



Afghanistan Conundrum: From Intelligence Havoc to Sustainable Peace

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Abstract: After spending trillions of dollars, making Afghan war the U.S longest combat, and jeopardizing the future of Afghan generations; ‘Not War But Peace’ became the reality on February 29, 2020 when Tehreek-e-Taliban Afghanistan (TTA) deputy leader Mullah Abdul-Ghani Bradar and American peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad signed the Peace Agreement in Doha, Qatar. The foundation of peace that Pakistan once wanted to build in Kabul by recognizing the Taliban regime became truth after 18 years of U.S. combat in Afghanistan that witnessed continuous chaos, instability, civil war, and turmoil beyond borders. Presence of Pakistan at the time of Doha ceremony is adamant to 1996 decision of Islamabad when the then Taliban Regime was recognized to avoid instability and install regional peace. This article makes the point that the farsightedness of Pakistan rightly realized the strength and resilience of Taliban and therefore took the right decision to bring them into mainstream diplomatic exposure in 1996. This fact was also recognized by Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and United Arab Emirates (U.A.E) who stood by with the reality of Afghanistan and too accepted Taliban as the legitimate political authority in 1996. A notion which was true in 1996 became reality of the day that “peace in Afghanistan is peace in Pakistan”. By incorporating deductive approach, this paper is descriptive in analysis and uses historical method of inquiry to establish facts and infer conclusions. Regional Complex Security Theory has been contextualized to refer to intelligence havoc that allowed regional states to sustain the chaos, instability, and turmoil in Afghanistan.

Key words: Global War on Terrorism, Tehreek-e-Taliban Afghanistan, Doha Peace Deal, Intelligence Havoc, United States, Pakistan, Afghanistan.

I. INTRODUCTION:

Last forty years of Afghanistan conundrum is the episode of intelligence havoc that was originally crafted by the President Ronald Reagan through CIA while exporting his version of insurgency to contain Soviet expansion. This was not possible without Saudi Arabia who created room for the proposition of Islamic *Jihad* and Pakistan that provided the requisite training to the Afghan resistance forces. Therefore, the CIA, Saudi intelligence, and the ISI were the forerunners of Afghan *jihad* (Riedel, 2014). Later on, the divergence of interests between the forerunners involved regional and extra regional intelligence agencies to create chaos, instability, and turmoil beyond borders. It is why Afghanistan has been recognized as an important country that is blessed with unique geostrategic and geopolitical landscape. Pakistan being the neighbor of this geography had remained directly affected with the circumstances and political developments. The region became hotspot of international politics when in 1979, the former Soviet Union under the expansionism decided to invade Afghanistan.

The complexity of such a new reality was not that Soviets decided to invade neighboring state rather it was the ultimate objective of Moscow that wanted to expand its outreach to warm waters making Pakistan the last resort (Girardet, 2012). Islamabad with its meager military resources and perpetual territorial threats emanating from India ended up into national security limbo. Though, local Afghans were resisting the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan but were not organized into ranks and files. The organizational structure happened when United States President Ronald Reagan decided to take the driving seat to create insurgency against Soviet occupation in Afghanistan. It immediately sought help from Pakistan. Islamabad had already turned down President Carter's offer of \$400 million which was stretched over two years to shore-up defense and economy. The time when Ronald Reagan invited General Zia and offered \$500 million yearly to play role in the insurgency, Islamabad has already calculated that there is no other choice to stop Soviet expansion towards warm waters of Pakistan (Hilali, 2002).

By compulsion of national security, Pakistan had to join Reagan's insurgency and train local Afghani resistance into an organized force. United States identified seven groups in Afghanistan and funded Pakistan military to train them along with providing all logistics to sustain the resistance at different places of Afghanistan (Hilali, 2017). Once a reluctant state was now playing operational role in the indirect warfare. Pakistan Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) and Army was participating in the insurgency through official tasks as stipulated between Washington and Islamabad that only mandated to train the local Afghani groups. It is important to highlight that the local seven Afghani groups were not so strong in strength that could be relied solely to defeat the Soviets (Kakar, 1995). That is why, to increase their strength in-terms of manpower a new plan was devised by the then United State leadership and it was not related to Islamabad but with Saudi Arabia (Rais, 1993).

