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Current Afghanistan Crisis: The Impact of External Factors on Internal Crisis

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Abstract: This paper attempts to address some of the fundamental questions concerning the current crisis in Afghanistan. After fighting for twenty years, the US and NATO forces announced their withdrawal and the Taliban again recaptured and took over Afghanistan on August 15, 2021. The US and NATO withdrawal and recapturing of Afghanistan by the Taliban was not the ending but the beginning of a new crisis. After the US withdrawal, the new Taliban are facing multiple threats from different militant groups and the worst humanitarian crisis. The article explores how the external factors influence the internal crisis. The study demonstrates that international support and regional pressure can persuade the Taliban government to ensure fundamental rights including girls' education. If left alone, the governance and humanitarian crisis will create space for more extremist groups who will use Afghanistan for perpetrating terrorism and will pose serious security threats to the world.

Key Words: Security, Terrorism, Extremism, Humanitarian Crisis

Introduction

The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan on August 15, 2021, has created serious security concerns at the regional and international levels. The neighbouring countries fear that Afghan territory can be used against their strategic interests. Pakistan, which shares the longest border with Afghanistan is concerned about the possible attacks of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in the erstwhile tribal areas despite fencing most of the Durand Line border (Karim, 2021, p. 1). The primary concerns of the US and European countries are that Afghanistan can become a sanctuary for international terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda and IS that might perpetrate terrorist attacks against them. They are also worried that the Taliban can again impose the strict interpretation of Shariah laws of the 90s in Afghanistan which deprived women and girls of their fundamental rights. Internally Taliban facing numerous challenges ranging from peace and stability to severe food crises. The

existing literature suggests that the legitimacy of the Taliban government internally and externally, security risks emanating from internal rival groups, governance and meeting humanitarian needs are the key challenges the new Taliban government is facing (Miakhel, 2021). Furthermore, the literature maintains that internal economic explosion, humanitarian crisis, brain drain, and large displacement are some of the key challenges confronted by the new Taliban government (Byrd, 2021). It argues that it is very unlikely that the Taliban will cut relations with other terrorist groups in Afghanistan (Rashid & London, 2021). Furthermore, the literature suggests that the Taliban will continue to impose the extreme interpretation of Shariah without the participation of the people and tolerating dissent (Rashid & London, 2021). Similarly, the literature maintains that the new Taliban rule will provide a favourable environment to the non-state actors including the US-designated terrorist organisations who will find themselves less

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vulnerable ([White, 2022](#)). In contrast to the above studies, this article analyse the impact of external factors on internal factors. The study demonstrates that the wait and see approach of international community can profoundly affect the security situation in Afghanistan and can create vacuum for more extremist groups.

Historical Background

Before discussing the internal challenges and external concerns it is important to understand the historical background of Afghanistan. Afghanistan has proved historically a forbidden country for foreign invaders. Alexander the Great after his defeat at the hands of Afghan in 330 BC is said to have remarked that it is easy to go into Afghanistan but difficult to go out ([Fergusson & Hughes, 2019, p. 1](#)). Similarly, the British empire faced enormous difficulties in its invasion of Afghanistan. In the first Anglo-Afghan war, the British experienced disaster when they were forced to withdraw from Kabul in January 1842 and marching to the garrison at Jalalabad, 110 miles away, out of 16,500 soldiers and civilians only one survivor made it to Jalalabad ([Bearden, 2001, p.18](#)). This humiliation to the then super power was captured by Elizabeth Butler in her painting showing the sole survivor – Dr William Brydon reaching the British fort in Jalalabad on horseback ([Fergusson and Hughes, 2019, p. 2](#)). Gates and Roy maintain that history shows that Afghanistan was never subjugated by Mughals, British and Soviets. We should learn the lessons of history. Despite advancement in military technology, Afghanistan's social, cultural geographical characteristics have remained unchanged. These characteristics are relevant even today and limit government policies of state-building ([Roy, 2016](#)). [Milton Bearden \(2001, p. 30\)](#) maintained that replacing government in Afghanistan should come from within not from without. This can be seen when the British and Russian attempted to replace the ruler and people did not accept it. In the last 40 years, two superpowers – first the Soviet Union and the US both failed to rule Afghanistan.

