

Post US Forces Afghanistan: Impact On Civil Society, Women Plight And Human Rights Situation

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Abstract

War in Afghanistan in new millennium is referred to America's counter-terrorism operation in Afghanistan. It had threefold objective to dismantle Al- Qaeda's safe heavens in Afghanistan, oust Taliban from power and combat terrorism in Afghanistan. Author has applied the International Alert Conflict Assessment Framework for the completion of this paper. Taliban defied their words to provide protection to women, girls, allow media to function, amnesty to former government employees and interpreters. After Taliban's violent take over on August 15, 2021 targeted campaign was launched to kill civil society members, former government workers, prevent girls' school education. Afghanistan today is the second country where girl's secondary education is banned. The regime stopped women from working. Eighty five percent of women working in media have quit jobs. Former government employees e.g. police officials, judges, army officials are primary target of the repressive regime. Women workers, journalists, human rights defenders, ordinary and notable Afghans daring to raise voice against Taliban are under threat in Afghanistan. Coercive policies are creating psychological problems in the suppressed community particularly female.

Keywords: NATO, Withdrawal, Case Study, Forces, Taliban.

Introduction

In new millennium war in Afghanistan is referred to United States of America (USA), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and US allies military intervention in Afghanistan. Purpose of this military intervention was threefold. First, to dismantle safe havens of Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, second oust Taliban from power and third to combat terrorism in Afghanistan. The terror incident on 9/11 in the US paved the way for this military intervention (Thomas 2021). Bush administration demanded of Taliban regime that the Taliban should hand over Osama Bin Laden (OBL) and expel Al-Qaeda. Taliban asked Bin Laden to leave the country but declined to extradite him without evidence of his involvement in the 9/11 attacks. Taliban's offer to negotiate was denied by America. Instead Washington launched counter-terrorism operations in response to the rejection of the Taliban regime to hand over OBL.

This research paper/case study focuses on evolving situation in Afghanistan in the wake of US forces withdrawal from war torn Afghanistan.

Structure of the Paper and Framework of Analysis

For the completion of this paper the International Alert Conflict Assessment Framework is applied. This framework is prearranged in a very comprehensive and understandable way. Framework divides the paper between levels, i.e., conflict profile, actors, causes of the conflict and dynamics. Afghanistan conflict is multifaceted. Historical dynamics of the Afghan conflict discusses issues leading to US forces withdrawal. Dynamics are discussed under the heading of conflict profile part. The subsequent part highlights impact of US forces withdrawal on Afghanistan, factors (global, national and societal) have also been taken into account to discuss the ongoing situation and their potential influence on the evolving conflict. Framework interlinks these levels. It provides a broader knowledge of conflict complexity instead of a general knowledge of the situation.

Conflict Profile

Afghanistan a mountainous land-locked country borders with Turkmenistan in the north, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In the east it borders with China and Pakistan in south and Iran to the west. Afghanistan conflict is acknowledged as one of the high level armed conflicts in the world. Modern conflicts in Afghanistan stemmed from not because of religious belief, social class, the directions such as development, constitutional rights, but they have stemmed from the attempts of the dominant tribes and their elites to accomplish a high degree of centralism of power with the help of foreign patrons (Breede 2008). Historically Pashtuns have ruled Afghanistan. Other groups who felt oppressed tried to emerge in the later stages of the conflict. Pashtuns are Sunni Muslims while other groups are majority Shia Muslims. In certain cases this factor also helped the ignition of the conflict.

On October 7, 2001, the US and British forces launched “Operation Enduring Freedom,” to disperse Al Qaeda from Afghanistan and remove Taliban regime from helms of power (The U.S. War 2021). On February 29, 2020 US and Taliban agreed to sign a peace deal after prolong negotiations (Joint Declaration between 2020). Important clauses of the deal include the following;

1. Taliban will prevent the use of Afghan soil against US and its allies by individuals or any terrorist organization.
2. A timeline for the withdrawal of US and coalition forces.
3. Intra-afghan dialogue and;
4. Permanent and comprehensive ceasefire agreement.

