

DYNAMICS AND DEVELOPMENT OF UNITED STATES OF AMERICA'S POLICY TOWARDS AFGHANISTAN

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Abstract

Due to the rise of violence in Afghanistan, there are indication of renewed interest by other regional and global powers, in building their power base and attaining a long-term strategic perspective. The US which returned in scene after 9/11, after its withdrawal in 1989, following the withdrawal of Soviet Union has many reasons; strategic, political and economic to protect its global interest, which is now focused in Asia. Afghanistan for many reasons has acquire Due to the rise of violence in Afghanistan, there are indication of renewed interest by other regional and global powers, in building their power base and attaining a long-term strategic perspective. The US which returned in scene after 9/11, after its withdrawal in 1989, following the withdrawal of Soviet Union has many reasons; strategic, political and economic to protect its global interest, which is now focused in Asia. Afghanistan for many reasons has acquired a crucial importance as an entry point to Central Asia and to the South Asia. The intention of US is not only to control its oil rich region but also to check the anti-American extremism, especially in the Middle East. US presence in the region has threatened the sovereignty of other neighbouring countries of Afghanistan. Therefore, the competition among neighbouring countries of Afghanistan in the areas of security, trade and influence had escalated the violence among various ethnic group in the country. It is due to the same reason that US, NATO and other allied forces have failed to establish their power throughout the country and increased the insurgency in this area.

Keywords:

INTRODUCTION

After Al-Qaida attacked the United States on 9/11, the U.S. Congress authorized the use of military force against those groups or individuals who planned or perpetrated the attacks as well as those who harbored them. Ultimately, this led to the invasion of Afghanistan, where Osama bin Laden resided under the protection of the Taliban. Over the past almost 18 years, the mission and objective of U.S. engagement in Afghanistan has evolved over the course of three U.S. administrations, multiple military commanders, and multiple Afghan governments. Nearly 3,500 U.S. and NATO troops and tens of thousands of Afghans have been killed. As of fiscal year, 2019, the United States has spent approximately \$900 billion on direct war and reconstruction costs.

Due to the rise of violence in Afghanistan, there are indication of renewed interest by other regional and global powers, in building their power base and attaining a long-term strategic perspective. The US which returned in scene after 9/11, after its withdrawal in 1989, following the withdrawal of Soviet Union has many reasons; strategic, political and economic to protect its global interest, which is now focused in Asia. Afghanistan for many reasons has acquired a crucial importance as an entry point to Central Asia and to the South Asia. The intention of US is not only to control its oil rich region but also to check the anti-American extremism, especially

in the Middle East. US presence in the region has threatened the sovereignty of other neighbouring countries of Afghanistan. Therefore, the competition among neighbouring countries of Afghanistan in the areas of security, trade and influence had escalated the violence among various ethnic group in the country. It is due to the same reason that US, NATO and other allied forces have failed to establish their power throughout the country and increased the insurgency in this area. Henceforth, the task of reconstruction had not been fulfilled.

The “war on terror” led by US has dramatically altered the strategic environment in Afghanistan. The Taliban regime came to its end and the safe abode found by Al-Qaeda was dismantled. US installed a democratic elected government in Afghanistan. The incessant desire of US to establish a control over the natural resources in Afghanistan and get a firm grip on Northern Distribution Network (NDN) to get a permanent access to Central Asia, and New Silk Road Strategy had drawn US to Afghanistan. A Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) was signed between Washington and Kabul on September 30, 2014, which allowed US to retain their military bases in Afghanistan (Afghan Foreign Ministry). This allowed US to influence the strategic environment in the neighbouring region. In accordance with the unclassified source, since invasion, more than \$800 billion was spent in Afghanistan and more than 2400 lives were lost in the conflict.

NEW AFGHANISTAN POLICY

The new Afghanistan policy adopted by President Donald Trump has surprise all the stake holders in Afghanistan; regional and international. Except few allies like India and UK, it had seriously irked Pakistan and other regional allies. There had been a lack of consensus among the major powers which had seriously jeopardized the peace process in Afghanistan, and not only this, this may lead to new power struggle in Afghanistan.

It is quite unfortunate that the neighboring states of Afghanistan as well as the great powers of the world have a competing interest in Afghanistan, and they all intend to maximize their respective gains in Afghanistan. The new policies of Donald Trump regarding Afghanistan need to be examined, and it also needs to be seen, how leading international and regional players like US, Russia China, Iran and Pakistan have reacted to it. The power politics and the implicit desire of the powerful nations have complicated the nature of the conflict.

