarly, the U.S. Air Force was allowed to carry out their Strike against Taliban and other insurgent groups inside Afghanistan.³⁵⁶ The U.S. administration did not fully withhold their decision to withdraw from Afghanistan and repeated the commitment of troop's withdrawal from Afghanistan. However, the earlier planes of phased withdrawal were not materialized.³⁵⁷

3.2.5. Post-2014 Intensified Military Confrontation

With every passing year, Afghanistan witnessed an ever-increasing influence of Taliban and resultant guerilla warfare incidents. President Barak Obama's announcement of the withdrawal of the U.S. troops was perceived, by Taliban, as a zero-sum outcome of the war in Afghanistan.³⁵⁸ So, instead of taking advantage of the peace talks offers, they further relied on coercive means to ensure their victory in the Afghan war. Towards the end of the Obama administration, many writers and journalists resembled the withdrawal of the U.S. troops from Afghanistan with those of the Soviet Union in 1989.³⁵⁹ It was largely perceived as a total victory for Taliban, while the U.S. was considering a face-saving for a total withdrawal from Afghanistan.³⁶⁰ The Afghan government and local Afghans were in a state of fear and confusion for an undecided end to the international commitments. Many factions within Afghan society were opening to Taliban and hence sympathies towards the group increased, which further facilitated the attacks from Taliban.³⁶¹

3.2.6. Presidential Election and the Transfer of Power

Another important development in Afghanistan's politics vis-à-vis a U.S. policy outcome was the successful conduct of the presidential election and the transfer of powers from Hamid Karzai, to Ashraf Ghani.³⁶² However, the process was not that transparent and fair. Ashraf Ghani rival, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah disputed the election results, and a deadlock was

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Clayton Thomas, "Afghanistan: Background and US Policy." *Congressional Research Service* (2018): 18.

³⁵⁷ Katzman, "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance..." (2017): 1, 2.

³⁵⁸ Waseem Ishaque, Ghulam Qumber, and Syed Jawad Shah. "Prospects of Enduring Peace in Afghanistan: Avoiding Zero Sum Game in Af-Pak Region." *Global Social Sciences Review* 2, no. 2 (2017): 146-161.

³⁵⁹ Nasir Mehmood, *Comparative Analysis of the Regime-Stabilization Efforts by the Soviet Union and the US-Led Coalition in Afghanistan*. Naval Postgraduate School Monterey United States, 2018. 57- 66.

³⁶⁰ Ishaque et al., "Prospects of Enduring Peace in Afghanistan..." (2017): 146-161.

³⁶¹ Antonio Giustozzi, "Bureaucratic façade and political realities of disarmament and demobilisation in Afghanistan." *Conflict, Security & Development* 8, no. 2 (2008): 169-192.

³⁶² Aureo Gomes, "Hybrid democracy: electoral rules and political competition in Afghanistan." *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional* 61, no. 1 (2018).

made in the making of the new government in the country. With the mediation efforts of international stakeholders, particularly the U.S., a new post of ‘chief executive’ was created to make room for a parallel executive position to Ashraf Ghani by Dr. Abdullah Abdullah.³⁶³ The power-sharing mechanism was largely seen as a positive development as a promise to political stability. With the exclusion of local influential groups in the mainstream governance apparatus, the power-sharing between Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah did not prove effective and Taliban’s terrorist momentum kept threatening peace and security throughout Afghanistan.³⁶⁴ So, the 2014 presidential election was a positive development in terms of the continuation of the political process but it did not prove fruitful vis-à-vis conflict resolution and peace in Afghanistan.

3.2.7. Shift of Responsibility to Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF)

It was long-awaited to hand over the responsibility of primary combat operations from the NATO forces to the local Afghan army and police. This was decided in the light of increasing attacks from Taliban and resultant casualties among the international forces. The role of the international forces was limited to the training of the local Afghan forces in addition to the conduct of intelligence-based special counterterrorism operations. The formal ceremony was held at a military academy outside Kabul, attended by President Hamid Karzai and the general secretary NATO Anders Fogh Rasmussen, where the control of ninety-six remaining districts was handed over to the local security forces. So, the Afghan forces were now in the front lead in controlling the security of all thirty-four provinces and four hundred and three districts in the country.

The Afghan security forces started working independently of NATO in the tale of 2013 but they are heavily dependent on the U.S. in terms of funding and military equipment. They proved effective in counterterrorism operations against Taliban as they were more aware of the local circumstances as compared to the international forces. However, Taliban did not discriminate between the U.S. and local Afghan forces, and hundreds of casualties are reported to date. Taliban continues to conduct coercive attacks against the Afghan forces and many districts are taken back from the control of the Afghan government. Taliban enjoys tactical and

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ Noah Coburn, “Elections and the failure of democratisation: how voting has made Afghanistan less democratic from the ground up.” *Conflict, Security & Development* 16, no. 6 (2016): 541-555.

numerical superiority against the Afghan national army and hence are dominating in the post-2014 conflict.

The U.S. had principally agreed on avoiding direct military confrontation with Taliban in the post-2014 era.³⁶⁵ The U.S. citizens and civil society elsewhere in Europe had developed pressure on the U.S. policymakers in the wake of increasing casualties among international forces in Afghanistan. In addition to this, the longevity of the U.S. war in Afghanistan with no tangible outcome further compelled the U.S. to go for enduring counterterrorism partnerships with the Afghan government, regional and extra-regional players. The U.S. signed such agreement with the Afghan president in May 2012.³⁶⁶ The expectations of this agreement were high, as Hamid Karzai stated that the ten years long intervention and war is now being converted into an equal relationship between two sovereign countries.³⁶⁷ However, the agreement was also criticized by many U.S. senators and war veterans, who thought that the insurgents would come up more strongly against weak opposition, the Afghan national army.³⁶⁸

Nominal Afghan local security forces were transformed into a well-organized force with the help of international partners in Afghanistan. The leading countries, who cooperated to restructure, train and increase capacity of the Afghan security forces included the U.S., UK, Canada, France, New Zealand, Germany, Bulgaria, Romania, and Mongolia. The Combined Security Transition Command – Afghanistan (CSTC-A) was mainly responsible for the training and monitoring of the local Afghan National Army operations. The cost-benefit of the Afghan National Army can be contested on many grounds, however, the enhanced operational capacity is an open reality. Afghanistan had a traditional loosely organized force throughout history.³⁶⁹ It was indeed a major development/ outcome of the U.S. strategies in building Afghan Army on modern notes.

The Afghan National Army was numbered as 6000 in 2003, which was gradually increased to more than 272500 through an extensive recruitment drive throughout Afghanistan.³⁷⁰ Maintaining balance in an ethnically diverse country during the recruitment

³⁶⁵ Katzman, "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance..." (2017): 30.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ Hamid Karzai, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (2004–2014). "JISB Interview: 'We Don't Want to Be a Rentier State Forever'." *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 12, no. 3 (2018): 442-448.

³⁶⁸ Cutler, "President Barack Obama's Counterterrorism Strategy..." (2017): 59.

³⁶⁹ Giustozzi. "Auxiliary force or national army? 45-67.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

process for a national army was a challenge for the local administration and international donors. 42% of the Afghan population comprised of Pashtuns, who were largely considered skeptical on grounds of allegiance with Taliban.³⁷¹ Moreover, there were grievances relating to ignorance vis-à-vis their share in the national politics among ethnic groups, which could have further aggravated if any discrepancies were made in the recruitment process. To overcome all of those challenges, many recruitment centers were established in different parts to facilitate all Afghans on equality basis. This recruitment drive was also used as a major strategy in the demobilization of potential terrorists in the country.³⁷² The yearly increase in the local Afghan security forces can be seen in the following table.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Giustozzi, "Bureaucratic façade and political realities of disarmament and demobilization..." (2008): 169-192.

Year	Ministry of Defense forces ⁵	Ministry of Interior forces ⁶	Total
2003	6,000	0	6,000
2004	24,000	33,000	57,000
2005	26,000	40,000	66,000
2006	36,000	49,700	85,700
2007	50,000	75,000	125,000
2008	68,000	79,900	147,900
2009	100,100	94,900	195,000
2010	149,500	116,800	266,300
2011	179,600	143,800	323,400
2012	178,500	148,500	327,000
2013	185,800	152,300	338,100
2014	178,600	152,600	332,100
2015	170,300	148,200	318,500
2016	175,000	147,600	322,600
2017	180,000	156,000	336,000
2018	174,300	148,700	323,000
2019 ⁷	180,900	112,400	272,500

Figure 8: Afghan Security Forces, 2003-2019³⁷³

3.2.8. Collateral Damage and subsequent Shift in Public Sympathies

One of the many problems with the U.S. strategies in Afghanistan is the failure to distinguish between insurgents and non-combatant ordinary Afghans. The ratio of civilian casualties and collateral damages is a record high in the U.S. counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan.³⁷⁴ Since the U.S. mostly relied on air operations in their targets against Taliban and Al-Qaeda, which carried potential for a large number of civilian casualties and collateral damages. The U.S. used unmanned drone technology in aerial bombardment for specific

³⁷³ Sam Gollob, and Michael E. O'Hanlon. *Afghanistan index: Tracking variables of reconstruction & security in post-9/11 Afghanistan*. Brookings Institution, 2020: 7.

³⁷⁴ Takayuki Nishi, "Threat, Military Culture, and Strategy: The United States in Afghanistan and Iraq." PhD diss., The University of Chicago Order No. 3369458, (2009). 187.

targets, whose accuracy was not that good.³⁷⁵ So, an obvious outcome of the U.S. counterterrorism operations was the increased number of collateral damages and civilian casualties.³⁷⁶

The use of drones in counterterrorism operations was criticized at both local and international level.³⁷⁷ Many human rights organizations criticized drone attacks on grounds of gross human rights violations. The accused is supposed to be given the chance of a fair trial before deciding about his life. However, killing people through drone attacks deprives the accused of such basic rights.³⁷⁸ Despite the condemnations, the U.S. relied on drones' technology from time to time. Apart from the collateral damages, a more worrisome outcome of the U.S. strategy is the hate among people against the U.S. forces in Afghanistan. More civilian casualties by the U.S. further strengthen Taliban stance about the legitimacy of Jihad against 'intruders' in Afghanistan. Collateral damages and civilian casualties turn Afghans sympathies towards Taliban, who finds support from ordinary citizens in the cities.³⁷⁹ Moreover, the number of civilian casualties as a result of the actions of pro-government parties, including the U.S., coalition troops, the Afghan National Army and other militant groups, is much higher than the number of victims of Taliban and other rebel groups.

³⁷⁵ Tyler Wall, and Torin Monahan. "Surveillance and violence from afar: The politics of drones and liminal security-scapes." *Theoretical criminology* 15, no. 3 (2011): 239-254.

³⁷⁶ Nishi, "Threat, Military Culture, and Strategy..." (2009) 169-187.

³⁷⁷ Wall, and Monahan. "Surveillance and violence from afar..." (2011): 239-254.

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

³⁷⁹ Nishi, "Threat, Military Culture, and Strategy..." (2009) 169-187.

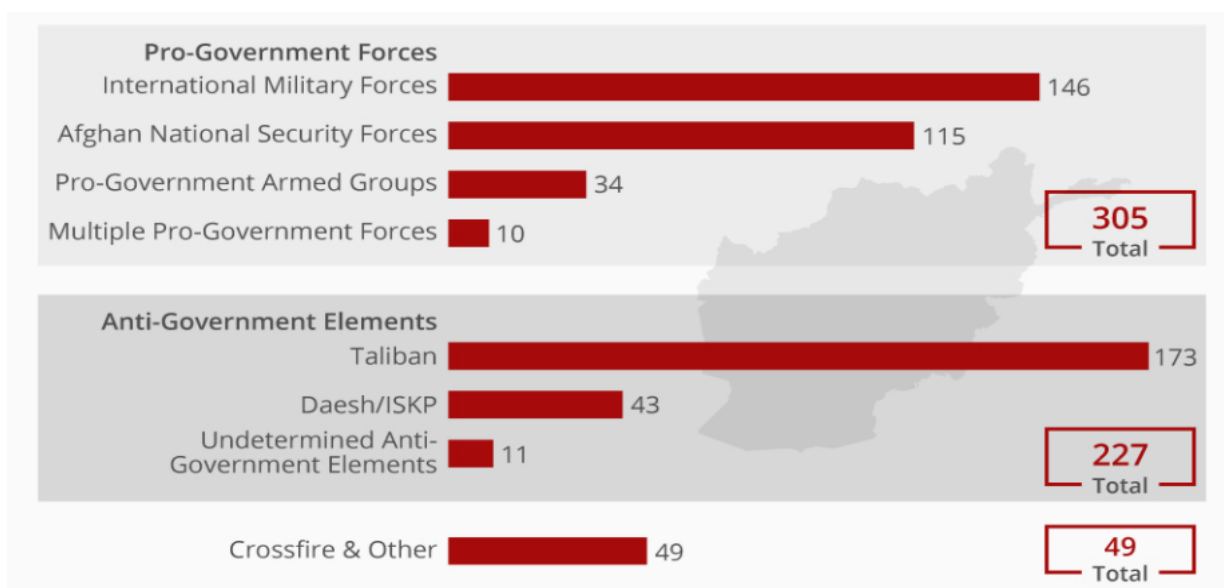


Figure 9: Civilian Casualties by Parties to the Conflict.³⁸⁰

In 2001, Afghans were fed up with the coercive policies of Taliban regime and hence welcomed the U.S. intervention on a positive note. The successful conduct of three time's presidential elections is the manifestation of the fact that Afghans desire for a stable democratic political system in the country.³⁸¹ However, disappointments from both the U.S. and local governance apparatus left common Afghans in a disarray. The U.S. was not consistent in its strategies and kept on swinging between various tools for ending war and maintaining peace in Afghanistan. On the other hand, the Afghan government officials used international funds for their interests and ignored the national cause of statebuilding and reconstruction. All of these shattered public expectations and hence a shift in sympathies towards other available political options was observed.³⁸²

Many common Afghans had developed sympathies with Taliban and are facilitating their operations. The civilian casualties in the U.S. counterterrorist operations further increased people's sympathies towards Taliban. This is the reason; the numbers of Taliban combatants were recorded high since 2001.³⁸³ Despite the fact that the U.S. killed hundreds of Taliban fighters and incarcerated many thousands, the number of combatants increased. This reflects

³⁸⁰ Niall McCarthy, "Coalition Forces Are Killing More Civilians Than Taliban", *Statista*, (2020): Accessed at: <https://www.statista.com/chart/17812/civilian-deaths-in-afghanistan-by-parties-to-the-conflict/>

³⁸¹ Giustozzi, "Bureaucratic façade and political realities of disarmament..." (2008): 169-192.

³⁸² Ibid.

³⁸³ Zachary Laub, "Taliban in Afghanistan." *Council on Foreign Relations* 4, no. 7 (2014): 1-9.

about the possible failure of the U.S. ideology and a contrary victory for Taliban's position about the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan.³⁸⁴

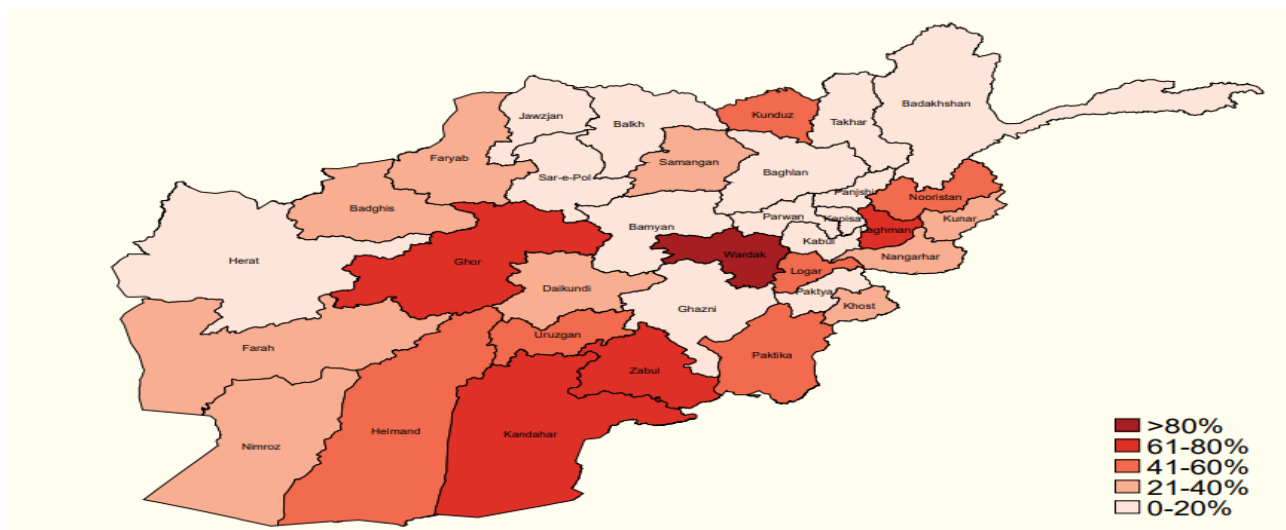


Figure 10: Sympathies for Armed Groups in Various Provinces of Afghanistan³⁸⁵

3.2.9. Regional Approach to Political Settlement

Since 2009 the U.S. administration realized that Afghanistan's security is multifaceted and involves extra-territorial actors. Barack Obama's AfPak strategy was reflecting the realization of the multifaceted dimensions of Afghanistan's security.³⁸⁶ In addition to Pakistan, the role of China, Iran, Central Asian Republics, Russia and India was considered important and hence regional countries were called for their role in the reconciliation process between Taliban and Afghan government.³⁸⁷ Some of the related outcomes of the strategy are as follows. The regional countries' role is essential and could be partly decisive in the conflict resolution efforts. Pakistan and India want to counter each other's influence inside Afghanistan and hence are in a competition that adversely affects Afghanistan's politics and development.³⁸⁸ Similarly, Iran wants to safeguard its border and assist the local Shia community in Afghanistan.³⁸⁹ They do have a record of rivalry and then-recent friendship stories with

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

³⁸⁵ Zachary Warren, and Nancy Hopkins. "Afghanistan in 2015." *A survey of the Afghan people. Asia Foundation* (2015): 50.

³⁸⁶ Ahmad, "The US Af-Pak strategy: challenges and opportunities..." (2010): 191-209.

³⁸⁷ Muhammad Khan, and Shabir Ahmad Khan. "Peace in Afghanistan: Role of Regional Countries and United States." *Central Asia* 85, no. Winter (2019): 1-23.

³⁸⁸ Zachary Constantino, *The India-Pakistan Rivalry in Afghanistan*. United States Institute of Peace, 2020: 18

³⁸⁹ Barzegar, "Iran's Foreign Policy in Post-Taliban Afghanistan..." (2014): 119-137.

Taliban.³⁹⁰ China is yet another important player who looks forward to peace and stability in Afghanistan, which is considered a core variable for its regional connectivity project.³⁹¹ At the same time, China is concerned about its Uighur Muslims' tilt towards jihadist movements.³⁹² Russia's role is also important, who is accused of playing dual roles; pretended to be with the U.S. to achieve peace and simultaneously provided backdoor support to Taliban against the U.S. forces in Afghanistan.³⁹³ Some key Middle Eastern countries like UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar continues to be the key actors in Afghanistan's peace.³⁹⁴ It is pertinent to mention that the local, regional, and extra-regional players carry both positive and negative potential concerning peace in Afghanistan.

Peace in Afghanistan is in the interest of all regional countries in terms of trade and commerce. An immediate neighbor, Pakistan's most crucial economic projects, TAPI and CPEC are at the mercy of security in Afghanistan. Similarly, Iran is hardly surviving the U.S. sanctions and needs trade with immediate neighbors. India is part of the TAPI project, which again is dependent on the restoration of peace in Afghanistan. Central Asian countries are energy-rich states, whose export diversification is dependent on routes through Afghanistan. China is an emerging economic world power, which is working on Belt and Road project for regional and extra-regional connectivity. Afghanistan's security is indeed in favor of China's agenda of regional development.³⁹⁵

Despite merged interests, regional countries have contradictions over the role of different players within Afghanistan. Russia is accused of back-door support to Taliban against the U.S. on the premise of the U.S. role in the soviet-Afghan war of 1979.³⁹⁶ Iran despite ideological differences with the Sunni majority Taliban is extending good bilateral relations concerning the common animosity towards the U.S.³⁹⁷ India and Pakistan are all times enemies who always supersede their animosity above economic interests. Pakistan is skeptical of the Indian investments in Afghanistan and raises accusations of the possible exploitative role of

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

³⁹¹ Khan and Khan, "Peace in Afghanistan...", (2019): 1-23.

³⁹² M. Ehsan Ahrari, "China, Pakistan, and the" Taliban Syndrome"." *Asian Survey* 40, no. 4 (2000): 658-671.

³⁹³ Katz, "Putin's Predicament...", (2014): 13-17.

³⁹⁴ Henner Fürtig, "Afghanistan in the Foreign Policies of Middle Eastern Countries." *Asian Perspective* 38, no. 4 (2014): 541-564.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

³⁹⁶ Mark N qa

³⁹⁷ Kayhan Barzegar, "Iran's Foreign Policy in Post-Taliban Afghanistan." *The Washington Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (2014): 119-137.

Indian in Afghanistan against its national interests. The Central Asian countries have played a very passive role in the entire episode of war in Afghanistan.³⁹⁸ So, engaging regional countries in the resolution of conflict in Afghanistan proved less promising due to the potential conflict of interest in Afghanistan.

3.2.10. The Rise of ISIS

The interest of regional countries in Afghanistan further increased after the surfacing of another militant group ISIS.³⁹⁹ The breakaway groups within Afghan Taliban and Tehrik e Taliban Pakistan joined together under the umbrella of a Middle Eastern terrorist group, ISIS. ISIS is primarily based in Iraq and Syria but extends their operational activities throughout the World, using modern tools of communication. The first appearance of ISIS in Afghanistan was seen in Eastern parts of Nangarhar and Southern Helmand province.⁴⁰⁰ Initially, ISIS avoided confrontation with any of the warring parties but in late 2014 and early 2015 violence erupted, when ISIS stopped people from poppy cultivation.⁴⁰¹ Ideologically, ISIS conflicted with Taliban and hence ISIS met with serious resistance from Taliban.⁴⁰² Since the U.S. policy in 2014 was more focused on withdrawing troops; less attention was paid to the new threats. China, Pakistan, Central Asian Republics, Iran, and even India were skeptical of the rise of ISIS and hence a consensus was there on joint efforts to fuse the threat of the rise of ISIS. Many writers argue that the rise of ISIS in Afghanistan is the outcome of the inconsistent U.S. policies.⁴⁰³

In conclusion it can be said that the Obama administration's strategies in Afghanistan from 2009 to 2017 had some successes, but also faced significant challenges and setbacks. The primary goal of the Obama administration was to disrupt and defeat Al Qaeda and its affiliates, and to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven for terrorist groups. One of the main successes of the Obama administration was the increase in troop levels in Afghanistan. The administration deployed an additional 30,000 troops to the country in 2009, which helped to

³⁹⁸ Iqbal and Rauf, "Afghanistan Imbroglio..." (2018): 61-63.

³⁹⁹ Paul Lushenko, Lance Van Auken, and Garrett Stebbins. "ISIS-K: deadly nuisance or strategic threat?" *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 30, no. 2 (2019): 265-278.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid: 270-274.

⁴⁰² Niamatullah Ibrahim, and Shahram Akbarzadeh. "Intra-jihadist conflict and cooperation: Islamic state–Khorasan Province and Taliban in Afghanistan." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2019): 1-22.

⁴⁰³ Arie Perliger, and Matthew M. Sweeney. "United States–Taliban, al-Qaeda, and ISIS: the failure to defeat Jihadist terror." In *Deterring Terrorism*, pp. 260-280. Routledge, 2018.

push back the Taliban uprising in some areas and create more stable conditions. This surge was followed by a gradual drawdown of U.S. forces in the country over the course of the administration. Another success was the shift in focus from counterinsurgency to counterterrorism. The Obama administration pursued a strategy that relied more heavily on targeted drone strikes and other forms of precision military action against key Al Qaeda targets. This approach was seen as more effective in disrupting terrorist networks while minimizing civilian casualties and avoiding prolonged ground engagements.

Additionally, the Obama administration made efforts to build up the capacity of the Afghan security forces. The administration provided training and equipment to Afghan forces, and worked to improve their capabilities in areas such as intelligence, logistics, and air support. By the end of the Obama administration, Afghan forces had taken on a greater role in combat operations, and the U.S. had shifted to a more supportive role.

However, there were also significant challenges and setbacks during the Obama administration's tenure in Afghanistan. The Taliban uprising remained resilient and continued to mount attacks on Afghan forces and civilians. The Afghan government also struggled with corruption, weak governance, and other challenges that undermined its ability to provide basic services and establish the rule of law. Another significant challenge was the difficulty in negotiating a peace settlement with the Taliban. While the Obama administration made some efforts towards reconciliation, such as establishing a Taliban office in Qatar, progress towards a negotiated settlement was slow and limited.

3.3. Outcomes of Trump Administration Strategies

After winning the election, Donald Trump had long consultations with the security advisors.⁴⁰⁴ Finally, in a speech addressed to Fort Myer's troops (Arlington, Virginia) on August 21, 2017, he announced the launch of a new policy towards Afghanistan, termed as South Asia Policy.⁴⁰⁵ Breaking with his predecessor's policy of a gradual military withdrawal from Afghanistan, Mr Trump reaffirmed Washington's commitment to the training, advisory and assistance mission and its missions of fight against terrorism. The U.S.' new strategy

⁴⁰⁴ Jonathan D Pollack, "Donald Trump and the Future of US Leadership: Some Observations on International Order, East Asia, and the Korean Peninsula." In *제5 회 한국국가전략연구원-브루킹스연구소 국제회의*. 2017: 17.

⁴⁰⁵ Kaura, "The Trump Administration's Afghan Policy..." (2017): 92-108.

provided in particular for the deployment of several thousand additional troops, a relaxation of the rules of engagement applied by the U.S. forces and an increase in the pressure exerted on the neighboring countries to contribute to the stabilisation of Afghanistan.⁴⁰⁶ Also ruling out the Obama administration's sunset clause, the new strategy indicates that future military withdrawals would henceforth depend on conditions on the ground.⁴⁰⁷ Aside from these sweeping strategic shifts, the President only touched on a few details, noting that the metrics to guide the assessment of the conditions in the revised sunset clause remain to be defined.

While the new strategy called for less political engagement by the U.S. in Afghan governance, it strengthens Washington's commitment to military action.⁴⁰⁸ More specifically, it was based on the assumption that it would be possible to get Taliban to negotiate a political agreement by overpowering them on the battlefield.⁴⁰⁹ In this perspective, President Donald Trump, once again linking with the debate on burden-sharing, asked member countries and NATO partners engaged in Afghanistan to model their attitude on the U.S. by reviewing troops and increasing the funding. The Trump administration's broader policy in the region is also showing quite significant change. The administration was now exerting strong pressure on key actors for general security in the region, which could have a decisive impact on the Afghan battlefield conditions. Donald Trump's mixed strategy, of using force and compelling Taliban for peace, was differently viewed by researchers. "Since late 2016, early 2017, U.S. government had actively sought to terminate its involvement in the conflict in Afghanistan by forcing a political settlement between all major actors including itself, the Afghan government, and the insurgent Afghan Taliban. Initially, the U.S. envisioned a political agreement as part of which the Afghan Taliban would not only scale back violence but also negotiate a power-sharing arrangement with the Afghan government, following which U.S. forces would withdraw. To this end, the U.S. government sought to increase military pressure on Taliban, including against Taliban leaders living in Pakistan, and threatened sanctions against Pakistan to stop supporting Taliban. By late 2018, however, the U.S. government assessed that the strategy was not working as it struggled to increase military pressure on Taliban. There was also a feeling that risks of pressuring Pakistan with sanctions outweighed any benefits. Finally,

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ Vinay Kaura, "The Trump Administration's Afghan Policy: Implications for Regional Security." *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs* 26, no. 3 (2017): 92-108.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ Roy-Chaudhury Rahul, "The New US Strategy on Afghanistan and South Asia: Challenges and Prospects." *The International Institute for Strategic Studies*, No 23, (2017). Accessed at: <https://www.iiss.org/events/2017/10/afghanistan-south-asia>

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's ability to swiftly forge a united front among his allies and rivals to compel the Afghan Taliban to negotiate was in doubt. This led the U.S. government to shift gears in two ways to hasten the process of ending the conflict. One, it decoupled the intra-Afghan discussions from a first-order agreement between the U.S. and the Afghan Taliban, which was a demand of Taliban. This allowed the U.S. government to directly negotiate with Taliban and achieve an initial agreement that would pave way for intra-Afghan talks. Second, it dropped the demand for a reduction in violence until the initial agreement and moved up the offer of withdrawing U.S. forces".⁴¹⁰ This broader regional approach was decisive, in that it constituted one of the key elements on which the outline of the Trump administration's approach to Afghanistan would be drawn. An academician and researchers responded to the question of this thesis and argued that there are two perspectives on the style of the U.S. policy pursuit in Afghanistan. The U.S. failed earlier in a sense that "the U.S tried to address the question of Taliban and religious extremism by focusing on Taliban inside Afghanistan while refused to situate the conflict as a regional issue. Specifically, refusal from addressing Taliban sanctuaries and strong logistical, medical and military support system in Pakistan that sustained the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan".⁴¹¹ The changed U.S. approach towards conflict resolution seems promising in terms of the recent negotiations. "Yet, it comes too late and remains strategically narrow in its scope. The negotiations might bring a shaky understanding between elements within the U.S government and Taliban but I am not sure if it ends the conflict in Afghanistan in long-term unless it is comprehensively revised".⁴¹²

Though the U.S. strategies for conflict resolution varied from 2001 till 2020, the latest peace talk's strategy to pay the way for complete withdrawal was clear. When the phased withdrawal of the U.S. troops until December 2014 was announced during Barrack Obama's presidency, the implementation was somewhat ambiguous. A shift to the war model was seen from 2016 onwards. However, the re-emphasis on complete disengagement and troop's withdrawal signaled the U.S. commitment and seriousness in withdrawing from Afghanistan, which they ultimately made in August 2021.

⁴¹⁰ Interview with Asfandyar Mir, a Postdoctoral fellow at the Center for International Security and Cooperation, Stanford University.

⁴¹¹ Interview with Dr Omar Sharifi, a former Senior Research Fellow and Director of the American Institute of Afghanistan Studies, Kabul.

⁴¹² Ibid.

President Donald Trump South Asia's policy of April 2019 had a primary focus on the conflict in Afghanistan. One of the key drivers of the policy was a clear indictment of Pakistan's negative role in the conflict resolution efforts in Afghanistan.⁴¹³ Trump believed that Pakistan betrayed the U.S. by giving extremists safe sanctuaries and not helping the U.S. in Afghanistan. The policy had mixed responses but mainly resulted in creating rifts in the U.S. bilateral relations with Pakistan.

