

A Critical analysis of the hurdles in the way of Peace and Stability in Afghanistan

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This paper analyzes the most burning and significant issue of the future of Afghanistan and the role of various dynamics in the security and political stability of the country. Taliban are going to ascend the throne of Kabul through coercive means and has become a headache for the government of Afghanistan, the United States and allied partners and the regional powers. The paper takes into account the significance of the trilateral group that got them united to act as a defensive regional group for maintaining the security of the region. Research questions of the study include the role of trilateral groups in defending their frontiers, the issue of two governments in Afghanistan, implications of keeping the Pak-Afghan border open and the implications of the US airstrikes on the Taliban that may further complicate the Afghan peace process. Methodology for the study is based on the qualitative approach using secondary sources of data including books, research articles, web pages and newspapers. The study is very significant for focusing on a very important issue of the security paradigm and political stability of the country.

Keywords: *Afghanistan, Security, Peace, Trilateral group, Border, and Implications*



Introduction

Afghanistan has been passing through another era of transition on account of the withdrawal of the US forces from Afghanistan. There is no certainty and predictability about the future of Afghanistan which may help in shaping the political stability and security in the country. Many rumors are in the offing as to what the future of the country might be in the post-US withdrawal scenario. But the thing security situation goes from bad to worse each day partly due to the weakness of the Afghan security forces, partly due to the resurgence of the Afghan Taliban and partly due to the withdrawal of the US forces (Pacific, 2021). It is significant to note political stability and security situation keep on changing at a very rapid speed in Afghanistan due to the direct involvement of the different multi-ethnic groups (Tariq, 2020). This change in the existing state of affairs is not only due to the direct involvement of the non-state actors (Taliban, and other insurgent groups) but also the rivalry and clash of interest on part of the different countries particularly India and Pakistan (Tariq, 2015). The windy and mountainous nature of the country has made it further complicated which has resulted in providing enough substance to the terrorists and insurgents for taking shelter in the safe havens. The US and allied partners pondered over the drawdown of the US forces from Afghanistan and did not opt to go for total withdrawal of the forces from Afghanistan (Tariq, 2015).

Objective of the study

To analyze the hurdles in the way of peace process and political stability in Afghanistan in the backdrop of US withdrawal

Research Questions

- i) What role can the trilateral group play in the political stability of Afghanistan?
- ii) Why is there the issue of two governments in Afghanistan?
- iii) What are the implications of the keeping the Pak-Afghan border open?
- iv) How can the airstrikes affect the Afghan peace process in Afghanistan?

Problem Statement

Afghanistan has been faced with the issue of civil war and political instability for the last so many years. Many factors contribute towards the deteriorating law and order situation and political instability, the most common of which is the direct involvement of the Taliban by challenging the writ of the elected government in Afghanistan. The focus of this study is to evaluate the Role of various dynamics in the peace and stability of Afghanistan by focusing on the role of Afghan Taliban.



Methodology

The study is qualitative in nature and focusses on the utilization of secondary sources of data including books, research articles, web pages and latest newspapers for getting updated data on the subject area.

Significance of the study

The study is very significant for dealing with a very significant and burning issue confronted by the Afghanistan, the Taliban, the United States and allied partners and the regional powers. It shows the significance of the trilateral group by strengthening their security paradigm through the creation of a trilateral group. The issue of two parallel governments is another impediment in the way of peace and security. Keeping the Pak-Afghan border open is another area of concern for the governments of both Afghanistan and Pakistan in the wake of the US airstrikes which will bear a direct imprint on the future prospects of peace and stability in Afghanistan. The study will serve as an authentic document for the policy makers by providing guidelines for establishing peace and stability in the country.

Much depends upon the internal and external threats emanating from the various actors that are involved in the deteriorating law and order situation of the country. The US forces had much to do with the security of Afghanistan which fact has been felt by the government stakeholders of Afghanistan. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani opines that he had warned Washington that the withdrawal would have consequences. He also holds the view that the security forces of the country have kept the Taliban under control. Though fighting continue in southern Afghanistan particularly in the Helmand province where the security forces of Afghanistan are faced with stiff resistance from the Taliban yet the Afghan security forces have been able to fight tooth and nail against them on all fronts for the protection of their country. Helmand is a very important province but security situation has been going from bad to worse besides being the epic center of poppy cultivation contributing towards the lion's share of the opium cultivation for the international heroin trade by making it a lucrative source of tax and cash for the Taliban (Pacific, 2021). The loss of the province of Helmand would cause irreparable loss to the national integration of the country and would rather act as a source of income revenue generation for the Afghan Taliban.