President Donald Trump has announced his Strategy in the context of Afghanistan and South Asia. He mentioned how wearied US had been in this long 17 years’ war in Afghanistan. He expressed his inability of withdrawing US forces abruptly. Indirectly he looked for an honourable and graceful exit. He said, “Our troops will fight to win. From now on, victory will have a clear definition: attacking our enemies, obliterating ISIS (acronym for the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), crushing Al-Qaeda, preventing the Taliban from taking over Afghanistan and stopping mass terror attacks against America before they emerge.”

Indirectly he said that, there will be a power vacuum after the US withdrawal and the place will be filled by terrorist organizations like ISIS and Al-Qaeda. But what president of US seem to be hiding was that, Afghanistan, even in the state of the chaos fits into the scheme of the things due to its geo-strategic location.

The strategic significance of Afghanistan lies in the fact that it lies adjacent to the several important regions of West Asia, South Asia, Central Asia and Eurasia. It consistently occupied a

war zone between US and Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) during the cold war era. The socio-political balance in Afghanistan witnessed a severe tilt by the respective invasions of US and USSR. It is surprising to note that despite possessing military might, American forces have failed to control Afghan insurgents and establish government of Afghanistan. This failure has come despite US vehemently backing and sponsoring the Afghan regime.

The global political changes have led to new variants of power struggle in Afghanistan, it has added to the already existing chaos in the country. The struggle that we witness today in Afghanistan among the internal and external stake holders have emerged due to a number of contending issues. Foreign interventions have further caused the deterioration of the domestic conditions. There is an implicit desire of the parties involved in Afghanistan to adopt an inclusive management approach to end the civil war.

It is important to ask these important questions; how important is Afghanistan for greater powers for their economic and strategic gains? How the chaotic condition in Afghanistan is affecting neighbouring states? In the process answering these questions, it is also important to note, how the interest of US, Russia, China, India is shaped in the region, further, what are the policies that are being followed by the neighbouring states of Pakistan and Iran. Despite such heavy expenses, the victory for US is not in the offing, at-least not in the near future. The instability in Afghanistan had been multiplied by several times by confused and an ambiguous policy of Afghanistan. The region-oriented strategy of President Trump is not drastically different from what Obama followed in Afghanistan. Trump very clearly asked Pakistan to stop sponsoring terrorism and nurturing terrorists at Afghanistan and Pakistan border areas. He warned Pakistan that US-Pakistan relations were contingent upon Pakistan taking actions against terrorist outfits. He threatened Pakistan with the all the military, economic and diplomatic means to isolate and pressurize Pakistan.

Trump further annoyed Pakistan by inviting India to play a constructive role in improving economic condition in Afghanistan. Trump even went a step ahead and asked Afghan government to strengthen themselves, as the US forces may only stay for the duration during which the incumbent builds its capacities. He said, "Our support is not a blank cheque.... Our patience is not unlimited. We will keep our eyes wide open".

The bottom line is that US wants to eliminate terrorist and their infrastructure from Afghanistan. US is fully conscious of its economic interest in Afghanistan, particularly its mineral resources. Afghanistan occupies a central place in the Eurasia-strategy pursued by Washington. Hence, in most likely-hood US military presence in Afghanistan will be sustained. Even the Afghani authorities are thankful to the US president and American people for their affirmation and support for the self-reliance and removal of terrorism as a menace in the region.

While Abdullah Abdullah, the Chief Executive of Afghanistan invited neighbours to cash on this opportunity, while the former president Hamid Karzai expressed his concern on the new Afghan strategy and termed it against the interest of Afghan. The Trump Strategy had been rejected by Afghan Taliban, they have stated that for long they have defended their country and US is simply wasting its soldiers. For them, nothing will change in the country and they will fight till the end. Taliban spokesman said, "If America does not withdraw its troops from Afghanistan, soon Afghanistan will become another graveyard for this superpower in the 21st century".

The Trump's Afghanistan support have found support by NATO secretary general Jens Stoltenberg, he said that 'NATO allies have committed themselves to enhance their presence more than ever in this Afghanistan and can not allow the country to become a launch pad for the terrorists who attack allied countries.

US RELATIONS WITH NATO FORCES: THE TRUMP ERA

British defence secretary, Michael Fallon supported the US stand and said, they welcome US commitment. German Defence Minister Ursula Von Der Leyen, conveyed to the US administration that Germany will come ahead of others to contribute more and they had already increased the presence of soldiers by more than 18 per cent. However, one of the Australian military analyst David Kilcullen, an Australian military analyst said that, Trump strategy was more focused on fighting terrorism in Afghanistan rather than fighting an insurgency. According to him, fighting insurgency requires more lethal force and a sustained approach to the over reconstruction and nation building of Afghanistan and economic development. There are many Americans who are apprehensive of Trump's Afghan strategy. They are more perturbed by Trump's criticism of Obama's policies in Afghanistan openly and lowering down the prestige of the office of Presidency and credibility of its military. His open criticism to Obama and his policies is a huge disregard for the Americans who elected him President twice. Nancy Pelosi raised serious concerns about US President Trumps commitment to provide unlimited troops in Afghanistan with no timeline for withdrawal. This, according to her, is risking American's lives without accountability to the American people.