Trump administration agreed to withdraw US forces by May, 2021. On January 15, 2021 US forces in Afghanistan reached the lowest level 2,500. It was revealed by the then acting Secretary of Defence Christopher Miller (Thomas 2021). US has withdrawn approximately 90% of its troops, military equipment and vacated its military personnel from nearly all of the military bases in the country. President Joe Biden announced that his military commanders have suggested swift withdrawal from the country (Subramanian 2021). Final withdrawal of US forces was completed before August 31, 2021. It brought an end to the longest war in US history. New conflict is evolving in Afghanistan as Taliban forces have taken control of large swathes. Afghan army officials surrendered without firing a single bullet. Several Afghan national army soldiers fled to neighbouring Pakistan and Tajikistan. Taliban swift advances surprised military planners.

Impact of US Military Withdrawal on Afghanistan

It was expected that US military drawdown will affect neither security situation nor counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan nor training, assisting Afghan forces. This conclusion was perhaps drawn because of the statements issued by US officials. In its annual threat assessment, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence reported that “the Afghan Government will struggle to hold the Taliban at bay if the Coalition withdraws support,” (Annual Threat Assessment 2021). US President Joe Biden while defending US withdrawal from Afghanistan claimed that approximately 75,000 Taliban fighters are no match for the 300,000 Afghan national army (Biden Defends Decision 2021). Afghan President Ghani has insisted that Afghan security forces can keep Taliban at bay (Taliban capture key 2021).

Security situation in Afghanistan is tense therefore impact of US withdrawal on Afghanistan’s security is discussed under different categories. Including impact on erstwhile Afghan National Army, civil society, Intra-Afghan peace talks,

Impact on Erstwhile Afghan National Army

Overconfident Afghan officials particularly from security establishment downplayed the impact of US forces withdrawal from Afghanistan. In the wake of US forces withdrawal Afghan army officials surrendered without firing a single bullet to Afghan Taliban. Instead of fighting several other officials crossed the border into Pakistan and Tajikistan to save their lives. Many others fearing Taliban backlash have deserted. Collapse of Afghan army resulted in easy victory. It encouraged Taliban fighters to continue their assault against government forces. Afghan national army was trained by US contractors and NATO military trainers yet it failed to halt Taliban advances across the country. It is not surprising because US military report prepared in February, 2021 asserts no Afghan airframes, “can be sustained as combat effective for more than few weeks,” (Operation Freedom’s Sentinel 2021). It ascertains Afghan army failed to protect key areas, consolidate their positions and it has lost strategically significant areas in Taliban sweeping advances. Psychological and military defeat of Afghan army resulted in Taliban’s easy victories. Simultaneously, it raises serious questions about fighting capabilities and morale of Afghan army.

Impact on Afghan Civil Society

Taliban fighters were underestimated and the security situation in Afghanistan is contrary to above quoted claims. Strategic planners in Washington and Kabul ignored the fact that Taliban have tirelessly fought against world most modern militaries and robust security alliance NATO. Taliban have survived counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations for almost two decades. Taliban have had better situational awareness, understanding of the terrain and enemy’s fighting skills and techniques. They are battle hardened, better trained and evolved innovative technique to fight and win asymmetric warfare. They gradually made progress to take control of symbolically, strategically and commercially significant places. Overall security situation in Afghanistan rapidly changed. Afghan Taliban roughly 60,000 Taliban fighters took control of major areas of the country. Afghanistan districts, cities, towns and villages are under Taliban control.

Women workers, journalists, human rights defenders, ordinary and notable Afghans daring to raise voice against Taliban are under threat in Afghanistan. The ruling Taliban regime has used force to suppress dissident voices. Houses of active civil society members have been raided, searched, they are tortured, detained and prosecuted (Kohsar 2021). Human right violations have become a serious concern for Afghan civil society and international community today.

Afghan Exodus

Contrary to Afghan government, Afghan forces and NATO officials claims Taliban easily achieved significant territorial gains. During Taliban takeover several journalists, tribal elders, politicians, lawyers, businessmen, foreign diplomats, activists, religious personalities, serving and former (local) government officials were killed. Keeping in view security situation many other Afghans decided to leave Afghanistan. Afghan citizens lost faith in Afghan national army.

Majority people were pessimist about restoration of peace in the war torn country after US military haste withdrawal. People fear an all-out civil war or they will be caught in crossfire between different warring factions. This process is continued. Large scale exodus of civilians from Afghanistan confirms that security situation is worsened.

