
US Strategy in Pak-Afghan Region During War on Terror: Impacts on Pakistan

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Abstract

The region where Pakistan and Afghanistan are located, poses extraordinary importance owing to its geo-strategic location. United States under the banner of NATO, with United Nation's resolution attacked Afghanistan primarily to defeat Taliban, dismantle Al-Qaeda and lessen the role of non-state actors. Soon after the demise of Taliban she started reconstruction of building of Afghan nation and spent more than a trillion dollars for the said purpose, with few apparent achievements, yet she couldn't achieve the desired targets due to many factors. United States adopted different approaches in the reins of George. W. Bush, Barrack Hussain Obama, and now Donald Trump. She looked many things with her own approach of handling issues with lack of understanding of new dimensions of Afghan social fabric, treacherous nature of regional players and last but not the least, the loopholes in handling increasing militancy and reorganization of Taliban in Afghanistan. Pakistan was impacted in many ways, and is still facing the music of collateral damages, economic deficits, institutional crisis, militancy and mistrust. USA is now in a hurry to ramp up their final withdrawal from Afghanistan and is using every possible platform which can help them in providing a face-saving opportunity.

Key Words: Terrorism, Af-Pak region, US Policy, Pakistan, Afghanistan

Introduction

History of United States shows that since its independence, she has set some ideals before formulation of any policy, either internal or external (Kimberly Amadeo, 2017). Among these ideals, the American Dream is one of the most important ideals of United States which guides and drives the American foreign policy makers to support and promote democracy in outside countries, where United States is involved in one way or the other (Ibid). The same approach was opted for development and democratization during the American presence in Afghanistan since October 2001. United States, soon after the defeat of Taliban diverted its focus from war strategy to supporting Afghan nation in democratization and restructuring its institutions. She came forward for uplifting and building the Afghan state and its institutions. United States set up the transition government led by Hamid Karzai in 2002 which continued until 2004 as an interim government. The same set up was provided legitimacy through holding a Loya Jirga comprising of over five hundred delegates from all over Afghanistan. USA gave new constitution to Afghanistan which was ratified by the same Jirga in February 2004 (Afghanistan passes constitution by consensus, 2004). United States supported and in fact initiated the process of elections in Afghanistan for

bringing democratic set up and let Afghans lead their nation by themselves and every Afghan be provided with his fundamental rights of vote, representation, and participation etc (Afghanistan passes constitution by consensus, 2004). The first ever elections in the history of Afghanistan were held under the supervision and support of USA in 2009 and Mr. Hamid Karzai was re-elected as President of Afghanistan (Jon Boone and Mark Tran, 2009). The same practice was repeated in a peaceful manner in 2014 after the completion of five years tenure of Hamid Karzai. This time Mr. Ashraf Ghani; the successful candidate and Dr. Abdullah Abdullah; the defeated candidate agreed in the presence of John Kerry; the then Secretary of State of USA, upon a deal to make a unity government on September 29, 2014 (May Jeong, 2014). This transition took place just a few months before withdrawal of the NATO forces from Afghanistan. This transition also helped in reverting the chances of a civil war of 1990's after the Soviet withdrawal and stopped further destabilization of the country (Ibid). Before this, United States had started preparations for its withdrawal. President Obama in his Af-Pak Policy 2009, announced surge of troops and added up to 1,50,000 forces to the creed already operating in Afghanistan. Operations were intensified and insurgents and their hideouts were targeted. On the other hand, United States also opted for the policy of reconciliation with the Afghan insurgents including Taliban. For the said purpose, Afghanistan High Peace Council was established in 2005 and then reformed in 2010 for making it more fruitful and result oriented. The process of reconciliation saw many ups and downs until now and Taliban were also allowed to open their political office in Doha, Qatar. Some of the Taliban members laid down their arms and opted for reconciliation. Although, the main resistance group; Taliban is yet to be persuaded for reconciliation but during this era United States has used many measures and started many processes and groups as tactics to control the insurgency in Afghanistan (Kenneth Katzman, 2015). To reach the desired aims of the paper the researchers have used the qualitative and analytical methods and has done descriptive techniques for analysis of American policies in Afghanistan. The researcher has used the primary as well as secondary sources in order to get the real picture.