For instance, in April 1978 President Daoud's government in Afghanistan was overthrown by Nor Muhammad Taraki, the communist leader of a faction of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). The revolution called Saur (April) was supported by the Soviet Union, but the Tarakai government soon came to an end when his own aide Hafiz Ullah Amin conspired against him and overthrew his government. This led to a civil war in Afghanistan, and a resistant movement started by Mujahideen against the Amin government. Before Afghanistan could slip into America's block, the then superpower Soviet Union directly intervened in December 1979 and installed a puppet government led by Barak Kamal.

The Soviet Union, under the Brezhnev doctrine, believed that it was morally and politically justified to help a socialist government if it faced a threat from hostile forces ([Galeotti, 1995](#)). The US government declared the Soviet intervention to be an act of aggression and subjugation of an independent state. In his address to the American people in 1980, President Jimmy Carter, while expressing the sentiment of the Afghan people said, "It is a deliberate effort of a powerful, atheistic government to subjugate an independent Islamic people" ([Carter, 1980](#)). Pakistan, which shared a long border with Afghanistan, was worried about the spillover effect of war and the possible direct incursion of the Soviet forces across the border ([Afghan Task Force, 1980](#)).

America wanted to contain Russia in the Soviet-Afghan war, and Pakistan's objective was to confront its eternal enemy – India ([Riedel, 2013](#)). Needing each other's support, the relations between the US and Pakistan improved significantly during this period. The then US National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski said:

There was a certain coolness and distance in the American-Pakistan relationship prior to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. After that invasion, we collaborated very closely. And I have to pay tribute to the guts of the Pakistanis: they acted with remarkable courage, and they just weren't intimidated and they did thing which one would have thought a vulnerable country

might not have the courage to undertake. We, I am pleased to say, supported them actively and they had our backing, but they were there, they were the ones who were endangered, not we (Brzezinski quoted in [Ishtiaq Ahmed, 2013](#), pp. 274-275).

During the Afghan war (1979-89) the US increased its military and development assistance, and Pakistan became one of the biggest recipients of US aid, receiving \$5 billion between 1980 and 1990 ([Newsweek, 2009](#)). It was during this period that the Pakistan ISI established close relations with different militant groups and became a strong intelligence organisation. Rashid identifies seven major Mujahideen groups ("the Peshawar Seven"), which were recognised by Pakistan and received aid from the CIA ([Rashid, 2001, 18](#)). The groups were serving the interest of the US in the region, therefore, she did not need to intervene.

1. Hezb-e-Islami Afghanistan (Gul Baddin Hekmatyar)
2. Hezb-e-Islami Afghanistan (Maulvi Younas Khalis)
3. Jamiat-e-Islami Afghanistan
4. Ittehad-e-Islami Afghanistan
5. Mahaz-e-Millie-e-Islami Afghanistan
6. Jabha-de-Nijat-e-Milli-e-Afghanistan
7. Harkat-e-Inqilab-e-Afghanistan

As stated above, the nine year Soviet-Afghan war, formally ended after Afghanistan and Pakistan signed the UN-sponsored Geneva Accord on April 14, 1988. The accord provided a timetable for the withdrawal of Soviet forces by the end of February 15, 1989, but it did not contain any provision for Afghan national settlement ([Rubin, 2013](#)). The accord terminated assistance to the Mujahideen via Pakistan, but both the US and the USSR claimed their right to assist the Mujahideen groups and the Najeeb government respectively ([Rubin, 2013](#)). However, with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the assistance to the Najeeb government also ended. The civil war started between the Soviet-supported President Najeeb Ullah and Mujahideen groups. To end the deadlock and find a solution, the Peshawar Seven formed an interim government called the Islamic Jihad Council

([Feifer, 2009](#)). However, the Council failed to bring any stability to Afghanistan, and these groups started fighting among themselves. In March 1992 President Najeeb stopped fighting and took refuge in a UN compound until 1996 when the Taliban captured him and later hanged him ([Collins, 2009](#)).

