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Post 9/11 Trends: Bush to Obama to Trump (Multilateralism and Peace Initiatives in Afghanistan)

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Abstract

The overall U.S. strategy in Afghanistan lacks clarity and consistently coordinated efforts/policies to bring peace in the war-torn country. From the Bush to Obama and Trump administrations, the situation remains complex, and ambiguity prevails on the future of Afghanistan and achievements; therefore, the U.S. needs to think outside the box to emerge from this turbulent 19 years-long war. No single country can bring peace and security in Afghanistan due to its complex and diverse nature of issues, its history of conflicts and unsettled domestic issues, which divided the nation into different tribes and factions. The continuity in using soft and smart powers, a multilateral approach, along with Principal-Agent theory, would help to further pave the way forward for bringing peace in Afghanistan. The consistent approach towards state-building and nation-building took by U.S. coalitions, and the U.N. will have a positive impact and create a consensus to develop a peaceful and stable Afghanistan.

Key Words: Post 9/11, Anti-Terrorism, Multilateralism, Peace Initiatives, Foreign Policy, Afghan War, Obama, Peace Building, Pakistan

Theme of Study

Since the Cold War era has come to an end, the topics of peace, security, counter-terrorism and defense have remained key issues at global and regional levels. These issues remained the main focus of the world political arena since 11 September 2001 when the US-led war against terrorism to secure the world started in Afghanistan. The paper analyzes how the U.S. has used a multilateralism approach to build a soft image that has helped to bring peace and stability.

This paper discusses the complex structure, interests, objectives and achievements of U.S. policies in global politics during the two terms of the Obama Administration from 2008 to 2016, as the

debate on the War on Terror has not ended. The policies of President Obama are still effective in foreign policy to tackle and come out of this quagmire. This paper focuses on how the U.S. multilateral policies prompted to effectively counter-terrorism and insurgency in Afghanistan, why the Obama Administration preferred multilateralism over unilateralism and whether it was successful in bringing peace to Afghanistan.

Introduction

On the day of September 11, 2001, when terrorists attacked on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre in New York changed the face of global

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politics. The United States' present hegemonic status is deep-rooted in several aspects as economic prosperity and cultural absorption at the global level; however, the political factor remained at the top. America exerts its influence in global affairs through political ideals. The U.S. is the most influential and powerful polity in the globe today; however, this current status is being discussed and debated across the world. The world has entered an "era of 'groupism'-the construction of defensive blocks, each of which asserts an identity around which it builds solidarity, and struggles to survive alongside and against other such groups" (Immanuel, 1995, p 6-7).

Since World War II ended, the U.S. has been known as the most important polity, and with the end of the Cold War period, an unrivalled hegemonic power. Since 9/11, however, the topics of security and countering-terrorism have remained the key issues at global and regional forums. These issues remained the main focus of the world political arena since the U.S. led war on terror to secure the world has started in Afghanistan. The shift in foreign policy affairs can be understood from statements of Obama for instance while addressing the graduation ceremony of cadets at West Point in New York in 2014, President Obama said:

We must shift our counter-terrorism strategy—drawing on the successes and shortcomings of our experience in Iraq and Afghanistan—to more effectively partner with countries where terrorist networks seek a foothold. (Obama, 2014)

On the other hand, the differences can also be found in the party manifestoes as Bush held the legacy of his party "Republican" in foreign policymaking while Obama took the "Democrats" policies.

Multilateral Approach

The present structure of global affairs has turned into a complex. This complex interdependency has increased the role of regional and international blocks. Multilateralism is a policy or an approach that refers to cooperation among several states on a host of issues. It is a diplomatic practice that countries used instead of hard power. Therefore, multilateralism is simply moving in policy directions

with the assent and cooperation of other states. Multilateralism is directly counter to unilateralism or taking policy actions alone. Therefore the question arises of why states go for multilateralism instead of bilateralism? The term bilateralism refers to "policies that are not well coordinated with other countries and/or that engage with another country singly" (Milner & Tingley, 2013).

Keohane explains that the multilateralism is "practice of coordinating national policies in groups of three or more states" (Keohane, 1990). Ruggie, however, defines multilateralism as "an institutional form that coordinates relations among three or more states on the basis of generalized principles of conduct" (Ruggie, 1993). Hence, it provides a base for collective response in order to resolve a particular problem.