Analysis of US Policies

The researchers have analyzed various aspects of US policies in Afghanistan since its invasion up to the election of Donald Trump as new President of United States of America. We have seen a continuous change in policies, strategies and command in American camps stationed in Afghanistan. President George W. Bush in his address just after 9/11 attack explained the consequences of the attack to the World (Ibid). He expressed the American designs of dealing with iron hands with the terrorists, either states or non-state actors and named some countries in many of his upcoming speeches (American Enterprise Institute, 2007). The War has to be launched against Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan for which, Pakistan's assistance to USA was inevitable. After attack on Afghanistan and crushing of the enemy, America and NATO should have left Afghanistan immediately but the covert plans were not only to defeat Al-Qaeda but to stay there and implement its hegemonic designs. Since then NATO under the leadership of America is present in Afghanistan for more than 16 years. The post 9/11 policies and funding of USA and other international players have ignored or have little attention towards the fact that due to the geographical location of Afghanistan, there is more foreign interference, hence Afghanistan has not been able to construct and build its nation on its own and its institutions with its own resources. Moreover, due to the diversity of tribes and groups, foreigners have used and are still using different groups for achieving their vested interests (Hy Rothstein, 2014). Moreover, the regional players have a crucial role in the stability of Afghanistan. Currently, they are not on the same page and are there for safeguarding their respective interests. Russia, Iran and China have made contacts with Taliban and reports suggest that Iran and Russia are providing material support to them

((Javed Hammim Kakkar, 2017). Their concern is to defeat ISIS through using Taliban as a tool, (Hamid Shalezi, 2016) but in real sense it is very difficult for these countries to accept Taliban in full control of the country's state of affairs. India has been brought in to the middle in the name of development for countering the interests and stakes of Pakistan. So, Afghanistan is once again heading towards a scenario where new proxies will be played on this chessboard. Another flaw was that the continuous change in strategies along with regular change of command, added fuel to prolongation of the war and distraction from counterinsurgency and counter terrorism (Ibid). During Bush's second term and Hamid Karzai's era, the objectives of US presence were unclear and the stay was prolonged. U.S repeated the same errors in Afghanistan which USSR did in 1980's. America after the demise of Taliban, instead of fighting Afghans, should have invested majorly in economic and social sector of Afghanistan to legitimize their presence and win hearts and minds of Afghans. U.S had no clear mind either to withdraw or to stay the course (Frederick W. Kagan, 2014).

Here, America's pre-mature withdrawal from Afghanistan, would have disastrously damaged the global and regional interests of America in Asia, Middle East and Latin America, just like USSR, lost it in Eastern Europe, as repercussions of its defeat in Afghanistan. Americans feared that their defeat and hasty withdrawal would have also energized global Jihad networks along with the regional powers, to line up their clients for another adventure in Afghanistan. For staying the course, America and NATO legitimized their presence by saying that it is must for surveillance of sanctuaries of terrorists and extremist activities in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Taliban's re-emergence, have considerably threatened US strategic objectives in one way but provided another opportunity for their legitimate presence in Afghanistan (M. Hamid, 2017). Another flaw in the strategy is apparent from the fact that she wanted to end the influence of Non-State Actors like Al-Qaeda but it failed, rather it's endures resulted in mushroom growth of NSAs and has now changed the threat and nature of war. The US presence in Pakistan and Afghanistan resulted in creation of various brands of Taliban, ISIS, and other proxy forces of the rival states made their foot hold here. Furthermore, U.S was also of the opinion that lack of democracy in rogue states are the roots of terrorism, so it needs to be democratized, yet she failed to accomplish this rhetoric based and apparently enthusiastic plan of democratization. Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan were targeted for democratization process, are now facing more political instability than ever (Noor Zahid, 2017). During first few years, America was unable to understand the Afghanistan's insurgency challenge, and their counterinsurgency strategy was fatally flawed, (Ibid) and consequently failed to neutralize Taliban, dismantle Al-Qaeda completely, and make of a strong nation in Afghanistan. But with the accomplishments made during early months of its military campaign, US was able to give some attention to nation building and revival of political system and institutions. By 2003, America had started a transition from Combat to Development, (American Enterprise Institute, 2003) subsequently, the Taliban were successful in reorganizing themselves and reportedly Taliban raised their number from three thousand in 2003 to about thirty thousand in 2010 (Hy Rothstein, 2014). The flaws in strategy, however, allowed Taliban to reorganize and get new recruitments. On one hand US had failed to win the confidence of Afghan nations, the alleged involvement of US forces in digging mines and shifting precious minerals to USA (Mark Landler, 2017) has further convinced the locals that the presence of foreign troops was in their least interest. After the demise of Taliban rule, America should have withdrawn and should have left Afghanistan to the hands of Afghans as their land and they should have given the right to decide about their own fate and destiny. Meanwhile, U.S looked unclear on its long-term vision and had no clear mind on whether to withdraw or to stay the course. While America's pre-mature withdrawal from Afghanistan would have disastrously damaged the global and regional impact and interests of America, and had the potential to energized global insurgency. America and NATO had to remodel

