

Afghanistan at the Cross-Roads after Doha Agreement

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Abstract

Afghanistan is a country which continued to remain under crises since the late 1970s. Even after the Soviet departure, the peace could not be restored due to the internal strife. The incident of 9/11, invited new trouble which enabled the US forces to enter in Afghanistan to fight against the Taliban. It was presumed that on the US withdrawal, Afghan security forces duly organized by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) would be able to maintain peace in Afghanistan. But, since 2014 when Afghan forces assumed command from the ISAF, they are gradually melting down in face of the Taliban's onslaught and the country is back in a state of political uncertainty. Due to compelling reasons, the US is in a hurry to leave Afghanistan. Thus, after a brief pause, they resumed talks with the Taliban, and finally, the two sides signed a historical accord at Doha on 29 February 2020. It's anyone guesses as to what kind of security environments would emerge in Afghanistan after America's departure. Yet, it is suggested that the key players involved in the Afghan peace process must avoid the 'alliance vs adversary game' by engaging all stakeholders to carve out a 'way forward', guaranteeing a 'stable political order' in Afghanistan.

Keywords

Future discourse, Alliance vs adversary, Distinct regional complex, Imperial overreach, Fragile peace, Afghan peace process

Introduction

Afghanistan is part of a distinct regional security complex, consisting of China, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Iran and Pakistan.

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Russia and the US influence the region as outside powers.¹ It is a gateway to Asia and Europe. It continued to be dominated by foreign invaders in the past and also remained a battle ground for opposing groups from within the country. Afghanistan regained its full independence from the United Kingdom on August 19, 1919.² Even after getting sovereign status, it remained under turmoil for the next decade. The era under Zahir Shah (1933 to 1973) is considered as 'Golden Period' during which Kabul was known as the "Paris of Central Asia".³

During 1973, in a bloodless coup, Shah was replaced by Daud Khan. His departure brought a bad patch for Afghan people for the next three decades. Ten years' war (1979-1988) between the Soviet Union and Jihadist groups duly supported by the US, shattered Afghanistan's stability. After Soviet departure, the US turned its back, leaving Afghanistan in a state of chaos, paving way for the Taliban to take control of Kabul.⁴

While Afghanistan under the Taliban regime was still in the crises, the incident of September 11, 2001, put the country back into anarchy. It is believed that if Taliban were given an assurance of economic support, they would not have opted for their alliance with al-Qaeda. This time, instead of resisting Russian occupation, Taliban fought the longest war in the Afghanistan's history, against the US-led ISAF, bringing fresh miseries and chaos for Afghan people.⁵

After fighting this never-ending war, America is running short of options and planning to pull-out its forces from Afghan soil as early as possible. It is viewed that the US is looking for 'safe exit'. While America would wish to leave straightaway but at the same time, it would not like that its credibility as a reliable partner and security guarantor is undermined by its friends and allies.⁶ In this regard, President Trump asked Pakistan for assistance which has already done its best to facilitate the talks between the US and Taliban.⁷ But, Trump's declaration of troops' withdrawal from Afghanistan and Syria has been seriously contested by the US policy makers.⁸ He has faced

embarrassment from the US cabinet members, who preferred to resign rather than supporting the withdrawal call of Trump.⁹ Gen James Mattis, the US Defence Secretary resigned in reaction to an unplanned move by Trump for pulling out of the US forces from Syria and Afghanistan.¹⁰ In his letter addressed to Trump, Mattis wrote, “the US strength as a nation inextricably lies in our unique and comprehensive system of alliances and partnerships. We cannot protect our interests effectively without maintaining strong alliances and showing respect to those allies.”¹¹

In the same context, Marc A. Thiessen opined, “His planned withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan is a gift to the Taliban and al-Qaeda. It was unwise to announce the plan of withdrawal at a time when the US officials were holding talks with the Taliban...”¹² In addition, as pointed out by Brahma Chellaney, he continued that, “the US is showing the signs of desperation in trying to end its war in Afghanistan”, yet, it is unlikely that it would be able to get away from Afghanistan because right now, Taliban are being supported by the foreign countries like China, Iran, and Russia in an effort to tie down the US forces in Afghanistan.¹³