Principal-Agent (Pa) Theory and Multilateralism

In the P.A. model, the governments are principals, and they have an option that they can delegate their policymaking authority to agents (international institutions) (Nielson and Tierney, 2003; Hawkins et al., 2006). So, in multilateralism, there is a choice to delegate to an international organization; therefore, the P.A. model explains the choice for multilateralism. In PA, the principals have the benefit to delegate as they do not have enough expertise and knowledge to make a decision as the agent can (Hawkins et al., 2006; Milner and Tingley, 2013). For the delegation to occur, the principals must take benefit from reducing transactional and operational costs and for solving common problems.

"When multiple principals delegate to a single agent, as in multilateralism in foreign policy, then at some point, the agent will make a decision that is not preferred by one or more of the principals because the principals usually do not have identical preferences" (Milner and Tingley, 2013, p.5). An agent's structure and principal's interests and preferences determine the scope of the P.A. and multilateralism. Burden sharing is key to be gained from the delegation, but this action embroils the multiple principals that are the other states, with their own interests and preferences.

Then the question arises, why is burden-sharing essential in world politics? If countries make decisions for global public goods, then the possibility of under-provision are there as everyone will try to get benefit on efforts of others. The multilateral security organizations such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and economic aid organizations, such as the European Union (E.U.) and World Bank (W.B.), support countries across the globe to address collective issues by providing a larger amount of public goods ([Milner and Tingley, 2013](#)).

Americans support the multilateral efforts as they consider it “will be cheaper than unilateralism in the long run” since the other states would most likely work in collaboration with the U.S. ([Lake, 1999](#), p.220; [Keohane and Nye, 1985](#), p.153; [Cowhey, 1993a](#), p.311, & [Holsti, 2004](#), p.267). The multilateral approach depends upon cooperation among world bodies, and therefore, burden sharing is key to multilateral engagements and commitments.

As [Cowhey \(1993, p.311\)](#) maintains, “The practice of multilateralism also ameliorates concerns over the possibility of the economic bleeding of America while other countries shirked their duties. Collective public institutions (e.g., NATO and the World Bank) with clear conditions on access to their benefits and contributions by other countries addressed U.S. fears about burden-sharing.”

Brief History of Conflict in Afghanistan

The internal conflicts in Afghanistan started in 1978 between anti-communist guerrillas are commonly known as Afghan 'Mujahideen/Taliban', and the central communist government (supported in 1979–89 by the Soviet Union), leading to the falling of government in 1992.

Insurgency and Uprising against the Communist Rule

The origins of the Afghan conflict can be traced to the overthrow of President M. Daud Khan's government in April 1978 by the leftwing inspired army officers (supported by the Soviet Union) led by Nur Mohammad Taraki. The new government had close linkages with the Union of Soviet Socialist

Republics (USSR) due to lack of popularity, launched aggressive and brute force to purge all local opposition leaders, and launched social and land reforms at a large scale. These actions were severely disliked by devoutly Muslims and mostly anti-communist groups.

The events of violence and insurgencies increased against the new government among the tribal and some urban groups, and all of these collectively known as *mujahideen*. These uprisings, internal fighting and conflict within government circles prompted USSR to invade the country in December 1979. The Soviets sent around 30,000 troops and overthrew the unstable and short-term presidency of People's leader Hafizullah Amin (“Afghan War,” n.d.).

The USSR forces attempted to press insurgency by using several strategies, but the guerrillas largely prevented their assaults. The USSR also attempted to halt the civilian support for *Mujahideen* by attacking with bombs and depopulating several countryside areas. The actions and tactics of Soviets troops sparked a mass movement from the countryside, and by 1982, around 2.8 million people from Afghanistan had sought asylum in the neighboring country Pakistan, and additional 1.5m fled to Iran. Ultimately the *Mujahideen* were in a position to defuse the Soviet strong air-power by using “shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles” supplied by USSR's Cold War rival, the U.S. ([Gibbs, 2000](#); [Phillips, 1980](#); and [BBC.CO.UK, n.d.](#)).