their engagement in Afghanistan as surveillance mission to prevent sanctuaries of terrorists. Taliban's re-emergence thus considerably undermined stated objectives of United States in one way but provided another opportunity for their legitimate presence in Afghanistan (Frederick W. Kagan, 2014). For antiterrorism, in the words of Scott Sigmund Gartner and Leo Blanken, US should have acted upon the policy of "*Go Local, Go Small, and Go Long*". Going small was less costly, going local was in accordance with the local culture and going long strategy was needed in view of Afghanistan's poor infrastructure, abject poverty, weak government and ethnic divisions. In US strategies the notion of "*jus post bellum*", or post war justice also seemed missing and US, couldn't focus on national life, stability and legitimacy of Afghan state and the institutions. Post war justice demanded from America, to leave Afghans to build the sort of state they would like to live in, along with enough security apparatus to stop the prospects of civil war (Gartner S.S. and Blanken. L., 2014).

After analyzing the policies and actions of United States in post 9/11 era it can easily be understood that during this era she opted for De Facto policy of Islamophobia and a new crusade against Muslims of the World. The theatres for War on Terror are all in the Muslim countries and Islamic values and teachings are consistently made controversial (Colin Wolfgang, 2017). Moreover, the U.S un-proclaimed agenda of the War on Terror was to secure its trade routes, i.e. Strait of Hormuz, Strait of Malacca and Bay of Pigs to reach Asian markets and increase its global economic reach, which it got to some extent by diverting the concentration of the world from these areas and engaging them in war on terror. The stay in Afghanistan was also a tactical pressure on Iran to withdraw its plans for making an atomic bomb and compel it for a deal with the Western powers. The maturity of talks and some-what normalization of state-to-state relations between USA and Iran helped NATO forces to withdraw from Afghanistan, yet USA's bases are still operating in different areas of Afghanistan (Kelly Tim, 2011). In June, 2006, the then Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice coined the word "Creative Instability" in these words that "We have to create an arc of instability, chaos, and violence extending from Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria to Iraq, The Persian Gulf, Iran, Pakistan and the borders of NATO-garrisoned Afghanistan," and the project of "New Middle East" which started with the war between Lebanon and Israel in the same year (Nazemroaya, M.D., 2006). Now United States has left the region due to pivot to Middle East for accomplishing its another project of "Creative Instability," practically started in the name of "Arab Spring" and is now at its peak in Syria and Iraq. It confirms the U.S designs to target those countries which are considered potential fortresses of Islam and their influence in the Muslim World. During the surge of troops in Obama's era, the US forces couldn't attained the set goals of paving the way for withdrawal. They targeted the locals, civilians and search operations of houses without any intimation even during night times which stimulated the locals to support Taliban for getting rid of these foreign occupants. There are many other such examples which proves the failure and flaws of US strategies during past sixteen years (Sadiq, M., 2017). Nevertheless, after withdrawal, the US and NATO forces' residual presence apart from other strategic objectives is meant for training and support of the Afghan National Security Forces. Despite their efforts and massive funding the Afghan forces failed to achieve visible gains on grounds and control desertion in their troops. Corruption inside armed forces reached at its peak and power was used at its best to attain their personal and political interests. Reports suggest that on average 40 Afghan soldiers and police die each day due to attacks by the insurgents or internal scuffles. By analyzing different reports and analysis it can rightly be stated that USA is now trying to sustain the controlled chaos and managed anarchy to legitimize their presence for a long time (Malik A, 2107). On political front, National Unity Government was formed to bring unity in Afghan nation and provide a democratic setup to the Afghans. NUG proved to be united only in name and it failed to cover the internal rifts even after the passage of three years in office. Alliances are formed within the

government against the government. Parliament and Arg: the presidential palace are found at a continuous clash on the selection of ministers and many governance related issues (Amini, K., 2017). The Afghan cabinet is still incomplete and six ministers were sacked by the parliament who are still working on interim basis, which shows the conflict of interests between the legislative and the executive branches of the government are persistent. Within the government, the tripartite alliance (including the foreign minister) against NUG shows the level of disunity in the Unity government (President Bush, 2001).