Afghan civilians fear that Afghanistan will become ideal place for terrorists group. They are faced with uncertain future and have refused to live under insecurity and uncertain situation. They have been left with no choice but to leave their homes in a search for finding peace. Afghan civilians are fleeing their homes to Dak in Pakistan's Balochistan province and Iran from inhospitable Mashkel mountain (Bezhan 2021). Taliban have also been accused of the rights of ethnic and religious minorities. It is yet another grave concern for international society.

Female Education and Travel

After coming to power in Afghanistan the hardcore extremists group has imposed restrictions on female education and travel. Several incidents have been reported wherein Taliban fighters stopped public transport to check whether female are accompanied by adult male relative. Fearing Taliban fighters' taxi and bus drivers refuse to take female clients travelling solo. Crux of the matter is Taliban rulers are restricting women.

In other incidents repressive regime has barred millions of girls' right to education, access to justice and healthcare. It is utter contempt for Afghan female human rights. Afghanistan today is the second country where girl's secondary education is banned. Taliban in their repressive drive stopped several girls from appearing in exams. Keeping in view frozen funds and international community's condemnation the regime has announced female will have all the rights within Islam. However, the real picture is bleak. Orthodox regime has imposed restrictions on women travel, education, healthcare, employment and work. Reportedly, there is no mechanism to redress issues confronting women e.g. faced with domestic violence, to provide them shelter, harassment and intimidation. It is creating psychological issues/problems in female. Several former employees start to cry when they remember old days.

Women Workers Fear for their Lives

In January, 2021 two Afghanistan's Supreme Court Judges were assassinated in Kabul. Afghan officials raised two significant points following the two high profile killings. First, judges were assassinated despite peace talks are underway. Second, it is violation of the peace agreement (Harding 2021). In another terrifying incident 85 schoolgirls were killed in suburb of Kabul (Graham-Harrison 2021). Prior to US forces withdrawal Afghan policewomen also come under attack and killed. US and Afghan officials alleged Taliban multiple targeted attacks carried out

against notable people. Families of female workers stopped them from working they believed space for work particularly journalists had shrunken.

Abovementioned incidents of terrorism sent shockwaves across Afghanistan. Several female workers were reportedly intimidated and harassed and advised to quit offices. Fearing for their lives many female have resigned from their services and go underground. Former women workers believe their right to work and education is abandoned. Crux of the matter is violence against women has increased after US forces withdrawal in Afghanistan. Women working in different field of life and formerly contributing to the society are forced to sit at home. They are unsure about the future. Barring women from performing their duties means fewer women are girls have access to health facilities and education services. Eighty five percent of women working in media had to quit their jobs. Violations are committed with complete impunity. The rule of law has collapsed abuses against women and lacks of accountability are the hallmarks of new Afghanistan.

Threats to Lives of Afghan Interpreters

In post US Afghanistan Afghan who worked with America and its allies are fearful that Taliban have declared them national traitors. Interpreters believe fighters will search and hunt them. They are fearful and uncertain about their future. President Joe Biden announced to have issued 2,500 special immigrant visas to Afghan nationals who have assisted US (Biden Defends Decision 2021). Biden's announcement to launch "Operation Allies Refuge," to safely evacuate 2,500 Afghan nationals who served as interpreters for US (Sediqi and Hakimi 2021) was a sigh of relief. However, several Afghan interpreters are waiting for their visas to be processed.

Impact on Intra-Afghan Peace Talks

Former President George Bush Jr. in an interview expressed fears that US withdrawal left behind the people "to be slaughtered," (Afghanistan: Taliban Flag 2021). United Kingdom (UK) Chief of Defence Staff General Sir Nick Carter highlighted three possible scenarios for Afghanistan. First, "hold the ring," Taliban will continue to advance and capture provincial capitals. Second, "collapse of Afghan government," resulting in fractured country ruled by Taliban and its rivals. Third scenario was, "political compromise," between Taliban and Afghan government to end the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan (Taliban capture key 2021). However, President Biden rejected the possibility of unified government in war torn country (Biden Defends Decision 2021). Under the February 2020 Peace Agreement Taliban agreed to hold negotiations with Afghan government to find peaceful resolution of the conflict. However, no progress was made to reduce violence, determine future form of government and reach comprehensive peace settlement. Instead Taliban took control of the country through use of force. Intra-Afghan peace talks collapsed. More people were forced to leave their homes and displaced to secure their lives.