3.3.1. Rifts in the U.S.-Pakistan Bilateral Relations

The U.S.-Pakistan bilateral relations deteriorated after Donald Trump's South Asia policy. Prime Minister Imran Khan responded proactively on twitter, reminding President Trump of Pakistan's sacrifices on the U.S. war in Afghanistan.⁴¹⁴ The U.S. withheld annual military aid to Pakistan and hence uncertain relations were observed between the two sovereign states. President Trump, in his various speeches, one in Riyadh in May 2017, lauded India's role in South Asian politics which raveled Pakistan's bilateral relations with the U.S.⁴¹⁵ The U.S. wanted to give a greater role to India in Afghanistan, which was a serious concern vis-à-vis the national security of Pakistan. Pakistan has conveyed its concerns to the U.S. officials and also highlighted the possible India's spoiler role. Earlier, President Barrack Obama also tried to persuade Pakistan to use its influence on Taliban to reach any meaningful conclusion vis-à-vis conflict in Afghanistan. however, the strategic importance of Pakistan persuaded the U.S. in changing the diplomatic tone and gradually the relations eased after Prime Minister Imran Khan met Donald Trump in the white house in June 2019.⁴¹⁶

3.3.2. Border Management Improved

With growing concerns for cross-border infiltrations, Pakistan decided to fence the Pak-Afghan border in June 2016.⁴¹⁷ Pak-Afghan border movements have always been informal due to the cultural and tribal linkages between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Formal FATA (federally administered tribal area) residents used to have informal trade and cultural exchanges with Afghans on the other side of the border and hence a loosely regulated border existed.⁴¹⁸ During

⁴¹³ Vinay Kaura, "US-Pakistan relations in the Trump era: Resetting the terms of engagement in Afghanistan." *ORF Occasional Paper* 128 (2017). 19.

⁴¹⁴ Robert M Hathaway, "Power without Leverage, Leverage without Power: Pakistan and the United States in the Era of Trump." *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no. 2 (2019): 1-19.

⁴¹⁵ Kaura, "US-Pakistan relations in the Trump era..." (2017): 11.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

⁴¹⁷ Amina Khan, "Pak-Afghan border: A case study of border management." *Strategic Studies* 37, no. 3 (2017).

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

an anti-terrorist operation, Operation Zarb-e-Azb, hundreds of Pakistan Tehrik-e-Taliban fighters cross-over to the Afghan territory and managed attacks from there.⁴¹⁹ Moreover, the U.S. was also skeptical of safe sanctuaries on Pakistan's side, and hence the decision to fence the border was taken. Afghan government protested against the decision on account of the historic unsettled border dispute with Pakistan, however, the fencing project was never stopped under Afghan government pressure. So, one of the outcomes of the U.S. strategy of pressuring Pakistan was an improved border management system at the Pak-Afghan border.

3.3.3. Peace Talks with Taliban

The latest strategy adopted by the U.S. was to initiate peace talks with the Afghan Taliban for the settlement of war in Afghanistan.⁴²⁰ This was the first time in twenty years when the two warring parties decided to set together and sort out a peaceful solution to conflict resolution in Afghanistan. The start of negotiations between the two sides also signifies the non-zero-sum nature of the war in Afghanistan. Since the beginning of war in 2001, all players in the war in Afghanistan were looking for a zero-sum outcome of the war but neither of them achieved this optimistic goal.⁴²¹ The longest and ever-expanding violence in Afghanistan compelled all players to accept that a zero-sum outcome is less likely.

In the recent past, Taliban goals and demands regarding participation in the negotiation process and a potential peace deal show the dynamic and diplomatic touch in Taliban's outlook. It seems like there is a transformation in the outlook of Taliban. For example, in 2016, some Taliban leaders were of the view to participate in the upcoming Afghan election and become part of the country's political system.⁴²² However, a strife opposition to these proposals resulted in the non-materialisation of such proposals. Despite the lack of consensus on participation in the electoral process, the very proposals reflect Taliban's changing nature. Secondly, in January 2016, Taliban reiterated the will to rejoin the Afghan peace process after the failure of earlier peace talks held in 2013 and onwards.⁴²³ Taliban's announcement was a clear message

⁴¹⁹ Yousaf Ali, Asadullah Khan, Ghani Khan, Amin Ullah Khan, and Zeeshan Ahmad. "Evaluation of Effectiveness of Fence on a Country's Border: a Case Study of Pak-Afghan Border Fence." *Journal of International Migration and Integration* (2020): 1-22.

⁴²⁰ M Tariq, "US-Afghan Talks: Myths and Realities." *Global Political Review* 1 (2020): 104-111.

⁴²¹ Ishaque et al., "Prospects of Enduring Peace in Afghanistan..." (2017): 146-161.

⁴²² Khalilullah Safi, and Thomas Ruttig. "Understanding Hurdles to Afghan Peace Talks: Are the Taleban a Political Party?." *Afghanistan Analyst Network*, June 27 (2018): 7.

⁴²³ Ibid: 1.

regarding their readiness for cooperation with the U.S. for a negotiated settlement of the conflict.

Meanwhile, the U.S. reliance on the war model, for instance, dropping the ‘mother of all bombs’ against insurgents on April 13, 2017, changed Taliban outlook.⁴²⁴ The U.S. probably used this bomb as bluffing to be on the advantageous side in the strategized peace talks with Taliban. Taliban responded with the same zeal and again relied heavily on terrorism against the local and international security forces. Despite the rise in military confrontation and the use of force from all sides, Taliban welcomed the U.S. offer for peace talks under Zalmay Khalilzad, who was appointed as the President’s special envoy for peace talks in Afghanistan. In February 2018, while presenting their demands for negotiations, Taliban insisted on international forces’ unconditional withdrawal. However, in June 2018, Taliban reformulated their demands, focusing on the withdrawal of the U.S. forces, the release of Taliban’s prisoners, the removal of Taliban from the U.S. blacklist, and the opening of the political office in Doha. These demands show that Taliban remained flexible in reconsidering their demands without compromising on the core objective. Later on, Taliban even had shown willingness to the phased withdrawal of the U.S. forces, deviating from their earlier rigid demand for a complete unconditional withdrawal. In July 2018, Taliban demanded freedom of movement for their members. In August 2018, Taliban principally agreed to show flexibility on their demand for a total withdrawal of international forces but reiterating their condition of exclusive talks with the U.S., denying any possibility of direct talks with the local Afghan government. Though incomplete but Taliban did entered into intra-Afghan peace talks, primarily with the local Afghan government. This deviation from an earlier condition of ‘no talks’ with the Afghan government shows flexibility and dynamism within Taliban. They were meant to be rigid in the past. Though, Taliban regaining government during the process of the repatriation of the U.S. and international forces shows that Taliban flexibility was meant as bluffing during the peace agreement with the U.S. The post-withdrawal Afghanistan was expected to be dominated by Taliban but the quickest take-over was surprising for the international community and even regional countries. Despite being victorious, Taliban would continue to show flexibility to the international community demands, particularly the U.S. because of the global interdependence in world politics. They would not be able to sustain their regime for a longer period without cooperating with the world community. So, the change in Taliban behavior was not limited to

⁴²⁴ Sylvester, “President Trump and the Mother of All Bombs...”, 2020: 21.

the peace agreement with the U.S. but would potentially continue in their course of diplomatic engagements with the world.

Another critical change in Taliban approach was that they stopped bombing girls' educational institutions. In many interviews, Taliban negotiators have expressed their willingness to allow girls education with all due regard to the Islamic values. During Taliban's regime from 1996 till 2000, girls were not allowed to study in schools, and women were not allowed to work in workplaces. Even after the U.S. intervention in 2001, Taliban bombed girls' educational institutions. Some of Taliban negotiators' families were settled in Doha, and their children were going to the local schools with permission from Taliban Ameer.⁴²⁵ This was a reflection that Taliban had developed an understanding about the acceptability of the modern education. However, the problem of multiple groups within Taliban could be a challenge in this regard, as some hardliner groups are expected to hold the values of their earlier regime from 1996 till 2001.

After successful nine rounds of negotiations between Zalmay Khalilzad and Taliban in August 2019, when the U.S. and Taliban delegations finally finalised, signed and handed over the preliminary agreement draft to the host country, Qatar.⁴²⁶ The draft agreement contained a timetable for the phased withdrawal of U.S. troops, a ceasefire clause, and counter-terrorism commitments.⁴²⁷ However, the first year of direct negotiations with the U.S. did not directly change Taliban's refusal to negotiate with the Afghan government. It did not lead to the de-escalation of the armed confrontation: moreover, in 2018, the highest level of combat losses was recorded from the beginning of the conflict (more than 22800 people killed).⁴²⁸ However, the dynamic combination, interaction, and mutual influence of negotiations and armed violence was typical of most modern peace processes, especially at an early stage. Despite successful nine rounds of negotiations between the two parties, Donald Trump canceled talks on the premise of killing a U.S. soldier by Taliban.⁴²⁹ However, both Taliban and the regional stakeholders reacted positively and kept the options open for future dialogue on the terms of

⁴²⁵ Ibid: 38.

⁴²⁶ Philip Stewart, Jonathan Landay, and Hamid Shalizi, "In U.S. pursuit of peace talks, perilous rift opens with Afghan leaders," *Reuters*, March 27, 2019. Accessed at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-afghanistan-idUSKCN1R809V>

⁴²⁷ Ruttig, "First Breakthrough toward Peace? ..." (2020): 7.

⁴²⁸ Theo Farrell, "Unbeatable: Social Resources, Military Adaptation, and the Afghan Taliban." *Texas National Security Review* (2018): 72.

⁴²⁹ Tariq, Rizwan, and Ahmad. "US Withdrawal from Afghanistan..." (2020): 290-297.

the peace deal.⁴³⁰ Donald Trump's cancellation announcement could have been exaggerated exploited by Taliban leadership, who were already facing strife resistance from within the group's hardcore Taliban for entering into peace talks with the U.S. However, Taliban reacted in a mature diplomatic manner and kept the doors open for negotiations and peace agreement with the U.S.⁴³¹ This change in Taliban's diplomatic tone was a clear manifestation of the group's non-zero-sum approach towards conflict resolution in Afghanistan, and the same approach is likely to be adopted again by the Taliban by facing the realities of world politics in the post-withdrawal period.

Though, Taliban members from the Tajik, Uzbek and Hazara community are largely those, who are in conformity with the ideology of Taliban.⁴³² Taliban have not reached to a position whereby they accept accommodating the opposition, who do not agree to the ideology of Taliban. Despite this, the minimal dynamism in the group has brought transformation, creating a political space for themselves in the country and hence a possibility of becoming part of the democratic political process in Afghanistan in the long run. Historically, Taliban showed strife resistance to Western democracy on the premise of contradictions with the Islamic Sharia. So, Taliban giving more importance to the minority ethnic groups and opposition parties in the country is a manifestation of the increasing faith in the people's power.

Lastly, Taliban have been focusing on national sentiments while fighting with the international forces, asking local Afghans to be resilient to foreign occupation. This is another shift in Taliban's main outlook, which was earlier focused on Islamic Khilafat's concept under an Ameer (leader).⁴³³ Nationalism serves as a centripetal force for convergence of all Afghans, irrespective of their ethnicities and languages. Overall, Taliban seem to have learned from their experiences and mistakes. They are now more open, dynamic and flexible in their outreach to both local and international entities. The diplomatic skills of Taliban got worldwide recognition and admiration after the successful conclusion of a peace deal with the U.S. Taliban would not do the mistake to fade away this much awaited admiration by engaging in the coercive policies of their earlier regime from 1996 till 2001. So, the prospect of conflict resolution in Afghanistan seems more certain from Taliban's perspective.

⁴³⁰ D'Souza, "Peace Making in Afghanistan: Future...", 2019: 2.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² Rasouli, "The US Approach to Peacebuilding in Afghanistan..." (2020). 13-15.

⁴³³ Anchita Borthakur, and Angana Kotokey. "Ethnicity or Religion? The Genesis of Taliban Movement in Afghanistan." *Asian Affairs* 51, no. 4 (2020): 817-837.

Proceeding with the peace talks, the U.S. representative met with Taliban representative in Doha on June 28, 2018, without the participation of Afghan government. On October 13, 2018, in another major development, the U.S. president appointed an Afghan American, Zalmi Khalilzad as a special representative for peace talks with Taliban. In January 2019, the U.S. and Afghan Taliban openly started different rounds of negotiations in Doha.⁴³⁴ The negotiations were not easy but the two sides principally agreed on the framework of agreement towards the end of August 2019. However, the agreement was delayed due to a sudden suspension of talks by the U.S. president on the premise of a Taliban attack on U.S. forces, killing a U.S. soldier.⁴³⁵ The cancellation of the ongoing peace talks were seen as bluffing strategy from the U.S. president. However, on February 22, 2020, the two sides agreed to a seven days ceasefire as a precondition to the signing of peace deal in Doha.⁴³⁶ Finally, on February 29, the two sides signed a historic peace deal in Doha. The Afghan government was not happy with the agreement and President Ashraf Ghani rejected the terms of prisoners exchange, however, later on, he accepted the terms and released nearly five thousand Taliban prisoners in phases. Apparently, the agreement was seen by many as a non-zero-sum outcome but Taliban had bluffing strategy which was not evident until they took over Afghanistan without considering non-Taliban stakeholders in the government power-sharing.

3.3.4. The Doha Agreement

A brief four-page document was signed between the U.S. and Afghan Taliban on February 29, 2020, in Doha, Qatar, aiming to bring peace in Afghanistan. Overall, the agreement's main theme is about the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in fourteen months from the signing date of the agreement and Taliban's assurance for not letting terrorist organisations use Afghan soil, threatening the security of the U.S. and allies. The document also clearly states that other coalition forces would simultaneously drawdown, with the U.S. forces withdrawal. The agreement also includes intra-Afghan negotiations, primarily focusing upon the dialogue between Taliban and the Afghan government. The agreement does provide a timeline for actions; for example, the number of U.S. forces will be reduced, after repatriation, to a number of 8600 within thirty- five days of the signing of the agreement. There will be no pre-conditions for the withdrawal of the U.S. troops in the first phase. The same proportion of

⁴³⁴ Tariq, "US-Afghan Talks..." (2020): 104-111.

⁴³⁵ Muhammad Tariq, Muhammad Rizwan, and Manzoor Ahmad. "US Withdrawal from Afghanistan: Latest Development and Security Situation (2020)." *sjesr* 3, no. 2 (2020): 290-297.

⁴³⁶ Thomas Ruttig, "First Breakthrough toward Peace? The seven-day 'reduction of violence'", *Afghanistan Analysts Network*. (2020). Accessed at: <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2024729.html>

the coalition forces will withdraw parallel to the U.S. forces. The overall withdrawal in the first phase will be from the five designated U.S. bases in Afghanistan. There is no compulsion on Taliban regarding reduction in violence or any other commitment as a condition to the U.S. withdrawal in the first phase. However, the second phase of the U.S. troops withdrawal does carry some obligations on Taliban. The rest of the U.S. and allied forces will completely withdraw in the next nine and a half months after the fulfilment of commitments from Taliban; that they will not allow any terrorist group, individual or their own members to let Afghan soil to threaten the security of the U.S. and allies. It further states that Taliban and any of their members would not be facilitating the fundraising, recruitment and training of the terrorists for any group in Afghanistan. Another condition upon Taliban is the assurance of reduction in violence and the beginning of intra-Afghan negotiations. However, the reduction in violence and the intra-Afghan negotiations are further linked with the release of five thousands of Taliban prisoners.

Regarding the conditions upon the U.S. from Taliban, it included the removal of Taliban members from the U.S. list for designated terrorists as early as May 29, 2020. Moreover, the U.S. was to remove their sanctions against Taliban before August 27, 2020. The exchange of five thousand Taliban prisoners against one thousand prisoners, of the other side, is yet another condition, which is more favorable to Taliban. Surprisingly Taliban prisoners were held by the Afghan government, whose guarantee, to be released, was given by the U.S. Despite reservations and protest by the Afghan government, the prisoners' exchange took place with some delay from the agreement's date. Now the most important question about the agreement is, whether it carries the potential to end the conflict and bring peace in Afghanistan or not?

The attainment of the peace agreement's objective between the U.S. and Taliban had faced certain challenges from the very start of its implementation. The change of presidency in the U.S. had causes a bit delay in the troop's withdrawal plan but it happened. Further, Taliban took-over the government and stalemate in the intra-Afghan negotiations further complicated the positive outcomes of the agreement. The very first problem immediately after signing the agreement, there was a clear observation that the U.S. and ex-Afghan government were not on the same page regarding the conditions/ provisions of the agreement. The Ashraf Ghani government felt alienated from the overall developments between the U.S. and Afghan Taliban. It seemed like; the U.S. was least concerned about the Afghan government's exclusion in the

peace talks with Taliban. It was an implicit recognition of Taliban as more relevant in Afghanistan than the constitutionally elected Afghan government. However, the Afghan government's reservation was partially addressed in the agreement by the condition of intra-Afghan negotiations after the peace agreement between the U.S. and Taliban, which are not concluded and can be termed as bluffing from the Taliban side. Before the signing of the agreement, the earlier seven days reduction in violence was a testimony that Taliban holds control over its sub-groups. However, there has been a constantly prevailing violence in the post-agreement weeks. Hundreds of Afghan forces and civilians got killed in various guerilla attacks, claiming to be launched by Taliban. However, after Taliban took over the government, the incidents of guerilla attacks had significantly reduced, which testifies one of the conditions of the agreement that Taliban would reduce violence in the country. Some attacks were carried out by the ISIS in the post-troops withdrawal period but overall the security condition on ground is satisfactory. The controlled security condition on ground would be encouraging for the U.S. because they would expect Taliban to disallow extremist groups from taking strong holds on Afghan soil.

Until the withdrawal of the U.S. troops, the agreement between the U.S. and Taliban did not require Taliban to be reducing violence as a condition for the fulfillment of the agreement's objectives. Taliban have even publicly denied any promise regarding reducing violence against the Ashraf Ghani government and even international forces. So, technically, Taliban were not violating the agreement merely by the guerilla attacks in the post-agreement week. This was one of the reasons, why the Ashraf Ghani government was skeptical of Taliban intentions and the president fled the country prematurely. So, if the peace agreement between the U.S. and Taliban was not meant to ensure peace before the troop's withdrawal, then the peace deal was actually troop's withdrawal deal and not a peace deal. The long term sustainable peace in Afghanistan seems difficult without the successful conclusion of intra-Afghan negotiations; the more the initiative for the talks is delayed, the more the country will trouble its socio-political and economic fortune.

Given the challenges and potential opportunities of the peace deal discussed above, there are two possible scenarios; shift in Taliban expectations for a zero-sum outcome after the U.S. troops withdrawal or the consistent perusal of the present approach for a non-zero-sum outcome due to the threat of resumption of the use of military escalation from the U.S. Unlike the failed plan of complete troop's withdrawal by December 2014, the U.S. had already

withdrawn its troops along with the forces of its coalition partners in 2021. This time, the U.S. was serious about the materialisation of the troop's withdrawal plan, as per agreement, to avoid any international and local policy embarrassments. Though, the peace agreement between the U.S. and Taliban have not been worked upon in true spirit but it only served as a diplomatic cover for the repatriation of all international forces. Apparently it served as a zero-sum game for Taliban but in the long run, Taliban would be considering valuing the promises they made to the U.S. in the Doha negotiations to achieve diplomatic recognition and enter into an economically interdependent world. The U.S. recognition of Taliban regime and a possible economic relationship would not be free from pre-conditions, which could ultimately turn the cards of the game into a non-zero-sum game.

3.3.5. Taliban Resurgence

In 2001, after the initial ouster from power, Taliban managed to regroup them and remained significant in Afghanistan's conflict by carrying the attacks using guerrilla warfare tactics against the U.S. and coalition forces. Despite many setbacks, damages, and cleavages within the group, Taliban emerged stronger and influential with every passing year. Ironically, the number of combatants increased despite low numbers in 2001 and casualties' on a large scale. They managed to take back control of many rural regions in Afghanistan and hence asserted their influence and control in a significantly larger territory. With growing influence in the country, Taliban showed rigidity towards any peaceful settlement of the conflict in Afghanistan. In July 2015, Mullah Umar, the founding Ameer (leader) of Taliban death, was made public after hiding it to avoid any possible divide within Taliban. Mullah Umar's death was the end of a strong and united Taliban era, as many cleavages were reported regarding disagreements over future leadership. Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansoor's announcement was finally announced as the new Ameer of Taliban in the shadow of disagreements. Mullah Mansoor's appointment was not entirely accepted by the influential group members, notably Mullah Umar's sons. Some latter compromised and bow-down to Mullah Mansoor's leadership, potentially, to avoid disintegration within the group. However, some parted ways and appeared with their own identity. For example, a prominent Taliban member, Mullah Muhammad Rasool Akhund, defected from the leading Taliban group and declared an independent group as High Council of Afghanistan Islamic Emirate. Though Mullah Mansoor's period was short as he got killed in a U.S. drone attack in May 2016, he introduced

the concept of peace in the war and altered Taliban's course of action. The end of Mullah Umar's era is broadly considered the beginning of dynamism in Taliban.

Mullah Haibatullah Akhunzada was immediately appointed as the new Ameer of Taliban after Mullah Mansoor's death in May 2016. Mullah Haibatullah's appointment served as a positive development as many subgroups, who parted ways due to disagreements with Mullah Mansoor, rejoined the main group. There were rumors all around that Mullah Haibatullah's focus would be on strengthening Taliban on the ground instead of tilting towards any peace talks; however, he proved all such rumors wrong and remained flexible concerning the peace efforts. In the recent past, Taliban were seen as quite open to all possible peace efforts and hence participated in the Moscow peace conference, Islamabad meetings, and most importantly, the Doha peace talks. In an unrecorded anonymous interview, a Taliban leader expressed that Taliban have always desired to have direct talks with the U.S. for a peaceful settlement of the dispute, but they denied such offers, relied on the military means to defeat the group. The Afghan government was reluctant to enter into any peace talks with Taliban and relied on the U.S. coercive measures to end conflict militarily. This pretext shows that Taliban's overall strategy and behavior evolved and changed over time, showing prospects for the success of a peaceful solution to conflict resolution in Afghanistan.

Afghan Taliban increased guerilla attacks in the backdrop of negotiations with the U.S. government. Against a much bigger military opponent, the only bargaining chip with Taliban was violence, which they effectively used in winning favors in the peace deal with the U.S. Even after the conclusion of peace deal, Taliban continued to attack the local Afghan forces, to again persuade the Afghan government for concessions in the intra-Afghan talks.⁴³⁷ The then Ashraf Ghani government knew that without the U.S. support they would not be able to achieve any diplomatic nor military support against Taliban and hence were least interested in the intra-Afghan talks.

3.3.6. Intra-Afghan Negotiations

On September 12, 2020, Afghan government and Taliban marked the beginning of the intra-Afghan dialogue in Doha. Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, the chairman of the high council for national reconciliation in an opening statement hoped for the success of the peace negotiations,

⁴³⁷ Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and laptop: The neo-Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan*. Columbia University Press, 2008.

saying that “I can tell you with confidence that the history of country will welcome and remember today as the day of ending the war and the suffering of our people”.⁴³⁸ This indeed is the historic opportunity for all stakeholders in Afghanistan to restore peace in the country and move away from violence towards peace, development, and prosperity. The Afghan Taliban negotiator, Baradar hoped for peace in Afghanistan while showing their commitment towards an Islamic political system in Afghanistan; “We want Afghanistan to be an independent, developed country, and it should have a form of Islamic system, where all its citizens see themselves reflected”.⁴³⁹

The U.S. secretary of state, Mike Pompeo stated that “the choice of your future political system is, of course, yours to make” and what is important at hand is to “seize the opportunity” to secure peace in Afghanistan.⁴⁴⁰

Responding to a question of a journalist about Taliban’s demand for an Islamic political system, Abdullah Abdullah responded that the very constitution of Afghanistan is Islamic. He argued that there could be differences in the interpretation of the Islamic system but there is a consensus among all stakeholders that Afghanistan will remain an Islamic republic, with no law in contradiction with the basic principles of Islam.⁴⁴¹ Former governor of Nuristan and an employee of Ministry of Foreign, Jamal – ud - din Badr, in his face to face interaction during his visit to Pakistan to participate in conference organized by Pak-Afghan youth forum, stated that ‘Taliban interpretation of an Islamic political system is rigid, which is not liked by many of the local Afghans. He maintained that every Afghan citizen is of the opinion to have an Islamic constitution in the country but that should not be based on the interpretation of any particular individual or group. There are many Islamic republics in the world, where constitution or local law is based on Islamic ideology but flexibility is common.’ In response to a question about the prospects of intra-Afghan negotiations, he argued that ‘he is quite hopeful that all Afghan stakeholders will agree on political settlement of the conflict because of the experiences of the past mistakes. He believed that all parties in Afghanistan have realized that

⁴³⁸ Oxford Analytica. “Afghan talks start despite multiple unresolved issues.” *Emerald Expert Briefings* oxan-db. 2020. Accessed at: <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/OXAN-DB256302/full/html>

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ BBC, “Afghan-Taliban peace talks an 'opportunity for peace' (September 12, 2020). Accessed at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-53976968>

progress and development is not possible without peace and harmony among varying ethnicities in the country.’⁴⁴²

The prospects for success of the intra-Afghan peace negotiations before the deadline for the complete withdrawal of international forces were already dim; moreover, the regime change in Kabul has further given rise to pessimism vis-à-vis intra-Afghan negotiations. The withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan, prior to the conclusion of the power-sharing agreement among the local Afghan stakeholders had complicated the negotiations between the intra-Afghan parties. Taliban now enjoys unmatched power within the country and the rest of political stakeholders enjoys no leverage over the hardcore Taliban for political concessions. The earlier Ashraf Ghani government, though weak, had cards in their hand to bargain with the Taliban. The future of intra-Afghan negotiations for the working mechanism of power-sharing now depends on the potential transformation within Taliban and partly on the international pressure in terms of economic sanctions.

A political settlement within the Afghan stakeholders requires an agreement on the division of power and a new governance and political structure in Afghanistan. Whatever the nature of such an agreement, it cannot even ideally satisfy all interested parties’ interests, not only the various intra-Afghan groups, but also various regional players, whose interests often contradict each other. The state structure in Afghanistan during Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani governments was based on the 2004 constitution, which was formed within the Bonn Process framework with active leadership and direction of the U.S. and Western countries, without any interference from Taliban.⁴⁴³ This mechanism represented a centralised and relatively secular system with a strong tendency towards presidential authority.⁴⁴⁴ Such a system was not only ineffective and inappropriate for the complex and heterogeneous social formation in Afghanistan, but was in principle incapable of integrating Taliban. Taliban are not only an armed movement, it is also an alternative administrative, normative, and socio-political system under the banner of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. The major differences between the ex-governments and Taliban on the ideological foundations of the state system was the

⁴⁴² In a face to face interview with Jamal – ud - din Badr, who is a former governor of Nuristan and an employee of Ministry of Foreign, during his visit to Pakistan to participate in conference organized by Pak-Afghan youth forum.

⁴⁴³ Nixon and Ponzio. “Building democracy in Afghanistan...” (2007): 26-40

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

reason, Taliban had not recognised the corrupt “puppet” Afghan governments,⁴⁴⁵ which was central in their demands and refused to discuss political issues with the Afghan government and to formally participate in any peace process under what they consider a “foreign occupation.” Now, the government is being ruled by Taliban, and their governmental structure is completely different from the earlier centralized presidential form of government. Consequently, the pro-democratic groups within Afghanistan would not be ready for the acceptance of the Taliban form of governance; therefore, the prospects of negotiated settlement in the intra-Afghan negotiations seem difficult.

In response to a question of political settlement with Taliban, an Afghan expert, Rahimullah Yousafzai⁴⁴⁶, responded that, reconciliation with Taliban based on the 2004 constitution and within the current state political system, even with some specific amendments, is impossible. The start of ongoing intra-Afghan negotiations is an achievement, but these talks’ success will have to go through a bumpy road. Irrespective of the challenges, without reconciliation with Taliban, and without any form of political and administrative integration in the coming years, there will be no peace, not even a minimum of stability. This reality provides an impetus to all intra-Afghan stakeholders’ seriousness in overcoming differences with respect to conflict resolution in the country. In response to a similar question in an interview with South Asian Voices, Rahimullah Yousafzai stated that, “The Taliban do not want to give legitimacy to the Afghan government since they believe that it is powerless. They think that this government is not going to last. This is their belief. It seems that they are waiting as they have waited in the past. It will be interesting to see what is going to happen after the tweets that Hamdullah Mohib, National Security Advisor, sent out since he essentially speaks for President Ashraf Ghani. His words reflect the President’s anger and frustration. It is evident that they are now targeting Zalmay Khalilzad, which is rather strange because Khalilzad used to go to Kabul before and after every round of talks with Taliban and take the Afghan government into confidence. Khalilzad was keeping the Afghan government updated about the talks. As far as

⁴⁴⁵ Thomas H Johnson, Matthew DuPee, and Wali Shaaker. *Taliban narratives: The use and power of stories in the Afghanistan conflict*. Oxford University Press, 2017: 82.

⁴⁴⁶ Rahimullah Yousafzai in a face to face interview, who is journalist and a well-known expert on Afghanistan politics.

we know, in every meeting he was also putting pressure on the Taliban to agree to hold talks with the Afghan government.”⁴⁴⁷

In a face to face interview, Rahimullah Yousafzai⁴⁴⁸ further stated that, it can be presumed that, while preserving the current political course of the U.S. and its European and local allies, conflict in Afghanistan will not be settled. The comprehensive settlement will require a radical review of the existing political system, not partial and cosmetic. Suppose the U.S. and its local allies continue to insist on preserving the 2004 constitution as a basis for negotiations and the country’s future apparatus. In that case, the prospects of any serious negotiations with Taliban seem difficult and reconciliation with them cannot be achieved. This scenario is fraught with further instability and the continuation or even escalation of Afghanistan’s internal conflict. However, this does not mean that reconciliation among different Afghan stakeholders, including the Afghan government and Taliban is impossible.

The U.S. longest war in present history has taught lessons, regarding the cost of war, to nearly all parties at local, regional and international level. Taliban, after enjoying earlier months of their rule in Kabul, would be realizing the need to engage with the world. They should be realizing that the world would not accept them if they continue to ignore the important stakeholders in the political power-sharing in the government. An ethnically divided Afghanistan would require Taliban to engage in meaningful intra-Afghan negotiations to ensure that each group satisfies through their legitimate representation in the government. In the pretext to this realization, there is a possibility of intra-Afghan negotiations’ success, but such settlements will not be made with nominal and superficial amendments, rather radical revision of the existing political structure would be required. Such a review’s main focus should be regionalisation and decentralisation as a central principle of the state’s political system.⁴⁴⁹ The combination of these two terms (regionalisation and decentralisation) correctly and best conveys the essence of the necessary changes from the more radical concept of either Taliban

⁴⁴⁷ Rahimullah Yousafzai, in conversation with South Asian Voices on “What to Expect from the Taliban in Afghan Peace Talks” on April 19, 2019. Accessed at: <https://southasianvoices.org/rahimullah-yusufzai-on-what-to-expect-from-the-taliban-in-afghan-peace-talks/>

⁴⁴⁸ The interview was done before the withdrawal of the U.S. troops from Afghanistan and hence misses the context to the present day situations; however, it reflects the fundamental difference of Taliban from the rest of the stakeholders and testifies the potential difficulty in the conclusion of an intra-Afghan settlement.