After the fall of President Najeeb, the Islamists who were fighting against him now started fighting among themselves for the occupation of Kabul. According to Misdaq 'The Islamists were the major groups who organised resistance against President Daoud (1973-1978), against Soviet Invasion (1979-1989) against one another for power (1992-1996), and finally against the Taliban (1996-2001)' ([Misdaq, 2006, p. 167](#)). Pakistan, while seeing the growing instability and infighting among the different Islamist groups, withdrew its support from them in favour of the Afghan and Pakistani madrassa graduates called the Taliban who wanted to implement Shariah Law (Teachings of Islam) in Afghanistan ([Collins, 2009, p. 36](#)). The word *Talib* (seeker of knowledge) refers to a student who seeks religious knowledge in a madrassa. The civil war ended with the emergence of the second generation of Mujahideen who called themselves Taliban (or the students of Islam) ([Rashid, 2001, p. 13](#)).

The Taliban Movement began in Qandahar province in Afghanistan in spring 1994 when Mullah Umer with some of his companions hanged a warlord Mansur on the charge of dishonouring a woman ([Misdaq, 2006](#)). The movement received a boost when it successfully attacked and captured the Pasha Arms depot in Spin Boldak province which contained 18,000 AK-47 ([Misdaq, 2006, p. 177](#)). After getting control of Qandahar and capturing the Pasha Arms depot, the Taliban Movement gathered momentum, and the number of their volunteers increased to 12,000 by December 1994, when they soon gained control of twelve of the thirty-one provinces ([Rashid, 2001, pp. 29-30](#)). Osama bin Laden came to Afghanistan shortly before the Taliban took over Kabul in 1996 ([Collins, 2009](#)). He fought against Soviet forces along with Mujahideen. It was in 1980 when he first visited Afghanistan at the behest of Turki bin Faisal,

chief of Saudi Intelligence, and he established his base in Peshawar in 1982 to provide infrastructure to the Mujahideen ([Tanner, 2002](#)).

In November 1994, the Taliban occupied Qandahar city and almost two years after in September 1996 they entered Kabul and established the Islamic Emirates of Afghanistan. Taliban rule in Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001 witnessed a strict implementation of Shariah law. They banned girls' education, deprived women of working, forced men to keep their beards. The Islamic rule of the Taliban helped Al-Qaeda to flourish in Afghanistan. After the attack on the US twin towers, Al-Qaeda claimed responsibility for the attack and the Bush government demanded the handover of Osama bin Laden to the US authority. On refusal, the US invaded Afghanistan on October 7, 2001, toppled the Taliban government and initiated war on terror against Al-Qaeda and its affiliates. In the longest war of American history, the US succeeded to disrupt, dismantling Al-Qaeda but could not root out completely. The US security forces also failed to weaken the Taliban and they again recaptured the government in Afghanistan on August 15, 2021. The US spent \$ 70 billion on the training and funding of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and other security forces and they were supposed to provide security to the political process after the withdrawal of NATO forces but it just collapsed ([Fergusson and Hughes, 2019](#)).

It is evident from the above discussion that external great powers intervened in Afghanistan when their perceived interest was not being served in the region. Similarly, the US supported the militant groups when they were serving their interests against the Soviet Union. Again, the US was in too much hurry to abandon Afghanistan and failed to realise the future threats ([Abbas, 2014](#)). Leaving Afghanistan again alone can create a vacuum for some other militant groups. This study demonstrates that in the current crisis the wait and sees approach of the international actors especially the US will trigger an economic breakdown, leading to increasing economic insecurity.

Internal Threats

In February 2020, the US government and the Taliban signed an agreement that set a timeframe for the withdrawal of US security forces from Afghanistan. The US government agreed to reduce the number of troops to approximately 8,500 within 135 days and complete withdrawal within fourteen months (CFR, 2022). Taliban in return agreed that they will not allow any terrorist group to use Afghan territory against any other state. According to New York Times that three major miscalculations contributed to the Afghanistan imbroglio. The Americans believed that have enough time, they overestimated the capacity of Afghan security forces and their faith on President Ashraf Ghani who left Afghanistan after its fall ([Shear et al, 2021](#)). Even though the Taliban claim that they have changed and they are willing to address the concerns of the Western officials but there are no indications showing that they (Taliban) will change their extremist religious ideology and their social policies with regards to women's mobility, education and their right to work ([Shah, 2021](#)). Taliban has got control of Afghanistan however they face numerous challenges to make a strong and stable government.