Afghan Taliban Seize Control of Border Crossings

During their advances Taliban surprisingly took control of significant border crossings along with Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. Border crossing in North West Afghan provinces Herat, Farah, and Kunduz are under Taliban firm control (Sediqi and Hakimi 2021). Taliban also took control of Islam Qala border town near Iran and Torghundi bordering Turkmenistan in Herat province (Taliban capture key 2021). In pursuit to cut-off supplies to Afghan national army Taliban fighters took over control of important highways across the country. These border crossing are significant from strategic and economic perspectives. Control of highways is an additional source of revenue generation for Taliban.

Seizure of Islam Qala alone will enable Taliban to generate US \$ 20 million per month. In another advance Taliban have claimed to have taken control of Wesh border town in Spin Boldak opposite to Pakistan's Chaman border in Kandhar province. It connects landlocked Afghanistan with Arabian Gulf. Taliban fighters are collecting tool tax on border from transit vehicles.

Control over border crossings enables Taliban to generate uninterrupted revenue through tool tax collection. Large scale budget will ensure sustainability of Taliban ongoing military operations. Financial autonomy will reduce Afghan Taliban's dependence on external actors reducing foreign interference in decision making process and pressure on Taliban. Financial autonomy will ensure strategic autonomy at strategic, operational and tactical levels. The substance of the matter is Taliban will be able to resist outside pressure particularly from allies in making vital decisions.

Border crossing with Pakistan and Iran provides leverage to Taliban to welcome Taliban sympathizers from both countries and join their ranks. Further, injured fighters can be shifted to hospitals across the border in the guise of Afghan civilians caught in Taliban and Afghan security forces crossfire.

Human Rights Situation

Taliban after coming to power have been accused of their involvement in human rights abuses. Amrullah Saleh, former Vice President of Afghanistan has alleged that the Minority Kerghiz residents of Northern Badakhshan province have been asked by the Taliban either to leave the area or convert to Islam (Sediqi and Hakimi 2021). United Nations Mission in Afghanistan expressed concerns over persecution of ethnic and sectarian minorities, killings and ill-treatment in war-hit-areas in the country (Sediqi and Hakimi 2021). Conflict and rising violence forced people to leave their homes. Internally displaced people are faced with different problems. Earlier, many were left under the scorching heat of the summer, with no food, drinking water and shelter. Injured and sick have no access to medicine (Afghanistan's Ghani Blames 2021). Later in winter millions were faced with food shortages.

Threats to Afghan Civilian Property and Developmental Infrastructure

UN has accused Taliban of attacking, looting and destroying civilian property including homes, schools, clinics, water supplies bridges, shops, cellular phone and electricity towers (Graham-Harrison 2021). People have accused Taliban fighters of destroying telecommunication infrastructure so networks are down.

Actors

Erstwhile Afghan Government

Taliban in swift advances captured areas of Eastern, Northern and Southern provinces. Taliban's blitzkrieg strategy created doubts in the minds of international observers, Afghan officials, populations and different segments of Afghan society about Taliban sincerity to peacefully resolve the conflict. Clashes did not stop instead Taliban kept advancing and seized power by force (Cornwell 2021). Former President Ashraf Ghani adopted three prong failed strategies to deal with Taliban onslaught.

1. First, at the diplomatic front unfortunately ,senior Afghan officials have repeatedly blamed Pakistan for sponsoring Taliban (Siddique 2021).They have put the onus of instability in Afghanistan on Pakistan. In post US forces withdrawal period Pak-Afghan relations are at the lowest level as both states have withdrawn their ambassadors.
2. Second, Ghani administration accused Taliban of using Doha dialogue as a time gaining tactic. Despite dialogues Taliban continued violent activities to solidify their control in the suburb of provincial capitals. Ghani believes Taliban see little incentive in reaching a comprehensive peaceful settlement (End of the Post-Election Impasse? Ghani and Abdullah's New Power-sharing Formula 2020). Therefore, Taliban have reached near and they will overrun Kabul and provincial capitals after US and coalition forces complete their withdrawal. Ghani urged warlords to form a united front against Taliban and push them back in pursuit to recapture lost territories. Ghani announced government has prepared six-months plan to thwart Taliban fighters (Afghanistan's Ghani Blames 2021).
3. Ghani criticized US for worsening situating amid US hasty withdrawal from Afghanistan (Kermani and Zubaide 2021). Government wants US to continue its support to prolong its rule.