⁴⁴⁹ Thomas Barfield, “Afghanistan’s ethnic puzzle: decentralizing power before the US withdrawal.” *Foreign Aff.* 90 (2011): 54.

version of Islamic caliphate or the earlier version of a strong central government in Afghanistan.

In more likely circumstances, when the intra-Afghan negotiations succeed, the central government's role would be significantly reduced. It would be reduced to a limited and at the same time very important role of an arbitrator between regions within Afghanistan and to representative functions on international level. The national constitution's main content will be the regulation of relations among the different regions, divided along ethnic and sectarian lines, inside the country. The power-sharing mechanism as of consociationalism, there is a possibility that all stakeholders would agree to allow the constitutional cover to a few national bodies like the National Assembly and a professional army in much smaller numbers than now, exclusively aimed at external defense missions and the symbolic presidential authority in representing Afghanistan to the outside world. At the same time, Taliban would control the driving seat to the administration's main functions in the economic, social and political spheres, as well as in the field of judicial law and law enforcement. Key powers should be transferred to different regions in the country, on the condition that Afghan sovereignty is recognized. In a face to face interview with Ataurahman who is the Deputy chairmen of National Council Reconciliation Afghanistan/ Former minister of religious affairs, he stated that 'a strong centralized power at Kabul with no devolution of power to regions with the country will create problems in the long run'. He maintained that 'the country had never been ruled effectively by ignoring the key stakeholders at different districts and provinces of the country. So, it is pertinent that the central government is not given unchecked powers, which will undermine the traditional authority of the varying regions within the country'.⁴⁵⁰

Moreover, regions should be accorded a high degree of autonomy, particularly in terms of defining the most favorable and appropriate political and legal model for each, including the degree of complementarity of Sharia standards. For example, in the southeast of the country, Sharia courts will dominate, while in the more secular northern and central regions, the degree of integration of Sharia standards will be much lower. This political architecture would look more of a consociational democratic model of Arend Lijphart.⁴⁵¹ The consociational model of power-sharing is not new to the Afghan traditions. It should be noted that such a configuration

⁴⁵⁰ Molvi Ataurahman Saleem, in a face to face interview during his visit to Pakistan to participate in a conference organized by Pak-Afghan youth forum.

⁴⁵¹ Arend Lijphart, "Consociational democracy." *Cambridge University Press, World Politics*. 21 (1968): 207.

fits well with the prevailing traditions of the state in Afghanistan, where central authority, in the form of monarchy until the April 1979 revolution, and the arrival of the PDPA to power was always relatively weak.⁴⁵² However, it played an important role as arbiter between major regions and warlords. Such a political settlement, which will be based on regionalisation in the country, will require a transitional period, thus changing the status, form and composition of the socio-political and economic system in Afghanistan.

To materialize the idea of regionalization and decentralization under consociational framework would not be easy for Taliban to accept now, when they are enjoying power in the country. Taliban face more difficulty in convincing the hardcore members within the group as compared to convincing the regional or extra-regional countries. Any policy option that potentially dents Taliban core political ideology of an Islamic caliphate would not acceptable to the hardliners within the group. However, such reluctant and self-centered approach would isolate Taliban in the long run and they would not be able to control the deteriorating socio-political and economic conditions of the common Afghans at home. Despite being a difficult decision, the sustainable way forward lies in the consociational framework of power-sharing among all stakeholders in Afghanistan.

As already discussed, the road to peace and agreement between the Afghan government and Taliban was not going to be an easy task, hence was destined to failure. Taliban took over the government without waiting for the conclusion of the intra-Afghan peace talks. Taliban swift take over was a surprising development for many but this was more likely as Afghan government had always been dependent on the U.S. for their policies and actions. Seeing the withdrawal of the U.S. and allies, the local forces and government felt pressurized and hence paved the way for Taliban swift take over.

In conclusion, it can be said that during his tenure, the Trump administration pursued a strategy in Afghanistan that focused on reaching a negotiated settlement with the Taliban, reducing U.S. troop levels in the country, and shifting towards a more limited military role.

One of the main outcomes of the Trump administration's strategy was the signing of a peace deal with the Taliban in February 2020. The agreement called for a phased withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan, a reduction in violence, and the start of negotiations between

⁴⁵² Kenneth Katzman, *Afghanistan: Politics, elections, and government performance*. DIANE Publishing, 2009: 8-12.

the Taliban and the Afghan government. However, progress towards a political settlement was slow and limited, and violence continued to escalate in some parts of the country. Another outcome of the Trump administration's strategy was the reduction of U.S. troop levels in Afghanistan. During his tenure, President Trump initially increased troop levels to about 14,000, but later announced a plan to reduce them to about 2,500. This drawdown was seen as controversial by some who argued that it would leave the Afghan government vulnerable to Taliban attacks, while others argued that it was time for the U.S. to end its involvement in the conflict.

The Trump administration also faced some significant challenges in Afghanistan. One of the main challenges was the continued violence and instability in the country, which undermined efforts to achieve a lasting peace settlement. The Taliban continued to carry out attacks on Afghan security forces and civilians, while the Afghan government struggled with corruption and weak governance. In addition, the Trump administration faced criticism over its approach to negotiations with the Taliban. Some critics argued that the administration had given too much ground to the Taliban, including the release of Taliban prisoners and a commitment to withdraw U.S. troops, without securing sufficient concessions in return.

3.4. Outcomes of Biden Administration Strategies

Despite expectations from President Biden for revisiting his predecessor's agreement with Taliban, his administration choose to completely abandon Afghanistan in August of 2021. The U.S. and allied troops stayed for 20 years in Afghanistan, spent billions of dollars on statebuilding and raising local security force, but it took less than 20 days for Taliban to retake government after the U.S. announcement of complete withdrawal. Despite massive criticism against the Biden administration, he actually had very little options but to withdraw from Afghanistan. The unexpected outcome of the U.S. disengagement sparked controversy for the Biden administration both in the U.S. and around the world, as Republican and some Democratic leaders criticized his administration for misjudging the strength and resolve of both the local Afghan forces and Taliban. Many political analysts called on the president to delay or cancel the decision of complete withdrawal, but Biden reaffirmed his commitment to a full withdrawal by August 31st of 2021. The proceeding part will analyse the two important outcomes of Biden administration strategy for Afghanistan.

3.4.1. The U.S. Exit from Afghanistan

The U.S. and Taliban signed a peace agreement on February 29, 2020, where it provided for the complete withdrawal of US troops within 14 months, on the condition that the Taliban take part in intra-Afghan peace negotiations, primarily with the Afghan government and prevent the activities of ISIS and al-Qaeda affiliates in Afghanistan. The agreement only bound Taliban to enter into the intra-Afghan negotiations and did not include a condition to reach an agreement with the Afghan government and other stakeholders.

Before the inauguration of Joe Biden presidency, the acting Secretary of Defence Christopher S. Miller announced the government plans to cut down the presence of American troops in Afghanistan to 2,500 by mid-January. A large number of troops had already been withdrawn since the deal was signed with the Taliban, moving closer to fulfilling President Trump's campaign promise to end long international wars bearing no results. The announcement by the secretary of defence days before the inauguration of president Biden shows that the bureaucratic arrangements had already been finalized to carry out troops repatriation as per the deadline agreed in the Doha agreement with Taliban. The announcement comes as talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban stalled and the militant group continues to carry out deadly attacks. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg had already warned about the consequences of withdrawing troops earlier than the meaningful conclusion of the Afghan deal.

On April 14 of 2021, President Biden announced that the U.S. is not going to meet the deadline set by the U.S-Taliban Doha agreement to withdraw all troops by May 1. President in the same announcement president Biden unveiled a new plan for the withdrawal of the U.S. troops by September 11, 2021. Extending the deadline was meant to give extra time to the Afghan government to reach any agreement with Taliban over a powersharing arrangements in the intra-Afghan talks. It was also done to deviate from president Trump plan for political reasons. Despite delay of about three months in the withdrawal process, the exit was messy and brought about a lot havoc and loss of human lives. Almost all stakeholders criticized Biden administration for mismanaging the entire withdrawal process. President Biden defended his administration by calling it the 'right decision' to end the twenty years long military involvement in Afghanistan. President Biden had blamed the Afghan security forces for all the mess as they failed to counter the Taliban from taking over the Afghanistan capital. During the withdrawal process, the Biden administration did sent some 6,000 troops to secure the Kabul

international airport for the safe evacuation of the American and allied security personnel. Despite such arrangements at the airport, the world witnessed some heart-wrenching scenes as thousands of Afghans were trying to flee. When thousands of people were trying to evacuate, thirteen U.S. security personnel and one hundred and seventy Afghan got killed and many more injured in an attack on a checkpoint near the Kabul airport. This was a major blowback to the U.S. forces since February 2020. The attack was carried out by the ISIS. Despite all the havoc and devastation, the U.S. did not roll back its decision of complete withdrawal and ultimately completed the exit on August 30, 2021, marking the end of the twenty years longest war in the history of the U.S.

3.4.2. Taliban Return to Power

Another major outcome of the Biden administration strategy is the Taliban return to power after twenty years. The same group now rules Afghanistan, which the U.S. took twenty years to keep them out of rule using all possible military and political means. Taliban swiftly took control of Afghanistan on 15 August after Ashraf Ghani fled Afghanistan with his wife and two close aides for Uzbekistan. Few hours after Ghani left Kabul, the presidential palace was captured by Taliban. Later that day, Ghani posted on his Facebook that “he thought it was better for him to leave to avoid bloodshed and urged the Taliban to protect the civilians and said the Taliban now faced a historic test”.⁴⁵³ On August 18, 2021, the United Arab Emirates acknowledged that their government hosted Ghani and his family on humanitarian reason. On August 17, the Taliban announced that they were actively working on the formation of a government, which would be announced in the coming days. On the same day, First Vice President Amrullah Saleh declared that he was acting President after Ashraf Ghani is absent. However, neither Afghans nor international community paid much attention to the announcement of Amrullah Saleh and Taliban continued with their consultations within the group to formulate government.

Taliban leaders still maintained their earlier position that they will negotiate with Afghan stakeholders to form an open and inclusive Islamic government. In this regard, they had consultations with the former Afghan President Karzai and Abdullah Abdullah for setting

⁴⁵³ Ramy Allahoum, 2022. "Taliban Sweeps Through Afghan Capital As President Flees". *Aljazeera.Com*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/8/15/taliban-continues-advances-captures-key-city-of-jalalabad>.

up a council to facilitate a peaceful transition to a Taliban government.⁴⁵⁴ Despite such claims for an inclusive government, the seizure of territory followed a rapid advance by the Taliban in which they got control of nearly all provincial capitals and border crossings. This massive success and subsequent control over power had changed Taliban tone and they ultimately announced an entirely Taliban based interim government in the country, thus defying their earlier claims for an inclusive government. Taliban return to power was indeed a zero-sum outcome of the twenty years long war in Afghanistan. This is because, the Doha agreement between the U.S. and Taliban would have been an outcome based on non-zero-sum if the condition of intra-Afghan negotiations had been met and an inclusive government was established. On the contrary, Taliban seemingly appears to be stronger than what they were in 2001. They enjoy an absolute monopoly over power in Afghanistan. Though, in the long-run, Taliban can possibly be in trouble due to international isolation and the economic challenges, which could lead to political instability at home and hence threatening the zero-sum victory of Taliban, but in the near future they are able to enjoy power without any major competition.

Overall, it can be said that the Biden administration's strategy in Afghanistan has been dominated by the decision to withdraw all U.S. troops from the country by September 2021, which marked the end of America's longest war. One significant outcome remained the announcement of April 2021 that it would withdraw all U.S. troops from Afghanistan by September 11, 2021, ending America's longest war. The withdrawal process began in May, and by August, most U.S. troops had left Afghanistan. The complete withdrawal was a significant outcome of the Biden administration's strategy in Afghanistan. However, the troops withdrawal from Afghanistan did carry certain setbacks for the Biden administration. For examples, the withdrawal of U.S. troops was accompanied by a rapid takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban. The group quickly gained control of most of the country, culminating in their takeover of Kabul, the capital, in mid-August. The speed and ease with which the Taliban were able to take control of Afghanistan came as a surprise to many, and it highlighted the fragility of the Afghan government and security forces. In addition to that, as Taliban took control of Afghanistan, the Biden administration faced criticism for its handling of the evacuation of U.S. citizens and allies. The evacuation was chaotic and disorganized, and many Afghans who had worked with the U.S. military or government were left behind. The outcome of the evacuation was a mixed

⁴⁵⁴ Ayaz Gul, "Taliban, Consolidating Power, Meet with Former Rivals" *Voice of America (VOA)*, August 19, 2021. https://www.voanews.com/a/south-central-asia_taliban-consolidating-power-meet-former-rivals/6209746.html

one, with many being evacuated, but many others being left behind. The Biden administration's handling of the withdrawal from Afghanistan was criticized by many in the international community, including U.S. allies. Some critics argued that the U.S. withdrawal had been too sudden and had left Afghanistan vulnerable to the Taliban's takeover. Others criticized the chaotic evacuation and the Biden administration's handling of the situation.

The Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan has created significant uncertainty about the country's future. The Taliban have promised to form an inclusive government, but many Afghans, particularly women and minorities, fear a return to the repressive regime of the 1990s. The outcome of the Biden administration's strategy in Afghanistan has left the country in a state of flux, with many questions about its future direction.

Conclusion

President George W Bush administration was able to ouster Taliban regime in the shortest possible time. They expanded the U.S. mission in Afghanistan by initiating a long term statebuilding programs. Through Loya Jirga and the Bonn agreement, a new constitution was drafted which led to the conduct of presidential and parliamentary elections in Afghanistan. The U.S. and its allies provided heavy funds for both infrastructural as well as public welfare projects in Afghanistan. Afghan government had largely become a rentier state due to dependency on international support. While the statebuilding programs were progressing, the U.S. main rival Taliban resurged and started attacks using guerrilla warfare tactics. Taliban resurgence questioned the efficacy of the U.S. strategies with respect to conflict resolution and statebuilding programs, leading to rifts in the within the western donor coalition partners. Under Obama administration, despite increasing confrontation between the U.S led forces and Taliban, the constitutional political process continued and the second presidential elections were held in 2009. In 2011, a major outcome of the U.S. intervention was seen when the key culprit of the 9/11 attacks, Osama Bin Laden was killed inside Pakistan. In the post-Bin laden period, the Obama administration initiated peace talks with Taliban but no tangible outcome was seen vis-à-vis conflict resolution. The failed negotiations with Taliban resulted in the failed troops drawdown policy of president Obama which further led to the surge in fighting. The year 2014 and 2015 were considered the deadliest years in terms of casualties since 2001. The sustained collateral damages and the loss of civilian lives turned public sympathies against the U.S. and local Afghan government, further complicating the ground security situation. President Trump continued with the use of force as a potential way out for conflict resolution

but soon opted for pacific means for the settlement of conflict in Afghanistan. The main outcome of the Trump administration strategies was the peace agreement of February 2020, with Taliban. The prospects of the peace agreement with Taliban are yet to be seen but this development in itself is a major breakthrough in the decade's long conflict between the parties. Overall, the outcomes of the U.S. strategies shows that the U.S. was not able to understand the local Afghan socio-economic and political ethos and hence drafted strategies which proved less compatible with the ground realities. The U.S. intervention was made in a hurry without doing a proper homework vis-à-vis strategies to deal with the conflict and hence the varying strategies were not well coordinated and remained incoherent.

Though the U.S. had abandoned Afghanistan by withdrawing all international forces but the socio-political and economic conditions in the country remain a threat to a durable peace.⁴⁵⁵ The indirect role of the U.S. vis-à-vis their course of bilateral relations with the Taliban regime would serve to be the defining variable in the stabilization process in Afghanistan. The U.S. failed in achieving a zero-sum outcome in their favor over the course of twenty years; Taliban apparently achieved a zero-sum outcome in their favor but it seems that they could be in real difficulties in sustaining this success. The possibility for a zero-sum outcome through a force/ war model in favor of either Taliban or the U.S. and Afghan government had lesser prospects. Both the U.S. and Taliban exhausted military options to end the conflict in their favor but failed.⁴⁵⁶ The surge in military/ coercive measures jointly by the U.S., NATO, and Afghan forces further escalated violence in Afghanistan. From 2009 till 2014, violence and military confrontation was at a record high, possibly due to the U.S. withdrawal plan.⁴⁵⁷ Taliban were looking to take control throughout the country after the potential U.S. withdrawal back in 2014. Taliban also remained rigid in their demands after they started negotiations with the U.S. through Doha political office, which was established in 2013.⁴⁵⁸ Taliban's move was meant for a zero-sum game; however, it proved counterproductive as the U.S. further increased troop's level after failing to reach any meaningful conclusion before the final withdrawal. Donald Trump's South Asia policy was yet another surprise to Taliban. Trump, in his election manifesto, hinted at the U.S. withdrawal from all unending wars.

⁴⁵⁵ Shafiq Mubarak, "Political Settlement and National Reconciliation: The Right Diplomacy for Ending the War in Afghanistan." PhD diss., Indiana University, 2020: 23.

⁴⁵⁶ Ahmad Jawid Shinwari, "An Assessment of Peace Negotiations between the United States Government and Taliban Insurgent Group, 2001-2018." PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2019: 10.

⁴⁵⁷ Katzman, and Layton Thomas. "AFGHANISTAN: POST-TALIBAN GOVERNANCE... (2017): 22

⁴⁵⁸ Sheikh, and Greenwood. *Taliban talks: Past present and prospects ...* 2013: 06

Deviating from the election manifesto, Trump again relied on the war model and intensified airstrikes against Taliban.⁴⁵⁹ The dropping of the mother of all bombs was a manifestation of this change in the U.S. policy.⁴⁶⁰ However, the U.S. used military might as a deterrent tool to make Taliban realize about the U.S. potential to continue with the war for a longer period. This policy proved productive as Taliban's rigid position changed, and they accepted the possibility of a negotiated settlement with a non-zero-sum outcome of the conflict in Afghanistan. With a bumpy road to the finalization of negotiations, both sides, the U.S. and Taliban, signed a peace deal on February 29, 2020.⁴⁶¹ The peace deal was not the end goal; rather, further complicated the intra-Afghan negotiations. The U.S. - Taliban peace deal apparently provided an impetus for the conflict resolution but Taliban's take-over of the Kabul without finalizing the intra-Afghan negotiations served as spoiling factor in the maintenance of long-term peace in Afghanistan.

From the description of this chapter, it can be found out that the outcomes of the varying U.S. strategies were random and consequential and did not result in the achievement of any central objective, i.e., conflict resolution. The resurgence of Taliban and other terrorist groups, i.e., ISIS, were contrary to the very objective of the U.S. 'global war on terror'. The literature reviewed in this chapter shows that resurgence of Taliban was majorly the result of the failed U.S. strategies. The U.S. lost the confidence and support of the local ordinary Afghan citizens, developed cracks within the coalition partners and made the country a club for corrupt local stakeholders. All of these factors were grounded on the mistake that the U.S. made by not understanding or ignoring the local cultural norms. The next chapter will further dig into the deep causes of the failure of the U.S. strategic objectives in Afghanistan.

⁴⁵⁹ Clayton. "Afghanistan: Background and US Policy." (2018): 9-13.

⁴⁶⁰ Sylvester, "President Trump and the Mother of All Bombs...", 2020: 21.

⁴⁶¹ Ruttig, "First Breakthrough toward Peace? ... (2020).

Chapter Five

Causes of the Failure of U.S. Strategies

On the basis of the discussion on the U.S. strategies and their outcomes, this chapter is focused on the analysis of the causes of the failure of the U.S. strategies vis-à-vis conflict resolution and the attainment of strategic objectives. This chapter analyzes as to what extent is the main argument of the thesis, ‘that the prisoners’ dilemma defined American strategy towards the Taliban and Afghanistan with a similar logic on the Taliban side, and the exact failure of American conflict resolution strategy was in its non-attention to non-zero sum outcomes and an overt reliance on the pursuit of military objectives’. Furthermore, ‘the failure in achieving policy objectives vis-à-vis the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan stems from over-reliance on the military force, a strategic confusion regarding the use of coercive or political means to deal with Taliban and negligence to the ground realities in the country’ is appealing.

From the beginning of 21st century, the U.S. and NATO forces were involved in various operations in Afghanistan under the legitimacy of the UN Security Council resolutions.⁴⁶² The outcomes of this largest, costly and longest comprehensive involvement proved less promising vis-à-vis conflict resolution in Afghanistan. An approximate cost of the war in Afghanistan has exceeded one trillion dollars,⁴⁶³ which is unprecedented. The human cost of the war is equally astonishing; thousands of allied forces got killed and wounded.⁴⁶⁴ The number of Afghan casualties is even more horrific.⁴⁶⁵ The U.S. being an immense military might in the world was unable to resolve the conflict and losses. The U.S. tested various strategies but could not get the desired outcomes. The proceeding part of this chapter would look into the causes of the failure of the U.S. strategies in Afghanistan vis-à-vis conflict resolution.

The varying military-political strategies by the U.S. used both hard and soft power to achieve objectives.⁴⁶⁶ The U.S. was on the leading role, while secondary roles were distributed among allies. The U.S. agenda while staying in Afghanistan was multifaceted after getting

⁴⁶² Ryan T Williams, “Dangerous Precedent: America's Illegal War in Afghanistan.” *U. Pa. J. Int'l L.* 33 (2011): 589.

⁴⁶³ Neta C Crawford, “United States budgetary costs and obligations of post-9/11 wars through FY2020: \$6.4 trillion.” *Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, Brown University* (2019). 9.

⁴⁶⁴ Millen, “Aligning a Counterinsurgency Strategy for Afghanistan...” (2009): 1-14.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁶ Rasouli, “The US Approach to Peacebuilding in Afghanistan...” (2020): 13-15.

initial military success against Taliban backed Al-Qaeda.⁴⁶⁷ The then U.S. under defense secretary, P. Wolfowitz expressed that the U.S. is looking for developing a large communication and radar installation in adjacent regions to Afghanistan, one that adjacent to Iran in the western region of Afghanistan, using military bases in Bagram and Shindanda.⁴⁶⁸ There were differences among allies over the U.S. strategies in Afghanistan, which were always reflected in many international conferences.⁴⁶⁹

Despite many secondary achievements, the primary objective to defeat Taliban and achieve peace in Afghanistan remained unfulfilled. The varying U.S. strategies lacked certain potential attributes, which can rightly be considered/ written as the ‘causes of failure’ in achieving policy objectives in Afghanistan. From 2001 to 2003, the U.S. achieved unexpectedly early results by the fall of Taliban regime and hence declared a victory over the ‘forces of terror’ (Al-Qaeda) and Taliban, who supported them.⁴⁷⁰ The end of Taliban regime paved way for the launch of anti-terror campaign against terrorists in peripheries of Afghanistan. Subsequently, a successful Bonn conference at the end of 2001 further projected Afghanistan as an easy consignment.⁴⁷¹ The Western allies and a provisional local Afghan government were in misapprehensions of military success and hence attention was diverted to the socio-economic aspects of statebuilding project.⁴⁷² Dozens of non-governmental organizations, numerous foreign policy advisors and media representatives were allowed to work in Afghanistan as partners in the statebuilding project.⁴⁷³ With a diversion in priorities, Taliban found a space to reorganize its fighters/ Jihadists and launched a massive terrorist campaign against the foreign troops and local officials. On one hand, Afghanistan’s socio-economic figures were showing positive orientation due to the massive influx of aid from foreign donors, while on the other hand, a new wave of terrorism was shacking the security of the country and the sphere of armed confrontation between Taliban, local Afghan regime and the U.S. forces was expanding.⁴⁷⁴ The most damages and loss of contingents of the international forces occurred between 2006 and 2014.⁴⁷⁵ In the post 2010 era, the U.S. strategy to act at the

⁴⁶⁷ Katzman. “Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security...” (2017): 531-643.

⁴⁶⁸ Rasouli, “The US Approach to Peacebuilding in Afghanistan...” (2020): 21.

⁴⁶⁹ Ashraf, “The politics of coalition burden-sharing...” (2011): 92-289.

⁴⁷⁰ Lambeth, *Air power against terror...* (2011): 20.

⁴⁷¹ Fields, and Ramsha Ahmed. *A review of the 2001 Bonn Conference...* (2011): 12-14.

⁴⁷² Edwards, “State-building in Afghanistan...” (2010): 970-990.

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁵ Neta C Crawford, *War-related death, injury, and displacement in Afghanistan and Pakistan 2001-2014*. Watson Institute for International Studies, Brown University, 2015. 2-5.

back of the local Afghan security forces significantly reduced the casualties but the Afghan local forces suffered unprecedented fatalities. The U.S. invested heavily in recruiting and training of the local Afghan forces; however, the operational capacity was not improved in terms of the provision of advanced ammunition.⁴⁷⁶ The ever increasing expenses and expanding war in Afghanistan was causing resistance from the civil society organizations in the western countries,⁴⁷⁷ which led to the announcement of the withdrawal plan by the end of 2014. The troop's withdrawal plan resulted in the further intensification of military confrontation as Taliban perceived this decision as the defeat of the U.S. forces and a Zero-Sum outcome of the war in Afghanistan.⁴⁷⁸ They increased guerilla attacks on the U.S. and Afghan forces to further strengthen their strategic position in Afghanistan.⁴⁷⁹

The very foundational objective to intervene in Afghanistan stemmed from the determination to wipe out the agents of chaos and terrorism, so that the national security of the U.S. in particular and the world in general is safeguarded.⁴⁸⁰ From the very start of the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan, the U.S. operations aimed at the materialization of two core objectives; firstly, the elimination of Al-Qaeda safe heavens through the establishment of an international anti-terrorism partnership and the forceful change of Taliban regime, who openly advocated for their support to Al-Qaeda.⁴⁸¹ The two decades of war reveals that neither of the objectives is fully accomplished. Though Taliban regime was toppled within weeks of the U.S. intervention in 2001 but even after twenty years, Taliban holds an control of Afghanistan.⁴⁸² Secondly, the heroic leader of Al Qaeda is killed but the group still exists and a new terrorist group ISIS has also emerged and penetrated into Afghanistan. So, the U.S. has failed in achieving policy objectives in Afghanistan and this has become one of its most profound failures in history.⁴⁸³ The various causes which most likely caused the failure of the U.S. strategies in achieving policy objectives in Afghanistan are discussed in the proceeding paragraphs.

⁴⁷⁶ Giustozzi. "Auxiliary force or national army? 45-67.

⁴⁷⁷ Jude Howell, and Jeremy Lind. *Counter-terrorism, aid and civil society: Before and after the war on terror*. Springer, 2009. 65.

⁴⁷⁸ Ishaque, Qumber, and Shah. "Prospects of Enduring Peace..." (2017): 146-161.

⁴⁷⁹ Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and laptop...* (2008). 438.

⁴⁸⁰ Tellis and Eggers. *US Policy in Afghanistan...*(2017): 7-19.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

⁴⁸² Katzman. "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance...", (2017): 7.

⁴⁸³ Zalmay Khalilzad, and Daniel Byman. "Afghanistan: The consolidation of a rogue state." *Washington Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (2000): 65-78.

5.1. Causes of Failure

Conflict resolution in Afghanistan was a multifaceted game involving the U.S., Taliban and Afghan government and some local, regional, and extra-regional players. The presence of multi-players made the situation more complicated and troublesome. Towards the end of 2010, the presence of ISIS was observed in Afghanistan as a potentially destabilizing factor parallel to Taliban and Al Qaeda.⁴⁸⁴ ISIS is an international terrorist organisation, which carries the potential to destabilise Afghanistan and surrounding regional countries. Similarly, Al Qaeda is still considered a lively threat inside Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan, whose historical lineage and cooperation with Taliban is unprecedented.⁴⁸⁵ Many local warlords inside Afghanistan carry far less strength than Taliban. However, they could play a constantly destabilising role in Afghanistan and could destroy any effort to bring peace through the power-sharing mechanism. Over time, civil society in Afghanistan also emerged as a strong voice against all kinds of atrocities and bad governance from either player in Afghanistan.⁴⁸⁶

A famous expert on peace and conflict studies, John Galtung, in an interview stated that “The Taliban are part of Afghanistan. Talib means seeker-student. They are seeking for the truth in the Koran. And they are dead against secularisation. Among the Taliban you find moderates and less moderates. Afghanistan can’t be run by Kabul. It consists of at least 12 nations that are very autonomous. Afghanistan is surrounded by countries that are quite interesting in the sense that parts of those countries are in Afghanistan. Uzbekistan-Tajikistan. So why not make a community like the European Community. Make a central Asian Community. Much of the restlessness and violence in Afghanistan comes from the relationship with neighbouring countries.”⁴⁸⁷ He further stated that “the Afghans with the help of international community have to find a Koranic solution like Turkey, the Philippines and Indonesia and this can’t be imposed by the West. It is a violent country. It needs security machinery. That can’t be NATO. NATO is just a western kind of thing. To run it in such a way

⁴⁸⁴ Lushenko, Auken, and Stebbins. “ISIS-K: deadly nuisance or strategic threat...” (2019): 265-278.

⁴⁸⁵ Mubarak, “Political Settlement and National Reconciliation...”, 2020: 12.

⁴⁸⁶ Marika Theros, “Reimagining civil society in conflict: Findings from post-2001 Afghanistan.” *Journal of Civil Society* 15, no. 2 (2019): 156.