In the 1990s 'The basic forces that have been in play in the Afghanistan were roughly as follows:

- mostly Pashtun, Sunni Islamic forces, initially organised as the Hizb-e-Islami under Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, but from 1993/4 to 2001 organised as the Taleban, and supported by Pakistan and for a time Saudi Arabia;
- Hazara Shi'as, supported by Iran;
- Uzbeks, supported by Russia and Uzbekistan;
- Tajiks, mostly organised under Ahmad Shah Masoud, and with some support from Tajikistan' ([Buzan, 2003, p. 111](#)).

Currently, the forces playing in the Afghanistan are different and stronger. First and foremost, this time Taliban are not the only stakeholders controlling the power. Haqqani Network which is based in the East of Afghanistan of Paktika and Waziristan area of Pakistan presents a significant challenge to the Taliban in the South ([BBC Urdu, 2021](#)). The formidable Haqqani is part of the Taliban

group but it enjoys political power and financial independence ([BBC Urdu, 2021](#)). Haqqani Network and its allied external militant groups occupy half of the East including Kabul. They have a relationship with the Northern Alliance groups, Central Asian fighters and Al-Qaeda and the group is allegedly supported by Pakistan's intelligence agency ISI. Mike Mullen, the US Admiral described the organisation in 2011 as a 'veritable arm' of the ISI ([BBC Urdu, 2021](#)). However, the ISI denies the allegation.

Haqqani Network first entered into Kabul and now control the security of the capital city and also controls the main entry points ([BBC Urdu, 2021](#)). There were rumours that before the formation of the interim government Haqqani network and Mullah Baradar, had serious differences. They engaged in a fight over a certain position of the government where Mullah Baradar was reportedly wounded. However, both groups denied these reports and declared it propaganda of the West to weaken the Taliban government. Anas Haqqani, the Haqqani Taliban leader stated that "The new

propaganda is that the Haqqani Network and respected Mullah Ghani have differences over slots in the [interim] cabinet. The people who know us also know that we would never fight over government positions" ([Yousafzai, 2021](#)). Similarly, Mullah Baradar in a response to the rumours said that "We have only compassion, mercy, and confidence for each other. You won't find this kind of love and trust even within families" ([Yousafzai, 2021](#)).

Non-Pushtun groups of Uzbek and Tajik militants who are close to the Haqqani Network are unhappy with the distribution of current portfolios in the central government. The Tajik resistance movement is led by Ahmad Massoud son of the renowned warlord Ahmad Shad Massoud and Amrullah Saleh the vice president of Afghanistan ([Lucas, 2021](#)). He pleaded the international community for more weapons, ammunition and supplies ([Mehra & Wentworth, 2021](#)). Besides the internal political struggle, the tribal difference between Khilji in East and Durrani in West of Afghanistan also pose challenges to the new Taliban government ([BBC Urdu, 2021](#)).



Figure 1: Political Map of Afghanistan

Source: United Nations June 2011.

Similarly, a splinter group initially created by Mullah Dadullah and now led by Mullah Najeeb Ullah who also belongs to the Southern province of Zabul is a challenge for the Taliban government ([BBC Urdu, 2021](#)). From the very beginning, the group was against the peace process started in Doha, Qatar and considered it a CIA conspiracy against the Muslim world. In their policy statement they emphasised the continuity of the jihad, its expansion to other countries unless Muslims are freed from the subjugation of non-Muslims ([Yousafzai, 2013](#)). In 2012, after the Taliban opened a political office in Doha, the group parted its ways from the Taliban.