It was decided to allow all the followers of Syed Qutb philosophy, who have been creating trouble for Arab States particularly for those who have allowed US to station their forces (Haynes, 2005). Some of the prominent were Osama Bin Laden of Saudi Arabia and Ayman Mohammed Rabie al-Zawahiri of Egypt. Though, Osama Bin Laden participation in Afghanistan came due to insistence of his teacher Abdullah Azzam, who have already reached in Peshawar, Pakistan (Emerson, 2010). To denounce the version of Arab Jihad, many Arabs including Al-Zawahiri were allowed to strengthen Afghan Jihad (Filiu, 2009). By this a second tier of resistance force was created which mostly included the Arab Muslim Jihadist, who brought their affiliates and money into Afghanistan against the Soviet Union.

To achieve the discourse of strength, a third tier of resistance was also created by Saudi Arabia who while using its leverage with Pakistani religious factions poured millions of dollars into religious schools (Madrassa System) (Racimora, 2013). There is a difference between Arab society and Pakistani society that needs to be understood before entering into third tier of resistance. Most of the Arab Jihadists were the descendants of Islamic Brotherhood Philosophy that has influenced almost entire Arab society and created a culture of resistance against the kingships and dictatorships. Jihadi teachings with political discourse were not a new phenomenon in the Arab world at the time of Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. So, when this Arab tier was sent to Afghanistan, their motivation was almost up to mark and does not need any ideological fragmentation.

Contrary to Arab society, the Pakistani society was much moderate and had never induced *Jihad* as a political discourse. Even the religious factions of Pakistan did not seek Sharia Rule through Jihad rather believed purely on political struggle. Islamabad's decision to end up into Reagan's insurgency paved the way to all new realities that Pakistan was not ready to encounter with. One of the worst things was the change that happened into religious discourse of Pakistan. As mentioned above that Saudi Arabia poured millions of dollars into religious seminaries of Pakistan that started teaching *Jihad* as the only vision of Islam. Here it is important to mention that Jihad is one of the fundamentals of Islamic faith and should not be associated with terrorism or militancy. Unfortunately, it did end into wrong perspective and practice. With new ideological fragmentation, thousands of new recruiters from Pakistan joined the ongoing Jihad in Afghanistan against Soviet Union.

All the three tiers operated side by side in Afghanistan and fought against the Soviet Union. The decisive moment came when United States decided to give one of its latest missile technologies 'Stinger Missiles' to Mujahideen that took the Soviets by surprise. Alongside internal instability with that of deteriorating

economic situation of the Soviets, the Stinger Missiles paved the way to break Moscow's resolve to continue fight the war. Not only it disintegrated territorially but her resolve also fall apart. Americans took no time to leave Afghanistan as the objective to contain the Soviet Union with that of her expansion was achieved.

II. DAMNED IF YOU DO, DAMNED IF YOU DON'T:

The aftermath of Soviet defeat and American disorientation to stay committed with Afghanistan brought disorder. Civil war started between the seven groups of Afghanistan (Nojumi, 2016). The Arab tier of *Jihadis* started looking for global jihad (Van Linschoten, 2012). Those Afghanis who received religious education in Pakistani seminaries and participated in the *Jihad* remained in Afghanistan. The Pakistani tier of *Jihadis* started coming back and continued preaching their success stories along with constructing their own religious seminaries and mosques (Weaver, 2010). This gave birth and momentum to religious political struggle in Pakistan that wanted to achieve *Sharia* Rule through launching of fragmented version of *Jihad*. In the presence of strong armed forces, this was though not an easy task to be achieved in Pakistan (Fair; Littman & Nugent, 2018).

The civil disorder got impetus and a new force of Taliban under the leadership of Mullah Muhammad Umar started increasing their outreach in Afghanistan (Gopal & van Linschoten, 2017). They became so strong that in September 1996 the then President Burhanuddin Rabbani regime was defeated by them (Fatima, 2014). Pakistan had been observing the situation and found itself trapped into the evolving circumstances. There was no choice other than recognizing the Taliban regime as their direct affiliation with the Pakistani tier of *Jihadis* could expand their outreach into Pakistan. To put a full-stop on their outreach and confine them within Afghanistan border, Pakistan in 1996 recognized the Taliban Regime as official government of Afghanistan (Laub, 2014). Taliban's political reality helped them to get diplomatic recognition and exposure but their way of doing domestic politics became quite challenging for Pakistan, UAE, and KSA to accept. Taliban inhuman tactics to implement Islamic *Sharia* became the fundamental discourse of their illegitimacy, which was in no way acceptable to Muslim nations like Pakistan, U.A.E and K.S.A (Rangelov & Theros, 2012). Before Islamabad, Abu Dhabi, and Riyadh had to show their displeasure and discomfort to Taliban regime, the 9/11 incident in United States brought new scenario into geo-strategic environment surrounding Afghanistan.