The Afghan war became a quagmire by the late 1980s and resulted in the disintegration of the Soviet Union (the USSR suffered a huge loss of economy, military and human). In 1988 the U.S., Afghanistan, Soviet Union and Pakistan signed an accord by which the Soviets withdraw their forces (completed in 1989). After completion of the withdrawal of Soviets forces, Afghanistan returned to the non-aligned status (“Afghan War,” n.d. and [BBC.CO.UK, n.d.](#)). In April 1992, many dissident groups and newly rebellious government forces overthrew the communist president Najibullah, who had succeeded Karmal in 1986.

During the period of the Cold War, USSR and the U.S. provided “nearly \$11 billion in weapons to

the warring parties in Afghanistan" ([Crews, 2008](#), p.39). Consequently, the Taliban emerged in 1994, their advancements and expansion raised high expectations among the war-weary populace. The Afghans hoped that their sufferings would over soon. However, the Taliban, after coming into power in 1996, could not maintain stability and were remained involved in the proxy war with the opposition forces led by Ahmad Shah Massoud.

Despite the Taliban's control on over 80 per cent of Afghan territory but there was no end to killings and bloodshed, as the neighbouring states and other regional powers supported the warring factions. The battlefields were located in the north of Kabul city with heavy loss of civilians lives. None of the parties favoured a peaceful political adjustment or settlement and the "only game being played was on the military battlefield" ([Jan 1999](#)). As a matter of fact, the people of Afghanistan have never found any opportunity peculiarly since the fall of Najibullah's government in 1992.

The two-decades-long war has devastated the economic, social foundations of Afghan society and badly affected the social services countrywide. "Afghanistan has the highest number of landmines (10 million), the largest refugee and disabled population, the highest rates of infant mortality" (UNDP PEACE Initiative, 1997-1999).

Apart from territorial disputes and the influence of regional powers, Afghan societies and former warlords were also divided internally. At the time of the Taliban's rule, Pashtuns dominated the economic, social and political structure of the country. The Taliban attempted to alienate and suppress other Afghan ethnicities, particularly those who were resisting them. Afghan Taliban also dissociated them from neighboring country Pakistan's Taliban faction. Owing to these differences, "conflicts between the groups exploded into shoot-outs on numerous occasions," a pattern that still continues at this time ([Vigier, 2009](#)).

With the onset of war against terrorism, and downfall of the Taliban led government occurred in 2001. The arrival of international coalition troops to fight against terrorists opened another chapter in the history of the Afghan conflict. This GWoT interlinked the local, national, and international

parties and interests ([Vigier, 2009](#)). The downfall of the Taliban sparked internal clashes and violence between the opponent warlords and further escalation of several other past internal conflicts. At present, Afghanistan's history reflects an abysmal situation and underlying patterns of the relentless cycle of conflicts and violence.

Bush Administration and War in Afghanistan (2001-2009)

On September 11, 2001, three planes hit the World Trade Center building in New York and the Pentagon in Washington D.C. By the end of that day, the then President George Walker Bush had given instructions to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to develop a strategy on war footing to attack al-Qaeda terrorist forces in Afghanistan.

The policies and approaches initiated by President George W. Bush are essential to discuss war against terrorism. There was no ambiguity in American strategy for invading Afghanistan: to dismantle al-Qaeda, topple the Taliban led government and prevent a repeat of the 9/11 terrorist attacks ([Whitlock, 2019](#)). After the attacks, on 7th October 2001, the Bush administration had given order for launching Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). Before invading Afghanistan, the Bush administration took the international community into confidence and sought its cooperation and support in an effort to purge the world from terrorism. Australia, the United Kingdom, France and indigenous Afghan opposition groups assisted the United States in first response to the terrorists' attacks (Heyble, 2014; [Lambeth, 2005](#)).

It was not the unilateralist approach of America rather, it was joined by several nations to fight against terrorism. The member states of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) demonstrated their willingness to reshape it in the changing international security environment. On 12 September 2001, NATO member states agreed to invoke Article 5 of the organization for the first time since it was established in 1949 ([Smith, 2012](#)). While announcing strikes against the Taliban regime in

In Afghanistan, President Bush, in his speech on 7 October 2001, said over 40 states in Europe, Middle East (M.E.) and Africa, and across Asia had granted air transportation and landing rights. Several other states shared intelligence information. The U.S. led Global War on Terrorism was widely supported by the collective will of the international community ([Bush, 2001](#)).