Meanwhile, the US seems to commit the same mistake which it did during the early 1990s. The likely scenarios are bad for the security of Afghanistan as well as Pakistan. To protect its national security interests, Islamabad might again be trapped in ‘Alliance vs Adversary Game’ which was played during the decades of 1980s and 1990s. After an exhaustive shuttle diplomacy for over two years, the US finally succeeded in inking an accord with Taliban on 29 February 2020 which is called ‘Doha Agreement’.¹⁴ Since the contours of this agreement are not very impressive, therefore, durable peace in Afghanistan is likely to remain a distant dream. Presumably, the upcoming security environments in Afghanistan might lead towards another long drawn civil war which must be avoided to promote regional and global peace.

This brief paper is aimed at highlighting the pros and cons of the US decision to hastily withdraw its forces from Afghanistan without chalking out a road map to achieve a 'stable political order' in Afghanistan. For better comprehension of the readers, the paper has been developed in the following sequence: First, a brief background to the Afghan troubled history since 9/11; second, Afghanistan in a vicious cycle: An in-depth analysis; third, a possible future setting in the region and Pakistan's position in it and finally the suggested way forward.

A brief background to Afghan troubled history since 9/11

As highlighted earlier, Afghanistan has a troubled history of turbulence. After a brief fragile peace under Mullah Umar led regime (1996-2001), the security milieu in Afghanistan once again took a turn for the worse, following the incident of 9/11. President Bush did not take too long to conclude that the incident was the brainchild of "al-Qaeda led by bin Laden". He instantly demanded that besides closing down al-Qaeda's training camps, Taliban should hand over bin-Laden to America.¹⁵

On September 12, 2001, NATO invoked Article 5 - the mutual defense clause of Washington Treaty, thereby committing itself to help the US against the perpetrators of the attacks.¹⁶ There is a general consensus among the scholars that the US did not give diplomacy, a chance to succeed. The Afghan regime was not given enough time to think. Although, the US and UK claimed that the attack on Afghanistan was justified under Article 51 of the UN Charter, covering self-defense but majority of the scholars did not subscribe to this argument. Moreover, neither of the two resolutions (1386 and 1373), adopted by the UN Security Council in the aftermath of 9/11, authorized military action in Afghanistan nor did either contain any aggressive language that could be used to justify the use of military force. Hence, one can strongly argue that the war initiated by the US and its allies against Taliban was illegal under international law.¹⁷

The legal argument aside, after consultation with his coalition partners, Bush decided to launch an operation against Taliban on October 7, 2001, with the code name 'Operation Enduring Freedom'. To begin with, Pentagon fired more than 12000 missiles against al-Qaeda and Taliban camps. By December 7, 2001, the main ground battle was over as Taliban instantly gave in the face of the extensive bombing, giving way to Northern Alliance (variously called the Panjsheris), to take control of the main cities of Afghanistan as the new American ally.¹⁸ Mullah Umar and bin-Laden both survived, regrouped their forces, and later turned Afghanistan into 'Vietnam' for the US-led ISAF.

Though it is beyond the scope of this paper to explain the expanded role of the ISAF but suffice to mention that it played a key role in organizing/ training the Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) to a combined strength of around 352,000 men including the Afghan army and police.¹⁹ During the training process, ISAF made claims that after the departure of the US forces from Afghanistan, ANSF would be capable of maintaining security inside the country. As per the decision taken at the Lisbon summit in 2010, by the end of 2014 Afghan armed forces were ready to take over the command from ISAF.²⁰

Afghanistan in a vicious cycle

After 18 years of war between the US and Taliban, Afghanistan is close to being back in the hands of the opposing fighting groups and warlords. Taliban have pushed back hard against beleaguered ANSF and presently hold more territory than at any time since 2001. The casualties of Afghan forces are increasing on a daily basis.²¹ This has also been admitted by the Kabul as well as Washington, Chellaney writes.²² Many analysts wonder whether Afghan forces can sustain such punishing losses in the long run especially in the absence of American support.²³