The post-9/11 compulsions were so serious and strategic in nature that Pakistan had to stay on the side of United States initiative of Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) (Collins, 2008). Pakistan entered into a 'catch 22' situation. The same was a situation when after Soviet retreat, United States decided to abandon Afghanistan without realizing the fact that the so-called Mujahideen could end up into civil war. The chaos would have direct repercussions for Pakistan. As a result of continuous civil disorder Taliban phenomenon emerged and took over Kabul in September 1996 from President Burhanuddin Rabbani. To put full-stop over the increasing chaos and instability in Afghanistan that has direct repercussions on Pakistan, Islamabad got to decide in-between "Damned if you do, damned if you don't" (Bennett-Jones, 2017). Taliban was a phenomenon that referred to 'students' as its literal meaning (Raqib & Barreto, 2014). Most of the Taliban got education from Pakistani Madrassa (religious schools) situated in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province (the then NWFP). Due to this relation of Taliban with Pakistan, the Northern Alliance of Afghanistan had always propagated that Taliban are asset of Islamabad (Warren, 2009). The fact of Taliban phenomenon has to do something with their ethnic identity. Other than Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras that mostly forms Northern Alliance; almost every *Talib* was a Pashtun (Pashtu speaking Afghani) and historically cherished close ties with Pakistani Pashtu speaking community residing adjacent to Afghanistan. This somehow created the hypothetical assumption among the Northern Alliance that it was Pakistan that overthrew the Rabbani government in Kabul rather Taliban did this (Saikal, 2010).

Another fact that made Taliban association with Pakistan so strong was the reality of their ideological grooming which got shaped during Afghan *Jihad*. President Ronald Reagan's insurgency campaign was against the Soviet invasion which also negated the very forces that invited Moscow to intervene in Afghanistan. These forces were not other than the so-called Northern Alliance who stood on the side of Soviet Union and

facilitated Moscow expansion (Galeotti, 2001). The Reagan insurgency was therefore against Northern Alliance and Soviet Union in Afghanistan (Busch, 1997). To resist Soviet and its allied forces in Afghanistan, most of the human force that Pakistan trained on behest of United States was Pashtun side of Afghanistan which was also reinforced by factions of Pakistani Pashtuns (Saikal, 2010). In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan religious organizations have established chains of religious schools that have provided the first educational opportunity for people living in tribal-cum-rural areas.

During Afghan Jihad, Saudi Arabia aggressively poured funding to these schools and produced local force of Jihadis to reinforce Afghani faction fighting Reagan insurgency. So, when the Soviet accepted defeat in Afghanistan and decided to retreat; the *Talib* factor became an unrecognized and scattered reality of both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Due to internal rivalry and civil war between the original seven groups trained under the patronage of President Ronald Reagan insurgency campaign, the unrecognized and scattered faction of *Talib* started getting impetus under Mullah Muhammad Umer, who later-on in September 1996 took over Kabul by throwing President Burhanuddin Rabbani government. Islamabad knew that the local Pakistan faction of *Talib* and the newly emerged Afghani *Talib* would ultimately get associated and consider Pakistan the next potential geography for the rule of Islamic Sharia. Therefore, to keep the faction of Afghani *Talib* confined to their own territory was deemed necessary for national security of Pakistan (Johnson, 2007). Hence, the policy option was either to wait and face the music of exploited ideology to slowly enter into Pakistan or to recognize the brutal reality of Taliban by putting a full-stop on their further expansion. That is why it was a decision to decide in-between “damned if you do, damned if you don’t”.