The international community witnessed dramatic shifts in the American foreign policy to deal with terrorism. Since the declaration of GWOt and 'Bush Doctrine' of unparalleled military supremacy, the "regime change" for "rogue states" and "preventive and pre-emptive war" strategy generated an unending debate in world political affairs ([Buckley and Singh, 2006](#)).

U.N., ISAF and Peace Building in Afghanistan

The post 9/11 effort constitutes a new round of internationalized initiative of state-building, with the United Nations formally accepted to play a role as coordinator for international assistance in Afghanistan ([Rubin, 2006](#)). The multilateral approach of the U.S., along with its allies and U.N., was an effort to introduce peacebuilding initiatives in Afghanistan. The U.N. provided a legal umbrella to all American actions against the Taliban. After the terrorists attack on 12 September 2001, United Nations Security Council (UNSC), in its meeting, strongly condemned terrorist acts and called upon all nations to cooperate in bringing perpetrators to justice. U.N. imposed sanctions against the Taliban regime. On 28 September 2001, UNSC unanimously passed a resolution (1373) and called for enhanced international cooperation and developing strategies to seize financial assets and economic resources of those who attempted to commit terrorist acts.

The UNSC, in its ongoing broad-based peace, security and political reconciliation efforts, on 6 December 2001 endorsed the Afghanistan agreement on interim arrangements, which was signed in Germany's city Bonn on 5th December 2001. After Bonn Agreement, on 22 December 2001, Hamid Karzai took oath as ahead of Afghanistan's power-sharing unity government. On 20 December 2001, U.N. Security Council authorized the U.S. and its NATO partners to

establish International Security Assistance Force. The formation of ISAF aimed at providing military assistance for pro-Western government.

The ISAF was one of the biggest coalitions in the contemporary world and was NATO's most complicating and multifarious mission. The ISAF troops were from around 51 NATO and other partner nations ([NATO.Int, 2015](#)). The provision of security to Afghan capital Kabul was one of the key objectives of ISAF. Later, its presence was steadily expanded countrywide by the second half of 2006. ISAF provided assistance to Afghan security forces, ANSF (Afghan National Security Forces), to conduct security operations and to reduce the capability of the insurgency (Lopez, 2020). The international forces helped the Afghan government and laid the foundations for good governance and a further improvement in socio-economic development.

The ISAF expansion was associated with a larger worldwide discourse on post-war reconstruction, recovery and peacebuilding. Apart from fundamental security purpose, promotion of economic development, political activities, human rights, governance and the rule of law were also part of the mission to be achieved ([Suhrke, 2012](#)).

In March 2002, the UNSC authorized to establish the U.N. Assistance Mission for Afghanistan (UNAMA) for managing all U.N. led humanitarian, relief, and recovery and reconstruction efforts. The United Nations' role in Afghanistan includes election operation by working with Afghan authorities for voters' registration and organizing elections. All of these efforts seem unreal and difficult to succeed as Afghan society is under a strong grip of never-ending violence, drug production, warlordism and suspicion of foreigners. Afghanistan can achieve durable and stable peace, which was designed and supported by Afghans; there can be no prospect of progress or otherwise (James Paul - Global Policy Forum).

The extensive role of the U.N. and NATO in the Afghan war reflects tenets of P.A. theory and multilateralism approach. On 6 November 2001, the then U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, in his speech, explained that how coalitions are important:

We need a lot of help to do this. And nations will help in some ways, and some other nations will help in other ways, and that's fine. Countries ought to participate in a way that they can contribute and feel comfortable with. It's important because if it were a single coalition and a coalition member decided not to participate in one way or another; it would be charged that the coalition was falling apart. On that basis, the weakest link in the chain would end the mission, which is why we don't have a single coalition; we have flexible coalitions for different aspects of the task. In this way, the mission determines the coalition; the coalition must not determine the mission. ([Rumsfeld, 2001](#))

In mid-2003, when the American defense intelligence in Afghanistan concluded that resurgence of Taliban was more likely and U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld accepted that "Afghan front was heating up" ([Jehl, 2003](#)). Since then, the demand for additional coalition troops' contribution to winning the war against Afghan insurgency and exhibit NATO solidarity became the topic of the day in Washington ([Suhrke, 2012](#)). Till the end of the second term of the Bush administration, apart from seeking overt and formal cooperation from the international community, the U.S. also sought covert and informal coalitions' support in Afghanistan to defeat and curb terrorism and to establish security and stability. The U.S. covert policy as a world leader was a reflection of its hegemonic role. Overall, the United States under President Bush could not achieve its desired objectives. Although the Bush administration was well aware of notions of soft power, however, its operationalization was misapplied. It was because of the tone and rhetoric of President George W. Bush that they established a worldview of him as a unilateralist, relying on hard power and non-negotiable norms.