In the same context, Daniel Coats presented a threat assessment before 'the US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence' and expressed that the Taliban have stepped up large scale attacks and resultantly, "Afghan security forces are mostly tied down in defensive missions."²⁴The US seems quite confused and helpless about the emerging security situation in Afghanistan. Thus, for the purpose of 'safe exit' and 'face-saving' and to cut its losses, America has struck a deal with Taliban while disregarding the interest of its long-term allies in Afghanistan.

Since 2014, the security environment in Afghanistan is gradually unfolding as expected. While making an in-depth analysis of the ANSF during 2014, the author had forecasted as to how this force would melt and wither away in face of Taliban's pressure in absence of the support from the US forces.²⁵ Earlier on, similar views were also expressed by Michael Williams who then underlined that "withdrawing international forces from Afghanistan won't solve the problem because the Taliban forces would then just return to dig into Afghanistan to oust the current government."²⁶ It is believed that since 2014, there has been a vicious cycle of violence in Afghanistan. In absence of the desired level of security, investments were not made and in the absence of investment, poverty could not be reduced. In the absence of a consensus government in Kabul, the role of ANSF is also being undermined.

Presently, the Afghan government is constrained due to a number of factors. In absence of full backing from the US forces, ANSF is gradually losing ground in face of Taliban's regular attacks. A year back in his interaction with the media, President Ashraf Ghani confessed, "We will not be able to support our army for six months without U.S. support."²⁷ Hence, right now, there is a controlled stability in Afghanistan having limited sovereignty being exercised by Ghani's regime around Kabul and some key city centres.²⁸

It is a well-known fact that Taliban had not surrendered to the US demand at the time (2010) when its military was fighting with full

might as the main component of ISAF.²⁹ With its present strength, the US has no capacity to contain the onslaughts of Taliban for too long. As stated by Ben Wolfgang, in the recent past, Taliban fighters have mounted a comeback in Afghanistan. Besides attacking Afghan forces, Taliban also launched blatant attacks against the US forces. In October 2018, Taliban also targeted the top US commander Gen Austin Scott Miller, though he remained unhurt.³⁰ At an international economic conference at Davos, Ghani informed that “45,000 members of the Afghan security forces had died since he took office in 2014.”³¹ The casualty estimates of Afghan forces showed a sharp rise during 2018, which further undermines the US leverage over Taliban.³² Taliban’s ‘discourse’ at Moscow conference held during February 2018, clearly indicated their strength and confidence level. They compelled the US for one-on-one meeting for a peace deal which was a distinct break from previous administrations’ efforts to end the war in Afghanistan.³³

In the emerging perspective, America had three options. First, continue to fight Taliban for an unspecified period by enhancing its military presence with a view to coerce them to submit. This option would have been self-defeating because America once tried this strategy from 2010 to 2012. Second, think for a planned pull-out by involving all stakeholders and create a win-win situation for all before its troops are withdrawn from Afghanistan. The State Department has already tried to exercise a similar plan.³⁴ Third, hand over Kabul to Taliban by negotiating a weak deal in the absence of other key players. In the backdrop of the ‘Doha Agreement’, one could predict that emerging scenarios might lead in that direction. Before signing the accord, Trump’s willingness to withdraw from Afghanistan in a hurry was quite obvious when he talked with reporters in the Oval Office and said that after around 19 years, Taliban have started to talk about “settling, talking about making an agreement, and we bring our people back home if that happens.”³⁵ It helped Taliban in gaining leverage over the US team during the negotiation process.