⁴⁸⁷ Johan Galtung in an interview on “Johan Galtung's thoughts on Afghanistan and the US+NATO invasion in Afghanistan” with *Democracy Now*, 2012. Accessed at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i1jWjzs_ZO8&list=LL&index=72

that the UN Security Council cooperates with the Organisation for the Islamic Conference about non-aggressive peacekeeping.”⁴⁸⁸

The initial military success against Al Qaeda and Taliban raised the U.S. expectations.⁴⁸⁹ Contrary to the U.S. expectations, a new wave of guerilla attacks was launched by Taliban against the U.S. and Afghan government officials, starting a new civil war in the country. The main players in the new civil war in Afghanistan were Taliban, Afghan government led by Hamid Karzai and International forces, particularly the U.S..⁴⁹⁰ Majority of Afghans remained neutral and passive to all of the players, relying on the wait and see approach.⁴⁹¹ However, the traditional Pashtun population was more tilted towards Taliban and was a source of logistical support to Taliban.⁴⁹² There existed political differences among many ethnic groups within Afghanistan, confronting the ruling elite over power sharing issues. The main fault line is the division along Pashtuns and non-Pashtuns groups. Seeing the increasing level of corruption, lack of transparency and accountability, Taliban received sympathies from common Afghans.⁴⁹³ Towards the end of 2002, Taliban successfully regrouped them and used a public outreach strategy, meeting increasing support from the population. The start of different statebuilding projects met an uncertain fate due to non-familiarity to the ground realities and hence ordinary Afghans considered the U.S. role as biased and not focused on the real issues.⁴⁹⁴ Taliban increased guerilla attacks against the foreign forces, which was a clear denial of the earlier US claims of defeating the terrorist groups in 2001. The first major guerrilla attack against ISAF forces took place in early June 2002, killing German soldiers and other significant casualties.⁴⁹⁵ This attack served as a warning to the international forces and provisional Afghan government. Academic researchers see the causes of the U.S. failure differently. Dr Asfand Yar responded to the question about the causes of the U.S. failure as, “It is a question on which books will be written for years and decades to come. I have tried to answer it by examining various documents and sources, such as the recently released

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid

⁴⁸⁹ Dobbins et al., *After the war...*, 2008: 53.

⁴⁹⁰ Collins, *Understanding war in Afghanistan*. 2011. 53-60.

⁴⁹¹ Giustozzi, “Bureaucratic façade and political realities of disarmament and demobilization...” (2008): 169-192.

⁴⁹² Antonio Giustozzi, *War, politics and society in Afghanistan, 1978-1992*. London and Georgetown: C. Hurst and Georgetown University Press, 2000.

⁴⁹³ Giustozzi, “Bureaucratic façade and political realities of disarmament and demobilization...” (2008): 169-192.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁵ Anthony H Cordesman, *The lessons of Afghanistan: War fighting, intelligence, and force transformation*. No. 24. Csis, 2002. 33.

Afghanistan Papers. They suggest that for much of the war, the U.S. government recognized and communicated major challenges of the war, including Afghanistan's geographic and social complexity, the cronyism of Afghan politicians, perils of warlords, Pakistan's support of Taliban, government corruption in Afghanistan and so on. But US policymakers failed to align policy solutions with the challenges they confronted to resolve the conflict on its own terms. The answer I believe lies in American politicians failing to provide leadership on what US goals should be with respect to involvement in Afghanistan. One can make the case that starting November 2001 -- when Taliban regime was toppled -- the U.S. started stumbling into assumptions and priorities, which suggests limited intentionality and confusion about available options and strategic ends. In that period, US policymakers contested and redefined the importance of the Afghan Taliban as an adversary throughout the war. Weak political oversight is not new to American national security, or for that matter national security decisions of most countries. So the key point to take away is that weak political oversight can undermine complicated interventions like US involvement in Afghanistan".⁴⁹⁶ Dr Omar Sharifi attached many reasons to the U.S. strategic failure in Afghanistan and argued that, "First and foremost, after the fall of Taliban regime, the U.S policy priority shifted to the war in Iraq. Only in 2009/10 that the U.S started to refocus on Afghanistan and the reconstituted/revitalized Taliban uprising. Second, over-reliance of the U.S. on Pakistan's cooperation in ending Afghan conflict. Pakistan while receiving billions of the U.S aid, continued to harbor, reconstitute, train, equip and send Taliban fighters to Afghanistan. Third, corrupt and incompetent Afghan government. Afghan government's inability to address injustice and corruption led many ordinary people to support the Taliban uprising while eroded international support for a prosperous and peaceful Afghanistan. Fourth, the shifting and inconsistent U.S policy towards the region. This seriously undermined U.S abilities to end the conflict by helping to establish regional consensus. This in turn let to an increased while military and financial support for Taliban. Fifth, the drug trade. So far narcotic trade had been one of the major sources of income for Taliban and their allied militant groups. The U.S and the Afghan government failed to address this problem".⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁶ Interview with Asfandyar Mir, a Postdoctoral fellow at the Center for International Security and Cooperation, Stanford University.

⁴⁹⁷ Interview with Dr Omar Sharifi, a former Senior Research Fellow and Director of the American Institute of Afghanistan Studies, Kabul.

Since then, the U.S. kept on changing different strategies, for conflict resolution, in the country with no prominent outcome. Some of the likely factors responsible for the failure of the U.S. strategies are discussed here.

5.1.1. Optimistic view of Operational Success and subsequent Expansion of Mission for Zero-Sum Outcome

Officially, the U.S. as well as Afghan government presented an optimistic scenario regarding developments in Afghanistan in terms of security, politics and socio-economic indicators.⁴⁹⁸ On June 15, 2004, the then Afghan president, Hamid Karzai addressed the joint session of the U.S. congress, and congratulated the participants of the military success against terrorists in Afghanistan. Similarly, the U.S. officials on various occasions celebrated the success of military operation against Taliban.⁴⁹⁹ However, these celebrations were not mature and contrary to the oblique circumstances in Afghanistan. The U.S. and its allies wanted to expand their operations in Afghanistan and hence launched a statebuilding project throughout the country.⁵⁰⁰ France was reluctant to expand operations in Afghanistan but the U.S. was not convinced and hence more troops were deployed in different provinces on premise of training and strengthening the local Afghan forces.⁵⁰¹ In spring 2003, when the open phase of operations in Iraq completed, the U.S. assured the Afghan government of its long term commitment in the country.⁵⁰² The then CENTCOM commander, General T. Franks, Minister of defense D. Rumsfeld and special representative, and Z. Khalilzad had repeated visits and assured the Kabul government of their commitments.⁵⁰³ D. Rumsfeld publically announced that the U.S. had achieved military success in Afghanistan but now they will focus on the transitional phase, from post-conflict situations to stabilization and restoration in Afghanistan.⁵⁰⁴

More practical steps were taken vis-à-vis expanding the functions of ISAF in the fall of 2002 after the rotational change in command of ISAF from Turkey to Netherlands and

⁴⁹⁸ Douglas A Wissing, *Hopeless but Optimistic: Journeying Through America's Endless War in Afghanistan*. Indiana University Press, 2016.

⁴⁹⁹ Richard L Kugler, *Operation Anaconda in Afghanistan: a case study of adaptation in battle*. National Defense University Washington Dc, Center for Technology and National Security Policy, 2007. 6.

⁵⁰⁰ Sharan, and Heathershaw. "Identity politics and statebuilding ..." (2011): 27-29.

⁵⁰¹ Astri Suhrke, "Statebuilding in Afghanistan: a contradictory engagement." *Central Asian Survey* 32, no. 3 (2013): 278-280.

⁵⁰² David W Barno, "Fighting" The Other War": Counterinsurgency Strategy in Afghanistan, 2003-2005." *Military Review* 87, no. 5 (2007): 32.

⁵⁰³ Tim Bird, and Alex Marshall. *Afghanistan: How the West lost its way*. Yale University Press, 2011. 173-255.

⁵⁰⁴ Scarborough, *Rumsfeld's war...* 2004. 35-62.

Germany.⁵⁰⁵ Under the new command, controlled security zones were strengthened in the Afghan provinces to ensure the minimum losses to the international forces. To further strengthen the security of international forces and expand the functions and scope of the mission, another important step was taken, an agreement was signed between the Federal Republic of Germany, the Netherlands and the Alliance headquarters in Brussels in September 2003 regarding the possibility of involving the relevant mobile units in the alliance as part of the concept of mobile deployment of NATO.⁵⁰⁶ This agreement proved effective in further anchoring the position of international forces in the Afghan military-political. At the same time, Berlin set off from the fact that the Tripartite Agreements provided grounds for transferring the entire ISAF leadership to NATO, completing the German-Dutch Joint Command mandate in the fall of 2003.⁵⁰⁷

The White House, National Security Council, the State Department, and the Pentagon had different approaches to the discussion of possible modalities for the additional mission of international forces. If the State Department called for an expansion of the mandate, the Department of Defense feared that it would to some extent impede the freedom of the U.S. military unit to conduct operations in the country, because of the possible compromises on policies/ strategies among the coalition partners.⁵⁰⁸ Gradually, however, especially with the approaching decision to invade Iraq, the view began to prevail that the active participation of NATO units in Afghan affairs could motivate the Allies to send their forces to Afghanistan and expand financial and economic assistance to Afghanistan, making them bound by NATO discipline.⁵⁰⁹ There were plans that the released American units be transferred to Iraq, putting Afghanistan's responsibility on the coalition partners.⁵¹⁰ Gradually, Washington became the main locomotive for expanding the West's presence in Afghanistan through the framework of NATO. In this regard a meeting was held in the spring of 2003 in Brussels regarding the finalization of the decision to deploy a peacekeeping presence in the country.⁵¹¹ The

⁵⁰⁵ Stephen M Saideman, and David P. Auerswald. "Comparing caveats: understanding the sources of national restrictions upon NATO's mission in Afghanistan." *International Studies Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (2012): 67-84.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁷ Sten Rynning. *NATO in Afghanistan: the liberal disconnect*. Stanford University Press, 2012. 47.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid: 46 & 256.

⁵⁰⁹ Mats Berdal, "NATO's Landscape of the Mind: Stabilisation and Statebuilding in Afghanistan." *Ethnopolitics* 18, no. 5 (2019): 535.

⁵¹⁰ Amy Belasco, "Troop levels in the Afghan and Iraq wars, FY2001-FY2012: Cost and other potential issues." Library of Congress Washington DC, *Congressional Research Service*, 2009. 36.

⁵¹¹ Dick A Leuridijk, "UN reform and NATO transformation: the missing link. Egmont Paper, no. 10, November 2005." (2005): 42.

headquarters structure was planned in Kabul, and strategic command and control was transferred to the coalition commander who was empowered under political control under NATO council, in appointments of the operation commander.⁵¹²

The expansion of NATO operational activities were linked with the provision of resources. They needed additional resources to implement the new tasks, requiring more troops and funds for the statebuilding projects. The updated plan included, among other things, NATO's more active operational participation in training Afghan security forces, country's reconstruction and statebuilding, the reintegration of former Taliban fighters in society, as well as in the creation of protected centers for the safety of international forces primarily in large cities in the central regions. The new tasks also included the possible expansion of the international force to provide short-term emergency relief operations or evacuations in the provinces.⁵¹³ The operation plan was discussed with Karzai, and upon getting consent, started functioning. In the midst August 2003, NATO established itself in the planning, coordination and management of ISAF operations throughout the country. In December 2003, the reorganization of the international forces also contributed to a more organized preparation for the convening of the highest general Afghan National Assembly to approve the new constitution and elect the president through the Loya Jirga.⁵¹⁴

In fall 2003, the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Secretary-General of NATO turned to the Secretary-General of the United Nations with a proposal to expand the mission of ISAF, materializing the recommendations of Bonn conference.⁵¹⁵ This led to the passing of UN Security Council Resolution 1510, allowing the transfer of their mandates throughout the country, including ensuring the safe operation of the Afghan Civil Administration and international forces, including the employees of non-governmental organizations.⁵¹⁶ The resolution expressed concerns about the complexity of conflict in Afghanistan and emphasized on strengthening the coordination and cooperation among the International coalition partners, Kabul government and international security assistance force.⁵¹⁷

⁵¹² Ibid.

⁵¹³ Berdal, "NATO's Landscape of the Mind..."(2019): 532.

⁵¹⁴ Fields and Ahmed. *A review of the 2001 Bonn Conference...*, 2011. 12-14.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid.

⁵¹⁶ Suhrke, "Waging war and building peace in Afghanistan." (2012): 481

⁵¹⁷ Ibid.

The U.S. and NATO expanding participation in Afghanistan, in addition to conducting military operations, has paid increased attention to the three elements most important to the survival of the Karzai regime. First is the formation of a new Afghan National Army (ANA), to be responsible for security and law enforcement in the country; secondly, the expansion of central government influence in the different provinces throughout the country; and thirdly, to provide economic assistance to central and local authorities for their effective functioning.⁵¹⁸ To materialize this, the U.S. was looking for a major power structure under the Afghan government. By the time Taliban regime was overthrown, there were no national military units ready to fight in the country and the entire responsibility for upholding peace in the country lied on the international security forces. The only exception in terms of local based security assistance was the former Northern Alliance support in ground operations, which consisted mainly of representatives of the minorities, including the Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras, who made a significant contribution to the U.S. Operation Enduring Freedom.⁵¹⁹ However, the support from the Northern Alliance was informal and they lacked any official combatant's status. Previously, they were also the main power structure of the Mujahideen government, and according to the Bonn Agreements, they had to be dissolved.⁵²⁰ The differences among the leaders of Northern Alliance and the U.S. forces also surfaced amidst the fall of Kabul and the subsequent ownership of power in Kabul. The U.S. wanted to avoid siding unilaterally with any of the groups to avoid a backlash from opposition and resultantly solely relying on the Northern Alliance.⁵²¹ Along with the influential Pashtun wing of the Karzai government, the U.S. had been actively interested in restoring the traditional dominant role of the Pashtuns in the country's domestic political life, which has been shaken in recent decades by the activities Communist regime. It was also important for Washington to largely link the creation of combat ready armed forces to the timing of the withdrawal of the coalition forces from Afghanistan. So, in this context, the U.S. decided to establish a local Afghan army to relinquish the security burden from international forces.⁵²²

Initially in the spring of 2002, Pentagon experts in coordination with the UNAMA planned to recruit, not more than eighty thousand security personals for the Afghan National Army, however, many Afghan civilian and military representatives immediately called for the

⁵¹⁸ Ibid: 481-485.

⁵¹⁹ Barnett R Rubin, "Saving Afghanistan." *Council on Foreign Relations*. Vol. 86, No. 1, (2007): 65.

⁵²⁰ Lambeth, *Air power against terror...*, 2001: 104-119.

⁵²¹ Ibid.

⁵²² Giustozzi. "Auxiliary force or national army? 45-67.

formation of a much larger unit.⁵²³ The recruitment was not limited to army; rather it included manpower for air force and ministry of internal affairs dealing with border management. Despite demands, the U.S. seemed less interested in expanding the number beyond eighty thousand. The U.S. was more flexible with regard to strengthening the National Guard, which was directly responsible for ensuring the security of the head of state and other senior officials but no major changes were made with respect to the demands for increasing Afghan air force and border guards.⁵²⁴ Calculations related to the number of contingents by NATO members were based on the difficulty in finding funds from international donors. So, the expansion of ISAF and NATO mandate in Afghanistan further complicated the conflict resolution process and Taliban, meanwhile, were busy in regrouping themselves for a tangible offensive against the international as well as local forces in Afghanistan.⁵²⁵

The democratization strategy set out by President Bush was intended to eliminate threats to the interests of the U.S. and its allies by the countries who spread in their territory and export it to other regions of the world. The new strategy proclaimed the success of democratic reforms in Afghanistan, which Washington thought was a model for future Asian democracies. In official documents, the U.S. policy results in Afghanistan were described in magnificent intonations and were called a stunning achievement and a huge strategic success. Stable successes in the field of democratic development in terms of the performance of the interim administration of the country, which reported every six months about the holding of elections to various kinds of authorities, was considered satisfactory and hoped that the situation in Afghanistan would not distract the American armed forces from the struggle for freedom of the Iraqi people. With the U.S. shift towards Iraq from 2003-2006, the Karzai government coped with the newly emerging challenges with varying success, seeking to compensate for cuts in the American funding. Sensing a shift in emphasis in US policy in the region to Iraq, Karzai took Washington's initiative in bilateral relations and initiated a series of meetings on the future of democracy in Afghanistan. Since the beginning of 2003, the Afghan leadership has begun to hint to Washington that it does not fully control the country's situation. On February 27, 2003, during his visit to Washington, H. Karzai asked the U.S. for new help, reminding the U.S. that the war in Afghanistan continues and convincing them that

⁵²³ Ibid.

⁵²⁴ Austin Long, Stephanie Pezard, Bruce Loidolt, and Todd C. Helmus. *Locals rule: historical lessons for creating local defense forces for Afghanistan and beyond*. Rand National Defense Research Inst Santa Monica Ca, 2012. 175-179.

⁵²⁵ Giustozzi. "Auxiliary force or national army? 45-67.

the defeat of Taliban is not the guarantee of victory, as many other groups are still active in the country. Then, on the eve of the American operation in Iraq, Karzai managed to get a promise from the U.S. to continue to provide financial assistance at the same level as in the past.

5.1.1.1. Establishment of Government and Reliance on Weak Administration at Kabul

Immediately after the fall of Taliban regime, the U.S. installed a provisional democratic political setup, led by Hamid Karzai. Governance at Kabul was not an easy task for Karzai administration; however, the U.S. fully supported the government but avoided to give autonomy in the key decision making processes. The U.S. used Afghan government to lobby for legal assistance over the expansion and extended mandate of ISAF in Afghanistan.⁵²⁶ Afghan government used to sign any bill, facilitating the U.S. mission in the country and thus acted as a facilitator for the U.S. forces.⁵²⁷ Quite often, Hamid Karzai raised the issue of the legitimacy of his cabinet, however, the U.S., Britain and Germany was only crediting ceremonial authority to his government.⁵²⁸ The input from Afghan government and other opposition parties/ groups were not fully heard at the formulation of policies for Afghanistan, thus lacking adequate depth to address the ground realities. Afghans have a traditional way of settling disputes, known as Jirga, which could have been a better choice to avoid violence. However, the U.S. excluded Taliban in the Loya Jirga held in 2001 and 2002.⁵²⁹ Resultantly, the U.S. had to face direct military confrontation with Taliban thus further engaging ISAF in the civil war in the country. Ignoring the policy recommendations from Afghan government, there existed an ambiguity in the U.S. policies towards conflict resolution in Afghanistan.⁵³⁰ All of this stems from the weak Afghan government, who only acted as a facilitator for the U.S..

5.1.1.1.1. Expanding Afghan Security Forces without Capacity Building Measures

In pursuance of the U.S. strategy to shift security responsibilities to the local Afghan forces, hundreds of local Afghans were recruited, trained and operationalized.⁵³¹ The U.S. acted as a main locomotive force in this entire process of establishing Afghan National Army and

⁵²⁶ Collins, *Understanding war in Afghanistan*. 2011. 23-39.

⁵²⁷ Suhrke, "Waging war and building peace in Afghanistan." (2012): 482-485.

⁵²⁸ Ibid. 486.

⁵²⁹ Fields and Ahmed. *A review of the 2001 Bonn Conference...*, 2011. 5-6.

⁵³⁰ Suhrke, "Waging war and building peace in Afghanistan." (2012): 482-485.

⁵³¹ Giustozzi, "Bureaucratic façade and political realities of disarmament and demobilization..." (2008): 169-192.

supportive organizational and financial framework, dividing responsibilities among the U.S., UK, Germany and France.⁵³² Unending attacks on international forces compelled the U.S. to develop local Afghan security forces in a hurry, putting little efforts in capacity building measures. Under the Freedom in Afghanistan Support Act, towards the end of 2002, Washington approved approximately \$ 3 billion to the formation of the armed forces and law enforcement agencies for the period from 2003 to 2006.⁵³³ However, the process immediately encountered many problems, significantly, was the mass desertion of recruits, often taking away the weapons along themselves.⁵³⁴ Many Afghans participated in the recruitment process for the sack of material gains, with no intentions to serve permanently as part of the regular forces.⁵³⁵ One of the possible reasons was the absence of tradition of regular army in Afghan culture.⁵³⁶ The recruitment of Afghan from Pashtun districts was more difficulty task on several grounds. There was a trust deficit between NATO members, Afghan government and Afghan Sunni Pashtuns.⁵³⁷ So, the recruitments of the Pashtuns were always suspicious and problematic. Parallel to the recruitment process, Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) was launched, focusing the formal Mujahedeen and Taliban.⁵³⁸ The aim of DDR was to make the formal fighters part of the national Army and police, however, the response was not encouraging. Many pro-Taliban elements were recruited, who latter inflicted damages by stealing weapons and running back to the insurgents.⁵³⁹ There were incidents of confrontation between the U.S. and local Afghan security forces. All this, in particular, led to the fact that at the beginning of September 2012 the U.S. command suspended the implementation of all combat training programs for new Afghan national army recruits until a further thorough investigation into their possible links with Taliban.⁵⁴⁰ By the fall of 2002, the first three battalions had been trained, and two more brigades were trained till March 2003.⁵⁴¹ The main combat Unit, Central Army Corps - 1 was restored towards the end of August in

⁵³² Ibid.

⁵³³ Amy Belasco, *Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and other global war on terror operations since 9/11*. Diane Publishing, 2009. 44-61.

⁵³⁴ Jason Lyall, Graeme Blair, and Kosuke Imai. "Explaining support for combatants during wartime: A survey experiment in Afghanistan." *American political science review* 107, no. 4 (2013): 679-705.

⁵³⁵ Ibid. 695.

⁵³⁶ Nishi, "Threat, Military Culture, and Strategy..." (2009) 169-187.

⁵³⁷ Katzman. "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security..." (2017): 531-643.

⁵³⁸ Steven A Zyck, "Former combatant reintegration and fragmentation in contemporary Afghanistan: Analysis." *Conflict, Security & Development* 9, no. 1 (2009): 111-131.

⁵³⁹ Lyall et al., "Explaining support for combatants..." (2013): 679-705.

⁵⁴⁰ Katzman. "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security..." (2017): 22.

⁵⁴¹ Austin Long, "'Green on blue': Insider attacks in Afghanistan." *Survival* 55, no. 3 (2013): 167-182.

2003.⁵⁴² The Afghan Security Forces were not able to adequately resist Taliban's offensive and hence the need to utilize international forces was realized.

NATO's initial plans to rely more on local Afghan Forces, after a speedy recruitment and training process, fell short of realization amid the growing guerilla attacks from Taliban.⁵⁴³ Initially, the U.S. wanted a small contingent of local Afghan forces but towards the end of 2012, the local Afghan security personnel's tripled in number, reaching one hundred and seventy thousand people.⁵⁴⁴ Not only the ANA, but Afghan Police was also extended by recruiting more people. However, the extended numbers were not adequately resources by the U.S. and allies, as they lacked in modern weapon and related technology. Seeing the clear advantages and advancements from Taliban the number of U.S. and international forces were also increased from thirty six thousand of 2006 to twenty two thousand in 2012, most of them, nearly ninety thousand, were from the U.S. security forces.⁵⁴⁵

In the process of expanding the ANA, local police and NATO troops, a sharp shortage of artillery, ammunition, armored vehicles and spare parts was faced.⁵⁴⁶ The U.S. wanted to void the Soviet style provision of weapons to the local Afghan forces but they had to reconsider their strategic decision regarding provision of the U.S. made weapons to the local Afghan security forces.

5.1.2. Failure to Understand or Ignore Local Afghan Cultural Conditions

In an interview a question was asked to an ex-head of National Counter-terrorism Authority (NACTA) Ihsan Ghani about the impact of the local Afghan culture on the failure of the US strategies in Afghanistan. He was of the view that "one of Afghans' traditional weapon is patience". They just waited for their chance. The US and its allied forces could not understand this and jumped into the statebuilding program assuming that the threat from Taliban is being eliminated. He further stated that "bad governance or absence of the same, human rights violations by local and US troops and massive corruption provided Taliban a firm ground to get the sympathies of the local Afghans and hence recruitment for their armed groups.

⁵⁴² Giustozzi. "Auxiliary force or national army? 54-57.

⁵⁴³ David A Arenas, *Afghanistan: Green-on-Blue Attacks*. Marine Corps Command and Staff Coll Quantico Va, 2013. 5-9.

⁵⁴⁴ Giustozzi. "Auxiliary force or national army? 51-54.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid: 45-67.

In Afghan culture, foreigners who disrespect the local values and are involved in gross human rights violations are rarely pardoned. This was the reason; the local Afghans have developed sympathies towards Taliban and acted as facilitators in their attacks against the international forces. Mr Ihsan further argued that abject poverty, especially in the rural area due to recent past Soviet occupation, perennial internal conflicts has enabled the Afghan people to survive with the minimum available resources. The US occupation did not make anything better in this respect. Due to the history of conflicts, Afghans have experienced to both sufferings and benefits from wars, occupations, conflicts and most of all elite capture. This shows that the US war in Afghanistan was taken as a 'blessing in disguise' by many and tried to benefit from it. Another important aspect identified by Mr. Ihsan was that the US had faltered from the start when they succumbed to the Northern warlords pressures who went on a rampage of ethnic cleansing, loot, abuses and not majorly focused on the US objectives in Afghanistan.

In response to the same question, on the role of culture in the failure of the US strategies in Afghanistan, Mr Salman Javed argued that, "The biggest issue in any policy framework when it comes down to Afghanistan is neglecting their rural population and their cultural elements. Considering a few big cities and the representatives of Afghan culture and traditions is one big mistake which US repeated over and over again. The local or more precisely rural culture of Afghanistan is conservative, tribalistic and very much ungovernable. Elements seeking their hideouts, safe heavens or developing relations based upon ethnic, historical or religious linkages will find their ways in the hearts, mind or pockets of these tribes and alliances would be made to create a deterrence which is very much needed for a revolt at such a large scale. Pitching tribes against other tribes or sects against other sects is also a short-term policy which was always bound to fail. Last but not the least. US didn't care at all about the development or nation building, it is very much there in the minds of local Afghans, hence the resentment and resistance." Mr Tahir Khan⁵⁴⁷ and Imtiaz Gul⁵⁴⁸, both expressed the similar view about the role of culture in the failure of the U.S. strategies in Afghanistan.

⁵⁴⁷ In an interview through WhatsApp with Tahir Khan, a Freelance Journalist based in Islamabad, who extensively covered the Afghan conflict during the past 20 years.

⁵⁴⁸ In an interview through WhatsApp with Imtiaz Gul, an expert, Journalist/ Author of 'The Unholy Nexus: Pak-Afghan Relations under the Taliban'.

5.1.3. Failure of the Statebuilding Program

After initial military success against Taliban regime in Afghanistan, the U.S. started a Statebuilding program in Afghanistan on the Weberian democratic model, primarily to exclude Taliban from powersharing and establishing a long-term structural pro-U.S. political system.⁵⁴⁹ Largely, the U.S. Statebuilding program failed due to various reasons; firstly, insufficient understanding of the local tradition or ignoring it for being least relevant, secondly, the underestimation of the link between capacity and legitimacy of the policies and institutions in the country, thirdly, the failure of the donor states to ensure transparency in the utilization of funds for various projects of the Statebuilding program.

The U.S. had not been able to grasp the traditions and socio-political culture of Afghanistan. The U.S. policy advisors thought they knew what the country needed in terms of Statebuilding necessities, which is not exactly what its people wanted. The U.S. politics vis-à-vis Afghanistan was driven by fantasy; chief among them was the idea that the Taliban could be destroyed and that an entire culture could be transformed and replaced by the western democratic model through the Statebuilding process. The U.S. backed Afghan government failed not only because of the Taliban but was hampered by the blind spots and prejudices of U.S. policies towards the conflict. The U.S. saw strong centralized authority as the solution to Afghanistan's problems and supported a constitution that gave the president wide range of powers without giving due importance to the traditional authority of the tribal war lords.⁵⁵⁰ This, along with a bizarre and confusing electoral system, undermined the development of parliament and political parties. The U.S. Statebuilding policies generated an outrage by promoting programs that were supposed to reshape gender norms contrary to the Afghan culture. The local Afghan culture and its various norms were the lifeblood of the country's political culture but the U.S. Statebuilding processes reflected the arrogance of the Western powers, who viewed Afghan traditions as an obstacle to be overcome easily whenever required, but it proved wrong. Such arrogant approach from the western allies turned a major chunk of the Afghan population to believe that the government never belonged to them and just a U.S. puppet government. They continued to turn to informal community-driven dispute resolution

⁵⁴⁹ Barnett R Rubin, and Humayun Hamidzada. "From Bonn to London: governance challenges and the future of statebuilding in Afghanistan." *International Peacekeeping* 14, no. 1 (2007): 11.

⁵⁵⁰ Thomas Barfield, "Culture and custom in nation-building: law in Afghanistan." *Me. L. Rev.* 60 (2008): 347.

and local figures they trusted. And that left the door open for the slow return of the Taliban from the mountains back to urban settlements.⁵⁵¹

The second important reasons for the failure of the U.S. Statebuilding program were the establishment of various institutions without fully taking into account their capacity building measures. Institutions without capacity certainly lost legitimacy among Afghans. For example, the U.S. planned to establish a local army and police institutions but failed in strengthening their capacity and transparent recruitment procedures.⁵⁵² Resultantly, the local forces failed in many respects. There were reports of the local Afghan soldiers breaking away from the government and joining the Taliban, hence a big security and intelligence breach. On many instances, the local Afghan forces killed allied troops as well. Moreover, the Afghan forces were least trusted by the common Afghans as they were considered to be less reliable as compared to Taliban. However, it is clear that legitimacy itself requires much more systematic attention and should be placed at the center of the discourse on the effectiveness of the state. States can only govern with authority and minimal coercion if their own citizens recognize their legitimacy.

Third important reason for the failure of the Statebuilding program was the lack of transparency in the utilization of the Statebuilding funds for various programs. Many research studies and even investigative journalists produced reports identifying massive structural corruption in the Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani administrations. The international community is equally implicated, in large part due to its mismanagement of aid. The donor countries had poured too much money into Afghanistan with little or no oversight which had no institutional mechanism to handle such resources. One SIGAR estimate puts the total donated by the United States alone at \$145 billion in development aid under the Statebuilding programs over the past 20 years.⁵⁵³ A CNN summary of SIGAR reports highlighted 10 examples, including a cargo fleet with an initial value of half a billion dollars sold for scrap at a measly \$40,000, a fancy \$85 million hotel that never opened, and a medical facility that had location coordinates in the Mediterranean Sea. So, the extremely fragmented, poorly implemented stabilization and democratization measures by donors have strengthened neo-patrimonial governance structures and allowed the development of parallel service delivery

⁵⁵¹ Rubin Hamidzada. "From Bonn to London...", (2007): 11.

⁵⁵² Nematullah Bizhan, "Building legitimacy and state capacity in protracted fragility: The case of Afghanistan." *Commission on State Fragility, Growth and Development*. Available at SSRN 3166985 (2018): 21.

⁵⁵³ Clayton Thomas, "Afghanistan: background and US Policy." *Congressional research service* 10 (2018): 55.

structures. Moreover, an unknown but significant amount of development aid ends up funding various armed groups.

5.1.3.1. Brahimi's Role as UN Special Representative for Afghanistan

On 3th October 2001, Lakhdar Brahimi was appointed as the UN special representative in Afghanistan, and was entrusted with the overall responsibility for political and humanitarian endeavors on the behalf of the UN.⁵⁵⁴ Brahimi focused on involving the six-plus-two group, particularly Pakistan and Iran, in the consultations about a political setup in Afghanistan after Taliban's regime was ousted by the U.S. and coalition forces. Upon his speedy consultations with the key stakeholders, he presented his report to the UN security council which focused on the following points.