Afghan Taliban- and Al Qaeda

Taliban believe US and coalition forces withdrawal is confirmation of Taliban's victory and affirms US defeat. Taliban emerged as an organized force under single command. It filled the power vacuum left by US. Group is running shadow government in captured areas (Kermani and Zubaide 2021). International observers and UN Taliban monitoring team in its 2020 report claimed that Taliban have strong ties with Al Qaeda. It was claimed that the top-tier of the group and several fighters are covertly operating and they have safe-heavens in Afghanistan. UN team in its report also claimed that Taliban have regularly consulted Al Qaeda during negotiations with US (S/2020/415 2020).

Under the 2020 Peace Agreement US agreed to withdraw its forces. US forces and Taliban also agreed to ceasefire under the agreement. However, US air force has launched aerial strikes against Taliban in support of Afghan national security forces. Taliban advances have been disrupted by these strikes. Taliban spokesperson has termed it violation of the peace agreement by US. If US continue aerial strikes after August 31, 2021 it will provide justification to Taliban to openly develop ties with Al Qaeda. Secondly, Taliban can launch attacks against remaining US forces in Afghanistan. In this case violence will further increase Taliban will demand US forces complete withdrawal. Third, Taliban have not horizontally escalated Afghan conflict hence never attacked US interests outside Afghanistan. However, US aerial strikes may provide justification to Taliban to perpetrate attacks against US interests in the region indigenously or in collaboration with Al Qaeda. Fourth, Taliban can evolve strategic partnership with Al Qaeda it will be aimed at bringing US under pressure to halt attacks against Taliban in Afghanistan. Taliban-Al Qaeda strategic partnership will be significant blow to US hegemonic position and raise serious questions including will US redeploy its forces in Afghanistan to fight Taliban and Al Qaeda? Biden administration decision to keep US forces in Afghanistan will mean collapse of peace agreement with Taliban and US renewed role in Afghanistan.

Islamic State Khorasan Province (IS-KP)

The vacuum left by Al Qaeda in Afghanistan in some parts is filled by more conservative and ruthless IS-KP. UN Taliban monitoring team in its 2020 report affirms above claim. The report highlighted IS-KP presence in Nangarhar since November, 2019 and neighboring Kunar province (Thomas 2021). It has carried out gruesome terrorist attacks in Kabul and various other parts of the country. Group has not spared anyone including journalists, television female workers (Operation Freedom's Sentinel 2021), Afghan civilians, government officials, Taliban fighters and minorities.

International Intervention

Afghanistan's immediate neighbors and extra regional powers have economic, political and strategic interests in the country. External involvement in Afghanistan's internal affairs further complicates the situation.

United States

Primary aim of US onslaught on Afghanistan was to dismantle terrorists training camps, kill or capture Al Qaeda leadership and overthrow Taliban regime from power (Thomas 2021). Today, Al Qaeda is present in Afghanistan. Taliban have large scale presence control huge swathes of territory. US has failed to achieve its objectives instead struck a deal with Taliban and outsourced counterterrorism responsibility to the group.

Pakistan

Experts believe that Pakistan's security establishment decided to fence Pak-Afghan border for two reasons. First, hostile countries intelligence agencies have used Afghanistan as a launching pad to sponsor terrorism in Pakistan. They created, sponsored and provided safe heavens to terrorists groups through its embassy and consulates in Afghanistan. Counterforce and counter value targets in urban centers of Pakistan remained their prime targets. Pakistani security forces were overstretched as they had to be deployed on Western border with Afghanistan. Continuous counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations exhausted Pakistani security forces. More than 70,000 people lost their lives in Indian funded terrorist activities in Pakistan (Siddique 2021). Foreign investors left Pakistan and economy was on the verge of collapse. Contrarily, spoilers want instability in Afghanistan to bleed Pakistan through their proxies and thousands cuts strategy. In these circumstances unstable Afghanistan is high profile issue. Strategic planners in Rawalpindi and Islamabad views peaceful and stable Afghanistan in the interest of Pakistan hence they desire peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Second, Pakistan is losing control over Taliban therefore it decided to fence Pak-Afghan border. Pakistan has completed 90% work on fencing the Durand Line in pursuit to stop spillover effects of instability and war in Afghanistan on Pakistan. Afghanistan's Eastern neighbor Pakistan fears spillover effects of instability in Afghanistan including extremism, terrorism, drug trafficking and influx of illegal immigrants into Pakistan. However, some segments in Pakistan believe extremism is already spilled over into Pakistan's Tirah valley as Taliban in a letter have warned women of dire consequences if they violate veil (Siddique 2021). Recently, approximately ten Chinese nationals have been targeted in Pakistan in two separate incidents. In first instance nine Chinese engineers working on under construction Dasu Dam part of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) were killed in bus blast in Northern Province of Pakistan. Prior to it in April Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) attacked hotel in Balochistan at the time Chinese ambassador was in the hotel (Chinese engineers killed in Pakistan bus blast 2021). In second terror incident a Chinese national was killed in Karachi (Negi 2021). Pakistani security establishment is under pressure from Beijing to guarantee security of Chinese nationals. Possibility and frequency of planned terrorist incidents targeted against Chinese nationals and projects is feared to increase in coming future. Pakistan's failure to provide foolproof security or to cope with the security situation can result in