Obama: Afpak and Counter-Terrorism Strategy

The Bush Administration's failure to achieve desired objectives and to stabilize the situation in Afghanistan compelled President Obama in 2009 to re-visit the problem. Obama voiced for focusing on the right war in Afghanistan ([Williams, 2010](#)). In mid-February 2009, the Obama administrations

have approved the deployment of more than 17,000 troops and 4,000 additional by March-end. While after eight months, President Obama announced that the U.S. would be sending more than 30,000 troops to Afghanistan. The Obama administration's key objective was to push back the Taliban terrorist groups, helping Afghan President Karzai to solidify political power and strengthening the capability of Afghan troops. President Obama's Afghan strategy could be well understood while he addressed the cadets of Military Academy at West Point on 9th December 2009. Obama highlighted that the troop's addition linked to the threats and dangers posed by the Taliban but placed the troop addition within the framework (U.S. forces drawdown in Afghanistan). President Obama took the broad middle-road to achieve objectives, winning the war in Afghanistan and establishing an environment to revive the soft image of America in the comity of nations. As he argued to the American people that:

We must deny al Qaeda a safe haven. We must reverse the Taliban's momentum and deny it the ability to overthrow the government. And we must strengthen the capacity of Afghanistan's security forces and government so that they can take lead responsibility for Afghanistan's future.

While taking the multilateral approach of cooperation in the fight against terrorism, President Obama further highlighted the significance of coalition partners as:

We must keep the pressure on al Qaeda, and to do that; we must increase the stability and capacity of our partners in the region. ([Obama, 2009](#))

The Obama administration's Afghan strategy mainly revolved around wipe-out al-Qaeda and its safe havens, strengthening the capacity of security forces and the government, building a secure and strong democratic state, providing economic and development assistance, particularly in areas of agriculture and good governance etc.

After more than a decade of ongoing GWOt, the Obama Administration announced that the added forces would return by September 2012 and the rest of the withdrawal process to be completed by 2014. Further, in the second week of January

2013, Obama vowed to expedite the withdrawal process keeping in view the gains made by Afghan troops. President Obama also reiterated that the U.S. would keep some troops in Afghanistan after the completion of NATO's combat mission in 2014 (Heyble, 2014).

The preeminent security threat to America continues to be from al-Qa'eda and its affiliates and adherents, I.S. (Islamic State) militant group. The purpose of the strategy was to halt terrorist attacks against American citizens, its interests, and allies across the globe. The strategy was aimed to create an international environment inhospitable to militants and their supporters. Afghanistan remained at the centre of the stage in American foreign policy under the Obama Administration. The new policy, as reflected in Obama's statement of March 2009 and NATO Lisbon Summit Declaration of November 2010 and reaffirmed in December 2010 at Afghanistan-Pakistan Annual Review, had an objective to persuade the U.S. allies that their support required for the implementation of "surge strategy". President Obama's Afghanistan Strategy (Perl, 2005 February) revolves around three dimensions:

1. By engaging global institutions
2. By seeking support from E.U. and NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) allies, and
3. By coordinating with all states, particularly Afghanistan's neighboring

On 15 October 2015, President Obama stated that the Afghan government and the people wanted and merited the continuation of American support and that (1) troops level to remain at about 10,000 until nearly 2016 end; and (2) post-2016 troops level 5,500 and continuation of missions enabling the ANDSF, and fighting against al-Qaeda and linked groups. The reports indicated the cost to operate post-2016 troops would be about 15 billion dollars per year (Jaffe, 2015). According to President Obama, "the post-2016 U.S. force would operate out of Bagram Airfield, Jalalabad, and Qandahar" (Jaffe, 2015).