Likewise, the Islamic State of Khurasan is a major threat to the new Taliban government. Although declaring them as a fringe, the IS asserted their power by attacking the Karzai airport in capital Kabul killing 95 people and wounding 150 ([BBC, 2021a](#)). The IS-K again conducted a suicide attack in the Afghan city of Kunduz killing 55 people ([Dawn, 2021a](#)). Shia constitutes 20 per cent of the Afghan population and has been under attack of the IS. Unlike the Taliban, the IS-K wants to establish a global caliphate and all Muslims must support it. The IS-K considers the Taliban as a staunch enemy because of its nationalist agenda and creating an Islamic state within Afghanistan's borders ([Dawn, 2021b](#)). The IS was established in 2015 in the Afghanistan province of Khurasan and found support in the eastern provinces of Kunar and Nangarhar and attracted support from the marginalised Salafist group and Taliban defectors ([Dawn, 2021b](#)). The Islamic State in the Province of Khorasan (ISKP or IS-K) is a regional affiliate of IS based in Afghanistan. The group was created by the disaffected commanders of the TTP a group that seeks to overthrow the government of Pakistan ([Dawn, 2021b](#)). The IS-K carried out seventy-seven attacks in Afghanistan in the first four months of 2021, a significant increase from 2020 ([Dawn, 2021b](#)). After the Doha agreement in February 2020, the IS-K declared the Taliban as the US stooges and 'Pakistani militia' challenging their legitimacy in Afghanistan ([Dawn, 2021b](#)).

Another significant challenge/threat is the unseen civil war. The prime minister of Pakistan stated that if the Taliban do not

include all the factions in the government, they will have a civil war sooner or later ([Dawn, 2021d](#)). The internal instability will create a favourable environment for a proxy war. According to Amir Rana, the Taliban can avoid the chances of proxy war by developing a working relationship with the different political stakeholders and civil society members in the country ([Rana, 2021](#)). But as said above, the engagement of the Taliban by the regional and international players can strengthen the central government thus minimising the chances of civil war. If the Taliban failed to have an inclusive government and were unable to cater for the needs of the people dependent on international aid civil war become the natural outcome. The lack of foreign aid can further expedite the process leading to civil war. The risk of proxy war in Afghanistan has been increased with the Taliban takeover. India opposed the Taliban for 20 years and now after their return India will use all options to exploit the situation in Afghanistan in her favour which will lead to the civil war ([Rana, 2021](#)).

Analyst Qaiser Bengali states that:

The 'angst' among world powers about the welfare and rights of Afghan women is only a cover. The real agenda is political and economic interests. For Pakistan, the prize is strategic depth; for India, it is about a foothold to encircle Pakistan and advance its strategic interests in Central Asia. For the US, Russia and China, it is access to trade and oil routes and to mineral exploitation rights in Afghanistan ([Bengali, 2021](#)).

It is alleged that there is a lobby in the US that supports proxy warfare in Afghanistan that help America to sustain its global dominance and achieve its strategic objective which it could not through military warfare ([Rana, 2021](#)). Once the proxy war starts in Afghanistan, the Taliban would not be able to control it ([Rana, 2021](#)).

External Concerns

The neighbouring countries of Afghanistan maintain that the poverty and humanitarian crisis will make the country unstable, thus creating a vacuum for the operation of terrorist groups. Since 2001, billions of dollars

of foreign aid was spent to strengthen the economy and reduced its dependence on aid however, it still heavily relies on foreign assistance. A weak government will naturally lead to civil war and external interference. The UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told a conference in Geneva held in September after the Taliban's takeover that the 'the poverty rate was "spiralling" and public service was close to collapse' (BBC, 2021b). In its editorial, Dawn the national English daily of Pakistan wrote that 14 million Afghans are living below the poverty line facing hunger and severe drought and cannot wait for political discussion to address their plight (Dawn, 2021e). According to Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran, abandoning Afghanistan will lead to its collapse, followed by chaos and mass migration and the natural outcome will be more terrorism (Khan, 2021). According to the UN, Afghanistan was facing 'a major humanitarian crisis.'

The lack of clarity and wait and see approach to whether recognise Afghanistan has halted the international aid to Afghanistan. Vicki Aken, Afghanistan director of the International Rescue Committee said that there is desperation in the people and the situation is going from bad to worse (quoted in Mellen & Ledur, 2022). According to the UN World Food Program, over 22 million people (more than half) are facing a hunger crisis and a majority of them are not sure about their next meal (Mellen & Ledur, 2022).