Another important area is the fall of the Kandahar airport to the Taliban where rockets were fired by the Taliban resulting in the damaging of the runway, leading to the suspension of flights for several hours. Now, this was another great blow to the Afghan government and security agencies of the country for their inability to cope with the worsening law and order situation in the country in the wake of the final withdrawal of the US forces from Afghanistan. Another province of concern is the Herat where the Taliban have been in strong footing and have been in continuous struggle to fight against the security apparatus of the country (Pacific, 2021). The threat of the

Taliban is at high risk in these three provinces but the government is doing her best to suppress the anti-state actors at all costs. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani is of the view that they are faced with the organized command and leadership, backed by an unholy coalition of international terrorism and its supporting cities (Pacific, 2021). He further adds that they would need a period of six months to thwart the Taliban but at the same time admits that insurgents are no longer a ‘scattered and inexperienced movement’. According to the Australian based Afghanistan expert, NishankMotwani, “If Afghan cities fall ... the US decision to withdraw from Afghanistan will be remembered as one of the most notable strategic blunders in American foreign policy” (Pacific, 2021).

The US has also shown concern on the current security situation in Afghanistan by keeping in touch with the neighboring countries of Afghanistan and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) about the potential outlaws of the people that may suffer as a result of the gross security concern (Pacific, 2021). The Russian is also concerned about the growing insecurity in Afghanistan and has responded by starting ‘joint military drills’ with Uzbekistan near the Afghan border (Pacific, 2021). The Russian government opines that 15,00 Russian and Uzbek forces are participating in the joint military drills that began at Termez military site in Uzbekistan. Due to the current deteriorating law and order situation in Afghanistan, Moscow fears that the southern part has been the most victim and can result in pushing the refugees into its Central Asian backyard. The Russian government is also partaking in the trilateral exercises comprising the Tajiks, the Uzbeks and the Russians (Avaneszadeh, 2021). The military drills among the trilateral countries would last from August 5, 2021 to August, 2021 with the aim of containing a US-generated power vacuum filled by the Taliban. The Taliban seem to have strengthened their political and tactical position in the country, though Tajikistan’s border with Afghanistan remains contested to some extent (Avaneszadeh, 2021). The trilateral drills would contain the capturing strength of the Taliban that have captured the Uzbek-and- Tajik Afghan border crossings since the security of both Tajikistan and Uzbekistan has been placed at jeopardy as a result of the Taliban offensive.

The Trilateral Group

The trilateral group comprising the Tajikistan, the Uzbekistan and the Russian have both the short term & medium term and long term designs in order to face the security threat emanating from the offensive of Taliban Russians (Avaneszadeh, 2021). The former include the intelligence sharing and continued Russian coordination with Uzbek and Tajik forces by preempting a potential spillover of extremist elements into Central Asia- which serves as the peripheral security buffer for Russia. The long term strategy expect Russia to continue in political dialogue and negotiations with the Taliban regarding regional security and stability. This may also lead to the Moscow’s recognition of the strength of Taliban that is likely to play a more significant role in the political future of

Afghnaistan. The Russian government is more concerned with the growing insecurity of Afghanistan as this may affect the security of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan which may result in the creating security concerns for Russia. Adopting the two-pronged strategy towards the Taliban by the trilateral group is an indication of the strength of the Taliban and indicates that:

- Taliban is a strong force and have proved their recognition in the regional and international communities on account of their offensive and defensive policies inside Afghanistan.
- The US-Taliban Peace Deal of February 29, 2020 is an indication of the strength of Taliban being recognized by the United States for signing a deal directly with them regardless of the fact that they are not the rulers of the country.
- The military drills by the joint venture of Tajikistan and Russia prognosticating the security concerns of the two countries towards their respective countries.
- The joint military drills by the trilateral group bespeak of the potential might of the Taliban and the security concerns of the trilateral group that may put the security of the neighboring countries at jeopardy.
- The rising of Taliban on the global politics despite the fact that the international actors spent twenty years in fighting against them but they rose with a more powerful position and fighting spirit.
- The failure of the theory of 'Realism' adopted by the United States and the global actors towards the weaker states.
- The failure of the unipolarity by the United States and the bipolarity by both the western and eastern block comprising the United States and the Russia on both extremes.
- Need that diplomacy and negotiation are the determining factors of maintaining peace and stability in the world.