III. CHAOS IN AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN’S FRONTIERS:

Issues and challenges associated with the political stability of Afghanistan have not been taken seriously by the government in Kabul nor has it been an agenda of the international forces in the country. Since the fall of Taliban government, the country had been in continuous turmoil. About 70% of the Afghanistan is disconnected with the concept of sovereignty neither does it enjoy ‘writ of the government’ (Sharifi & Louise, 2018). Taliban who claim the majority of Afghan territory further cherish their *de facto* political control as a parallel government in Afghanistan. The emergence of ISIS and its affiliates in Afghanistan immediately received negation from the Taliban, whereas the capabilities of the Kabul government to fight ISIS had been almost zero nor they showed political will to fight against them (Mumtaz, 2016).

On the other hand, wrapped with ideological construction of their cause, the Afghan Taliban has successfully projected themselves as active soldiers of the soil. Afghan Taliban’s have at least ensured the regional countries that the areas controlled by their forces will not be used against them. Therefore, regional countries like Pakistan and Iran are not fully ready to abandon Afghan Taliban. Contrary to Taliban pledge, the government in Kabul had bitterly failed to stabilize areas of their direct control rather they provide safe heavens to anti regional forces like Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) and Mosaad (Sargana, 2017).

The government in Kabul only sings the song of democracy and sovereignty, whereas it has failed to achieve the sense of security within and with her neighboring states (Saghafi-Ameri, 2011). Overdue presence of India in Kabul is no more a secret that causes irk in Islamabad (Ahmed & Bhatnagar, 2007). Nexus between RAW and National Directorate of Security (NDS) is actively working to destabilize Pakistan. The government in Kabul had been providing all possible support to RAW and terrorist groups to train, plan, and execute their military operations against Pakistan (Hafiz, 2017). The clash between the Afghan Taliban and the so-called Kabul Regime provides an ideal breeding ground for intelligence actors and their militant wings to misuse the territory. Regardless of helping the Afghan people and facilitate the dialogue between Taliban and Kabul, international forces are watching rogue elements destabilizing the regional states.

The commitments and the promises to stabilize Afghanistan made by international community only reflect a story of successful failures. As pointed out by Mohammad Tanha (2015) that:

“After the Taliban government fell, mega-sized construction projects, such as the Kabul-Kandahar road, renovations of government buildings, and the refurbishment of military and police offices, became the norm. In reality, the flurry of activity favored over function, accomplishing very little. The military, private companies and contractors spent most of the billions promised to rebuild Afghanistan. Foreign troops were the focus for nearly every dollar of aid” (Tanha, 2015).

In real posture, Afghanistan never became stable not it was developed. In fact, it became the battlefield of covert operations and producer of suicidal squads against its neighboring Pakistan.

IV. DOHA PEACE ACCORD AND WAY FORWARD:

The Doha Peace Accord is the manifestation of long lasting commitment of Pakistan to install peace in war torn Afghanistan. The agreement ceremony was attended by delegations of almost 50 nations. The important points of the deal could be mentioned in the following clusters (Welna & Dwyer, 2020):

- i. In Fourteen Months period, American troops would leave Afghanistan.
- ii. Starting from March 01, 2020 within next 135 United States forces would drop down to 8600 troops.
- iii. United Nations Security Council would endorse the peace deal.
- iv. United States would not interfere in internal matters of Afghanistan.
- v. From March 2020 dialogue process would be initiated for political stability in Afghanistan.
- vi. Within the Month of March 2020 all Taliban prisoners would be released.
- vii. Taliban are committed not to allow Afghanistan soil being used against the United States and its allies.
- viii. Members of the Taliban will be removed from the sanctions list of the United Nations as well as Taliban would come out from the U.S. sanctions.

The peace agreement is a success of Afghanistan that since four decades had only witnessed turmoil and violence. Pakistan’s role in bridging the stakeholders to a point that ultimately witnessed a day of peace accord would be remembered in golden words(Harrison, Sabbagh, Makoi, & Borger, 2020).After facing so much isolation and criticism, Pakistan remained committed to facilitate and bring Taliban on the table of talk while convincing them to denounce violence. The United States and Taliban peace accord is a mutual success of the stakeholders of peace, though countries like India would regret such a positive change in South Asia as their manifesto remained committed to bring instability not only in Afghanistan but also in Pakistan. Now Pakistan is not opened for criticism neither it is available for blame game on instability of Afghanistan. Pakistan had done everything to ink the deal and bring together all the stakeholders on the table of talk. After the 29 February 2020 deal, now rest of the responsibility lies on regime in Kabul to uphold the emblem of peace and move forward to negotiate internal political order acceptable to all legitimate stakeholders of Afghanistan.