Chinese decision to halt developmental projects in Pakistan. Secondly, China may decide to provide security to Chinese nationals in Pakistan. It means tacit deployment of Chinese security forces and reconnaissance system on Pakistani soil. Chinese private security companies are providing security to Chinese businessmen in (Cambodia) Southeast Asia and Africa (Berlinger 2021). Mounted terrorist attacks targeted against Chinese national can result in deployment of Chinese private security contractors in Pakistan. Third, accelerated pace of terrorists' attacks to sabotage Chinese developmental projects by assassinating Chinese engineers can result in Sino-Pak coordinated counterterrorism operations across Pakistan. Fourth, China can also take the case to United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on the basis of substantial proofs of the Indian involvement in terrorists' activities targeting Chinese interests in Pakistan to declare India as a terrorist sponsoring state.

Russia

President Putin issued instructions to Russian Special Envoy for Afghanistan to seriously negotiate with Taliban. Two significant announcements were made by Moscow regarding Afghanistan. First, it has warned against military intervention in Afghanistan in post US Afghanistan. Secondly, it will deal with terrorism in Afghanistan (Parashar 2021). It is result of successful diplomatic efforts initiated by Taliban political leadership. Modern day Taliban desires to be recognized as responsible citizens by international community. Modern Taliban acknowledges the fact that Russia can help Taliban to get international recognition. The group has assured Russia that Afghan soil will not be used against Russia (Parashar 2021).

India

India has carried out various developmental projects in Afghanistan. It enjoys good reputation among Afghan masses. New Delhi provided military training to Afghan military cadets, constructed dams and educational institutions. It is viewed as trusted ally and a reliable partner in Kabul. Prior to May 1, 2021 India had maintained commercial and diplomatic presence. Anti-Indian Taliban continuous surge in Afghanistan led to the withdrawal of Indian diplomatic staff. New Delhi had to stop various reconstruction projects in Afghanistan.

New Delhi is working on three different plans to deal with Afghan fiasco.

1. It has refused to accept Taliban regime if the group overthrow government in Kabul and seize control by force.
2. Launched diplomatic efforts to approach Taliban with Doha's support.
3. Surprisingly Indian pilots have attacked Taliban fighters.

India stepped up its regional diplomacy. It approached regional players including Russia and Iran to influence Afghan outcome (Mohan 2021). Jaishanker, Indian Minister for External Affairs tried to gather support for erstwhile Ghani government to push back Taliban fighters and compel them to find peaceful comprehensive solution of the conflict. Diplomatic efforts have paid-off as decision makers in Washington have responded to Indian proposal. Indo-US strategic and political interests in Afghanistan are converging.

China

Afghanistan and China shares border therefore Beijing is concerned about spillover effects of Afghan conflict into China. Beijing understands that political and negotiated settlement of Afghan conflict is the key to restore peace and stability in Afghanistan. China wants to extend CPEC Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) flagship project to peaceful Afghanistan to gain access to markets in Iran, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan. Wang Yi, Chinese Foreign Minister held talks with Taliban in this regard. Taliban have assured that Afghan soil will not be allowed to target Chinese mainland (Myres 2021). Taliban were referring to East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) in Afghanistan. ETIM poses direct threat to Chinese national security and a serious cause of concern for China.