Nonetheless, since the military leadership has already persuaded Khalilzad, US special representative, that a fallback on a reduced scale at a slower pace is best for the US under the circumstances. Hence, for the time, a steep withdrawal seems 'back in the box'. Yet, the statement made by Trump has implications because "when you're in negotiations, forfeiting more of your leverage voluntarily is strategic malpractice."³⁶ Some opinion-makers view that Khalilzad was under tremendous pressure to finalize the withdrawal plan on a fast-track.³⁷ It is believed that Trump was in a hurry to achieve a milestone at the end of his first term as the President of the US and less concerned about the consequences of this deal. His pressure for a quick withdrawal from Afghanistan was a gamble to gain support from within the US especially in the context of the election-2020.

However, on one occasion Khalilzad had said that we are still working on a number of issues. He had emphasised that "nothing is agreed until everything is agreed". He elaborated that 'everything', includes a detailed Afghan road map through intra-Afghan dialogue and a comprehensive ceasefire.³⁸ But in reality, in the Doha accord, nothing has been agreed on in concrete terms hence, the concerns expressed about the intended deal over the last two years, still remain valid.³⁹ Since the Doha accord looks into the future, therefore, nobody knows as to what policies the three sides namely, the US, Taliban, and Ghani led government in Afghanistan, would follow in the future. Even if Taliban implement the deal in letter and spirit, there are pull and push factors which can still spoil the accord.

The US plan has been criticised by many renowned scholars from across the world. From Hirsh's viewpoint, "any decision made in haste without a formal peace pact between the Taliban and Kabul—one that would delay the US withdrawal until full implementation—would be in effect an American surrender."⁴⁰ American hasty decision would increase the risk of Taliban's recapturing the country thus, pushing it back into protracted, bloody civil war.⁴¹ By comparing the current case with that of Vietnam, Ryan Crocker told, "We've seen this before,

at the Paris peace talks with Vietnam.”⁴² Anthony H. Cordesman made a comparison between the case of Afghanistan vs Vietnam. He said, “The US left South Vietnam with a hollow, unstable, economically bankrupt and corrupt “democratic” government in charge.” Thus, the moment America’s military support and high aid levels were cut, Vietnam was torn apart.⁴³ Currently, similar environments prevail in Afghanistan.

Senator Lindsey Olin Graham, a close associate of President Trump remarked that the President was very upset about America’s achievements in Afghanistan. He emphasised that an instant pull-out would be a sheer failure because Afghanistan still remains the centre of gravity in the War on Terror.⁴⁴ America’s intelligence assessment of 2017 indicates that if Washington decides to make a complete withdrawal of its troops from Afghan soil, it would lead to a direct threat to the US mainland within two years.⁴⁵ A complete withdrawal of the US forces from Afghanistan would be a significant risk, Trump’s hasty decision only adds to that risk, Bruce O. Riedel said.⁴⁶

The above arguments on the subject besides, President Ghani had warned almost a year back that in the absence of American economic and military backup support, his regime would fail to withstand the pressure and will collapse soon. He emphasised that without American support, the Afghan army would wither away within six months.⁴⁷ With the current American moves, Ghani and his team are “deeply worried they’re about to be sold out by the U.S.”, said Daniel F. Feldman. Ghani and his team have already conveyed their serious concerns about outcome of the peace accord if Afghan authorities are kept out of the dialogue process.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, the strategy of hasty withdrawal is not something new for the US to follow. As highlighted earlier, it has already betrayed its allies in Vietnam and Afghanistan. In the early 1990s, its abrupt decision to pull out from Afghanistan led to the civil war, giving way to Taliban and al-Qaeda. Trump has already made up his mind to pull

out his forces from Afghan soil. In his State of the Union address in 2019, he was categorical in saying that “Great nations do not fight endless wars.” “It’s time to end the Afghanistan war.”⁴⁹

A possible future setting in the region

In the real world, the decisions and strategies to deal with states are made to promote/ protect the national interests. It is believed that the US interests in the regional context would be served well by keeping some kind of control over Afghanistan. For this purpose, it earlier on played a central role in driving out Russia. For the last 19 years, it continued to fight against the Taliban to install a regime of its own choice but failed. But America is unlikely to give up its objective of maintaining direct influence in the region. Thus, to have direct influence over Afghanistan, the US may find a way to deal with Afghanistan if they take over control of Afghanistan in the absence of US forces. If so required, the US might not even hesitate to extend physical support to Taliban against its former allies to ensure that it remains relevant in the region.