Now, it is time to address three important questions that revolve around the future of Afghanistan.

(i) What is the political future of Afghanistan?

First to address this question, the United States and the Kabul Regime needs to depart from the very assumption that Taliban are asset of Pakistan and it does not want peace in Afghanistan. Pakistan’s commitment and utmost efforts to bring together all the stakeholders on the table talk is adamant to the factual position of Islamabad that ‘Peace in Afghanistan is Peace in Pakistan’. After departing from the above assumption, the Government in Kabul has readdressed gaps in the Constitution of Afghanistan. For example, political developments of last 19 years have given birth to an uneven constitution that mostly tilts towards non-Pashtun factions, whereas Pashtun factions of Afghanistan are deliberately kept aside. Since Taliban are Pashtun that is why the political consensus would require a new constitutional understanding between the stakeholders to ensure sustainable political process.

(ii) What will be the economic future of Afghanistan?

Secondly, the United States has been the sole economic lifeline of Afghanistan. After the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan, will western democracies continue to pour money into Afghanistan to stabilize its economy along with continue prioritizing Kabul for foreign direct investment? In case of NO, whatever is the level of political stability in Afghanistan it had to end up into political chaos once again.

(iii) What will be the security future of Afghanistan?

The new circumstances of Afghanistan in the wake of U.S. forces withdrawal would have to checkmate security vulnerabilities of the Afghan National Army (ANA). Since 9/11 United States has patronage and trained the Afghan forces. United States would continue to pour about \$4.2 billion to help sustain ANA but what is the guarantee after the U.S. complete withdrawal(Thomas, 2020). Who will train and equip the ANA? India replacing United States would create security anxiety among regional players particularly in Pakistan and China. Furthermore, what will be the future of Taliban forces that had been fighting against the foreign troops and ANA? If they are not made part of the standing army of Afghanistan, then these Taliban trained forces could end up into Daesh/ ISIS or form new resistance groups. In case they are made part of the ANA then who is going to provide financial guarantee to sustain such a big Afghan force would raise a million dollar question.

V. CONCLUSION:

The overall scenario of Afghanistan and its situational analysis suggest that there were bleak chances of political stability since the subsequent political regimes in Kabul and overdue presence of hostile intelligence agencies altogether posed great security challenges for the neighboring countries. On the other side forces like ISIS, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, and separatist receive direct support from the rogue elements of Afghan government to undermine the consensus against terrorism. Along with such circumstances in Afghanistan, it was also observed that back in Washington the civil and military establishments were not on the same page to end the fiasco. Afghanistan had been a vulnerable state and in absence of US political oversight it will become battlefield for the regional powers. Regardless of Afghanistan moving towards stability, it would become a battlefield for intelligence operations against Pakistan, Iran, China, and Russian interests.

The US-Taliban peace agreement was necessary as the appetite of foreign forces particularly the United States have been reducing (Rasouli, 2020). In case of no deal, the civil-war in Afghanistan was evident. So, Pakistan in its best interest and interest of the global community played a positive role to bring together all the stakeholders of Afghanistan through the US-Taliban Deal.

In case, Afghanistan seeks formal support and the United States officially mandates Islamabad to play its role to strengthen the discourse of peace in Kabul, then following steps shall be taken by Pakistan:

- i. Political and diplomatic efforts to facilitate dialogue between Taliban and Kabul government,
- ii. Form a Joint Intelligence Coordination Command to gather intelligence and relevant data hampering the interests of neighboring states, the United States and its allies,
- iii. Training of Afghan civil and military forces to better equip them against the non-state actors like ISIS,
- iv. Activation of the SCO to connect Afghanistan with regional economic and security structure,
- v. Financial commitments to uplift the infrastructural development of Afghanistan.

Now it is an internal matter of Afghanistan. If they require American facilitation or Pakistan, it is up to them. Islamabad is only concerned and will remain so if the Afghan soil would harbor anti Pakistan policy. Other than this, who will be the next Afghan President, how they fix their military problem, what economic policy they adopt, and which political system they end up into; has nothing to do with Pakistan neither Islamabad

would bother to interfere into internal political dynamics of Kabul. Though, everyone in Pakistan would be interested to see peace in Kabul because 'Peace in Afghanistan is Peace in Pakistan'.

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