Pakistan's National Security Advisor (NSA) said that "History will judge us very poorly if we do not create the most conducive possible environment to push them in a healthy direction – for the collective benefit of Afghans and the world" (Dawn, 2021c). The NSA further said that "Afghanistan deserves peace and prosperity, and a blame game among international actors will not get us there. Nor will a repeat of the mistakes of the 1990s, when the United States abandoned Afghanistan and sanctioned Pakistan" (Dawn, 2021c). Pakistan has made continuous efforts to push for a coordinated regional and global approach. On December 16, Pakistan hosted a session of 57 members of the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC). Including the observer delegations from the US, China, Russia, the European Union and United

Nations which decided to set up a Humanitarian Trust Fund and Food Security Program to deal with the worse food crisis (Haider, 2022).

As stated earlier, the major concern of the neighbouring countries is that unstable and weak Afghanistan will enable some of the extremist groups which will pose a severe threat to their security. For instance, Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is a group of Pakistani militants formed in December 2007. After Operation Zarb-i-Azb in the tribal areas of Pakistan, many of its operatives fled to Afghanistan. According to a BBC report Taliban, victory in Afghanistan has given new impetus to the Pakistani militants (BBC Urdu, 2021). Its current leader Noor Wali Mehsud has reorganised the group with the help of Al-Qaeda and has increased its attacks in Pakistan. TTP congratulated the Afghan Taliban for their victory on August 15 and they also want to overthrow the Pakistani government to impose strict Islamic rule (Mehra & Wentworth, 2021). Like other Afghan governments, the Taliban has neither accepted the Durand Line border nor Pakistan's attempt to demarcate the border physically and most importantly they have not renounced or condemned the Afghanistan goal of Pashtunistan (Miller, 2021). Regarding the relationship between the Afghan Taliban and the TTP, General Bajwa warned the members of parliament that both the groups (Afghan and Pakistan Taliban) are 'two faces of the same coin' (Miller, 2021).

Besides these major groups, there are some small groups such as The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Jamat AnsarUllah and Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM). The IMU is a militant group seeking to overthrow the Uzbek government and install a Shariah-based Islamic government. IMU remained close to Al-Qaeda, Haqqani network and TTP. IMU relocated in Pakistan's tribal areas after the US military operation in Afghanistan in 2001. However, they were later expelled by the Pakistan army from the tribal areas. Another important militant group is Jamat AnsarUllah. Jamat AnsarUllah represents the interest of Tajik in Afghanistan. The group is led by Arsalan and other Tajik militants in Afghanistan. The government of Tajikistan

has declared it a terrorist group and has banned it ([Ahmadi, Yusufi & Fazliddin, 2021](#)). Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) is a militant group based in the province of Badakhshan. China considers the group as a threat to its strategic security and has demanded the Taliban to take action against the group. However, the United State removed the ETIM from its terrorist list in November last year because there was a lack of evidence regarding the existence of the group ([Dawn, 2021f](#)).

The concerns of the West and US are that the Taliban can again implement the strict interpretation of Sharia and deprive women of their fundamental rights, not allowing girls to have access to education and restricting human freedom. The other significant fear is that Afghanistan's territory might be used against any other country. Taliban maintains that they will only implement 'Islamic government' in Afghanistan and will allow the land of Afghanistan to be used against any other country. However, analysts argue that both Taliban and Al-Qaeda are not separable and the latter is mainly involved in training activities ([BBC, 2021](#)). The Taliban have pledged that they will 'safeguard national assets and not to attack projects of public welfare, abstain from using religious police as in the past to force compliance with the strict Taliban edicts, allow the media, including television, to work and even promote women rights, including girls' education based on Islamic teachings. One will have to wait if Taliban mean what they are saying' ([Yusufzai, 2018, p. 140](#)). Another fear is that Islamabad controls the Taliban and can use them for their vested interest. However, Rahim Ullah Yusufzai argues that 'this is a wrong approach as Pakistan's influence on Taliban isn't decisive enough to make them agree to something that isn't in their interests. Besides, Taliban are no pushovers' ([Yusufzai, 2018, p. 145](#)).