While sliding with Taliban’s in an ‘Alliance Game’, the US could also be in a position to control Jihadist groups who have made footprints on Afghan soil. With its presence in Kabul in some form, the US would be in a position to monitor the activities of Iran and other anti-Taliban and anti-US groups. Washington would also be able to check and monitor Beijing and Moscow’s activities in the region. While staying inside Afghanistan, in worst case scenarios, Washington might instigate ethnic Uighurs to cause unrest in China’s province Xianjiang. This province is believed to have “one-third of China’s oil reserves and more natural gas than any of its other regions.”⁵⁰

In such a scenario, India is likely to take full advantage of the US influence over Taliban in an ‘Adversary Game’ against Pakistan. Though in the projected scenarios, Taliban would play a lead role in Afghanistan, but they may not be able to freely exercise their options as Kabul government is likely to remain financially dependent for

support on other powers for quite some time, thus, they would have limited options to take independent positions on national and international affairs. It would be a kind of 'marriage of convenience', forcing both Taliban and the US to exercise restraints thus, allowing India to use Afghanistan as a launching pad against Pakistan.

In another scenario, though less likely but one can still not rule out the possibility of Russia coming back in Afghanistan as an important player. It is no more a weak country. It enjoys ties both with Taliban and Afghan politicians. During February 2019, President Putin played smartly and managed to persuade Taliban and powerful Afghan politicians to come to Moscow and sit across the table for unprecedented talks.⁵¹ Russia also enjoys good friendly relations with China and Iran thus, it has fair chances of forging a greater alliance in the region inclusive of Panjsheris and Taliban.

It may be however surmised that without a comprehensive plan of action involving all stakeholders, it would not be easy for the US to have easy sailing in Afghanistan along-side Taliban. The present alliances are likely to be renewed.⁵² Some new alliances are expected to be created including the revival of some old one in the region. In 'Alliance vs Adversary Game', Iran, currently enjoys good relations with Taliban. In this regard, Kugelman says, "By scuttling the nuclear deal and sanctioning Tehran, the US has already created ground for Iran to support Taliban in an 'Alliance Game' by providing them with military training, financing, and weapons...Despite all their bloody differences, a common US enemy is enough to bring the two sides together."⁵³

Though, Iran has already denied that it has no intentions to dominate the region and that it is only helping the process to promote peace in Afghanistan⁵⁴ but it is believed that even if Tehran is sincere towards the ongoing peace process, the US might not allow it to stay in Taliban's camp in an 'Alliance Game' because currently there is a serious trust deficit between the two due to a number of

disagreements. Although Iran would still like to keep Taliban under its influence but failing to protect its national interests in an 'Alliance Game' with Taliban, Tehran has the option to go back in Panjsheris camp against Taliban in an 'Adversary Game'.

The prospects of building a strong nexus between Iran and Taliban are quite low unless there is a close harmony between Taliban and Panjsheris camp. Iran being a Shiite state enjoys substantial clout over Afghan Shiite Muslims. Panjsheris camp is its natural ally and it would take less time to build an 'Alliance with them in an Adversary Game' against the US sponsored Taliban. Similarly, it is viewed that Russia and China which are currently sympathisers to Taliban in 'Alliance Game' might realign their strategies and shift their loyalties towards anti-Taliban group to give tough time to the US.