Key Tools in President Obama's Policy

The key tools used by the Obama's administration to achieve its targets were:

- 'Soft Power' To attract and cooperate rather than using hard power (coercive)
- Smart Power (Nye, 2009) has five key aspects: partnership and alliances, global development, economic integration, diplomacy, and technology and innovation. (Combines soft and hard power known as smart power. It became the core principle of Obama's foreign policy)
- 3-Ds (Defence, Diplomacy and Development)

Obama's Afghanistan Strategy

United States' AfPak policy aimed at ensuring to improve the ongoing law and order situation in Afghanistan by disrupting, dismantling, and defeating al-Qaeda. Obama administration also expressed its commitment that the United States will "promote a more capable, accountable, and effective government in Afghanistan" (House, 2011) that requires implementation and resourcing an integrated civilian-military counterinsurgency strategy. The following are the key points:

Withdrawal of U.S. Forces

While announcing the Afghanistan Strategy in 2009, Obama announced to draw down U.S. forces from Afghanistan. By the start of 2013, the withdrawal plan was implemented rightly: 65,000 U.S. troops were in Afghanistan in 2013, then 40,000 in 2014, and only 9,800 in 2015. Obama administration set a time limit of 2016 end to withdraw all American troops from Afghan territory. Through the withdrawal plan, the Afghan government was compelled to take responsibility for security and to implement required reforms.

Peace in Intra-Afghan Dialogue

President Obama's strategy stresses talks with the Afghan Taliban and the other powers with stakes in Afghanistan's peace and stability. President Ghani's delegation gained some successes in talks with the Taliban delegates, but the negotiations halted by the mid of 2015. While the efforts for the resumption of negotiations by the U.S., Pakistan, China and Afghanistan failed because the Taliban victories

reinforced those who made an argument against peace talks. Afghan minorities and some women's groups expressed apprehensions that the settlements likely undermine the post2001 gains for improvements in the human rights situation in the country.

Nation-Building and Empowerment for Peaceful Afghanistan

According to President Obama, the America's Afghan policy would remain successful as the U.S. is not in Afghanistan to occupy it but to provide support and enhance efficiency of the Afghan government. President Obama, while announcing the U.S. Strategy on December 1, 2009, reiterated that America has no intention to occupy the Afghan land. The U.S. presence in Afghanistan is for providing training and supporting Afghan partners to combat threats to their peace and stability.

Helping Central Govt

The America and its allies presence in Afghanistan were for making efforts to restore peace, maintain security, providing assistance for the nation-building process, development and reconstruction.

Trump, Afghan Peace Talks and Way Forward

President Donald John Trump entered office on January 20, 2017, with a legacy of the longest U.S. led war against terrorism. Trump, on the 2016 campaign trail, promised "America First" and is therefore considered a nationalist leader. Trump called for a shift in U.S. counter-terrorism strategy and promised to "defeat the ideology of radical Islamic terrorism" (Brands, & Feaver, 2017). Now in 18 years of war, the U.S. has suffered around 2,400 military casualties in Afghanistan (including four in combat in 2020 till June 25, 2020), and Congress has appropriated approximately \$137 billion for Afghan reconstruction (Clayton, 2020).

President Trump's speech in August 2017 laid the foundation of revised strategy for Afghanistan, and while announcing the plan, he referred to political settlement of Afghan war as a result of effective military efforts. But initially, the Trump administration was not clear and did not explain what the objectives or conditions could be part of

Afghan political peace-process. The Trump Administration's decision to enter into direct peace talks with the Taliban, without the participation of representatives from the Afghan government, resulted in the first top-level direct negotiations between the U.S. and Taliban held in Qatar's city Doha, in July 2018.

Trump Administration: U.S.-Taliban Peace Deal

Direct contacts between U.S. officials and Taliban leaders started during President Obama's first term in office in November 2010. The U.S. officials met with Tayyab Agha, a delegate of Mullah Omar, the Taliban leader, in Munich (Germany), for holding secret talks. The talks were arranged by the German officials and Qatar's royal family. Further, two more rounds of preliminary meetings were held in Qatar and Germany in 2011. Later, the Taliban set up a political office in Doha (Qatar) in January 2012 (Sheikh and Khan, 2019). Later, direct talks with the Taliban and the peace process initiated in July 2018 were result of the Trump administration's changed attitude towards the Taliban and shift in Afghan policy.