The US-Taliban agreement of February 2020 was signed with the aim of reaching a peaceful settlement of disputes and a way forward to resolve the Afghan stalemate through negotiations but despite that there has been no official cease-fire in place (Tracker, 2021). It is fact that violence continued across Afghanistan as the United States increased air-strikes and raids targeting the Taliban while the Taliban, in retaliation, carried out attacks on Afghan government and the Afghan National and Defense Security (ANDSF) by claiming territorial gains, bases and outposts (Tracker, 2021). The Taliban have also conducted high-profile attacks across the country including Kabul, Kunduz, Kandahar and Helmand. Besides the Taliban, the Islamic State in Khorasan (ISK) have also continued by expanding its presence in several eastern provinces of Afghanistan and continue to carry out attacks in Kabul and remains responsible to increasing suicide attacks targeting civilians (Tracker, 2021). So, in addition to the offensive by Taliban across the country the ISKP has also been involved in offensive against the Afghan government and security forces. The main similarity of the two non-state actors (Taliban and the ISKP) is that both are fighting against the Afghan government and law enforcement agencies of the country but the points of



dissimilarity between the two factions is that they are also involved in fighting against each other for their vested interests.

The Issue of Two parallel governments in Afghanistan

Keeping in view the growing strength and power of Taliban on account of their attacks and territorial gains against the Afghan government, two types of government exist inside Afghanistan; the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Mishra, 2021). In the current scenario, the former is an example of the puppet state imposed upon the Afghan people by the US and NATO while the Islamic Emirate Afghanistan claiming *de facto* sovereignty in the country. Although the western-backed Islamic Republic of Afghanistan claim *de jure* sovereignty in Afghanistan with headquarter in Kabul. It is significant to note that the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan has a stronger claim over most of the territories of the country. This has resulted in delimiting the authority of Ashraf Ghani to not more than act as a mayor of Kabul (Mishra, 2021). Afghan president Ashraf Ghani is likely going to be faced with the same scenario as was faced by Dr. Najibullah Ahmadzai in 1989 following the withdrawal of the Soviet Forces from Afghanistan. In case the Taliban get control of the throne of Kabul there are likely chances that they would dethrone the elected government of Afghanistan and would establish their own authority in the country.

Looking at the emergence of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan over the ruins of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan through the prism of Pakistan's foreign policy, it is beyond doubt that Islamabad-Rawalpindi will have to achieve long standing goal of 'Pakistan- Friendly Afghanistan' (Mishra, 2021). It is a common misperception that the Afghan Taliban function on the directives of the Pakistani inter-services intelligence (ISI) (Mishra, 2021). This propaganda against the Pakistan military establishment is propagated by the Kabul, New Delhi and other international actors through misinformation and disinformation networks (Mishra, 2021). Pakistan has never denied its deep-rooted ties the Afghan Taliban but this not mean that Pakistan has got control over the Afghan Taliban nor does she support them on any issue. It is a fact that Pakistan has some influence over the Afghan Taliban given its position as a vital stakeholder in the Afghan peace process which fact is clear from the role played by Pakistan and has been recognized by both the United States and the Afghan government (Ahmer, 2021). It is also a fact that Pakistan has no aspirations of becoming a hegemonic power in Afghanistan but rather has a long standing cherished desire of living peacefully next to a non-antagonistic Afghanistan with brotherly relations built upon socio-cultural and religious ties of kinship between the two Muslim countries (Ahmer, 2021).

At present, the two belligerent contests in Afghanistan are the Afghan government and the Taliban each unable to break through the defensive cordon of the other (Chaudhry, 2021). The Taliban

dominated region comprising the Kandahar, Herat and Helmand present stiff resistance for the security agencies of Afghanistan. Taliban are in strong position to get control of the Kunduz and Sheberghan but there is still uncertainty about the law enforcement agencies of the country. If the Taliban after all get control then it will also be a matter of concern for them as to whether they will be able to retain the areas. At the same time, it also puts a question mark on the security agencies of the country with the potentiality to get the areas back from the Taliban or they face a complete failure. Such a situation may further trigger the strategic stalemate where the country may seem divided between the two rivals with two different parallel systems of administrations and governance (Chaudhry, 2021). Peace can be brought to Afghanistan through the efforts of the regional actors by playing their due role as a peaceful Afghanistan means a peaceful region and peaceful global politics (Tariq, 2018).