- A legitimate Afghan government that represents the entire population would have the necessary legitimacy and determination to counter international terrorist groups in the country.
- Acknowledgment of the special role and legitimate interests of Pakistan and Iran, as well as their connections to certain Afghan factions.
- All parties involved, particularly Pakistan and Iran, must commit to a political resolution that preserves Afghanistan's unity and territorial integrity.
- Afghan parties must reach a consensus without undue interference from neighboring countries to achieve a lasting solution.
- A stable Afghanistan is in line with regional interests, particularly the national interests of Pakistan and Iran.
- The creation of a politically balanced, multinational, widely based, and freely elected government with both international and domestic legitimacy is necessary.
- The UN has a critical role in convening negotiations and mediations between the parties and in the implementation of any agreement.
- The imposition of an external resolution on Afghans is not desirable.
- The international community must be involved in providing the necessary political and financial resources on a permanent and long-term basis.
- Due to rapidly changing military circumstances, the four major groups, namely the Rome Group (led by the former king), Northern Alliance, Peshawar Group (Pakistani

⁵⁵⁴ Ebrahim Afsah, and Alexandra Hilal Guhr. "Afghanistan: Building a State to Keep the Peace." *Max Planck Yearbook of United Nations Law Online* 9, no. 1 (2005): 407.

diaspora), and Cyprus Group (Iranian diaspora), would meet at a convenient location as soon as feasible.

- These current groups and processes would commence talks, and more representatives would be added to ensure extensive participation, but the absence of representation early on should not detract from the possibility of agreeing on a structure.
- Afghans themselves, particularly the returning diaspora, must be involved in creating good governance institutions by establishing clear and equitable regulations and adhering to them.
- A robust security force, particularly in Kabul, rather than a non-UN multinational force, must be deployed.
- Kabul should be demilitarized and not controlled by any single group.
- Donors and the UN system must closely collaborate in implementing the UN mission, with clear delineation of powers and responsibilities.
- All participants must agree that Afghans are accountable and should own the process.
- The agreed-upon institutions would be temporary and would not include everyone who should be considered, including some with questionable credentials; however, given that this was just the beginning of a process and not a settlement, these deficiencies must be accepted in the interest of peace.⁵⁵⁵

Brahimi's report to the UN security council set the ground for the Bonn negotiations; however, he, in an interview with the 'Center for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD)' confesses that despite his understanding that Taliban remained an important player, even after conceding defeat from the U.S., the entire coalition partners, the U.S., India and even Russia were insisting on the notion that Taliban are out of option in any possible political arrangements in Afghanistan.⁵⁵⁶ He said that despite the voices about Taliban exclusion from the political reconciliation efforts, he met Mullah Umar three times to make them part of the Statebuilding efforts. However, the U.S. administration was convinced that they can successfully carry out the Statebuilding agenda through Bonn negotiations by excluding Taliban.⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid; 407-409.

⁵⁵⁶ Lakhdar Brahimi, "Lakhdar Brahimi on hopes and failures in Afghanistan" interview by *The Mediator's Studio - Center for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD)*, Episode 1, Season 3, 15th February 2022. <https://hdcentre.org/podcasts/lakhdar-brahimi-on-hopes-and-failures-in-afghanistan/>

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid.

In the same interview, Brahimi quotes Zalmi Khalilzad that Mr. Hamid Karzai did not discuss the letter he received from Mullah Umar about his desire to negotiate with the government and the U.S. He claims that Karzai subsequently discussed the letter with Donald Rumsfeld and later made it public. The reason for not disclosing the letter in time could probably be for two reasons; firstly, Karzai wanted to protect his interests and not allow the Taliban to negotiate directly with the U.S., and secondly, the U.S. did not pay attention, as was clear from their statements in those days, to consider the Taliban as a political stakeholder to the Bonn negotiations. Brahimi's revelations in his interview clearly underline the notion that by ignoring Taliban in the initial period after the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan led to further strategic confusion in their conflict management policy, leading to the longevity of the conflict and failure to achieve strategic goals.

5.1.4. President Bush's Penchant for Unilateral Action

The U.S. has been skeptical of the local, regional and extra-regional players and failed to get over the prisoner's dilemma from the very start of its intervention in Afghanistan. In implementing the U.S. global war strategy on terror, the Bush administration was inclined to act unilaterally. On the eve of the presidential election in the winter of 2000, C. Rice wrote about the readiness and determination of the future republican administration to act alone.⁵⁵⁸ By the end of the first year of the presidency, this trend had further strengthened. Although President Bush believed that September 11 provide an opportunity to improve relations between the great powers, he believed that they should not have a decisive influence on the U.S. foreign policy. The Republican administration perceived the U.S. as the leading centre for world decision-making. It ceased to consider Russia, EU and China as key elements of the international security structure. Speaking about the international coalition's fate on the "war on terror", Bush said there is a possibility that we can be left alone; hence, we are ready to act alone. The strategy and the course to pursue it, proclaimed by George W. Bush, was the manifestation of the concept put forward in 1992 by a group of analysts from the U.S. military department, led by Under Secretary of Defense for Political Affairs P. Wolfowitz.⁵⁵⁹ Then the Ministry of Defense proposed a draft containing a proposal on the guide to military planning,

⁵⁵⁸ Santos, Maria Helena de Castro, and Ulysses Tavares Teixeira. "The essential role of democracy in the Bush Doctrine: the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan." *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional* 56, no. 2 (2013): 131-156.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid

abandon multilateral actions on the world stage in favour of unilateral actions, and prevent the emergence of a parallel power to the U.S. strengthening the American military power.

In meetings at the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), which is the centre for making state decisions on the “war on terror”, the possibilities of using the Global Anti-Terrorism Coalition resources were discussed.⁵⁶⁰ This coalition began to take shape immediately after the September 11 attacks and included countries from all over the world in a short time. The U.S. counted on the world’s help but did not want the Allies to restrict their freedom of action. On September 13, 2001, Vice President R. Cheney formulated the administration’s international cooperation approach by clarifying that the mission should determine the coalition and not vice versa. At meetings of the NSS in September 2001, possible targets in the fight against terrorists were discussed by focusing on Iran and Iraq and Afghanistan. The then-Secretary of State Colin Powell (2001–2005) urged the president to concentrate on fighting Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and remain calm about other targets as the international coalition may not agree to a multi-targeted approach. Rumsfeld believed that if the coalition does not support the U.S. over its Iraq strategy, they should consider creating another coalition. Vice President R. Cheney was more convinced of the C. Powell recommendation. At SNB meeting on September 15, it was decided to launch a military campaign in Afghanistan.⁵⁶¹

In his speech to Congress and the U.S. Senate on September 20, 2001, George W. Bush asked all countries to join the coalition and urged that each state has to decide if they are with the U.S. or terrorists. He insisted upon countries that any country that continues to support terrorists will be considered a hostile regime by the U.S. from now onwards.⁵⁶² In another speech in Warsaw on November 6, 2001, President Bush clarified that the war on terror is a shared responsibility. Remaining neutral is not an option; every country has responsibilities in the war on terror, which are not limited to a simple expression of sympathy or words of support but a functional role against terrorism.⁵⁶³ This was somewhat a warning to Afghanistan’s

⁵⁶⁰ Adam DM Svendsen, “Developing International Intelligence Liaison Against Islamic State: Approaching “One for All and All for One”?” *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 29, no. 2 (2016): 260-277.

⁵⁶¹ Rowan Scarborough, *Rumsfeld's war: The untold story of America's anti-terrorist commander*. Regnery Publishing, 2004.

⁵⁶² George W Bush, “Selected Speeches of President George W. Bush, 2001–2008.” *The White House* (2008): 65.

⁵⁶³ Bush, Selected Speeches... (2008): 171.

neighbouring countries, particularly Pakistan. For the successful implementation of the Afghanistan campaign, the U.S. required the Gulf States' direct assistance and countries bordering Afghanistan.⁵⁶⁴ The U.S. sought to harness the potential of international organizations and unions and individual states, including those that had previously rarely solidified with the United States. In this regard, the primary issues were to obtain logistical support, particularly the airspace permissions, the establishment of military basis, and, more importantly, the direct military assistance from some strategically important countries.

The U.S. successfully took the U.N. into confidence. On September 12, 2001, the UN Security Council adopted resolution No. 1368, in which it expressed its readiness to take "all necessary measures" in response to the terrorist's activities.⁵⁶⁵ The resolution affirmed the right of countries and their unions to collective and individual self-defense. On September 28, 2001, a new UN Security Council resolution No. 1373 regarding the use of non-military methods of combating terrorism.⁵⁶⁶ It was agreed among UN member countries to take necessary measures for the cessation of financial and other logistical support for terrorists throughout the World. UN security council resolution no 1373 was primarily concerned about the financial support to the various terrorist groups from the Gulf and Afghanistan's neighbouring countries.⁵⁶⁷ The U.S. was satisfied with the wording of resolution No. 1368, and did not consider it necessary to send a formal request to the Security Council for an operation in Afghanistan. The NATO Council's Article 5 of the 'Washington Treaty' allowed the U.S. to begin negotiations on attracting resources and logistical support from its alliances to Afghanistan's war. However, at an early stage in the military campaign, the U.S. was reluctant to accept NATO military assistance. Instead, only the U.S. and Great Britain's armed forces participated directly in the war against Taliban in Afghanistan.⁵⁶⁸ Subsequently, some warships were sent to the Persian Gulf, where NATO members (France, Germany, Canada, Turkey) played a supporting role. Donald Rumsfeld at security meetings repeated that the military would not "invent roles" for

⁵⁶⁴ Richard Hogg, Claudia Nassif, Camilo Gomez Osorio, William Byrd, and Andrew Beath. *Afghanistan in transition: looking beyond 2014*. The World Bank, 2013.

⁵⁶⁵ William B Messmer, and Carlos L. Yordán. "A partnership to counter international terrorism: The UN Security Council and the UN Member States." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 34, no. 11 (2011): 843-861.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid

⁵⁶⁸ Mark Webber, "NATO: The United States, transformation and the war in Afghanistan." *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 11, no. 1 (2009): 46-63.

the allies, because the U.S. administration was reluctant to accept any dictations in their policy in Afghanistan and mainly in the global war on terror.⁵⁶⁹

The right to fly and station US and NATO forces in the Gulf countries became necessary for Afghanistan's US military operation.⁵⁷⁰ Shortly after the 9/11 attacks, many Arab governments announced their support for the United States. The Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have condemned the terrorists, responsible for the 9/11 attacks in the United States.⁵⁷¹ Simultaneously, actions in support of fundamentalists Islamic elements in many Islamic countries forced these countries' governments, particularly Oman and Saudi Arabia, to cooperate with the U.S. on anonymity or without disclosing specific aid points. At the closing statement of a GCC meeting, it was stated that the member countries are willing to take part in any well-defined collective action against terrorists. Agreeing to assist the U.S., many Islamic states chose the least burdensome measures such as allowing the U.S. warplanes to fly over their territory, avoided publicly demonstrating friendly feelings, and forbade the use of their territory to launch military attacks on Afghanistan.

On the Central Asian side, the U.S. had to support the newly independent Muslim countries from the formal Soviet Union. Russia still enjoyed the leverage of influencing the Central Asian States.⁵⁷² Since the mid-1990s, Russia's foreign policy towards Afghanistan has intensified due to the constant efforts to protect the Central Asian States' southern borders from the invasion of Islamists from Afghanistan.⁵⁷³ In this regard, Russia in 1996 began to support the forces of the Northern Alliance against Taliban regime.⁵⁷⁴ In Washington, it was understood that without using the Russian factor, the U.S.' possibilities to conduct an Afghanistan campaign would be significantly limited. On September 23, 2001, George W. Bush asked Russian President Vladimir Putin to support US actions in the region. According to the White House chronicler R. Woodward records, the tacit agreement was that Russia would not oppose the U.S. presence in the region. At the same time, the U.S. waged war on terrorists and did not

⁵⁶⁹ A. S. M Ashraf, "The politics of coalition burden-sharing: The case of the war in Afghanistan." PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, (2011), 24.

⁵⁷⁰ Webber, "NATO: The United States, transformation...", 46-63.

⁵⁷¹ Tom Lansford, *A bitter harvest...*, 2017, 147.

⁵⁷² Barnett R Rubin and Andrea Armstrong. "Regional issues in the reconstruction of Afghanistan." (*World Policy Journal* 20, no. 1, 2003): 31-40.

⁵⁷³ Józef Lang, "Afghanistan: the view from Russia." (*Brussels: EU Institute for Security Studies, ISS Alert-No10-07 February* 2014).

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid

intend to consolidate its military presence on an continuing basis. At the end of September, President Putin said that Russia does not object to the contacts and cooperation of the Central Asian republics with the U.S. over the global war on terror.⁵⁷⁵ However, at least in the case of Uzbekistan, the consent of Russia was late. Tashkent began cooperation with the U.S. without coordination with partners in the region.⁵⁷⁶

The Central Asia Republics considered American diplomatic initiatives differently. Turkmenistan hastened to break off relations with Taliban and started giving cautionary attention to the terrorist activities in Afghanistan. Remaining formally outside the coalition, Ashgabat nonetheless granted the U.S. easy access to fly over its territory but did not allow its airspace to strike in Afghanistan.⁵⁷⁷ The most convenient supply base for the anti-Taliban coalition forces in Afghanistan was Uzbekistan. With the most significant armed forces in the region, Uzbekistan sought to play an independent role. Since the late 1990s, it has reduced its integration processes under the regional security alliances' auspices.⁵⁷⁸ The direct relief of the border between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan made it possible to carry out allied aviation flights with lower costs than the basing of aircraft in neighbouring Tajikistan. Besides, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan were connected by an existing highway, which quickly supplied to the Northern Alliance's base in Mazar-e-Sharif in Northern Afghanistan. However, Tashkent was in no hurry to place its resources at the disposal of the United States. For a week and a half, Uzbekistan provided evasive answers to requests from Washington, wanting to make sure of the seriousness of the U.S. intentions. To expedite negotiations, D. Rumsfeld flew to Tashkent. On October 5, 2001, an agreement was signed with President of Uzbekistan I. Karimov to allow the U.S. to use Uzbek airspace and establish an airbase in Khanabad. At a joint press conference, Rumsfeld said that the U.S.' interests are establishing long-term relations with Uzbekistan which should not be limited to the current issue.⁵⁷⁹ This statement made a strong impression on Karimov, who hastened to inform the assembled journalists about it. Asked by one of them whether Russia was informed in advance about the current agreements, Karimov referred to a statement by V. Putin made at the end of September 2001. However, from his

⁵⁷⁵ Roy Allison. *Russia, the West, and military intervention*. (OUP Oxford, 2013). 87-88.

⁵⁷⁶ S. Frederick Starr, "A partnership for Central Asia." (*Foreign Affairs*, 2005): 164-178.

⁵⁷⁷ Thomas Clayton, "Afghanistan: Background and US Policy in Brief." (*Congressional Research Service* 1, 2019). 8-9

⁵⁷⁸ Sajid Iqbal and Sarwat Rauf. "Afghanistan Imbroglio: Impact on the Central Asian States." *Central Asia Journal* NO 83, (Winter 2018): 61-63.

⁵⁷⁹ Scarborough, *Rumsfeld's war...* 2004.

words, it followed that there were no direct consultations between Russia and Uzbekistan in this regard.⁵⁸⁰

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan readily provided the U.S. with access to its airspace. In December 2001, Kyrgyzstan granted the U.S. the right to use the Manas military base.⁵⁸¹ Tajikistan, for its part, allowed the use of the airport in Dushanbe to refuel American aircraft. According to the American press, on the Northern Alliance's side in the battles with Taliban in October – November 2001, the Tajik army units took part, accompanied by Russian military instructors. The U.S. Department of State believed that countries in the region would be pleased to see the emergence of US troops in Afghanistan. According to the former US ambassador to Uzbekistan, at the beginning of the new Afghan campaign, all Central Asian states hoped for an extended presence of the U.S. in the region, with two goals: eliminating the source of threats in Afghanistan and reducing dependence on Russia.⁵⁸² The course towards the U.S.' rapprochement with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in the early 2000s was considered by experts differently. On the one hand, as part of a strategy of reaching the Afghanistan-Pakistan zone of instability from the north and on the other hand, attempting to strengthen the American presence in Central Asia.⁵⁸³ Small and medium-sized countries of Central Asia learned to defend their interests, playing on Russia and the U.S.; however, in the mid-2000s there was no reason to exaggerate the possibility of Americanization of the region.⁵⁸⁴

An essential point of the political and diplomatic campaign to isolate Taliban was blocking Afghanistan's borders from its neighbours. Iran refused to participate in the anti-terror coalition, declared its neutrality and pointed out the need to seek political solutions to the conflict. Iran remained an implacable opponent of Taliban. At the same time, it did not want to be associated with US actions, seeing in the upcoming military campaign a threat to its interests in the region and a model of a possible future campaign against its regime. Nevertheless, Iran agreed to the U.S.' request to assist, if necessary, in the search and rescue of American pilots in Afghanistan.⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid: 71-73.

⁵⁸¹ Jim Nichol, "Kyrgyzstan and the Status of the US Manas Airbase: Context and Implications." Library of Congress Washington Dc Congressional Research Service, (2009): 8.

⁵⁸² Ibid: 4-9.

⁵⁸³ Iqbal and Rauf, *Afghanistan Imbroglione...* (2018): 66.

⁵⁸⁴ James Coffman, "The Gulf: Privatization and Americanization." *International Higher Education* 33 (2003).

⁵⁸⁵ Marvin G Weinbaum, *Afghanistan and its neighbors: An ever dangerous neighborhood*. Vol. 31. United States Institute of Peace, (2006): 13.

The Eastern neighbour of Afghanistan, China, joined the international coalition. It also had a common border with Pakistan and feared fundamentalist fermentation in the country's western districts inhabited by Uyghurs. China tightened control over its border with Afghanistan and provided the U.S. with intelligence on Taliban activities in the region. Beijing was dissatisfied with the Islamists' activation to the same extent as US troops' appearance in its strategic rear.⁵⁸⁶

At the end of October 2001, the U.S. had seventy-one (71) countries and fifteen (15) organizations as part of the Global Counterterrorism Alliance. Sixteen (16) countries participated directly in the Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan.⁵⁸⁷ On October 7, 2001, the U.S. started a full-scale war in Afghanistan with allies' help. In an appeal to the American people, President Bush announced that the purpose of hostilities with Taliban is to destroy their military potential. The ideological background of the "war on terror" allowed the Republican administration not to declare the U.S. campaign in Afghanistan as any type of conventional wars. An official declaration of war did not precede the U.S.'s military action. The U.S. viewed Taliban fighters in the legal sense, not as soldiers, but as terrorists not protected by law.⁵⁸⁸ In the U.S. domestic political arena, the post 9/11 situation nullified the dominance of the Democratic Party in Congress to oppose the policies of the Republican administration. On the domestic political front, the "war on terror" helped Republicans overcome inter-party disagreements and quickly get approval for the military-political initiatives, which in another situation would probably trigger much more lively discussions.⁵⁸⁹

The U.S. and Western allies were in synchronization on policy of distancing the military, political and economic relationship between Russian and the post-Taliban Afghan government.⁵⁹⁰ After the establishment of provisional administration in Kabul, the Western allies started strong opposition to the Russian influence in Afghanistan and agreed on providing all possible support to the U.S. to avoid any possible assistance from Russia. However, reckoning with the realities of ground situations, the U.S. and allies had to readjust their policy

⁵⁸⁶ Iqbal and Rauf, *Afghanistan Imbroglion...* (2018): 68.

⁵⁸⁷ Curtis A Ward, "Building capacity to combat international terrorism: the role of the United Nations Security Council." *Journal of Conflict and Security Law* 8, no. 2 (2003): 289-305.

⁵⁸⁸ Joan Fitzpatrick, "Jurisdiction of military commissions and the ambiguous war on terrorism." *American Journal of International Law* 96, no. 2 (2002): 340-359.

⁵⁸⁹ Marc Hetherington, and Elizabeth Suhay. "Authoritarianism, threat, and Americans' support for the war on terror." *American Journal of Political Science* 55, no. 3 (2011): 545-559.

⁵⁹⁰ Ekaterina Stepanova, "Russia's Afghan policy in the regional and Russia-West contexts." *Russie. NEI. Reports* 23, no. 2018 (2018): 10.

line with respect to cooperation with countries beyond traditional allies. They continued hindering the economic and political ties between Russia and Afghanistan; however, under the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) of 2002, they ceased to pose any obstacles with respect to the military-technical cooperation.⁵⁹¹ In 2003 in a meeting in Moscow, Russia showed its readiness to support the Afghan stabilization cause, including their support to NATO in future operations in the country.⁵⁹² In the same year, the U.S. and the Western allies emphasized more on the well-coordinated correspondence among all partners for ISAF mandate, while re-emphasizing on the invariability of Russia's line to non-participation in these forces.⁵⁹³ This shows the lack of clarity among the partners over the role of Russia in Afghanistan. The U.S. wanted to exclude Russia from Afghanistan's affairs but the ground realities were compelling them to rely on the Russian help.

At subsequent meetings, including on the sidelines of NATO summits, certain significant decisions were made to expand cooperation on the transit of cargo of allies through Russian territory.⁵⁹⁴ This was decided after some hurdles were experienced in the NATO supply through Pakistan's territory due to an ongoing militancy by the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and later by the protests of Pakistan's opposition parties at NATO supply route.⁵⁹⁵ Though, Russian route was lengthy but the U.S. had to consider it as a second option, in case of any inconvenience in the NATO supply through Pakistan. In this regard, the NATO Bucharest Summit in 2008 endorsed the concept of an additional "transit bridge" of non-military cargo through Russia, Central Asia, and the Caucasus.⁵⁹⁶ Simultaneously a corresponding agreement was signed with Moscow, Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan for the legal transit of NATO cargo.⁵⁹⁷ Since the route through Russia was much lengthier than the one through ocean and then Pakistan, the NATO's cargo supply was shifted to rail in the summer of 2010, which was ten times cheaper than the supply by air or through

⁵⁹¹ Ibid: 37.

⁵⁹² Andrei Kazantsev, "Russian policy in Central Asia and the Caspian Sea region." *Europe-Asia Studies* 60, no. 6 (2008): 1080.

⁵⁹³ Angela Stent and Lilia Shevtsova. "America, Russia and Europe: a realignment?." *Survival* 44, no. 4 (2002): 127.

⁵⁹⁴ Heidi Reisinger, *How to get out of Afghanistan: NATO's withdrawal through Central Asia*. NATO Defense College., 2012: 9.

⁵⁹⁵ K. Alan Kronstad and Kenneth Katzman. "Islamist militancy in the Pakistan-Afghanistan border region and US policy." Library of Congress Washington Dc Congressional Research Service, 2008: 5.

⁵⁹⁶ Paul Gallis, "The NATO summit at Bucharest, 2008." Library of Congress Washington DC Congressional Research Service, 2008.

⁵⁹⁷ Reisinger, *How to get out of Afghanistan... (2012)*: 9.

Pakistan.⁵⁹⁸ Knowing the advantages of Russian help, additional NATO- Russian cooperation agreements were signed at the Lisbon summit of 2010 for transit related facilitation and a possible withdrawal of the international forces through Russia, which were then planned to be starting from 2011.⁵⁹⁹ In this regard, Russia in 2012 formulated an integrated approach to both air and land transportation of the U.S. military equipment and troops from Afghanistan through its territory.⁶⁰⁰ Russia's support to the U.S. and allies was not without risks, as the threat of the spasmodic export of drugs and a possible trading within Russia was quite prominent. Drugs production in the post-Taliban Afghanistan got record high, reaching to the 90% of the total world production.⁶⁰¹ Russia expressed their concern in the NATO-Russia Council meeting regarding the possible trade of drugs through their territory.⁶⁰² They stressed upon the need to pay serious attention to the anti-drugs efforts by the NATO and ISAF forces. Despite, Russian concerns, the U.S. and allies majorly ignored Moscow's concerns, due to their primary focus on security in Afghanistan.⁶⁰³ This indeed was another variable for the destabilized or unhappy relationship between the West and the Russian federation. The lack of trust between the U.S. and Russia federation could finest be described under the prisoner's dilemma of game theory.

Russia kept on raising demands for anti-drugs actions and hence, by the end of 2005, the federal drugs control service of the Russian federation and ISAF established cooperation against the illegal drugs trade.⁶⁰⁴ In 2005 and 2010, two designated centers for the training of specialists for anti-drugs force were set in Russia and Central Asian states. The force carried out some joint anti-drugs measures in Afghanistan with the active assistance of ISAF and NATO forces.⁶⁰⁵ The joint anti-drugs efforts conducted regular radio interceptions of drugs dealers from Afghanistan. Similar proposals were presented by Russia in 2003 but got no acknowledgment from the U.S. and allies because they did not wanted to consider Russia as an equal partner in Afghanistan.⁶⁰⁶ Russia was also a strong proponent of the implementation of

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid: 6.

⁵⁹⁹ Andrew Foxall, "A fateful Summit: The future of NATO's relationship with Russia." *A Policy Paper of Russia's Study Centre 1* (2014): 5.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁰¹ Doris Buddenberg, and William A. Byrd, eds. *Afghanistan's drug industry: structure, functioning, dynamics, and implications for counter-narcotics policy*. DIANE Publishing, 2006: 48.

⁶⁰² Christopher M Blanchard, *Afghanistan: Narcotics and us policy*. DIANE Publishing, 2009: 32.

⁶⁰³ Robert E Hunter, and Sergey M. Rogov. *Engaging Russia as Partner and Participant. The next stage of NATO-Russia relations*. RAND CORP SANTA MONICA CA, 2004: 18.

⁶⁰⁴ Bettina Renz, "Traffickers, terrorists, and a 'new security challenge': Russian counternarcotics strategy and the Federal Service for the Control of the Drugs Trade." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 22, no. 01 (2011): 61.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid: 57.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid: 58.

international mission in accordance with the UN Security Council resolution, which concerned the U.S., who wanted its lead role in the decision making process vis-à-vis conflict resolution in Afghanistan.⁶⁰⁷

Russian federation too, was skeptical of the U.S. growing influence over central Asian states, which are traditionally considered as Russia's backyard.⁶⁰⁸ The U.S. established its airbases in the region, which were also seen as part of the New Great Game plan in the region.⁶⁰⁹ Russia's position about the provision of logistical assistance to NATO's supplies through the Northern Route was as ambivalent as Washington's line regarding cooperation with Moscow. On the one hand, there was a pragmatic understanding of the need to provide such assistance to the Alliance; on the other hand, there was real, including officially voiced, concern over the additional consolidation of the U.S. and NATO positions in Central Asia to the detriment of the interests of the Russian Federation.⁶¹⁰ However, despite the military-political sensitivity for Russia's interests in the Central Asian region, the intentions of the U.S. and NATO to maintain their support bases in Afghanistan after 2014, it was hardly worth ignoring their significant stabilizing potential. This factor was of particular importance in the understanding that at present no other state or group of states was able to assume such a function in Afghanistan. It must also be recognized that in the real dimension Moscow was unlikely to be able to offer Kabul its alternative either unilaterally or through the CSTO. The same goes for the economic aspect. So, Russia never truly trusted the U.S. in Afghanistan and was suspicious of their activities beyond Afghanistan. However, the common interests of the two sides, in terms of the anti-drugs efforts and the U.S. dependence upon Russia in terms of territory, compelled the two sides to cooperate.⁶¹¹ The overall relationship between the two formal foes during the cold war could generally be considered as an unhappy marriage.

The lack of adequate resources for effective operationalization of the local Afghan forces, led to the growing mistrust among coalition partners.⁶¹² Inconsistent policies with little orientation towards the socio-political realities on ground had stirred rifts in the international

⁶⁰⁷ Stent and Shevtsova. "America, Russia and Europe..." (2002): 127.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid: 130.

⁶⁰⁹ Kazantsev, "Russian policy in Central Asia ..." (2008): 1081.

⁶¹⁰ Stent and Shevtsova. "America, Russia and Europe..." (2002): 123.

⁶¹¹ Mark N Katz, "Putin's Predicament: Russia and Afghanistan after 2014." *Asia Policy* 17, no. 1 (2014): 13-17.

⁶¹² Chad A McGougan, *Enduring Relationships: Cornerstone of Effective Sustained Engagement in Afghanistan*. ARMY WAR COLL CARLISLE BARRACKS PA, 2012. 5.

donors.⁶¹³ The U.S. was also cautious about the reliance on other regional countries to maintain their lead role in Afghanistan. The U.S. had earlier stopped the direct military-technical cooperation (MTC) between the Russia and Afghanistan to maintain their supremacy in the post-intervention operations.⁶¹⁴ However, keeping the growing concerns about the challenges of ammunition/ technological scarcity with the local Afghan forces, the U.S. stopped hindering MTC between Moscow and Kabul.⁶¹⁵ The restoration of the military exchanges between Afghanistan and Russia manifested the U.S. willingness to engage with regional countries in overcoming the growing menace of terrorism. It also signifies the lack of trust among coalition partners over the inflated economic costs of the Afghan war.

In later 2002, some general agreements were concluded between Afghanistan and Russia, which concerned the U.S. and hence propaganda was launched for the failure of those agreement's execution.⁶¹⁶ There was a clear manifestation of the U.S. intentions/ goals to unilaterally control local Afghanistan's politics and act against the potential influence of Russian and in the region. The U.S. unilateral influence in Afghanistan's politics was not limited to the regional countries but it also avoided over-reliance on the western coalition partners.⁶¹⁷ In 2006 at NATO summit at Riga, the coalition partners strongly disputed over the ambiguity in the U.S. strategies in Afghanistan.⁶¹⁸ The U.S. wanted coalition partners to act in accordance with their policy recommendations, while NATO member states wanted the U.S. to remove such restrictions and demanded freedom in operations. Despite requests from partners about freedom in operations, the U.S. denied any such leverage and the cleavages widened between the U.S. and coalition partners. The U.S. war wary of the coalition partners and raised questions of less number of troops from the coalition partners, while the latter insisted on the provision of supportive force for the protection of lives of international non-combatants, working with the civil society on different statebuilding projects. The number of casualties among international forces kept on increasing with every passing year, thus making the coalition partners resistant of sharing more troops in Afghanistan. Moreover, some twenty-eight countries in the Riga's summit complained about the ignorance of their policy

⁶¹³ Goodhand and Sedra. "Who owns the peace? ..." (2010): 90.

⁶¹⁴ Katz, "Putin's Predicament..." (2014): 13-17.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid.

⁶¹⁶ Andrew C Kuchins et al., "The Northern Distribution Network and Afghanistan." *CSIS Report, January* (2010): 13.

⁶¹⁷ Sarah Kreps, "When does the mission determine the coalition? The logic of multilateral intervention and the case of Afghanistan." *Security Studies* 17, no. 3 (2008): 536.