Lack of Interest of External Powers and its Impact on Internal Challenges

The lack of interest of external powers especially the US and the West as stated above can have profound effects on the internal challenges. It is significantly

important that policymakers and scholars understand the dynamic of Afghan society and culture. Comparing Afghanistan with any least developed country in Europe will always produce a different result. Conditioning cooperation and foreign aid with the radical changes in the society especially with regard to women will only contribute to the crisis. The existing concerns need to be addressed but with a consensus. The twenty years war in Afghanistan has killed 3,586 allied and US troops, 75,971 Afghan security personnel, 78,314 civilians and 84,191 Taliban fighters ([BBC, 2021c](#)). If the US and other external powers remained indifferent and the forthcoming humanitarian catastrophe was not addressed, the loss would be unprecedented as compared to the above figures. This would not only affect Afghanistan but would also affect the regional and international countries. Firstly, the unresolvable crisis would cause more refugees to the neighbouring countries ([Khan, 2021](#)). Pakistan, which shares the longest border with Afghanistan and hosts 1.4 million registered refugees according to UNCHR December 2020 report will suffer the most because the country is facing severe economic challenges ([Khan, 2021](#)). The more refugees Pakistan hosts, the difficult it would be to have peace in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Secondly, the humanitarian crisis will contribute to poverty and poverty causes violence and violence lead to terrorism and extremism and if the situation remains so, this would weaken the legitimacy of the Taliban to rule Afghanistan effectively ([Khan, 2021](#)). Weak Afghanistan will again pave the way for both regional and international players to pursue their vested interests. A vacuum might give birth yet to another ultra-extremist group. It has happened in the 1990s when the Taliban emerged as a powerful group. Remaining indifferent will only create space for more extremist groups who will pose threat to the whole world.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper analyses the current crisis in Afghanistan and provides a detailed historical background to demonstrate that after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan the interests of great powers finished and despite

the potential threat, they remained indifferent to what was happening in Afghanistan. Furthermore, the historical background demonstrates how the indifferent approach of the external powers created a vacuum for the Taliban. The article then links the historical literature with the current crisis in Afghanistan and demonstrates that the Taliban government confronts multi-facet challenges/threats and the role of external powers would have a profound impact on these threats and vice versa. Numerous terrorist groups are fighting for their vested interests such as the Haqqani group, Al-Qaeda and IS-K. Considering themselves part of the Taliban the powerful Haqqani group is a significant challenge for the Taliban government. Some of these groups such as IS-K and a splinter group of Taliban led by Mullah Najeeb Ullah are anti-Taliban and considered Taliban stooges of the US. They were against the Doha Peace Accord signed in February 2020 between the US and the Taliban. Furthermore, there are ethnic groups such as Uzbek, Tajik, which are also posing challenges to the new government of the Taliban.

The neighbouring countries of Afghanistan and the international countries have their concerns. Afghanistan heavily relied on international aid and after the withdrawal of international forces the assistance was stopped and their assets were frozen. This has created a grave humanitarian crisis. More than half of the population (22 million) are facing hunger and they are not sure that they will eat their next meal. The neighbouring countries feel that the humanitarian crisis can lead to unrest, chaos and civil war. If the situation gets worse, they can have an influx of more refugees.

Instability in Afghanistan will also provide a favourable environment for extremist groups such as TTP to conduct terrorist attacks in their home country. Similarly, Tajik, Uzbek militant groups can also create a security threat for their home countries. The external concerns as discussed in the paper have halted the cooperation of international countries with Afghanistan and until now not a single country has recognised the new government. Lack of cooperation, assistance will only intensify the internal threats and will make Afghanistan weaker and more vulnerable.

To have a stable Afghanistan internally, the Taliban and the people of Afghanistan should realise that unless they are united and have an inclusive government representing the major ethnic groups, stability and peace will remain a distant dream. Secondly, the external powers and players must realise that unstable and chaotic Afghanistan will only serve the purpose of extremist groups mainly Al-Qaeda and IS-K. Therefore, they should help Afghanistan and assist the government in the improvement of governance and service delivery. Most importantly, the Taliban must realise that it was the golden principles of Islam such as justice, equality, rule of law, women's rights and freedom of expression that conquered the hearts and minds of the people. Repression, torture and depriving people of their fundamental rights will lead the new Taliban nowhere but to failure. The external powers must realise that their interest might have been achieved but the threat of extremism and terrorism still exist in Afghanistan. Therefore, they need to help and push the Taliban to materialise their commitments that can avert threats where lies their interest.

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