When United States attacked Afghanistan on October 07, 2001, it basically aimed at pushing Taliban out of power and dismantle Al-Qaeda (UN Security Council, 2001). The military campaign was named 'Enduring Freedom', and had the backing of NATO as well as an approval by the world in form of UN Resolutions (The Guardian, 2003). Within few weeks, USA was able to dethrone Taliban and had pushed them to the mountains, but had failed to make them irrelevant or at least fend off the likelihood of their coming to power again. President Bush in his victory speech announced that they have killed the dragon and will now search out snakes in the jungle (Hy Rothstein, 2014). Afghan war became "the Secondary Theatre", after the invasion of Iraq in 2003 (Ibid). Afghanistan's economy is heavily dependent on foreign aid and the budget of the current year included 70% of foreign funding (Ministry of Finance, Government of Afghanistan, 2017). The GNP increased by 20% in past 16 years but here, once again the major portion is coming from the foreign aid (Ibid). Mines are dug illegally and credible reports suggest that Afghan mainstream politicians are involved in it (Bowley, G., 2012). The drugs production that became zero in 2001 during Taliban regime is now adding 90% of narcotics to the World Drugs Statistics (Afghanistan opium production, 2016). UN reports suggest that more than 201000 hectares land is cultivated for drugs production (Ibid). The US and NATO forces failed to control its production, rather some reports opine that they are supporting farmers in different areas to produce opium and other narcotics (Nordland. R., 2010). Special Inspector General on Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) reports that, United States failed to revive and strengthen Afghanistan's economy. It has noted that Department of Defense formulated a special Task Force for Business and Stability Operations (TFBSO) with \$675 million for funding business related projects in different areas of Afghanistan with the aim to enhance economic activity and lessen the fighting trends there. But SIGAR report suggests that this program terribly failed in attaining its objectives due to several reasons including lack of coordination with other projects of USA and other International Donor Agencies. The foremost of them are that the group failed to realize the local factors, i.e. culture, politics, weather and security. Most of its part, i.e. \$316.3 million spent on direct support while \$299.8 million spent on indirect administrative and general spending (US Program to Revive Afghan, 2018). It's not the tale of a single project but these dilemmas are found in almost every funding aimed at the development of Afghanistan.

The local warlords are getting benefit of such situations and have developed their stakes in chaos rather than restoration of peace, law and order. War Economy has become very strong and civil society members and other workers of different international or local organizations are against the complete withdrawal of US and NATO forces, as it will shrink their sources of income which they get in lieu of humanitarian services in a war ridden state. Some figures in mainstream politics and high positions in government offices are also supporting the presence of foreign forces for their survival and job security (Tarkel, A., 2011). The status quo is too strong to be influenced easily for change or any political settlement with Taliban or any other resistant group. Managed and controlled chaos is in the favor of the elements of status quo. The debate on the *Endgame in Afghanistan* was initiated with the first public speech of President Obama, when he said the process of the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan will commence from 2012. Although the final verdict on troop pullout has not been announced but there were clear signs that US will pull out

from Afghanistan - the 30,000 surge troops in Afghanistan have already been withdrawn before the November 2012 presidential elections (Iqbal, A., 2011). President Barrack Obama said the United States would draw motivation from those who lost their lives and still continued the work for protection of Afghanistan (Ibid). Admiral Mike Mullen said that America required staying in Afghanistan devoted to the assignment of these armed forces and “The fight will continue” (Burki, S.J., 2011). It clearly shows that there is huge difference of opinion among Pentagon and Washington. Osama bin Laden’s death at the hands of US Special Forces was considered to be a touch stone in regard of this endgame. With bin Laden’s death, the argument has often been made that the mission which begun almost 10 years ago, has now been accomplished and there is hardly any convincing reason for American military to stay in Afghanistan. Combat troops should begin to be brought home, according to the assurance given by American President Barrack Obama when he declared his Afghan policy at West Point on Dec. 1, 2009, but has the task of stabilizing Afghanistan been actually completed? (Ibid) The followers of Realist school suggest that in the absence of stable Afghanistan, it will be a mistake to leave Afghanistan as the country would once again descend into violent chaos posing enormous risks to regional and global order, vice versa Idealist/Liberal elements suggest the withdrawal of combat forces and stresses on the rebuilding and restructuring of Afghanistan.