⁶¹⁸ Astri Suhrke, "A contradictory mission? NATO from stabilization to combat in Afghanistan." *International Peacekeeping* 15, no. 2 (2008): 226.

recommendations with respect to the formulation and execution of policies in Afghanistan. The Secretary-General NATO, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, has called on member states to agree to common commitments to preserve what they have already achieved in Afghanistan.⁶¹⁹ He also warned of the possibility of possible reversal in achievements in the event of continuing differences and lack of coordination between the coalition partners. NATO's secretary general assured the participants of Riga's summit that a comprehensive and coordinated approach will be adopted, leading to the transfer of security's responsibility to local Afghan forces and a subsequent operational success.⁶²⁰ Despite assurances, the rifts in coalition continued, causing the failure of strategies for conflict resolution in Afghanistan.

5.1.4.1. Economic Challenges to the War

The lack of trust among coalition partners not only impacted the military-political side of war but also posed economic challenges. The expansion of NATO and related military buildup was coupled with demands for economic assistance to sustain operations in Afghanistan. The U.S. and allies were not only investing in the war against Al Qaeda and Taliban but they had a multi-front war, including investments on the neutralizations of Taliban stance among masses over the intrusion of foreign forces.⁶²¹ This is because; Afghans as a nation are credibly brutal against any foreign invasion in their country.⁶²² The U.S. had to get maximum Afghans into confidence about their intervention and the possible positive outcomes of anti-Taliban operation in the country. If Taliban had succeeded in convincing all Afghans against the U.S. intervention on premise of the breach of Afghanistan's sovereignty and dignity of Afghan culture, the U.S. would have been in hot waters. Since Taliban's coercive policies and action from 1996 till 2001 inflicted unprecedented pain upon Afghans, they did not fully stood by Taliban's stance and should mixed reaction to the U.S. intervention. The U.S. had to invest in uplifting the lives of Afghans, primarily on the troubled Eastern and South-Eastern region of the country to make sure that the population is not influenced by Taliban.⁶²³ For that purpose, the U.S. and allies had to ensure an uninterrupted economic assistance to Afghanistan, which indeed was a challenge for the donors countries. To overcome the economic challenges,

⁶¹⁹ Scheffer, "NATO on the Eve of the Riga Summit..." (2006): 4-7.

⁶²⁰ Ibid.

⁶²¹ Katzman. "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security..." (2017): 33-37.

⁶²² Lewis G Irwin, *Disjointed Ways, Disunified Means: Learning from America's Struggle to Build an Afghan Nation*. Strategic Studies Institute US Army War College, 2012: 26.

⁶²³ Jeff Gilmour, "The Recent US Intervention in Afghanistan." *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 18, no. 3 (2018): 13.

the Japan, Saudi Arabia and India pledged economic assistance in the reconstruction projects.⁶²⁴ The U.S. needed highways and local roads for better communication in operations against Taliban,⁶²⁵ which required both men and money. Taliban used to attack military convoys on highways, sometimes disconnecting cities by destruction of roads, causing the U.S. to compromise on strategic logistical communication across the country.⁶²⁶ The highways reconstruction required economic assistance, which the coalition partners, primarily the U.S. had to fulfill.

The U.S. was also strengthening the Afghan institutions, where nearly two-hundred American advisors were appointed.⁶²⁷ The advisors were meant to study and improve the efficiency of the respective institutions, thus requiring budget worth millions of dollars. The EU member countries assisted the U.S. by providing economic assistance in many projects. It would have been challenging for the U.S. to meet all economic requirements solely by its own funds. Despite the economic assistance from coalition partners and some regional countries, the U.S. had invested more than one trillion dollars, which surpasses the collective spending during marshal plan.⁶²⁸ More focus was given to the statebuilding projects, specifically the construction division by strengthening engineering personnel, equipping with advanced technology and increasing budget.⁶²⁹ Some of the construction projects at small scale included the construction of local roads, bridges, public buildings, and the irrigation system.

Another important recipient of the international funds was the local militias, which the U.S. used for small scale anti-Taliban operations as well as intelligence purposes.⁶³⁰ Some of the prominent militias in Pashtun dominated rural areas had been paid with monthly salaries to ensure their support in the U.S. operations against local insurgents.⁶³¹ In this context, the U.S. had clearly drawn a line towards the creation, financing and interaction with the militias of the tribal regions. Most of the weapons confiscated from the terrorists, during operations, were

⁶²⁴ Belasco, *Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan...* 2009. 44-61.

⁶²⁵ Peter Marsden, "Afghanistan: the reconstruction process." *International affairs* 79, no. 1 (2003): 104.

⁶²⁶ Lauren McNally, and Paul Bucala. *Taliban Resurgent: Threats to Afghanistan's Security*. Institute for the Study of War, 2015: 17.

⁶²⁷ Clayton. "Afghanistan: Background and US Policy." (2018): 56.

⁶²⁸ Anthony H Cordesman, *Afghanistan: A War in Crisis!*. Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 2019: 6.

⁶²⁹ Edwards, "State-building in Afghanistan..." (2010): 970-990

⁶³⁰ Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Hurray for militias? Not so fast: Lessons from the Afghan Local Police experience." *Small wars & insurgencies* 27, no. 2 (2016): 264.

⁶³¹ *Ibid*: 263.

also handed over to the local militias.⁶³² The U.S. had also supported the moderate Taliban to persuade them against the coalition forces operation against Taliban. Despite all the economic and logistical support to the tribal militias and moderate Taliban, the U.S. air raids against Taliban in settled areas resulted in sharp rejection from within population including the local district administrations. In an unpleasant surprised development many anti-American protests happened and guerilla attacks were carried out against the coalition forces.⁶³³ Such anti-American demonstrations and guerilla attacks proved that the economic assistance to the local militias could not improve situations in favor of the coalition forces, rather further complicates the situations through escalation of armed confrontation.

The increasing activities of Taliban and the failure of the U.S. policy of funding local militias and moderate Taliban, effectiveness of the local forces and expanding NATO operational bases, resulted in disagreements between the U.S. and western allies. There was a trust deficit among the partners, giving rise to situation similar in nature to the prisoner's dilemma.⁶³⁴ Another close non-NATO ally, Pakistan, also lost trust with the U.S. as the country itself had growing insecurity through attacks as a consequence of their support to the U.S. in operations enduring freedom.⁶³⁵ In 2008, the then US president, Barrack Obama, was dissatisfied with the role of Pakistan, in hints towards the safe havens in the tribal region of Pakistan.⁶³⁶ The drone attacks in both Afghanistan and tribal regions of Pakistan resulted in strife resistance in the form of demonstrations in the western societies, demanding the repatriation of their troops from Afghanistan. There was resistance in Pakistan as well, resulting in the hindrance of NATO supplies to Afghanistan, causing the U.S. and allies an economic cost of the logistical transportation. Keeping in mind the complexity of the Pak-Afghan border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, Barrack Obama announced AfPak strategy for both Afghanistan and Pakistan.⁶³⁷ Under the strategy, more troops were sent to Afghanistan, resulting in the highest number of international forces from 2009 to 2011.⁶³⁸ The increased

⁶³² Ali A Jalali, "Afghanistan: the anatomy of an ongoing conflict." *Parameters* 31, no. 1 (2001): 85.

⁶³³ Brown, "Hurray for militias..." (2016): 270.

⁶³⁴ Richard JH Gash, "Game theory: Can a round of poker solve Afghanistan's problems?." *Small Wars J* 5, no. 3 (2009): 1-4.

⁶³⁵ Sunil Dasgupta, *Regional politics and the prospects for stability in Afghanistan*. United States Institute of Peace, 2013: 5.

⁶³⁶ C. Christine Fair, "'Clear, Build, Hold, Transfer': Can Obama's Afghan Strategy Work?." *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 37, no. 3 (2010): 113-131.

⁶³⁷ Ahmad, "The US Af-Pak strategy..." (2010): 206.

⁶³⁸ Ibid: 195.

number of troops meant more economic burden of the war in Afghanistan and hence more challenges to the U.S. and coalition partners.

The initial unilateral approach from the U.S. vis-à-vis conflict in Afghanistan has undermined the possibility of an inclusive and consensual strategy. Though, different countries supported the U.S. in their operation in Afghanistan, due to the sensitivity of the threat of international terrorism, but they were not involved in the key decisions.

Fiscal Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
ESF	117	239	894	1280	473	1211	1400	2088	3346	2168	1837	1850	851	831	633	650	650**
DA	18.3	42.5	153	170	185	167	149	.4	.3	0	0	0					
GHCS	7.5	49.7	33.4	38	41.5	101	63	58.	92	70	0	0					
Refugee Accounts	160	61	63	47	42	54	44	77	82	65	99	13					
Food Aid	206	74	99	97	108	70	231	82	32	19	0.6	0					
IDA	197	86	11	4	0	0	17	27	30	66	61	14					
INCLE	60	0	220	709	216	252	308	484	589	400	324	6.1	225	250	185	160	95**
NADR	44	34.7	67	38.	18.2	37	27	49	58	69	65	54		43.5	38	37	37**
IMET	0.2	0.4	0.7	1.0	1.0	1.2	1.7	1.4	1.8	1.6	2	0.8	.51	1.05	.86	0.8	.8**
FMF	57	191	414	397	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0					
Other	33	23	36	18	0.2	0.1	21	5	5.8	7.4	8	0					
DOD—ASSF	0	0	0	995	1908	7406	2750	5607	9167	10619	9200	5124	4727	4109	3652	4262	4938**
DOD—CERP	0	0	40	136	215	209	488	551	1000	400	400	200	30	15		5	5**
Infrastructure Fund	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	299	400	325	199	0			
Business Task Force	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	14	59	239	242	179	64	5			
DOD—CN	0	0	72	225	108	291	193	230	392	376	421	372					
DOD—Other	7.5	165	285	540	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0					
DEA Counternarc	0.6	2.9	3.7	17	23.7	20	41	19	0	0	0	0					
Total U.S. Assistance	909	970	2392	4712	3339	9818	5732	9292	14854	14800	13058	8084	6097	5725	5165	4267*	

Note: [ESF = Economic Support Funds; DA = Development Assistance; GHCS = Global Health/Child Survival; FMF = Foreign Military Financing; NADR = Nonproliferation, Anti-Terrorism, De-Mining, and Related; IMET = International Military Education and Training; INCLE = International Narcotics and Law Enforcement; ASSF = Afghan Security Forces Funding; IDA = International Disaster Assistance.]

Figure 11: U.S. Economic Assistance to Afghanistan⁶³⁹

(Appropriations/allocations in \$ millions)

⁶³⁹ Katzman and Thomas. "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance..." (2017): 70.

5.1.5. Strategic Confusion in the U.S. Policy about talks with Taliban for Conflict Resolution

The U.S. had made a strategic mistake by ignoring Taliban in the Bonn process aimed for the establishment of democratic political structure in Afghanistan. The majority of Taliban are from the dominant Pashtun ethnicity, whose existence and relevance in politics cannot be negated. Hamid Karzai himself revealed in some interviews that some senior Taliban leaders approached him and wanted to negotiate a peace deal in December 2001. In response to a question by Voice of American (VOA) representative about a letter by Mullah Umar in 2001, Karzai responded as, “That was not a letter from late Mullah Omar. That was a letter from the council of ministers of Taliban, the government of Taliban. I was in a village north of Kandahar. That was the day when an American bomb had also wounded us all. I was being cleaned of the shrapnel when a Taliban delegation came to see me. They brought this letter with them which recognized the emergence of the interim government and said they were transferring power to that government.”⁶⁴⁰ They were ready to stop the military confrontation, recognize Karzai’s government after a power-sharing mechanism is agreed as per the local culture of Afghanistan. Since the Afghan government was not autonomous, the then U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld rejected any such deal and expressed commitment for military victory against Taliban. Thereafter, from 2002 to 2004, Taliban leaders continued to ask Karzai for their resolute commitment to the political settlement but no tangible response was given. Karzai communicated these proposals to U.S. officials but the U.S. ended up with the establishment of democratic government in Afghanistan with the total exclusion of Taliban leadership.

Present Obama too was convinced about the military solution to the Afghan conflict and heavily relied on war model to defeat Taliban. However, he offered peace talks to Taliban in parallel to the ongoing military confrontation. The peace talks between the U.S. and Taliban were not concluded yet president Obama announced troop’s drawdown by the end of December 2014. Taliban perceived this announcement as a victory signal and got rigid in the peace talks and finally withdrawn with no outcome. This resulted in further intensification of the military confrontation between the U.S. led forces and Taliban.

⁶⁴⁰ Hamid Karzai in an interview titled, “Ex-President Hamid Karzai Discusses Prospects for Afghan Peace” with Voice of America (VOA), at October 23, 2020. Accessed at: <https://www.voanews.com/south-central-asia/voa-exclusive-ex-president-hamid-karzai-discusses-prospects-afghan-peace>

When Ihsan Ghani (ex-head of NACTA in Pakistan) was asked about the question of a strategic confusion in the US strategies vis-a-vis conflict resolution in Afghanistan; he bluntly said that ‘the US had no clear strategy in Afghanistan’. It was like ‘one step forward two steps back’. ‘They became absentee landlords and left Afghanistan to warlords and paratroopers. He argued that ‘while Afghanistan was still unsettled, they went into Iraq and while Afghanistan and Iraq were unsettled, they went into Libya and Syria. Unlike Europe, US had no experience of dealing with colonies and colonized people, especially as diverse and polarized as the Afghans. Afghans governments (both Karzai and Ghani administrations) have been more of war machines than a governance machinery and the US neither had the intentions nor any clues on how to train them in the art of good governance.’ Towards the end of the U.S. intervention, while announcing withdrawal, they did not taken into account the possibility that the terrorist groups might resurge and pose threat to the regional and extra-regional countries. In response to the same question about the strategic confusion in the U.S. strategies, Ambassador (r) Syed Abrar Hussain was confident to say that the decision about the U.S. intervention was taken in a hurry and the policy makers lacked any long-term planning on how to deal with the conflict or Statebuilding in Afghanistan.⁶⁴¹

Mr Salman Javed responded to the same question and said that there was indeed a strategic confusion in the US policy towards conflict in Afghanistan. He argued that, “a high-powered discussion took place when President Donald trump was elected. As per reports and attendees of the session, the initial policy was to go hot against the Taliban and coerce Pakistan (this was discussed while they were trying to break a deal with Taliban in Doha). Some argued about the fallacy of this policy which never bore any fruits in last 15+ years. Later on, this agreed upon policy was changed towards policy of negotiations and pull out. This all happened within 72 hours. It shows the confusion at the highest policy level with regards to Afghanistan inside US policy circles.”

5.1.6. Taliban Resilience

After being denied participation in the political power-sharing and keeping them at bay from the negotiations regarding conflict resolution in Afghanistan, Taliban started regrouping in 2001, after an initial ouster from power. Despite many failures, losses and splits within the group, Taliban has become stronger and more influential every year from 2001 till date.

⁶⁴¹ In interview with Ambassador (r) Syed Abrar Hussain, a retired diplomat and a National Academic Council Staff Member at IPS, Served in Afghanistan.

Ironically, the number of combatants has increased despite low numbers in 2001 and heavy losses. They have succeeded in regaining control over many rural areas of Afghanistan and, consequently, asserting their influence and control over a much larger area. As influence in the country grew, the Taliban became tough on any peaceful settlement of the conflict in Afghanistan. In July 2015, Mullah Umar, founder of the leader of the death of the Taliban, was made public after hiding it to avoid possible disenchantment with the Taliban. The death of Mullah Umar marked the end of an era of strong and united Taliban, as many disagreements were reported about the future leadership. The announcement of Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansour was finally announced as the new leader of the Taliban in the shadow of controversy. The appointment of Mullah Mansur was not fully accepted by the influential members of the group, especially the sons of Mullah Umar. Some of the latter compromised and bowed to Mullah Mansur's leadership, perhaps to avoid a breakup within the group. However, some have gone their separate ways and reappeared with their own identities. For example, a prominent member of the Taliban, Mullah Muhammad Rasul Akhund, defected from the leading Taliban group and declared an independent group the Supreme Council of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. Although Mullah Mansour's period was short, as he was killed in a US drone attack in May 2016, he introduced the concept of peace in war and changed the Taliban's course of action. The end of the era of Mullah Umar is widely considered the beginning of dynamism within the Taliban.

Mullah Haybatullah Akhunzada was immediately appointed as the new Amir of the Taliban following the death of Mullah Mansour in May 2016. The appointment of Mullah Haibatullah was a positive development, as many of the sub-groups that had broken up due to disagreements with Mullah Mansoor were reunited with the main group. Rumors swirled around that Mullah Haibatullah would focus on strengthening the Taliban on the ground rather than peace talks; however, he proved all such rumors wrong and remained flexible on the peace effort. In the recent past, the Taliban were considered quite open to all possible peace efforts and hence participated in the Moscow Peace Conference, the Islamabad meetings and, most importantly, the Doha peace talks. In an unregistered anonymous interview, the Taliban leader said the Taliban have always sought direct talks with the United States for a peaceful settlement of the dispute, but they have rejected such proposals, relying on military means to defeat the group. The Afghan government was reluctant to enter into any peace talks with the Taliban and relied on US coercive measures to end the conflict militarily. This pretext shows that the general strategy and behavior of the Taliban has evolved and changed over time, showing the

prospects for success in a peaceful solution to the conflict in Afghanistan. Taliban resurgence was facilitated by many factors of which geographic complexities and guerilla warfare tactics remained an important factor.

5.1.6.1. Geographic Complexities and Guerilla Warfare

Geography plays a crucial role in either stability or instability of all countries in the world. Afghanistan's geography is a two-way cause for the failure of any peacebuilding efforts in Afghanistan; first, the strategic location of the country provides an attraction to the world powers for intervention and secondly, the difficult mountainous terrain provides favorable circumstances for guerrilla warfare. Afghan Taliban had been involved in guerilla warfare against the international forces, thus making it difficult for the U.S and allies to have a complete military victory. Less than five percent of the total Afghanistan's territory is cultivable land, while the three-quarters territory of Afghanistan is covered by the mountain ranges. The mountainous ranges divide the country into different regions, which makes difficult for the administrative bodies to better control and govern all areas. The less control of the previous U.S. backed Afghan government administrative bodies over difficult mountainous terrain provided an opportunity for the non-state actors to establish their influence in those particular regions. The varying insurgencies in Afghanistan are sustaining the operations of international interveners due to the safe heavens in the difficult regions of the country. The international forces were not able to understand the complicated geography of Afghanistan, thus unable to effectively combat the insurgent groups.⁶⁴²

Snowfall in different mountainous ranges of Afghanistan further makes communication difficult. The challenges in accessing all regions within the country allow the non-state actors to enjoy reasonably safe zones for the preparation of terrorist activities. Afghanistan also has difficult borders with Pakistan, which was a challenge for both countries to effectively monitor the cross-border movements. These geographical complexities provided Taliban favourable conditions for guerilla warfare in Afghanistan.⁶⁴³ Guerrilla warfare had always been a better choice by a weaker party against a much stronger and well-equipped opponent. This kind of

⁶⁴² Ali Karimi, "Street fights: The commodification of place names in post-Taliban Kabul city." *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 106, no. 3 (2016): 742.

⁶⁴³ Thomas H Johnson and M. Chris Mason. "Understanding Taliban and insurgency in Afghanistan." *Orbis* 51, no. 1 (2007): 71-89.

warfare in Afghanistan did not required Taliban to organize large militant groups, rather small reliable combatant groups to carry out independent guerilla attacks.

5.1.7. Withdrawal Announcement and subsequent Surge in Troops as Bluffing Strategy

Both Obama and Donald Trump used bluffing strategy in their policies towards Afghan conflict to know the intentions of Taliban and get possible leverage against Taliban in the outcome of conflict. The Obama's AfPak strategy developed an uncertain future of the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan.⁶⁴⁴ The U.S. ignored public opinion about the repatriation of international troops from Afghanistan. In a survey back in the spring of 2012, sixty percent of Americans believed that the war in Afghanistan was not worth the money spent on it, and more than half supported the unconditional withdrawal of U.S. troops, regardless of the ongoing military confrontation and degree of combat training of the Afghan army.⁶⁴⁵ Contrary to the public opinion, instead the U.S. further intensified battle with Taliban. This time, however, the anti-Taliban operations were different in a way that the local Afghan security forces were fighting at the frontline, while the international forces were providing support in terms of training, intelligence information and aerial assistance to the ground forces.⁶⁴⁶ The local Afghan security forces were not equipped in full capacity to tackle with Taliban and hence huge losses were caused to the Afghan forces.⁶⁴⁷ On premise of the growing deterioration in the socio-political and security situation in Afghanistan, the local Afghan government and the U.S. officials developed distrust over policy orientations.⁶⁴⁸ The consistent increase in the number of casualties at all levels caused psychological fatigue among the security forces as well as civilian population. Not only the civil society in Afghanistan was protesting against an unending war in Afghanistan, the civil society organizations in western world too was putting pressure on their respective governments for an end to the war in Afghanistan.⁶⁴⁹ This led to the fact that the latter are increasingly turning their weapons against

⁶⁴⁴ Ahmad, "The US Af-Pak strategy..." (2010): 205.

⁶⁴⁵ Elisabeth Bumiller and Allison Kopicki., *Support in U.S. for Afghan War Drops Sharply, Poll Finds*. [online] Nytimes.com, (2012). Available at: <<https://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/27/world/asia/support-for-afghan-war-falls-in-us-poll-finds.html>> [Accessed 27 October 2020].

⁶⁴⁶ Rodriguez, "Leaving Afghanistan to the Afghans..." (2011): 49.

⁶⁴⁷ Anthony H Cordesman, Adam Mausner, and David Kasten. *Winning in Afghanistan: Creating effective Afghan security forces*. CSIS, 2009: 104.

⁶⁴⁸ Stephen Hadley, and John Podesta. "The right way out of Afghanistan: leaving behind a State that can govern." *Foreign Affairs*. 91 (2012): 41.

⁶⁴⁹ Jude Howell, and Jeremy Lind. "Manufacturing civil society and the limits of legitimacy: Aid, security and civil society after 9/11 in Afghanistan." *The European Journal of Development Research* 21, no. 5 (2009): 718-736.

NATO members. The U.S. democratization project under the statebuilding mission was also severely criticized. It was considered as an extra-engagement in Afghanistan ignoring the customs of local Afghan culture.⁶⁵⁰

President, Barack Obama announced the gradual withdrawal of the U.S. forces from Afghanistan from 2011 to 2014.⁶⁵¹ In 2011, the intensity of war in Afghanistan was very high, as Taliban were never strong as of now from 2001.⁶⁵² Despite casualties among Taliban, their manpower kept on increasing with every passing year. This shows that the ordinary Afghans were joining them over the course of time.⁶⁵³ Ignoring the severity of security situation on ground, the hasty withdrawal plan by Barack Obama was a sign of zero-sum outcome for Taliban. Taliban possibly perceived as if they are in a way of defeating the U.S. and compelling them to withdraw on the patterns of the Soviet Union's withdrawal of 1989. The only promising thing to Taliban was to further intensify attacks against the international and local forces to ensure a zero-sum outcome of war in Afghanistan.⁶⁵⁴

In January 2010, a high level conference on Afghanistan was held in London, approving the new policy for Afghanistan, focusing on the shift of security responsibilities and subsequent phased withdrawal plan.⁶⁵⁵ Along the withdrawal plan, the main focus of the U.S. strategy was to establish long-term counterterrorism cooperation agreements with the Afghan government to ensure that Afghanistan will not breed terrorism, substantially threatening the national security of the U.S..⁶⁵⁶ Meanwhile, some efforts were made in 2012 to engage in dialogue with Taliban but no tangible outcome was made as Taliban were expecting a zero-sum outcome.⁶⁵⁷ The U.S. was also trying to completely shift the security arrangements to local Afghan security forces before the complete withdrawal in 2014.⁶⁵⁸ In April 2010, NATO's foreign minister's meeting was held in Tallinn to develop the military-political framework for the transition of security responsibilities.⁶⁵⁹ In July of the same year, the transitional criterion was approved in another

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁵¹ Ahmad, "The US Af-Pak strategy..." (2010): 192.

⁶⁵² William Maley, "Afghanistan in 2011: Positioning for an uncertain future." *Asian Survey* 52, no. 1 (2012): 88-99.

⁶⁵³ Katzman. "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban governance..." (2010): 56.

⁶⁵⁴ Ishaque, Qumber, and Shah. "Prospects of Enduring Peace..." (2017): 147.

⁶⁵⁵ Jesse Paul Lehrke, "The London conference on Afghanistan: a new strategy in need of further specification." *Center for Applied Policy Research · Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich* (2010): 4

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid: 1.

⁶⁵⁷ Grossman, "Lessons from Negotiating..." (2013). 2.

⁶⁵⁸ Giustozzi. "Auxiliary force or national army? 45-67.

⁶⁵⁹ Ved, Mahendra. "Af-Pak and India's Options in Afghanistan." *Strategic Analysis* 34, no. 5 (2010): 684.

conference at Kabul by the international community. To supervise the transitional process, a Joint Afghan-NATO Inteqal Borad (JANB) was established under the control of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.⁶⁶⁰ Another important summit took place in November 2010 in Lisbon, where the beginning of the transitional period (2011-2014) was announced.⁶⁶¹ In the same summit a declaration on the long term cooperation and partnership with Afghanistan's government was passed. The declaration document noted that the Afghanistan is strategically important and the stability and prosperity in Afghanistan is pivotal for the entire world, particularly the interests of the Western countries; therefore, a long-term partnership and support to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is inevitable.⁶⁶² In pursuance of the withdrawal plan, in 2010, the Dutch begun the withdrawal process, and France too was committed to completely withdraw the French contingent by the end of 2012.⁶⁶³ In these hasty withdrawals of the international forces the security risks at ground were ignored and ill-equipped local Afghan forces were exposed to the mightier Taliban's uprising. When all of these developments were taking place with respect to the withdrawal of international forces by the end of 2014, Taliban increased guerilla attacks throughout the country. They took control of some districts from the Afghan government, as the local Afghan forces were less effective in anti-Taliban operations. The August 5, 2014 attack, carried by Taliban against the U.S. forces which killed Major General Harold J. Greene of the U.S. Army, and German brigadier general putted more pressure on the U.S. to reconsider their decision of complete withdrawal from Afghanistan.⁶⁶⁴ This was the first time in forty years of the U.S. war history in which major general rank officer was killed. So, the hasty troop's withdrawal announcement provided an impetus to Taliban's attacks on premise of the possibility of a zero-sum outcome of war for Taliban.

In May 2012, President Barrack Obama had a visit to Afghanistan to sign a strategic agreement with his Afghan counterpart, Hamid Karzai about the planned withdrawal of the U.S. forces.⁶⁶⁵ The document lacked in many details about many important priorities of the U.S. administration with respect to the post-2014 responsibilities. Afghan government wanted a comprehensive agreement on the style of the earlier US commitments both in Operation

⁶⁶⁰ Claire Taylor, *Afghanistan: The Timetable for Security Transition*. House of Commons Library, 2011: 8.

⁶⁶¹ *Ibid*: 7-9.

⁶⁶² *Ibid*.

⁶⁶³ *Ibid*: 23.

⁶⁶⁴ Katzman, and Layton Thomas. "AFGHANISTAN: POST-TALIBAN GOVERNANCE... (2017): 22.

⁶⁶⁵ Paul D Miller, "The US and Afghanistan after 2014." *Survival Global Politics and Strategy* 55, no. 1 (2013): 87.

Enduring Freedom and the making of Karzai administration.⁶⁶⁶ There were no details about the kind and nature of political orientation of the U.S. towards Kabul. Moreover, there were no provision related to the strengthening of democratic principles and human rights in Afghanistan.⁶⁶⁷ The incomprehensiveness led to the resistance from Hamid Karzai to agree to the approval of the proposed agreement.⁶⁶⁸

Similar agreement were already signed for a long-term cooperation from Germany, France, Turkey, Italy and some other NATO member countries with Afghanistan.⁶⁶⁹ They reassured the local administration of their support during and after the transitional period in line with the earlier commitments. The agreement with Germany involved interaction in matters of security, domestic and foreign policy and the implementation of various socio-economic projects. Germany also committed to pay special attention to the law enforcement agencies, focusing on police.⁶⁷⁰ Overall, NATO intended to pay \$ 200 million annually to Afghanistan.⁶⁷¹ At the Chicago summit, the Alliance's commitments arising from the Lisbon Declaration were summarized and an assurance of NATO's determination to firmly implement them after the transitional period was confirmed. This includes maintaining tight patronage over the Afghan National Army through the NATO Training Mission in Afghanistan (NTM-A).⁶⁷² Despite these agreements, the uncertainty of the allies was evidenced by the envisaged further increase in the number of its personnel to nearly 350 thousand people with an annual budget of \$ 4.1 billion; because of the increasing attacks from Taliban.⁶⁷³ So, the troop's withdrawal plan did not materialized due to the worsening security conditions on ground.

5.1.7.1. Trump Miscalculated Policy

After several months of consultations, President Donald Trump announced in a speech to the troops at Fort Myer (Arlington, Virginia) on August 21, 2017, the launch of a new policy

⁶⁶⁶ Ankit Panda, "August 2014: The New Deadline for the US-Afghanistan Bilateral Security Agreement." *The Diplomat* 14 (2014).

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁸ Khatera Alizada, "Afghanistan and US bargaining over Bilateral Security Agreement." *Virginia Modeling, Analysis and Simulation Center* (2014): 15.

⁶⁶⁹ Maxime HA Larivé, "From speeches to actions: EU involvement in the war in Afghanistan through the EUPOL Afghanistan mission." *European security* 21, no. 2 (2012): 191.

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid: 197.

⁶⁷¹ Oktay F Tanrisever, ed. *Afghanistan and Central Asia: NATO's Role in Regional Security since 9/11*. Vol. 106. IOS Press, 2013: 161.

⁶⁷² Trine Flockhart, "NATO's Training Mission in Afghanistan: A 'Smart Approach'to Change?." *Dynamic Change* 11, no. 4 (2012): 56.

⁶⁷³ Richard Rupp, *NATO after 9/11: an alliance in continuing decline*. Springer, 2016: 255-265.