Following initiation of talks with the Taliban, President Trump faced domestic pressures to remain tough on terrorism as faced by his predecessors. As such, the United States currently leads a coalition capable of propping up the Afghan central government and periodically sorting against jihadists. The forever war in Afghanistan will likely continue indefinitely, with the United States sharing the burdens with NATO and local allies, even as political leaders preach an America First strategy (Dubreuil, 2009; Dombrowski and Reich, 2018).

A major breakthrough and landmark development occurred on 29th February 2020, when the U.S. officials and the Taliban signed a peace accord in Doha, Qatar, after over 18 years of conflict. The peace agreement contained the following main provisions:

- Halt attacks against the U.S.
- Withdrawal of U.S. troops
- Prisoner swap
- Intra-Afghan peace talks
- Reduction of violence

Keeping in view the recent most developments in Afghanistan indicated a mixed and complex picture. Following the peace deal, only two tenets of agreement been implemented as the end of Taliban attacks on U.S. assets and interests and withdrawal of foreign troops. The implementation of the remaining provisions involving the Taliban and the Afghan government have been far more arduous. As anticipated by the experts, the situation within Afghanistan will remain unstable and unpredictable due to its complex nature and extremely fragmented society.

The Taliban has given little indication that peace agreement will reduce overall levels of violence by 80 per cent. Eventually, the recent developments have made it possible for the US-Taliban agreement to probably succeed in bringing an end to American military involvement in an ongoing Afghan war; however, peace in Afghanistan remains elusive ([Clayton, 2020](#); [George, 2020](#)).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The present situation in Afghanistan can be well described as a "conflict of all conflicts" owing to the complicated nature and innumerable problems involved in the ongoing war. The continuing intra-Afghan clashes, violence and counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan have now lasted for 19 years. The U.S. presence in Afghanistan was almost the same in nature when the Soviet Union remained as an occupying force before it was compelled to leave due to consistent resistance of *Mujahideen* and also gradually weaken the Soviet economy.

The U.S. officials asserted that, despite the present deteriorating security situation, insurgents do not pose a serious threat to the stability of the government. The successes of the U.S.-led War on Terror can be assessed as the world had witnessed a major blow to the Taliban when key leaders (Bin Laden, Mullah Akhtar Mansour, Mullah Mohammad Omar etc.) were traced and killed in operations.

An eminent part of the American policy was to help make Afghanistan a self-sustaining state. The self-sustaining process would encourage and bolster social development, economic cohesion and integration into regional trading patterns. However, Afghanistan to remain dependent on foreign aid and

assistance for many years. "Through the end of FY2014, the United States provided about \$100 billion to Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban, of which about 60% has been to equip and train the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF). About \$5.7 billion was being provided in FY2015, including \$4.1 billion for the ANDSF. For FY2016, the United States is providing \$5.3 billion, including \$3.8 billion for the ANDSF. The administration has requested about \$4.67 billion for FY2017, of which \$3.5 billion is for the ANDSF" ([Katzman, 2016 June](#)). These figures do not include funds for the U.S. military operations in Afghanistan.

The main recommendations are:

- Economic Development, Prosperity through robust initiatives keeping in view the ground reality
- Peace-building through Economic, Political and Social Uplift
- Empowering Afghan-own and Afghan-led Govt
- U.S. must seek international community support for lasting Afghan peace

The U.S. Administrations failed to understand the essential conditions of victory in war: the creation of an alternate just political order. Paul D. Miller in his article "Obamas Failed Legacy in Afghanistan" stated that "the single greatest strategic threat is the weakness of the Afghan government" and called for "a dramatically more ambitious capacity-development program" ([Miller, 2016](#)). Afghanistan needs a stable and legitimate political order that will pave a way forward to end political violence. Competent and well-functioning of institutions are pre-conditions for a peaceful and stable Afghanistan. The United States used the multilateralism approach to build a soft image that will help to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan. There is a dire need for a peacebuilding strategy to end the ongoing conflict in the war-torn country. It is, therefore, pivotal to have a peacebuilding framework that is grounded on long-term strategic vision so to prevent complete failure of the Afghan state and further recurrence of violence and civil war by envisaging a peacebuilding agenda that demands re-assessment of the present militarized perception of peacebuilding, looking particularly for the much required, peacebuilding strategy.

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