A US executive, quoted in the Washington Post, stated that: “Bin Laden's demise is the start of the endgame in Afghanistan, it changes the whole thing” (Noor Zahid, 2017). But, realistically, Osama’s death has changed nothing for the Americans until the White House employed all regional players in a regional arrangement. In reality, America has chased a vague war in Afghanistan based on weak tactics with apparently no thinking about the broad strategy. And Osama’s death does not resolve the strategic crisis facing America. The rise and establishment of ISIS on Afghan territory is credited (in the words of Hamid Karzai) to USA as their major financier and supporter (Times of Islamabad, 2017). ISIS has added more to the already prevailing insecurity and instability, and now reports are given by media on daily basis about their clashes with the Taliban in different areas. So Karzai’s confession added another source for American presence is to keep the enemy weak but alive to legitimize their presence and proactive role. The new policy of American President has made the future of Afghan War, vague, because there is no time limit for their ground presence, the war will further intensify and more target oriented due to the addition of mercenaries and soldiers. The regional and neighboring countries have shown their concerns for prolonged and indefinite American presence in the region. The SCO contact group meeting in Moscow also reflects the same notion with some reservations (Stavridis, J, 2017). Former Supreme Allied Commander of American and NATO Forces James Stavridis while writing in Foreign Policy says that, “the options are bad in Afghanistan. We could cut our losses (2,400 Americans dead, \$1 trillion spent) and depart — but that would eventually lead to another Vietnam moment, with helicopters lifting off the roof of the U.S. Embassy”. He further adds that “another approach would be to return to a robust NATO-led operation with 150,000 troops doing the actual fighting, which was the size of the force when I ran the Afghan war as supreme allied commander in 2009-2013. But there is no appetite for that level of commitment on either side of the Atlantic, and, frankly, the entire world wrestles with profound Afghan fatigue. So, we are left with the option that excites no one: a very modest increase of troop strength (probably 4,000 U.S. forces and an equal number of allied); a “conditions-based approach” without a specific withdrawal timeline; and a revitalized regional strategy that puts more pressure on Pakistan. Sounds a lot like what was proposed in 2013 as we drew down our military forces by 90 percent and significantly cut foreign aid to Afghanistan. And yet President Donald Trump calls this a “new approach.” Will it work? What should we really be doing?” (Impact of War in Afghanistan, 2018).

Impacts on Pakistan

Pakistan; being the immediate neighbor of Afghanistan has been consistently facing the repercussions of crests and troughs in Afghanistan's day to day situations. United States, while strategizing new policies of strategies for Afghanistan had to make Pakistan an integral part of her policies along with Afghanistan. Pakistan saw huge loss in the shape of rising of militancy in its tribal areas leading towards vigorous military operations which apart from loss of precious human lives, damaged infrastructure, massive mass displacements, from Swat, Dir, North and South Waziristan and Bajaur agency (Ibid). Pakistan's military and paramilitary forces have also given sacrifices of their lives and infrastructure in fighting the paranoid people in these areas. Pakistan's economy saw unparalleled loss due to loss of businesses, bombing in public places, unemployment, and plight of the investors and tourists (Ibid). Education sector also was severely damaged due to frequent targeting of schools for bombing, cancellation of classes and exams, infrastructural damages and psychological torturing of the students throughout the country. Pakistan received huge number of Afghan refugees, adding further tension to the already crumbling society due to massive liability of Afghan refugees since 80s (The Express Tribune, 2017). In USA's Af-Pak Policy, Pakistan was categorically pointed out and was brought on the same footings as Afghanistan. This policy attracted USA's spies, private contractors and proxies (Ibid). Due to situations in Afghanistan and the role of Pakistan, there developed a serious distrust and misunderstanding between Pakistan and USA.

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