‘South Asia policy’, focusing on Afghanistan. Breaking with his predecessor's policy of a gradual military withdrawal from Afghanistan, Trump reaffirmed Washington's commitment to the Training, Advisory, and Assistance (TAA) mission, and its counterterrorism.⁶⁷⁴ The new U.S. strategy included the deployment of several thousand more troops, a relaxation of U.S. forces' rules of engagement, and increased pressure on neighboring countries to contribute to the U.S. efforts for the stabilization of Afghanistan.⁶⁷⁵ In addition, setting aside the Obama administration's strategy of withdrawing without considering the nature of conflict and ground realities, the new strategy indicates that future military withdrawals will henceforth depend on conditions on the ground and without any prior announcement vis-à-vis policy implementation.⁶⁷⁶ In addition to these broad strategic reorganizations, the new South Asia policy did not include much detail, noting that an advanced plan of action would caution Taliban. While the new strategy provides for less political commitment by the U.S. to the Afghan governance component, it clearly reinforces Washington's commitment to military action, emphasizing again on the war model.⁶⁷⁷ More specifically, it was based on the assumption that it would be possible to bring Taliban to negotiate a political agreement by controlling them on the battlefield. In this perspective, President Donald Trump, once again stressed upon burden-sharing, called on NATO member countries and NATO partners to model their attitude on that of the U.S. by reviewing troops and funding up war in Afghanistan.⁶⁷⁸

At large the South Asian policy of Trump administration policy was showing a significant evolution. The administration had tried exerting strong pressure on key actors for general security in the region, who could have a decisive influence on the conditions prevailing on the Afghan battlefield. This broader regional approach was critical in that it was one of the key elements from which the outlines of the Trump administration's approach to Afghanistan will be drawn. NATO members and partners agreed at the Warsaw Summit in 2016 to extend the Resolute Support Mission (RSM) beyond 2016, maintaining funds for the ANDSF until the end of 2020, and to strengthen political and practical support for Afghan governmental institutions.⁶⁷⁹ Officially announced in the Warsaw Summit Declaration on Afghanistan, these

⁶⁷⁴ Sharma, Purnima. “Security Challenges in Afghanistan, POST-2014.” *Himalayan and Central Asian Studies* 23, no. 3/4 (2019): 83.

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid: 84.

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid: 83.

⁶⁷⁷ Antonio Giustozzi, *Decoding the new Taliban: insights from the Afghan field*. Hurst Publishers, 2009: 294.

⁶⁷⁸ Zannella, “An Analysis of Burden Sharing...” (2020): 5.

⁶⁷⁹ Pavel FAUS, “NATO Warsaw Summit 2016 The Dynamics of Alliance’s Strategic Consensus.” PhD diss., Masarykova univerzita, Fakulta sociálních studií, 2018: 38.

commitments were reaffirmed at the meeting of NATO Heads of State and Government held in Brussels on May 2017.⁶⁸⁰ The objectives of the RSM have not changed: first, to ensure that Afghanistan does not become a sanctuary for terrorist forces with the means to export violence and instability, and secondly, create conditions and mobilize support for Afghanistan to maintain its security, governance and long-term development.

As per the policy, to achieve these objectives, the RSM had committed to train, advise and assist the ANDSF, the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of the Interior by now focusing on the more tactical part of these tasks. NATO and partner forces were to work closely with a range of elements of the ANDSF including police, air force, special operations forces and conventional ground forces, from regional and functional commands in strategically important cities of Afghanistan. In order to sustain the results achieved in the training of Afghan Special Forces by their counterparts in the U.S., the new U.S. policy towards Afghanistan and South Asia provided for the dispatch of the U.S. advisers and additional allies, up to the “battalion” and “brigade” levels of Afghan conventional forces.⁶⁸¹ Until then, with few exceptions, these advisers were present only at the corps level. The forces were expected to use some combat enablers to address the capacity gaps of the ANDSF - intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR), artillery systems, airborne fire support, and logistical support. It should also be noted that the modification of the rules of engagement applying to the U.S. forces under the new policy towards Afghanistan and South Asia had the effect of removing certain reservations that limited fire support and air support to close operations against Taliban fighters.⁶⁸² This allowed the U.S. forces operating on Resolute Support missions to significantly scale up their air operations.⁶⁸³

The Trump administration's review of the Afghanistan and South Asia policy resulted in a significant increase in the force levels of the RSM. Since the release of the new strategy, the U.S. had deployed an additional 3,000 troops in Afghanistan, of which 2,400 have been deployed to the NATO SMR.⁶⁸⁴ It was also planned to allocate, as of February 2018, an

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid: 32.

⁶⁸¹ Luke Coffey, “Brussels Mini-Summit: The US and NATO Must Remain Committed to Afghanistan.” *The Heritage Foundation*, No. 4703, 2017: 2.

⁶⁸² Aaron Mehta, “Mattis reveals new ‘rules of engagement’ for US forces in Afghanistan.” *Military Times*, (October 3, 2017). Accessed at: <https://www.militarytimes.com/flashpoints/2017/10/03/mattis-reveals-new-rules-of-engagement/> (Accessed on November 2, 2020).

⁶⁸³ Peter Dombrowski, and Simon Reich. “Beyond the tweets: President Trump's continuity in military operations.” *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (2018): 56-81.

⁶⁸⁴ Clayton. “Afghanistan: Background and US Policy.” (2018): 9-13.

additional 1,000 troops to the newly created Security Assistance Brigades (SFAB), specifically trained to perform a combat advisory role, the SFAB will coach, advise and assist conventional ANDSFs at the battalion level, however, the start of the peace process in Doha had somewhat stalled that process.⁶⁸⁵







































	Albania	135		Germany	1,300		Poland	354
	Armenia	121		Greece	11		Portugal	214
	Australia	300		Hungary	93		Romania	797
	Austria	16		Italy	895		Slovakia	33
	Azerbaijan	120		Latvia	40		Slovenia	8
	Belgium	83		Lithuania	50		Spain	66
	Bosnia-Herzegovina	68		Luxembourg	2		Sweden	25
	Bulgaria	159		Mongolia	233		Turkey	579
	Croatia	110		Montenegro	27		Ukraine	21
	Czech Republic	334		Netherlands	160		United Kingdom	1,100
	Denmark	155		New Zealand	13		United States	8,475
	Estonia	42		North Macedonia	47			
	Finland	67		Norway	54			
	Georgia	871						
							Total	17,178

Figure 12: Resolute Support Mission Troops Contributing Nations⁶⁸⁶

Despite distrust and cleavages in the coalition, President Donald Trump's appeal to follow suit in the U.S. had been followed up. In the wake NATO defense ministers meeting in November 2017, Secretary-General Stoltenberg announced that the NATO mission in Afghanistan would increase from 13,000 to 16,000 troops.⁶⁸⁷ For example, the German Defense Minister latter announced that his country wanted to bring German forces in Afghanistan from 980 to 1,300 men.⁶⁸⁸ Montenegro, the last country to join NATO, has also pledged to increase the level of its troops by around 50%.⁶⁸⁹ Taking into account the reinforcements already on the ground, the RSM now had 15,046 men deployed by 39 countries (26 NATO members and 13 operational partners).⁶⁹⁰ With 8,475 men, the U.S. remained by far

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁶ Department of Defense (DoD) Report, "Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan" in Report to Congress, DoD: 2019: 8.

⁶⁸⁷ Wolfgang Hellmich, *Afghanistan: The Nexus of Local and Regional Security*. NATO Parliamentary Assembly, 2018: 3.

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid.

the largest troop-contributing country. The U.S. troops, in addition to participating in the NATO-led RSM, were also conducting air and counter-terrorism operations, bringing the total to 14,000. While welcoming the arrival of these reinforcements on the ground, the U.S. officials had indicated that international commitments are still not fully fulfilled and cautioned against these shortcomings in troops that could, according to them, compromise the success of the mission as well as the effective protection of the forces.⁶⁹¹ This shows the level of complexity of the security environment on ground; despite surge in troops from all coalition partners, the need for additional forces was felt to avoid possible attacks from Taliban. This means that the earlier troop's withdrawal policy was contrary to the ground realities and was meant for a unilateral withdrawal, giving a clear perception of a zero-sum outcome in favor of Taliban.

The total change in the U.S. policy of again relying on coercive/ war model approach against Taliban, the lead responsibility of the local Afghan security forces was shared by the international forces. In November 2017, General John W. Nicholson, commander of the RSM, said that the situation now tilted in favor of the ANSDF and that it had clearly emerged from the impasse.⁶⁹² In early 2017, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani began implementing what is known as the "ANSDF Roadmap", the strategy to reform the ANSDF over a four-year period. This plan was to 1) strengthen combat capabilities, particularly those of the air force and special operations; 2) to improve command capabilities; 3) to strengthen the unity of effort and command between the ministries of defense and the interior, and 4) to fight corruption within all Afghan security forces.⁶⁹³ These measures aim to bring maximum number of local Afghan population under government control and to force Taliban to sit at the negotiating table by 2020. These measures by the U.S. administration were clearly a bluffing strategy as they had principally decided to exit Afghanistan but wanted to pressurize Taliban through signaling a longer stay and reliance on the coercive approach to deal with the Taliban uprising. Despite such measure by the U.S. and Afghan president, the local population had distrust towards the local government and international forces, who failed to safeguard the lives and property of common Afghans. Seeing the increasing strength of the group, a large number of local Afghans developed sympathies towards Taliban. Thus, the overall reforms and restructuring of the administrative and governance measure could not prove much effective with respect to the

⁶⁹¹ Ibid: 4.

⁶⁹² Wolfgang Hellmich, "Special Report of Defence and Security Committee on Afghanistan" *NATO Parliamentary Assembly*, 164 DSC 17 E BIS (2017): 2.

⁶⁹³ Hellmich, *Afghanistan: The Nexus of Local...* (2018): 4.

minimization of violence and protection of collateral damages to the private property of common Afghans.

Donald Trump's initial calculations about the use of military force against Taliban proved short lived as the U.S. administration started to deal with Taliban diplomatically. However, one of the advantages of Donald Trump's initial coercive approach was that Taliban's optimism for a zero-sum outcome faded and they agreed on a non-zero-sum outcome of the conflict in Afghanistan, through active negotiations with the U.S. and other actors involved. Despite showing optimism about the peace talks with the U.S., Taliban too played bluffing game and signed the deal and subsequently toppling Ashraf Ghani, thus enjoying a zero-sum outcome. The sustainability of this zero-sum game is yet to be seen as the country after the take-over is facing immense economic challenges, posed by the passive diplomatic response from the U.S. This shows that the U.S., despite exiting the country, is still a relevant actor in the stabilization process in Afghanistan.

5.1.7.2. Taliban Uprising and Emergence of ISIS

The escalation of violence through renewed resistance of Taliban and some other terrorist groups; e.g. ISIS, has brought the Afghanistan situation at the forefront of international politics.⁶⁹⁴ The lack of coordination among coalition partners and institutional corruption in the local Afghan government provided tactical and strategic gains to Taliban, thus altering the balance of power on ground.⁶⁹⁵ The international coalition partners turned defensive to avoid any casualties and hence brought the local Afghan security forces at the forefront in war with Taliban. The air support from the U.S. was also limited in operations due to the collateral damages and civilian deaths. Moreover, Obama's troops withdrawal announcement without any conclusive solution to the ongoing conflict further intensified military attacks from Taliban, who were expecting a total military victory (zero-sum outcome) against the U.S. and allies.

After Donald Trump became president of the U.S., the tensions among the U.S. and coalition partners further widened. President Trump deviated from its electoral promise of withdrawing the U.S. troops and in August 2017, reported that the U.S. action in support of the ANDSFs and Washington's counterterrorism mission in the country was supposedly guided by

⁶⁹⁴ Perlinger, and Sweeney. "United States–Taliban, al-Qaeda, and ISIS..." 2018.

⁶⁹⁵ Giustozzi, "Bureaucratic façade and political realities..." (2008): 169-192.

ground realities. At the same time, Donald Trump emphasized on the need for more assistance from the coalition partners in operations in Afghanistan. In this regard, the U.S. tried to hide information about the possible future actions vis-à-vis conflict resolution in Afghanistan. The U.S. actually was committed to the withdrawal of the U.S. forces from Afghanistan and to save billions of the U.S. dollars from an unending war. The Trump administration had also made it clear that its participation in Afghanistan would be dictated by its interpretation of the Alliance's burden-sharing concept - in other words, it expected its allies to do more to help NATO achieve its broader mission in Afghanistan, stabilize that country so that it is no longer the breeding ground for international terrorism.⁶⁹⁶ One of the reasons for refocusing on the “War Model” to deal with Taliban’s uprising was the constant rise in insecurity in Afghanistan.⁶⁹⁷ The new rules of engagement allowed international forces to work more closely with the ANDSFs in establishing a more effective combat force in theater. In addition, it would appear that the pressure exerted by the international community was now prompting the Afghan government to increase its efforts to eradicate corruption in the country's security institutions. For its part, the Trump administration eased restrictions on combat forces on the ground, resulting in a doubling of airstrikes in 2017 under the U.S. command.⁶⁹⁸

The U.S. was also putting increasing pressure on states in the region to make a vital contribution to future peace and security in Afghanistan. This was particularly the case for Pakistan, which was considered to be not doing enough to restrict the freedom of action of the Afghan Taliban and other international terrorist groups in its border areas with Afghanistan.⁶⁹⁹ Pakistan in response termed the ‘do more’ policy of the U.S. baseless and without any empirical evidence.

Conclusion

The U.S. was able to ouster Taliban regime within weeks. This was possible due to the ground support of the northern alliance and Taliban incapacity to resist airstrikes. The U.S. secretary of defense, Donald Rumsfeld declared victory over Taliban on May 1, 2003, by

⁶⁹⁶ Anthony Zannella, “An Analysis of Burden Sharing in NATO and the Problem of Free Riding.” *Political Analysis* 21, no. 1 (2020): 5.

⁶⁹⁷ Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and laptop...*, 2008.

⁶⁹⁸ Benjamin Schreer, and Thomas Waldman. “Strategy on autopilot: Resolute support and the continuing failure of Western strategy in Afghanistan.” In *Terrorism and insurgency in Asia: a contemporary examination of terrorist and separatist movements*, pp. 58-71. Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2019.

⁶⁹⁹ Sharifullah Dorani, *America in Afghanistan: Foreign Policy and Decision Making from Bush to Obama to Trump*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019: 270-301.

calling it 'mission accomplished'. The optimistic view of the operational success resulted in the deviation of the U.S. strategic priorities. The U.S. failed to grasp the opportunity of Taliban vulnerability for a better agreement with respect to governance and power-sharing in Afghanistan. The optimistic view of the operational success and failure to grasp a deal with Taliban due to expectations for a zero-sum outcome, led to the regrouping and resurgence of Taliban. The U.S. had always played a dominant role in the decision making vis-à-vis conflict in Afghanistan and hence pursued for unilateral decision making. The subsequent of expansion of the U.S. mission in Afghanistan posed financial challenges and disagreements within the U.S. coalition partners. The U.S. remained skeptical of the local, regional and extra-regional actors in Afghanistan. The donor countries had reservations over the superfluous spending on war with negligible outcomes. Russia, China and Pakistan were seen suspiciously over the likely support to Taliban. The local government in Afghanistan had stories of corruption and bad governance. Nearly all stakeholders had been involved in the prisoner's dilemma and this trust deficit proved counterproductive and a leading cause for the failure of the U.S. strategies in Afghanistan. Moreover, the U.S. ignored local political culture and socio-economic ethos of Afghanistan, leading them to invest in an unsustainable centralized democratic political system. With the exclusion of key stakeholders, the democratic setup was not a true representative of ethnicities in the country. The corruption in public welfare and statebuilding programs coupled with increasing military confrontation and collateral damages turned public sympathies towards Taliban. Taliban were already enjoying safe sanctuaries in the difficult geographic terrain, further received logistical support from within the civilian population. The preceding causes of the U.S. failure in Afghanistan highlights a strategic confusion in the U.S. policy about engaging in talks with Taliban which resulted in over-reliance on force to deal with the conflict, which was contrary to the socio-economic and political ethos of Afghanistan.

Findings and Conclusion

Afghanistan has hardly existed as a stable country. Throughout its history, the country had faced international interventions and the civil wars. Various countries and factions continued to struggle for power, as a result of which a strong central government could not be established in Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, statebuilding experiments based on religious, Western and secular models have failed. There are many reasons for failures in conflict resolution through Weberian democratic model and statebuilding projects. The Conflict initiation in the pretext of the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. intervention focused on managing the conflict using a variety of strategies but failed to achieve the desired goals. The U.S. had given much importance to the strategy of statebuilding and establishment of a strong centralized government as means for conflict resolution. Not understanding the nature of Afghan society and domestic politics, the U.S. was unable to create a stable and strong executive branch in the centre. It reflects constitutional restrictions, stagnation in political parties, limited power of any of the local groups, and much more from the social environment, which forms the basis for resolving political issues. The changes in the U.S. strategies also limit the resolution of the country's core problems, such as the economy and security. The state's over-reliance on aid from international donors had turned Afghanistan into a rentier state with a compromised sovereignty from 2001 till 2020.

In the second half of the 1990s, the U.S. policy in Afghanistan was not based on significant strategic interests related to energy security. Then, the energy projects of American companies and the fight against al-Qaeda only for a short time attracted the attention of the White House administration to the situation in Afghanistan. Though, the issues of relations with Pakistan and the Indo-Pakistan confrontation, the U.S. conflict with Iran, the strengthening of the independence of the Central Asian republics from Russia invariably deserved more attention. The failure of the U.S. to recognize that Afghanistan had become a link in solving these problems had prevented Washington from developing a coherent strategy for the situation in the country. As a result of this policy, Pakistan seized the initiative in Afghan affairs and contributed to the rise to power of Taliban. The incident of September 11, 2001, led to a radical and rapid overhaul of the U.S. policy in Afghanistan. American officials were irritated by Taliban's refusal to extradite Osama bin Laden. Previous diplomatic and military experience in the country was dismissed as outdated. The new doctrine of the “war on terror” was based on the idea of “regime change” and supplemented by the concept of

“democratization”. The new doctrine was even less suited to the demands of ground realities and local Afghans in Afghanistan and ultimately hurt the U.S. interests.

Despite all the different rhetoric based on self-deception, the West had never really had a coherent strategy and policy for building a democratic state. There existed a strategic confusion in the U.S. strategy whether to talk or not to talk with the Afghan Taliban. The U.S. did not understand the nature of war in Afghanistan from the beginning. At first, it believed that they could ignore the immense problems and deal with a few thousand militants, which led to the U.S. aspirations for a zero-sum outcome with a total defeat of Taliban and subsequent installation of a U.S. friendly government in Kabul. After all, initially, Taliban had been expelled from the capital, and the Afghans were grateful at first. As the security situation worsened, the U.S. and NATO tried to suppress it through an overemphasis on military power. When this approach was unsuccessful, it was in 2009/2010 that the U.S. opted for a regional approach by linking Afghanistan’s security with neighboring countries. Although this represented some progress conceptually, it had at least been understood that a zero-sum outcome is unlikely, as the war could not be won simply by maximising and optimising the use of force. However, the political and military leaders failed to free themselves from the misconceptions and continued to rely on coercive measures with some peace-making efforts through negotiations. However, the simplistic understanding of the Afghan conflict and the consequent search for a simple solution did not work. Local field commanders, drug lords, tribal leaders, and other influential people control many government agencies, provinces, and even central government roles. They are chiefs of police or governors and follow a personnel policy that prefers their clientele and marginalises opponents. Therefore, central government agencies, especially police and judicial authorities, are considered a more serious nuisance in the country as compared to other insurgent or criminal groups. When NATO supports such semi-private and problematic bodies within the state, it becomes unlikely for the local Afghan to buy the slogan of the U.S. being a liberator and guarantor of security in Afghanistan.

Furthermore, the other party is not merely Taliban, but in many provinces, tensions and violent clashes had occurred for decades, involving numerous social groups. Tribal or sub-tribal, ethnic, social, and other groups compete for scarce resources: land, water, opium, state offices, opportunities for corruption, and more. Due to the rural state’s weakness and lamentable nature, local communities take control of production or the maintenance of “security” against both rival groups and predatory “state organs.” In such cases, local

communities have often been discredited as Taliban and were attacked by the NATO forces, resulting in further strengthening of Taliban's supporters. Often, local communities feared that government agencies or NATO forces might oppose their poppy fields or other interests or favour local competitors, appealed to Taliban or other armed groups for help. Simultaneously, the cultivation areas and the interests of the communities related to the government remained intact.

After the overthrow of Taliban, the U.S. strategic challenge remained to support the development of a legitimate state and a functioning pro-U.S. administration in Kabul. In the early years after intervention, there has probably been a possibility. Yet instead of removing the worst and most hateful warlords, war criminals, and drug traffickers from power and bringing them to justice, the West tried to buy their support by giving them key positions, weapons, and money. These American policies ruined all efforts to build a new post-Taliban state that could have earned the trust of the people. More convincingly, NATO and Western countries, including civilian actors, could have achieved such success. In any case, however, the massive emphasis on security at the cost of building a legitimate state undermined that opportunity. Even Clausewitz has pointed out that one must understand the nature of war to decide a better strategy. The war in Afghanistan was essentially a political dispute, so NATO's overwhelming military superiority over Taliban was not crucial to the war. The war was destined to finally end in the favor of the one, whoever is accepted by the population as the lesser evil.

The U.S. employed various strategies; however, experience from the U.S. and coalition partner countries operations had shown that neither of the strategies provided a consolidated framework for conflict resolution in Afghanistan. The total military escalation against Taliban and Al Qaeda took place with the expansion of ISAF, the subsequent transfer of command to NATO, and a significant increase in the international military contingent. The state building efforts were carried out with different economic reconstruction programs with the assistance of international donors. Afghanistan's political system was also changed along the lines of the Western democratic model. Given the increasing complexity of the security conditions on the ground, plans to withdraw troops, by December 2014, were also presented but could not materialize. The security burden was shared with local Afghan forces through counter-terrorism associations to reduce casualties among international forces, but no reduction in violence was achieved. Finally, peace negotiations with Taliban were started in the hope of

ending the conflict and guaranteeing the repatriation of international forces from Afghanistan. So far, no strategy has been fully successful with regard to conflict resolution in Afghanistan, except the repatriation of the international troops by allowing Taliban to take an unchallenged control of the government.

One of the reasons of the failure of the U.S. strategies towards conflict resolution stems from the optimistic view of the early military success against Taliban. The U.S. miscalculated the potential resurgence of Taliban and diverted their focus towards the democratization process through statebuilding programs in Afghanistan. A subsequent factor responsible for the U.S. policy achievements' failure was to expand the local Afghan security forces without enhancing their capacity through resources and effective training. They started recruiting drive without adequately studying the socio-cultural patterns vis-à-vis regular army in Afghanistan, leading to many confusions and disputes over the possible allegiance of the recruits with Taliban. Moreover, the estimates of the U.S. about the number of ANA strength were not adequately researched. The initial estimates about the recruitment strength of local Afghan forces proved inadequate, and hence a significant increase was made to enable them to take the security responsibility. The miscalculations by the U.S. raise questions about the understanding of the ground realities of the Afghan conflict. In various analyses, the local Afghan security forces' training was also questioned, particularly by the International Crises Group.

The local Afghan security forces were less disciplined and professional in dealing with a much stronger group- Taliban, who were carrying decades of combat experience. The unprecedented expansion of local and international forces resulted in the economic burden on the alliance partners, which sowed mistrust and the resulting lack of coordination. The expansion of ISAF operations and the never-ending history of interventions led to mistrust among the Afghan population, which was adversely affected by collateral damages. The local population expected a speedy completion of the U.S. mission and, as a result, a stable and peaceful Afghanistan. Losing their hope, the Afghans developed sympathy for the ideology of Taliban and many joined them as direct combatants, while others provided logistical support within civilian communities. The support of the local population was a direct manifestation of the instability of the U.S. and local Afghan administration and great mistrust of it. Not only had there been mistrust between the U.S. and the local population, over the years an unprecedented decline in mutual political trust developed between the Kabul administration and Washington. There were incidents of active hostilities between local Afghan and NATO

troops during operations against Taliban. The situation deteriorated to the point where NATO had to stop training new ANA recruits until investigating their possible ties to Taliban. Thus, the two crucial strategic partners had a prisoner dilemma and great mistrust, leading to less effective operational coordination. The U.S. always wanted a strategic autonomy in formulating and implementing policies with respect to operations in Afghanistan. Since American policies continually changed without tangible results, the economic cost of the war continually increased. The U.S. coalition partners were skeptical about this and disagreements with the U.S. emerged in many international meetings regarding policy making in Afghanistan, generating mistrust among all partners. Western allies were concerned about mounting public pressure at home on their troop casualties in Afghanistan. Thus, the U.S. faced mistrust and disharmony from its partners in Afghanistan and from partners in the international coalition. Seeing that all the challenges came in many forms with respect to the Afghan conflict, the U.S. decided to initiate the gradual withdrawal of all international forces from 2011 to December 2014. This decision was hasty and had not taken security conditions into account, thus offering a boost to Taliban to increase attacks to ensure a zero-sum outcome of the war in Afghanistan. Therefore, the U.S. strategy to withdraw troops from Afghanistan by 2014 proved to be momentous and did not materialize. In response to the rising guerilla attacks from Taliban, the U.S. had to increase its troop presence, registering an increasing number of American troops in 2011.

Furthermore, the U.S. and NATO policies regarding Russia's presence in post-Taliban Afghanistan from the beginning were marked by pronounced dualism. On the basis of pragmatic and purely opportunistic considerations, Washington showed more or less interest in cooperating with Moscow in the Afghan political space. In the short term, the U.S. cooperated with Russia to ensure the transit of the NATO contingent through Russian territory. The dualism and skepticism of the U.S. towards Russia's role in Afghanistan undermined its effectiveness, as the latter had prior experience of the realities on the ground. Russia could have been a great source and partner in America's conflict resolution efforts in Afghanistan. Similarly, the role and support of Russia towards the U.S. in Afghanistan too was based on suspicions and dualism. The Russian federation was also skeptical of America's growing influence over the Central Asian States, traditionally seen as Russia's backyard. The U.S. established its air bases in the region, which were also considered part of the New Great Game plan in the region. Russia's position on providing logistical assistance to NATO supplies via the Northern Route was as ambivalent as Washington's line regarding cooperation with

Moscow. It must also be recognized that, in the real dimension, it was unlikely that Moscow would be able to offer Kabul its alternative, either unilaterally or through the CSTO. The same goes for the economic aspect. Therefore, Russia never truly trusted the U.S. in Afghanistan and was suspicious of its activities beyond Afghanistan. However, the common interests of the two sides, in terms of anti-drug efforts and the U.S.' dependence on Russia in terms of territory, forced the two sides to cooperate. The general relationship vis-à-vis conflict resolution in Afghanistan, between the two formal enemies of the cold war could be viewed broadly as an unhappy marriage.

The role of regional countries vis-à-vis conflict resolution was significant and it continues to be an important catalyst for sustainable peace in Afghanistan. In the post-troops withdrawal period, one of the policy options with the U.S. could be to allow a more significant role from the regional countries vis-à-vis maintaining peace and ensuring that Afghanistan is not used by the terrorist groups again. The future of peace in Afghanistan is not alone dependent on intra-Afghan negotiations and peace settlement among different parties, but regional countries do have a role in either stabilisation or destabilisation of the country. Presently, the role of regional countries vis-à-vis conflict resolution can be observed in three different dimensions. Firstly, the interests of different regional countries in Afghanistan are inversely related; e.g. Pakistan vs. India, Pakistan vs. Iran, China vs. India and Gulf countries vs. Iran. The contradictions in the interests of different regional countries likely hinder the ongoing intra-Afghan peace talks. Even if Taliban agrees to engage again in the intra-Afghan negotiation, the post-negotiations/ settlement Afghanistan would be the center of regional competition.⁷⁰⁰ Despite contradictions, a common impetus for all regional countries lies in the conflict resolution in Afghanistan, which would indirectly ensure security and economic activities in the region at large.⁷⁰¹ Presently, given the environment for pacific settlement of the conflict, a relative balance among various regional countries could accelerate the sustainable peace in Afghanistan. Secondly, regional actors on the Afghan issue could be divided into three categories, depending on their relevance to Afghanistan's conflict and its resolution. These three levels are in order from highest to least important. On the first level, there are two neighboring states, Pakistan and Iran. These countries, especially Pakistan, but also to a large extent Iran, have been affected, directly, by the conflict in Afghanistan for decades. They are the ones who bear the main burden of the regional consequences of the

⁷⁰⁰ Dasgupta, *Regional politics and the ...*, 2013: 5.

⁷⁰¹ Ibid.

Afghan conflict in the form of refugees and drug flows to cross-border instability. Simultaneously, these two countries have the largest and most deep-rooted influence in parts of Afghanistan due to ethnic and sectarian groups. For example, Pakistan has better communications and influence in the Pashtun regions in the south and southeast of the country, recorded as being the most intensely affected region from the insurrection.⁷⁰² In a face-to-face interaction with Ahmadullah Alizai, Ex-Governor of Kabul and Badghis Provinces and the Chairman of New Foundation Party, during his visit to Pakistan to participate in a conference, he argued that Afghanistan sees Pakistan as a reliable brotherly country. Peace and security in Afghanistan is not only beneficial for the country itself but Pakistan too. Pakistan is developing infrastructural connectivity projects with China, which ultimately depends on the security situation in Afghanistan. So, keeping in view the interconnectedness of the two countries, Pakistan requires playing its role in bringing peace in Afghanistan. In a question about the role of India in Afghanistan, he argued that India is welcomed as long as she is investing in developing the infrastructure in Afghanistan, but they would discourage any malicious hidden agenda against the interests of Pakistan. Regarding the prospects of peace in Afghanistan, he maintained that the country has gone through wars for the past forty years and hence all Afghans including Taliban are eager to bring peace in the country. However, the country would need the support of regional and international countries after decades of war and devastation in the statebuilding of Afghanistan.⁷⁰³ On the other hand, Iran holds influence in the western regions bordering Afghanistan and the areas inhabited by Hazara (Shiites) and Tajiks.⁷⁰⁴ Without considering the relevance of Pakistan and Iran's interests, there are likely no prospects for Afghanistan's political settlement.

The second level players include other neighboring countries of Afghanistan, India, China, the Persian Gulf countries, Turkey and Russia, which are indirectly affected by the consequences of the Afghan conflict. Due to their interests, they do have reasons for concern regarding security and peace in Afghanistan. Some countries of this group, particularly the Gulf States and Turkey, may act as mediators in a political settlement and negotiations between international forces and many Afghan groups.⁷⁰⁵ Qatar's role in this regard is an open account

⁷⁰² Johnson and Mason. "Understanding Taliban ..." (2007): 72-74.

⁷⁰³ Ahmadullah Alizai, in a face-to-face interview during his visit to Pakistan to participate in conference held by Pak-Afghan Youth Forum.

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁵ Çolakoğlu, Selçuk, and Mehmet Yegin. *The Future of Afghanistan and Turkey's Contribution*. International Strategic Research Organization (USAK), 2014: 30.

for understanding the second layer of countries' mediation role. Third, multilateral forums/organisations can be referred to the third level from the regional dimension. Some specific interests of the parties dominate important, international, regional and trans-regional unions and initiatives.⁷⁰⁶ So, it is clear that the multilateral forums themselves are insufficient, and the existing forums are either weak or not institutionalised at all. For example, the existing bilateral or multilateral forums focus primarily on economic issues, i.e., Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

Similarly, some regional initiatives or forums under the auspices of broader international organisations, such as the trilateral Iranian-Afghan-Pakistani drug control initiative under the auspices of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)⁷⁰⁷, is limited to a specific objective of controlling drug trafficking across the borders. Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) unites a number of countries in neighboring regions, but they do not include Afghanistan among the main regional players, leaving it with only observer status.⁷⁰⁸ So the role of the regional and international organisations is limited to Afghanistan's conflict resolution process.