Finally, as far as Russia is concerned, it is busy working in creating cracks in "an already fragile yet fledgling peace process-and provoking a fresh crisis within Afghan government."⁵⁵ Moscow is unlikely to overlook the deep scars of defeat that it suffered in Afghanistan just two decades ago. In this regard, Rubin writes: "Putin did not want the Taliban to win, but he also did not want the United States to succeed where the Soviet Union has failed."⁵⁶ Some scholars have pointed out that Russian intelligence agencies are involved in arranging finances for Taliban who need money to continue their fight.⁵⁷

In the same context, Shinkai Karokhail, a member of the Lower House of Afghanistan's Parliament, told VOA that: "It is thought that Russia has been supporting the Taliban, and it has provided the Taliban with the means so the war, the US engagement in Afghanistan continues."⁵⁸ Thus, as predicted by American senator John McCain before his death, "the conflict in Afghanistan would continue on a low-burning simmer for a long time to come."⁵⁹

Pakistan's position in the new setting?

Unfortunately, at the time of independence, Pakistan inherited problematic boundaries along its eastern as well as the western frontier in the form of Kashmir dispute and Durand Line with India and Afghanistan respectively. On its western front, Pakistan considers that 'Durand Line' is a settled matter but it is contested by Afghanistan regularly.⁶⁰

In the late 1970s, General Zia-ul-Haq conceived an idea that Afghanistan could provide 'strategic depth' to Pakistan in case of war with India. He wanted to create a strong alliance with Afghanistan with a view to offset the disadvantage that Pakistan was facing along its eastern border.⁶¹ Thus, he created leverage with Taliban by supporting them in the war against Soviet invasion. Later, the Pakistan army continued to promote and follow Zia's policy.⁶² Islamabad was able to establish good relations with Taliban regime but it failed to convince them to recognize the 'Durand Line' as a settled border between the two countries. Yet, as highlighted by Richard Olson, while Pakistan has already moved away from promoting the concept of a strategic depth,⁶³ but it would definitely look for a favourable regime in Kabul to safeguard its western border.

India in an 'Adversary Game' against Pakistan has used all available cards to ward-off Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan in past and it will continue to do its bid in the future as well. It is believed that as long as the US remains present in Afghanistan in an 'Alliance Game' with Taliban, the Afghan government would continue to have close relations with India. Therefore, in American presence, Pakistan would be unable to enjoy even good friendly relations with Afghanistan.⁶⁴

Currently, Afghanistan is in a state of mess. As highlighted earlier, in order to maintain its direct influence, the US would first try to have consensus between Taliban and the Kabul regime without involving the regional players. If it fails to bring them at one platform, it would look for a new 'Alliance vs Adversary Game' with Taliban against

Panjsheris. This would ultimately lead to a new regional 'Alliance vs Adversary Game' by China, Iran, Russia, and Panjsheris against the US and Taliban. Nevertheless, India could draw advantage from both sides, having serious security implications for Pakistan in particular and the region in general.

It is now common knowledge that Pakistan has been frequently used by the US to protect its strategic interests in the region. Once again, it has been used as a facilitator in the recently concluded accord between Taliban and the US. It is still engaged in persuading Taliban to cooperate in intra-Afghan dialogue. But at the end of the day, neither of the two sides is likely to accommodate Pakistan as a partner. The probable alliance between Taliban and the US tacitly supported by India will have leverage over Tahrek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) which maintains its links within Afghanistan and continues to operate from across the 'Durand Line'.

Thus, the new setting in Afghanistan will have serious implications for the relationship between the two countries. India would use Afghan soil freely to create unrest in Pakistan having consequences for the effectiveness of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a project which is considered as the backbone of Pakistan's economy. Due to its prolonged deployment against the War on Terror, the Pakistan army is already under tremendous stress. In the changed setting, it would be obligated to take an additional load to physically defend its western border. The upcoming geo-strategic scenarios would compel Pakistan to have an additional defence budget and increase its military strength.

Proposed way forward

Afghan problem is a complex phenomenon. Although, an in-depth analysis of the Afghan crises, presents a gloomy picture and it seems quite tricky to carve a right course in the 'fog of war' that prevails in Afghanistan but some solution may be found if all sides work sincerely towards achieving peace there. As highlighted earlier, the

Doha agreement does not guarantee that permanent ceasefire will be upheld in Afghanistan during intra-Afghan dialogue. But it is understood that the peace process cannot move forward when the fighting is still on. Hence, Taliban will have to agree to a permanent 'ceasefire' if they are willing to bring sustainable peace in Afghanistan through intra-Afghan negotiations. Although the US has agreed for complete withdrawal of its troops from Afghanistan yet, the enduring success of Doha accord would lie in fulfilment of its commitment because even the symbolic presence of American troops inside Afghanistan would have consequences for the regional players.