Taliban are not the multi-ethnic composition they are thought to be. They remain a blatantly Pashtun movement headquartered deep inside the southern and eastern parts of Afghanistan (Chaudhry, 2021). While the northern and western parts of the country remain to be inhabited by the non-Pashtun helped by the Afghan security forces coupled with logistic support from the international community and civil society helped by militants and warlords (Chaudhry, 2021). So, the southern and eastern parts of the country mainly remain under the control of Taliban while the northern and western parts remain under the control of the Afghan government and that too assisted by the international actors and the civil society that are also provided assistance by the various internal and external agents. This clash of interest between the Pashtun and non-Pashtun may again destine the country to be overpowered by civil war, leadership vacuum, political instability and gross security concerns inside the country leading towards decline of the country. There is also no gainsaying the fact that Afghanistan is a country inhabited by the multi-ethnic groups belonging to different sects and political ideologies. For a country inhabited by such groups, federalism is the best solution as this can provide ample space for all the sects living in the country by giving them proper representation in the affairs of the government (Tariq, 2018).

The Issue of Pak- Afghan border

Washington wants Pakistan to keep her border open for the Afghan refugees that may suffer as a result of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and where security situation may go worse (Iqbal, 2021). The US wants Pakistan to keep her border open with Afghanistan in order the refugee may easily cross the border in case of offensives by the Taliban or other insurgents. A senior State Department official is of the view that if people go north or they go via Iran to Turkey then they have an opportunity both to enter the country as well as to register with either the government or with the UNHCR (Iqbal, 2021). So, it will be easier to keep the Pak- Afghan border open so that no Afghan refugee may suffer as a result of insurgency and offensive by the Taliban or any other insurgent group. By keeping the Pak-Afghan border open, it would mean more problems for

Pakistan as Pakistan as already suffered a lot on account of the huge rush of Afghan refugees during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. It would result in the infiltration of insurgents and terrorists across the border and would further create tension in the region (Tariq, 2020). But the most embarrassing thing for the two countries is that only the Pashtun people fall victim to terrorism and insurgency though they may not be involved in these activities (Tariq, 2018). Moreover, it would be an extra burden on the exchequer of Pakistan to provide all the basic necessities of life especially during the current scenario when the entire world is stricken by the pandemic of COVID-19 when a developing country like Pakistan has to cope with the medical requirements for her people. Besides, Pakistan may be faced with some of the following problems:

- Keeping the Pak-Afghan border open for the Afghan people mean more burden on the political stability of Pakistan as this may result in deteriorating the law and order situation in the country by creating problems for the government in Pakistan to take care of the refugees besides providing necessities to the people of Pakistan.
- It may result in economic crisis in the country because the government of Pakistan has to bear the burden of the influx of refugees that would directly affect the economy of the country in the form of price-hike, unavailability of facilities, education facilities, health facilities, and residential facilities.
- Failure of the Afghan government and law enforcement agencies of Afghanistan to overcome the security situation in the country and failure to provide them safety and security in time of need.
- Failure of the NATO and the US in maintaining security inside Afghanistan despite the fact that they had to spend a period of twenty years in Afghanistan by upholding the cause of democracy and bringing peace and stability in the country.
- The use of negotiations and dialogue between the Afghan government and the Pakistani government for resolving the issue of refugees while most of the Afghan refugees have been there in Pakistan since 1979.

This move by the US government to ask Pakistan and urge her to keep border open with Afghanistan is fraught with many problems for both Pakistan and Afghanistan. It is important that the US look into the matter on the basis of ground realities and make substitute arrangements for the Afghan people. Pakistan's National Security Adviser, Moeed Yusuf, in his briefing to the Washington stated that arrangements should be made for the displaced Afghan people inside Afghanistan instead of pushing them into Pakistan (Iqbal, 2021). The government of Pakistan does not have the capacity to bear the further brunt of the Afghan brethren as she has been suffering since 1979 when the Soviet intervened in Afghanistan. Then 9/11 syndrome was proved to be another blow to war-stricken Afghanistan but it greatly caused irreparable loss to Pakistan in terms of humans, finances, security and the infrastructure. So, the best option would be to make Pakistan



free of the burden of Afghan stalemate and make other arrangements inside Afghanistan whether, security, influx of the people and political stability.

National Security Adviser of Pakistan, Moeed Yusuf during his ten days visit to the United States made it clear that she the Biden administration has never asked for the military bases in Pakistan to influence developments in Afghanistan (Hindu, 2021). He said that the word base was not mentioned, not even once, during the talks, except in the media. This he stated at the conclusion of his visit to the US, remarking that bases were not discussed from either side during the trip as Pakistan has already made her position clear. Pakistani Prime Minister, Imran Khan clarified in June 2021 that Pakistan stated in clear terms that they are not hosting American bases in Pakistan for military action inside the war-stricken Afghanistan fearing that it might result towards his country being targeted in revenge attacks (Hindu, 2021).