It is important to understand that with all the diversity of regional interests, the first category of regional countries, Pakistan and Iran, is extremely important vis-à-vis conflict resolution in Afghanistan. Based on the priority of the first category of countries in the region with respect to the Afghan conflict, it is logical to suggest that any negotiated political settlement of the Afghanistan conflict should be in near conformity with the aspirations of the first category of countries. Such an agreement and political structure cannot be suitable for all equally, but taking into account some of the major and legitimate interests of the main regional players in the Afghan issue. The role of Pakistan and Iran can only be constructive vis-à-vis peace agreement among intra-Afghan groups, if their legitimate interests are taken into account. Afghanistan is a landlocked country and is dependent on its neighboring countries for trade communication. In a face-to-face interview with Painda Hikmat, the head of Ulama council and an advisor to Dr Abdullah Abdullah High Council for National Reconciliation, in question about the role of Pakistan in conflict resolution and development in Afghanistan, he

⁷⁰⁶ Goodhand and Sedra. "Who owns the peace..." (2010): 71-89.

⁷⁰⁷ "Afghanistan, Iran And Pakistan Discussed Ways For Effectively Combatting The Trafficking Of Afghan Opiates...". 2020. *Unodc.Org*. Accessed at: <https://www.unodc.org/pakistan/en/triangular-initiative-senior-officials-meeting.html>.

⁷⁰⁸ Enrico Fels, "The Role of the SCO in Afghanistan." In *Partners for stability*, pp. 235-250. Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG, 2013: 235 – 250.

responded that ‘Pakistan and Afghanistan cannot part ways due to ideological and geographical bonds. He maintained that Pakistan’s role in the conflict resolution is undeniably important because of their historical connections with Taliban. Pakistan can still use the historical influence to convince Taliban for a political settlement with all parties concerned. In response to the question of development, he talked about the formal and informal trade between people of the two countries. Afghanistan relies on Pakistan ports for their international business and hence keeping aid aside, Pakistan can be a key player in developing Afghanistan economy through trade facilitations. He argued that aid is a short term pill to cure the economy but the sustainable solution to economic stability lies in trade partnerships with all regional and extra-regional countries. Dependency is not only bad for Afghanistan but any country in the world, which is relying on aid’.⁷⁰⁹ This dependency has always cost neighborly Pakistan and Iran in terms of drugs and terror infringements.⁷¹⁰ So, both Pakistan and Iran would ensure that their interests are served before the Afghans enter into any power-sharing mechanism.

China is an emerging regional and global power and carries significant importance with respect to peace in Afghanistan. Stable Afghanistan can further gave momentum to China’s connectivity projects under the broader framework of built and road initiative (BRI). Though, China avoids direct interference in Afghanistan’s security due to its soft image of non-interference in political matters of states but the potential prospects of China’s economic endeavors with regional countries can serve as centripetal force for local Afghan stakeholders including Taliban to agree on developmental projects with China. On the other hand, China itself should be more interested in a stable Afghanistan due to its fears of extremism in Uighurs Muslims in China.

Failure to withdraw in 2014 resulted in further escalation of the war in Afghanistan. Donald Trump promised to put an end to all international military adventures, had to review his policy and therefore responded militarily; the use of the “mother of bombs” was an empirical proof in this regard. So Trump also misjudged the severity of the war in Afghanistan in his election manifesto. Overall, the lack of coordination, inconsistency in various American

⁷⁰⁹ Painsa Hikmat in a face to face interview during his visit to Pakistan to participate in a conference organized by Pak-Afghan youth forum.

⁷¹⁰ Tehseena Usman, and Minhas Majeed Khan. “Drug trafficking from Afghanistan to Pakistan and its implications.” *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan* 50, no. 2 (2013): 27.

strategies, and miscalculations about basic realities led to the failure of the U.S. policies regarding conflict resolution in Afghanistan.

The reinstatement of the NATO military presence in Afghanistan after the failed 2014 troop's withdrawal plan did not open the prospects for a military or political solution. While it helped close serious security loopholes, it offers no chance of a zero-sum outcome that the West was not been able to achieve in the past with many more troops. At the same time, there was nothing to suggest that the creation of a legitimate and persuasive state can be successful after Western leaders had so far been content with much higher levels of funding to make the creation neither work. A history of internal rivalry had paralyzed President Ghani's coalition government and ongoing corruption had further worsened the government's relations with the public.

Even a negotiated solution with Taliban looks less promising. Most Taliban groups believe they no longer need it. How can the opposition groups to Taliban in Afghanistan be able to influence intra-Afghan negotiations without the support of NATO, if they were not successful with NATO and the Ashraf Ghani government? While there may still be talks or even negotiations with some groups, but Taliban are likely to decisively dominate the mainstream politics in the country. The positive side of the present-day situation in Afghanistan is that the varying stakeholders have realized that the ultimate solution to all problems is not going to be resolved using military options. The realization could possibly result in the start of some meaningful intra-Afghan dialogue for finding the best possible power-sharing mechanism. Taliban too would have this realization that in the history of Afghanistan, the public had rarely allowed a tyrannical strongly centralized rule on the basis of religion by any one party or individual. They may not be defeated militarily but the long-term public outrage could cause them some serious challenges.

The reasons for the failure of the U.S. strategies in Afghanistan are numerous. At the Bonn Afghanistan Conference on December 5 2011, the U.S. committed to complete the security transition till the end of 2014, however, a new decade of transformation would last until 2024, signaling that the U.S. could engage in Afghanistan even in the proposed post-withdrawal period. The international community gathered in Bonn praised what increased support from the country had been achieved and promised as part of a renewed partnership. Since then, the international coalition had withdrawn most of their combat soldiers, leaving behind some 13000 troops for training and special security purposes. Since

then, his engagement had focused primarily on training the Afghan Security Forces (ANSF) and security sector reform. Parallel to the troops withdrawal, the insurgents strengthened. The result was that the U.S. and its partners had to strengthen their military engagement somewhat in 2015 again, including increased use of the Special Forces. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) reported an increase in insurgent activity and a record level of civilian casualties, resulting in the change in public sympathies towards the international forces and local Afghan government. The insurgents achieved unexpected military successes, such as the conquest of Kunduz in late September 2015. The U.S. military officials admitted that the ANSF could not yet operate on its own.

In the pretext of this, the various reports issued by the U.S. regarding their progress in Afghanistan seemed to be misleading. If the U.S.-based indicators of success are the basis for past counterinsurgency, the picture looks pretty bleak: the overall trend in good governance remained negative from 2001 till 2020. The new government of national unity (NUG), formed in 2014, had failed in ensuring good governance and state institutions still did not function. Corruption continued in all government ranks. The establishment of a reliable local security structures was not up to the mark and hence did not delivered. They range from inadequate effectiveness and reliability of the security forces to doubts about the affordability and democratic control of much of the security apparatus. The support to many insurgent groups from outside Afghanistan continued throughout the period of the U.S. intervention. Meanwhile, the so-called ISIS was seen as a potential new threat in Afghanistan. From these facts it could be presumed that the U.S. failed in its core objective of securing Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven for the terrorist groups. The same applies to the availability and use of safe haven for insurgents in some neighbourly countries, who indirectly supported war in Afghanistan, testifying the failure of the AfPak strategy or the later South Asia policy of the two U.S. administrations.

Overall, it follows that the military approach for conflict resolution using the state-building programs in Afghanistan was doomed to failure, even if immanent criteria of success were applied. Despite achieving a military victory against Taliban in the early months of the U.S. intervention, the roots of the local Taliban were not rooted out due to lack of interest in dealing with the situation as per centuries old Afghan culture. At the military victory, Peace was not a realistic scenario due to the insurgents' strength on ground and the Afghan army's weakness and structural problems in the U.S. backed Afghan governments.

In the future, any long-term military commitment by the U.S, or any regional country for counterterrorism partnerships is possible, but it must also end at some point, bringing no good to the people of Afghanistan. Therefore, a re-intervention to deal with Taliban failed promises in terms of their relations with Al-Qaeda, would be a repetition of the mistakes which they made in the first two decades of the 21st century. The other sustainable option is the political and diplomatic way forward for bringing Taliban to the intra-Afghan negotiation table. Afghanistan's problems are structural and therefore, can only be solved through a long-term development process. The prerequisite for this is, above all a political understanding among Afghans. Based on these assumptions, there are essentially some prospects vis-à-vis conflict resolution in Afghanistan.

The more favorable option depends on the restoration of trust among Afghan stakeholders. It is if all major Afghan players, including Taliban, agree in principle with a political solution. Everyone sits at a table intending to form a truly representative government of national unity. Its task is to regulate matters of policy formulation and political order. The joint review of the past and the creation of new political structures specific to Afghanistan are organised as parallel processes. Although a government of all parties, on the principles of consociationalism, in Kabul would be relatively weak due to its heterogeneity, it would have a high degree of legitimacy, since it would consider all forces and interests.

Provided that all actors respect the game's agreed rules, relative political stability with a high level of autonomy for local actors would be possible. At the regional level, all neighbouring states and other strategic actors and international and regional organisations, participate in a conference process on security, economic cooperation and development. The objective should be to create an essentially political document on mutual relations and a regional stability pact for a neutral Afghanistan, so that the concerns of the key regional actors vis-à-vis Afghanistan parting with one or the other, are resolved.

Another option is related to the withdrawal of the international security force from Afghanistan. The post-withdrawal period carries risks as well as opportunities. One of the most likely outcomes of this scenario is that the country would again plunge into a civil war among varying warlords and with Taliban in the near future. Therefore, the progress made in twenty years with respect to institutional and infrastructural development would diminish with for no good reason. On the other hand, the post-withdrawal period possibly offers an opportunity to Afghans for settling down to agree on an inclusive power sharing in the country. The likelihood

of agreement among Afghan stakeholders is there due to the four decades of worst experience of inter-group rivalry and civil war. Taliban would likely be in the leading position after the third scenario due to their unmatched military strength. However, Taliban too can possibly opt for an inclusive government based on the principle of consociationalism to avoid the risks of re-intervention of the Western powers or even regional stakeholders, but this could take some time after Taliban regime continues to face economic challenges and international isolation by getting no recognition from the important countries.

From the U.S. intervention to the troops withdrawal, it could be said that the international community has failed with its concept of military-backed conflict resolution and state-building in Afghanistan. There are many reasons for this: continued weak leadership at Kabul, optimistic view of the early military conquest against Taliban, President Bush penchant for unilateral actions, complex geography which favored guerrilla warfare, expanding Afghan security forces without building their capacity, lack of trust among the coalition partners, increasing costs of war, wrong prioritization through ill-defined and exaggerated goals, and a strategic confusion about talks with Taliban, resulting in delayed serious negotiations. Moreover, both the U.S. and Kabul administration had misconception that the Western model of institutions could be exported to a country without corresponding state tradition, and that the local people would endorse it.

International participation in terms of socio-economic assistance in crisis-affected countries like Afghanistan would be required to continue in the future. For this, the governments of western states should provide the necessary domestic support. A critical analysis of the situation ultimately prioritizes structural reforms in Afghanistan. It must follow logic of sustainable peace policy and not a policy primarily of security and power. An apparently zero-sum outcome in favor of Taliban by taking over Kabul and the troops withdrawal, may not be a sustainable outcome. In the long-run, a zero-sum outcome of the Afghan conflict seems unlikely and hence a strategic environment is needed to be set for a non-zero-sum outcome. Overall, an Afghan led and Afghan owned approach is needed, in deciding the key strategic issues independently and with confidence in what political and economic order they want to live in their country. The U.S. cannot ignore its geostrategic interests in South and Central Asia, hence needs to maintain good relations with Afghanistan. By not recognizing Taliban government and ignoring the worsening socio-economic challenges in Afghanistan could give rise to some serious threats to the U.S. interests in the region. If Taliban gets no

support from the U.S. and key European countries, they might look for alternative options for economic assistance, which could be provided by Al-Qaeda and ISIS. The U.S. should accept the responsibility for the destruction and loss of human lives over the past twenty years in Afghanistan. Instead of distancing itself from Afghanistan, the U.S. should share burden along key local and regional stakeholders in bringing a sustainable peace in Afghanistan.

Findings in a nutshell

1. Finding One-Objective of the Intervention

The description of historical events vis-à-vis political developments and the U.S. involvement in Afghanistan, particularly in the post-Cold War period, presumes that the objective of the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan was majorly guided by counterterrorism and subsequent Statebuilding mission to ensure a sustainable pro-U.S. democratic government. So, the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan was predominantly guided by its objective to destroy Al Qaeda safe havens and replace Taliban government with a democratic government, who shall ensure no safe havens for any international terrorist organization.

In the aftermath of the Cold War, the U.S. emerged as the world's sole superpower. As a result, it began to take a more active role in global affairs, including in the Middle East and South Asia. In the late 1990s, Afghanistan became a major focus of U.S. foreign policy due to the presence of Al Qaeda and the Taliban, who provided a safe haven for the terrorist organization.

Following the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the U.S. launched a military campaign against the Taliban regime, which had provided shelter to Al Qaeda. The primary objective of this military intervention was to destroy the Al Qaeda safe havens in Afghanistan and to prevent them from using the country as a base of operations for further attacks on the U.S. and its allies. After the Taliban regime was overthrown, the U.S. embarked on a Statebuilding mission in Afghanistan, aimed at creating a sustainable pro-U.S. democratic government. This involved rebuilding the country's political, economic, and social institutions, as well as establishing security and stability. The U.S. hoped that a stable and democratic Afghanistan would serve as a bulwark against terrorism and instability in the region, while also providing a strategic foothold in Central Asia. To this end, the U.S. provided substantial military and economic assistance to the Afghan government, as well as training and equipping its security forces.

Despite these efforts, the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan has been beset by a range of challenges and setbacks. These include a growing Taliban uprising, endemic corruption, political instability, and the rise of ISIS and other extremist groups in the region. The U.S. has also faced criticism for its handling of the conflict, particularly with regard to civilian casualties and human rights abuses. Despite these challenges, the U.S. has continued to play an active role in Afghanistan, with the aim of achieving a sustainable and peaceful resolution to the conflict. The U.S. has also sought to engage regional powers such as Pakistan, India, and China in efforts to stabilize Afghanistan and promote regional security.

Overall, the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan has been guided by a complex mix of strategic, political, and humanitarian objectives. While the primary aim had been to counter terrorism and establish a stable democratic government, however the U.S. failed in achieving these goals.

2. Finding Two-Nature of the U.S. Strategies

The U.S. excluded Taliban from all political processes mainly the Bonn process, in early nine years of conflict in Afghanistan. lately, they engaged with Taliban but it was not a favorable time for talks as Taliban sensed victory. The 2020 peace agreement between the U.S. and Taliban is apparently a non-zero-sum outcome of the conflict but it clearly favors Taliban more than the U.S. Taliban coming to power without giving any share in power to the key local stakeholders shows bluffing strategy and hence turns the outcome into a zero-sum game. Based on the discussion on the U.S. strategies in Afghanistan, it can be generalized that, there existed a strategic confusion in the U.S. strategies from 2001 till 2020, resulting in the fiascoes vis-à-vis the U.S. policy objectives.

During the early years of the conflict in Afghanistan, the U.S. ignored the Taliban in political processes, particularly the Bonn process, which aimed to establish a new government for Afghanistan. The U.S. viewed the Taliban as a terrorist organization and did not want to engage with them politically. However, as the conflict dragged on, the U.S. began to realize that a military solution alone was not possible and that a political settlement was needed. The U.S. began engaging with the Taliban in recent years, but this was not a favorable time for talks as the Taliban sensed victory on the battlefield. This meant that the Taliban had little incentive to negotiate, as they believed they could achieve their objectives through military means. As a

result, the U.S. had little leverage in the negotiations and was forced to make significant concessions to the Taliban.

The 2020 peace agreement between the U.S. and Taliban is described as a non-zero-sum outcome, meaning that both sides benefit to some extent. However, it is suggested that the agreement favors the Taliban more than the U.S. This is because the agreement allows the Taliban to come to power without giving any share in power to key local stakeholders, such as the Afghan government and civil society groups. This is seen as a bluffing strategy by the Taliban, who may be seeking to consolidate their power before making further concessions. The outcome of the peace agreement is described as a zero-sum game, meaning that one side's gain is the other side's loss. In this case, the Taliban's gain of power comes at the expense of the Afghan government and other local stakeholders, who are left out of the political process. This is seen as a significant setback for the U.S., which had hoped to establish a sustainable and democratic government in Afghanistan.

Overall, the study suggests that the U.S.'s approach to engaging with the Taliban has been characterized by strategic confusion. The U.S. initially ignored the Taliban in political processes, but later engaged with them at a time when they had little leverage. The peace agreement is described as favoring the Taliban more than the U.S. and as a result, turning the outcome into a zero-sum game. This strategic confusion is seen as a major reason for the fiascos that have occurred in the U.S.'s policy objectives in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2020.

3. Finding Three-Outcomes of the U.S. Strategies

It can be found out that the outcomes of the varying U.S. strategies were random and consequential and did not result in the achievement of any central objective, i.e., conflict resolution. The resurgence of Taliban and other terrorist groups, i.e., ISIS, were contrary to the very objective of the U.S. 'global war on terror'. The literature reviewed in the chapters shows that resurgence of Taliban was majorly the result of the failed U.S. strategies. All of these factors were grounded on the mistake that the U.S. made by not understanding or ignoring the local cultural norms.

The U.S. war in Afghanistan had a range of outcomes, both intended and unintended. While the initial removal of the Taliban government was a significant victory, the failure to establish lasting security and stability in Afghanistan, the emergence of new terrorist groups,

the financial and political costs, the loss of life, and the humanitarian consequences highlight the challenges of waging a prolonged conflict in a complex and dynamic region. The United States' twenty-year war in Afghanistan underscores the importance of a comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes of conflict and includes military and non-military components to achieve lasting stability and peace in conflict-affected regions.

One of the primary outcomes of the U.S. war in Afghanistan was the removal of the Taliban from power. Following the 9/11 attacks, the United States launched a military campaign against the Taliban, who were harboring Al Qaeda terrorists. Within months, the Taliban government was ousted, and a new government was established in Afghanistan. This outcome was a significant victory for the United States and its allies and demonstrated the power of the U.S. military. However, despite the initial success in removing the Taliban from power, the United States failed to establish lasting security and stability in Afghanistan. The Taliban retreated to the rural areas and launched guerilla warfare attacks against the Afghan government and U.S. forces. Over the next two decades, the conflict intensified, resulting in significant loss of life on both sides.

Another outcome of the U.S. war in Afghanistan was the emergence of new terrorist groups. As the U.S. military targeted Al Qaeda and the Taliban, other extremist groups, such as ISIS, began to emerge in the region. These groups took advantage of the chaos and instability in Afghanistan and other conflict-affected regions to establish themselves and expand their operations.

The war in Afghanistan had significant financial costs for the United States. According to estimates, the United States spent more than \$2 trillion on the war, making it one of the most expensive conflicts in U.S. history. The cost of the war strained the U.S. economy and had lasting consequences for government finances.

The U.S. war in Afghanistan also had consequences for the Afghan people. The conflict resulted in significant displacement and forced migration, with many Afghan civilians fleeing their homes to escape the violence. The war also had lasting consequences for the Afghan economy, with many businesses and industries disrupted by the conflict. The instability created by the war had long-term effects on Afghan society and had significant humanitarian consequences.

4. Finding Four-Unsuccessfulness of the U.S. Strategies

The preceding discussion on the causes of the U.S. failure in Afghanistan highlights a strategic confusion in the U.S. policy about engaging in talks with Taliban which resulted in over-reliance on force to deal with the conflict, which was contrary to the socio-economic and political ethos of Afghanistan.

The U.S. strategies unusefulness in Afghanistan is a complex issue with multiple factors that contributed to it. One significant factor that stood out is the strategic confusion in the U.S. policy about engaging in talks with the Taliban. This confusion resulted in over-reliance on force to deal with the conflict, which was contrary to the socio-economic and political ethos of Afghanistan. The U.S. initially invaded Afghanistan in 2001, following the 9/11 attacks, with the aim of rooting out al-Qaeda and Taliban. The U.S. was successful in ousting the Taliban government, but the group retreated to the rural areas and launched a military offensive against the Afghan government and U.S. forces using guerilla warfare tactics. In 2007, the Taliban intensified their attacks, and the U.S. realized that the military option alone could not achieve victory in the conflict. Despite this realization, there was strategic confusion in the U.S. policy about engaging in talks with the Taliban. The U.S. government vacillated between fighting and negotiating with the Taliban, leading to a lack of coherence in its strategy. The U.S. government was unwilling to negotiate with the Taliban while they were seen as a terrorist organization. It was not until 2010 when the U.S. government began exploring the possibility of negotiations with the Taliban.

The over-reliance on force to deal with the conflict was contrary to the socio-economic and political ethos of Afghanistan. The use of force resulted in significant civilian casualties, and this fueled anti-American sentiment among the Afghan people. The U.S. forces did not adequately understand the Afghan culture and the importance of minimizing civilian casualties. The use of force also failed to address the underlying socio-economic and political issues that fueled the already deteriorating security conditions. The U.S. forces failed to address the underlying socio-economic and political issues that fueled Taliban uprising. The Afghan government was corrupt, and there was widespread poverty and unemployment. The Afghan people lacked basic services such as education, healthcare, and clean water. These issues fueled resentment among the population, and the Taliban exploited this to gain support.

Furthermore, the over-reliance on force alienated the Afghan people, and the U.S. lost the support of the population. The use of force undermined efforts to win hearts and minds and build trust with the Afghan people. The U.S. failed to understand that the security issues in Afghanistan was not just a military problem but also a political one. The lack of coherent strategy and over-reliance on force ultimately failed to address the root causes of the conflict. The strategic confusion in the U.S. policy about engaging in talks with the Taliban undermined efforts to reach a political settlement to the conflict. The United States vacillated between fighting and negotiating with the Taliban, and this lack of coherence undermined efforts to reach a political settlement. The Taliban was also not willing to negotiate while they were winning the conflict.

Overall, there were significant issues in both the nature of the U.S. strategies and their implementation in the context of conflict resolution in Afghanistan. Complex local dynamics, shifting priorities, insufficient understanding of Afghan culture, and a lack of coherent and coordinated efforts all contributed to the challenges faced in achieving meaningful conflict resolution and sustainable peace in the region.

Way Forward

Consociationalism, which involves power-sharing among different ethnic, religious, or political groups, holds promise for conflict resolution⁷¹¹ in post-US withdrawal Afghanistan by providing a framework that accommodates the diverse interests and identities within the country. By ensuring representation and inclusion of various groups in decision-making processes, consociationalism can help address grievances and promote cooperation, potentially mitigating tensions and fostering stability. Additionally, power-sharing arrangements can incentivize compromise and reduce the likelihood of one group monopolizing power, which may contribute to a more inclusive and equitable governance system. Implementing consociationalism in Afghanistan could offer a platform for building trust, fostering reconciliation, and addressing the root causes of conflict, thus providing a prospectus for resolving the country's ongoing challenges. This at large could potentially lead to the recognition of the Afghan government and hence sustainability of peace and stability in Afghanistan.

⁷¹¹ Adrian Guelke, *Consociationalism and conflict resolution*. In *The Multicultural Dilemma*, pp. 171-184. Routledge, 2012.

Consociationalism, as a power-sharing mechanism, has the potential to address the deep-rooted ethno-political divisions in post-US withdrawal Afghanistan and facilitate conflict resolution. By ensuring proportional representation and meaningful participation of different groups in decision-making processes, consociationalism can help build trust, foster cooperation, and promote inclusivity. For example, in Northern Ireland, the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 introduced a consociational power-sharing model, which brought together political parties representing both Catholic and Protestant communities. This arrangement provided a platform for dialogue, negotiation, and joint decision-making, leading to a more stable and peaceful society. Similarly, in Lebanon, consociationalism has been applied through a power-sharing system that allocates key political positions based on religious affiliation. This arrangement, though imperfect, has helped prevent major conflicts and provided a mechanism for different religious groups to have a say in governance, reducing the likelihood of marginalization and promoting stability.

In the context of Afghanistan, a consociational power-sharing approach could involve the representation and inclusion of major ethnic and religious groups, such as Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks, in decision-making bodies and government institutions. By acknowledging and respecting the diverse identities and interests of these groups, consociationalism can address historical grievances, reduce feelings of exclusion, and provide avenues for cooperation and compromise.

Furthermore, a consociational power-sharing arrangement can also help manage potential conflicts over resources, territory, and political influence. By establishing mechanisms for dialogue, resource-sharing, and the protection of minority rights, consociationalism can mitigate the risks of competition and ensure that all groups have a stake in the governance of the country.

In the post Taliban's resurgence and the group regaining power in 2021, consociationalism could play a crucial role in facilitating conflict resolution and stability. Firstly, consociationalism could provide a mechanism to address the concerns and aspirations of various ethnic and religious groups within Afghanistan. The country is characterized by diverse ethnicities, including Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks, each with their own distinct interests and historical grievances. A consociational power-sharing arrangement would ensure the representation and participation of these groups in decision-making processes,

allowing them to have a voice in shaping the country's future. This inclusivity can help alleviate the sense of marginalization and address the underlying causes of conflict.

Secondly, consociationalism can serve as a means to build trust and foster reconciliation among different factions. The power-sharing model provides opportunities for dialogue, negotiation, and compromise, allowing the Taliban and other political actors to engage in peaceful political processes rather than resorting to violence. By including the Taliban in a consociational framework, it becomes possible to address their concerns, such as the preservation of their core ideologies, while also ensuring that the rights and interests of other groups are protected.

Thirdly, consociationalism can help manage the competing interests over resources, territory, and political power. Through mechanisms such as proportional representation, territorial autonomy, and resource-sharing agreements, consociationalism provides a framework for addressing these conflicts in a peaceful and negotiated manner. By creating institutions that enable cooperation and compromise, consociationalism can help prevent the reemergence of violent conflicts and foster stability.

However, the implementation of consociationalism in Afghanistan, especially in the current context, would face significant challenges. The Taliban's ideology and historical practices raise concerns about their commitment to power-sharing and inclusivity. Establishing trust among all parties and ensuring compliance with agreed-upon mechanisms would require careful negotiation, oversight, and international support.

Additionally, the success of consociationalism in Afghanistan would depend on the willingness of the international community to provide the necessary support and assistance, both politically and financially. External actors can play a role in facilitating dialogue, supporting capacity-building efforts, and providing resources for the effective functioning of consociational institutions.

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Interviews

S. No:	Name	Designation/ Expertise	Primary or Secondary/ Mode of Interview
1.	Rahimullah Yousazai	Senior Journalist/ Expert Afghan Affairs	Primary/ Face to Face

			Dated: 05/1/2019
2.	Asfandyar Mir	Postdoctoral fellow at the Center for International Security and Cooperation, Stanford University/ Focuses on Afghanistan.	Primary / Email Dated: 18/12/2020
3.	Dr Jonathan Schroden	Military Operation Analyst/ Focuses on Afghanistan	Primary/ Email Dated: 2/2/2022
4.	Dr Omar Sharifi	Former Senior Research Fellow and Director of the American Institute of Afghanistan Studies, Kabul.	Primary/ Facebook messenger Dated: 23/12/2020
5.	Juma Khan Sufi	Historian and political analyst/ Focuses on Pak-Afghan border and Pashtunistan politics	Primary/ Face to face 29/11/2020
6.	Brig (r) Mehmood Shah	Strategic Analyst/ Expert on Afghanistan politics	Primary/ Zoom Session 10/11/2020
7.	Khan Baba	An ex-Jihadist who fought against the Soviets/ Currently lives in suburb of Islamabad as a refugee.	Primary/ Face to face 5/10/2019
8.	Ahmadullah Alizai	Ex-Governor of Kabul and Badghis Provinces/ Chairman of New Foundation Party	Primary/ Face to Face Dated: 2/9/2021

		is a politician in Afghanistan	
9.	Painda Hikmat	The Head of Ulama council/ An advisor to Dr Abdullah Abdullah High Council for National Reconciliation.	Primary/ Face to Face Dated: 2/9/2021
10.	Molvi Ataurahman Saleem	Deputy chairmen of National Council Reconciliation Afghanistan/ Former minister of religious affairs	Primary/ Face to face Dated: 2/9/2021
11.	Jamal – ud - din Badr	Former Governor, Nuristan/ Employee of Ministry of Foreign Affairs and In charge of the Disk Of Arab countries	Primary/ Face to Face Dated: 2/9/2021
12.	John Galtung	A Mathematician and Sociologist/ Expert on Peace and Conflict Studies	Secondary/ YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j1jWjzs_ZO8&list=LL&index=72
13.	Dr. Barnett R. Rubin	A Senior Fellow and Associate Director of NYU's Center on International Cooperation (CIC)/ He directed the Afghanistan Pakistan Regional Program from April 2009 until October 201	Secondary/ YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p10W12iz-iM&list=LL&index=183&t=8s

14.	Hamid Karzai	Ex-president of Afghanistan	Secondary/ Video of VOA https://www.voanews.com/south-central-asia/voa-exclusive-ex-president-hamid-karzai-discusses-prospects-afghan-peace
15.	Rahimullah Yousazai	Senior Journalist/ Expert Afghan Affairs	Secondary/ Conversation with South Asian Voices https://southasianvoices.org/rahimullah-yusufzai-on-what-to-expect-from-the-taliban-in-afghan-peace-talks/
16.	Imtiaz Gul	Expert, Journalist/ Author of 'The Unholy Nexus: Pak-Afghan Relations under the Taliban'.	Primary/ WhatsApp Dated: 4/10/2022
17.	Ambassador (r) Syed Abrar Hussain	Retired Diplomat, National Academic Council Staff Member at IPS/ Served in Afghanistan	Primary/ WhatsApp Dated: 11/10/2022
18.	Tahir Khan	Freelance Journalist based in Islamabad/ extensively covered the Afghan conflict during the past 20 years	Primary/ WhatsApp Dated: 6/10/2022
19.	Ihsan Ghani Khan	Retired DG police and Former Chairman NACTA/ Expert on Terrorism and counterterrorism	Primary/ Email Dated: 13/10/2022

20.	Salman Javed	DG Pak-Afghan Youth Forum (PAYF)/ hosted a lecture series on Afghanistan conflict	Primary/ WhatsApp Dated: 19/6/2022
21.	Lakhdar Brahim	UN Special Representative for Afghanistan in 2001.	Secondary/ Lakhdar Brahim on hopes and failures in Afghanistan” interview by The Mediator’s Studio - Center for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD), Episode 1, Season 3, 15th February 2022. https://hdcentre.org/podcasts/lakhdar-brahimi-on-hopes-and-failures-in-afghanistan/