As suggested by Taliban at the Moscow conference, there is a need to have strong intentions and strategy for achieving peace in Afghanistan of which the end of occupation is a crucial part. Cordesman who in one of his research work concluded, "blundering into repeating Vietnam redux, and relying on the "fog of peace" to replace the "fog of war" is not the answer." It is, therefore, suggested that if the issue in hand is to be resolved lastingly, we need to organize an autonomous platform in a form of 'Afghan Reconciliation Committee' under the UN auspices to undertake the peace process forward.

Besides the principal stakeholders (Afghan elders-plus the US), the proposed committee must be represented by the regional players including China, Iran, Russia, and Pakistan. The platform should also include the technocrats from UN who would help the committee in drafting the reforms agenda duly consented by Afghan elders. Thus, a consensus decision taken by the 'Afghan Reconciliation Committee' will help bringing 'stable political order' in Afghanistan. Yet, if the suggested process is to succeed, the presence of the US forces during the dialogue process inside Afghanistan would be a major factor that could help ensure implementation of the decisions arrived at by the committee.

Alternatively, if the US wishes to leave Afghanistan in an orderly manner, then a political settlement would be a pre-condition. A

permanent solution to the issue, therefore, lies in ‘proportionate representation’ duly consented by Afghan people. To that end, Afghan elders must talk to each other and bridge the gulf between their political philosophies and envisioned systems of governance acceptable to all. In this regard, some ground has already been covered but still, to complete this gigantic task, Afghan elders need to be facilitated by the US and Pakistan including China and Iran.

Above all, despite the impact of Covid-19 which has already shattered the global economy, the world community will have to reiterate their commitment to provide Afghans with economic support over the next decade to rebuild this war torn country.

Finally, the US needs to ask India to stay away from using Afghan soil against Pakistan. Pakistan and the US will have fair chances of success if a strong coalition among the newly formed Afghan-owned and Afghan-led government is formed and supported. Pakistan army’s spokesman has already urged Washington to “leave Kabul as a friend of the region rather than a “failure”.”⁶⁵

Conclusion

Since the early 1990s, the US emerged as the sole ‘superpower’ and started to make excessive global commitments. But, what has been termed as the ‘imperial overreach’ too has its limits. After dominating the world for two decades, it appears that the US influence is shrinking. The US decision to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan safely should thus not come as a surprise to the world community.

Hence, bringing peace in Afghanistan is a shared responsibility of neighbouring countries. Countries like the US, China, Russia, Iran, and Pakistan would never be able to protect their respective national interests by having self-centred approach towards the Afghan issue. The regional players, therefore, must come forward and play their constructive roles in the ‘safe exit’ of the US forces from Afghanistan. The right spirit of the ‘real politics’ warrants that rather than dragging

the Afghan leadership in opposite camps, they should be persuaded to hammer out a peace plan.

Finally, as highlighted earlier, the 'Afghan Reconciliation Committee' should be formed and asked to take the lead role so as to reduce the US impact on the upcoming peace process and the resultant 'peace accord'. The committee should ensure that the broad plan of action with a timeline also form part of the agreement. The Afghan people are sick of the guns rattling around them for the last four decades, they deserve to have peace and prosperity.

Endnotes

¹ Barry Gordon Buzan and Ole Weaver define regional security complex as, "set of states whose major security perceptions and concerns are so interlinked that their national security problems cannot reasonably be analysed or resolved apart from one another". The concept was revised during 2003 which reads as "a set of units whose major processes of securitization, de-securitization or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analysed/ resolved apart from one another". This concept covers how security matters are clustered and played within the limits of geographical bounds.

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