Trump has pressurized US allies ignoring and their efforts and interests in Afghanistan to change the idiom of 'global war on terrorism' to 'American war on terrorism'. His strategy in Afghan seem to have given impression that US is not a hegemonic power but one of the many powers in the multi-polar world in which US is seeking assistance of NATO members and India. Trump's position in Afghanistan ran contrary to that of Obama. The latter emphasized the micro management of US troops in Afghanistan with certain checks and powers. However, Trump on the other hand , authorized, US could do anything against the enemies, and can use all kinds of weapons against terrorists. This policy will produce more civilian deaths and raise concerns of humanitarian nature. One of the UN reports of 2017 confirmed 1,662 civilians deaths and 3581 casualties. Since 2009, the conflict in Afghanistan has taken lives of 26,512 civilians and injured 48,931. Another confusion President Trump has created is that, he never disclosed his strategy in Afghanistan, and never stated at 'what state of attainment' US victory would be declared.

US has a two pronged strategy in handling Afghanistan issue, while it has increased the military presence in Afghanistan, it had encouraged India's role in the domestic affairs of Afghanistan. This paradigm shift in the US policy has alarmed neighbors of Afghanistan. Both Russia and China are aware of the new strategic designs of US, which is bent on limiting their role in global politics, maintain a stronghold in Afghanistan. At the same time , India is enforced to play an important role in South Asia to check the Chines influence in Asia. To counter such measures, Russians and Chinese have already increased their involvement in Afghanistan. Russia have already established a link with Taliban Afghanistan in the region. In the similar fashion, Chines have enhanced their engagements in Afghanistan by initiating a peace talks. Hence , the policy being pursued by Donald Trump may back fire and initiate a new round of power game in the region.

Trump's open accusation against Pakistan of providing safe refuge to the terrorist elements, has disturbed it immensely. To find solace, it had tilted towards China and Russia. This might initiate a new polarization of the world order leading to a proxy or a cold war against America. The culmination of such permutation and combination would be that US will not be able to attain its goals and Afghanistan would not be able to attain a peaceful state. The strategy of Trump against Pakistan is setting a wrong precedent for its allies and partners. It had coerced Pakistan, made drone attacks and curtailed aid.

Significantly, Pakistan has moved to Russia, China and Turkey to hold consultations with the reference to the shift in the policies of America towards Afghanistan and South Asia. Trump's attitude towards Pakistan has upset and Russians and Chinese too. Russia sent its envoy to Afghanistan and expressed the view that too much pressure on Pakistan would derail the regional peace and stability.

To the great surprise to all, in 2018, US administration turned to Afghan Taliban to end the stalemate in Afghanistan. This could have been outcome of international and domestic pressure on US to end the chaos in Afghanistan and bring the conflict to its conclusive end. Responding to US call, Taliban has expressed its willingness to talk to US directly but Americans are not willing to engage with them directly. The reason behind US stand is that it may undermine the significance of the Ghani government.

CONCLUSION

After almost 20 years in Afghanistan, the United States has achieved its primary goal of defeating al-Qaida and degrading its ability to use Afghanistan and Pakistan as a safe haven to attack the United States again. Today, the United States faces far greater national security challenges including climate change and China than the current threats posed in Afghanistan. The ongoing war there detracts from the United States' global interests. The United States should begin the process of ending its war in Afghanistan, supporting the chances for a peace agreement, and transitioning to a longer-term strategic partnership with the Afghan people in concert with regional players. This strategy will maximize the chances for the United States to secure its interests and those of the Afghan people in a sustainable way. Over the past almost 20 years, the United States has tried numerous different strategies in Afghanistan to go after terrorists and build a stable government. Under the leadership of President George W. Bush, President Barack Obama, and now President Trump, the United States has tried a massive military footprint nearly 100,000 U.S. troops alone at one point and a smaller presence, reaching as low as 8,400 troops at the end of President Obama's two terms in office. The United States has invested tens of billions of dollars in economic assistance to support development in Afghanistan. And the United States has engaged with regional and global actors to help stabilize the situation. However, few of these strategies have had a coherent set of goals or the means to achieve them.

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