China is emerging as a major stakeholder after US withdrawal from war-havocked country. Taliban understand strategic, diplomatic and economic value of relations with China. Taliban political leadership is confident to achieve large scale benefits including future international recognition and political legitimacy by addressing Chinese concerns (ETIM) in Afghanistan. Taliban leaders have publically welcomed Chinese investment in the country. It has announced to refrain from interfering in Chinese domestic affairs(Standish 2021). Close cordial contacts with Beijing will open the door of economic opportunities, foreign investment and diplomatic channels from various other capitals. It will increase Taliban stature in international arena resulting in lifting of sanctions imposed against Taliban.

Policymakers in Beijing believe Taliban emerged as powerful political actor and play dominant role. It has increased security engagement with Afghanistan's neighbours to implement "Plan B" if situation gets out of control.

Causes of US failure in Afghanistan

i. The Occupation of Iraq

Whilst American invasion of Afghanistan was an internationally recognized move supported by large chunks of afghan population American adventure in Iraq was illegal, unpopular and of course catastrophic. Most importantly it diverted the attention necessary to address the military and civilian needs of post-Taliban Afghanistan.

ii. Incoherent Strategy

Even if Iraq hadn't happened, American policy makers never really cared about Afghanistan. US special representative or defacto viceroy after 2001 Zalmi Khalilzad said in his memoir that President Bush's knowledge of Afghanistan was close to nil. He didn't know and he didn't care to know. For him it was just a side show of democratic politics.

iii. Wrong Afghan Allies

United States didn't come to have allies, it came to own slaves. From the first days 9/11 until today United States has directly and indirectly paid billions of dollars to Afghan warlords hoping they would one day be able to take charge. Fact of the matter is that fattening this corrupt militia, while tactically useful is a strategic blunder. They may win your battles but they will lead to a defeat in war.

iv. Underestimating the Taliban

Taliban took over Afghanistan within a very short period of time because they are brilliant tacticians, incredible and zombionic human resources the like of which no non-state militia had ever seen, not at least in our part of the world. They are the first Sunni and second Muslim militant spearheaded by the cleric class of mullahs. Every mosque is their base and as such every village their constituency and every madrassa all the way into Pakistan, their recruitment source. Forgetting the reality of their evil was the greatest mistake committed by Afghanistan's deluded political elite.

v. Inefficient and corrupt government

Despite massive military and financial aid by the NATO forces, the Afghan Govt couldn't deliver in terms of security or delivery of basic services. Rampant corruption has made the situation even worse. Majority of the general public despise the present Govt for their corrupt practices and indifferent attitude towards their genuine grievances. They also dislike the present setup for their failure to provide security and basic services. They consider this Govt as too much dependent on foreign forces and their partisan treatment towards a large segment of society. 2016 report issued by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Relief (SIGAR) showing how mass corruption, bribery, payoffs and drug money had fatally undermined US efforts to build a viable Afghan society.

Dynamics

- i. The conflict in Afghanistan is derived from the aforementioned structures and actors. To address the conflict in Afghanistan working with local level, national actors as well as regional and international actors is of prominent importance.
- ii. The Afghan National Security Forces trained to fight for the survival of the country deliberately failed to play their role.
- iii. US haste withdrawal from Afghanistan created power vacuum. It was filled by Taliban fighters.
- iv. A vacuum left by Al Qaeda is filled by Islamic State in Northern Afghanistan. It can result in regional instability and terrorism in future.
- v. Taliban may have not changed its domestic policies. However, it is clear that modern day Taliban are aware of the difference between responsible state and a pariah state. It realizes the significance of a state recognition as responsible actor in the communities of nations. Stepped up diplomatic efforts to achieve international recognition affirms this claim.
- vi. Despite Pakistan's sincere efforts to bring Taliban on negotiations table it is blamed for instability and ongoing civil war in Afghanistan.
- vii. Widespread corruption, internal rifts and bureaucratic tussles within Afghan government prevented it from focusing on eradicating insurgency and terrorism from the country.

Conclusion

Conflicts are never one-dimensional; the causes of the conflicts are always many, and the response should be strategic and prolonged. Therefore, bringing peace, stability and provision of human rights including female education and women rights to work in Afghanistan requires international community's comprehensive strategy to deal with repressive regime. It is also noteworthy that peace in Afghanistan means peace in the region; therefore the regional countries and organizations can play a vital role in bringing peace and security in Afghanistan and the region. A regional long-term approach is required to strengthen rule of law, inclusion of women, civil society and strengthening accountability.

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