US Airstrikes against the Taliban

The US still continues to conduct airstrikes against the Taliban that will put the prospects of future peace in Afghanistan at high risk. The carried on aerial attacks on the Taliban during the month of July and are likely to get authorization from the Biden administration during the month of August (Cooper, Gibbons-Neff, & Schmitt, 2021). But this authorization is contingent with the fall of either Kabul or Kandahar to Taliban otherwise there will be no need to carry out further attacks against the Taliban. In case of the fall of Kabul and the Kandahar, and the Biden's administration taking recourse to aerial strikes against the Taliban and other insurgent groups may destine the country towards another civil war catering for the worst law and order situation in the country. This will bear a direct imprint upon the regional and global politics. Such a move by the Washington would prognosticate a longer campaign giving President Biden space between his decision of withdrawing American troops and an eventual fall of Kabul (Cooper, Gibbons-Neff, & Schmitt, 2021). Allied partners of the American president are of the view that the US president is well aware of the risk factor in case of prolongation of the American engagement in Afghanistan. US officials are of the view that they expect Lloyd J. Austin III, Defense Secretary and Gen. Mark A. Miley, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of the Staff, to approach the Biden administration at the end of August 2021 regarding the possibility of continuing airstrikes into September (Cooper, Gibbons-Neff, & Schmitt, 2021).

Discussion and Conclusion

Afghanistan has been faced with the issues of civil war, issue of security and political instability since long. Many factors contribute towards that end; the role of various non-state actors (the Taliban, the ISKP and other insurgents). On account of their involvement in the affairs of the state this has resulted in the insecurity and political instability of the country. Keeping in view the involvement of Taliban in the attacking and capturing areas in the country, three countries including the Russia, the Tajikistan and Uzbekistan formed a trilateral group to keep their



territories secured in the wake of Taliban ascendancy. They also pledged to devise strategies by strengthening their security paradigm so as to cope with any untoward security situation emanating from the re-emergence of Taliban. For this purpose the three states had to carry on military drill rehearsals that continued for a period of one week. The basic logic behind these exercises was to keep a vigilant eye on the activities of Taliban and keep their frontiers safe and secure in the face of any insecurity.

With the rise and strength of Taliban in Afghanistan, there have been two sets of government in Afghanistan. One is the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan that acts as a *de jure* ruler of the country. The other one is the emergence of the Islamic Emirates of Afghanistan that is considered as the *de facto* ruler of the country. The main difference between the two governments is that the former has the support of the people of Afghanistan, the United States and allied powers and the global powers while the later does not have the support of the Afghan people but try to establish their authority throughout Afghanistan. Both sets of governments want to assert their authority and challenge the other for the sake of maintaining their strength and hegemony.

Keeping the Pak-Afghan border for the inflow of the Afghan Taliban may further exacerbate the security of the two countries and especially that of Pakistan that has suffered a lot on account of the war on terror. Though this stance has been rejected by the Pakistani National Advisor on Security, Moeed Yusuf, stating that Pakistan as clarified her position in clear terms by not keeping her border open with Afghanistan. This has already caused irreparable loss to the Pakistani exchequer besides causing huge loss in terms of the economy, sanitation, education and other related fields. Pakistan is of the view that the United States and the Afghan governments should jointly work together to make timely arrangements for the people of Afghanistan so as to prevent the influx of Afghan refugees into Pakistan. This again leaves a question mark on the security forces of Afghanistan and the security forces of the United States and the allied powers that were unable to maintain law and order in Afghanistan despite spending a period of twenty years in the country under the guise of fighting terrorism and insurgency.

The world is changing from the prospects of 'realism' to the prospect of 'liberalism' where countries could not be overcome by the offensive measures through attacks, aerial hitting and occupation or stationing of armed troops in the hot country. In modern era, diplomacy can serve to settle disputes and resolve conflicts in preference over waging war and adopting offensive measures. Negotiations and table talks are the strongest weapons that can help in resolving the issues confronted by the regional and global politics, which can better be explained through the recent example of US-Taliban talks held in Qatar (Doha) on February 29, 2020. The peace deal is an example of the recognition of the Taliban by the United States and global actors that had been



engaged in fighting against them for the last twenty years since 2001 for being declared as the terrorists and non-state actors.

The United States is still another hurdle in the way of peace process in Afghanistan by conducting aerial attacks and airstrikes against the Taliban though the former had pledged not to use force against them after signing the US-Taliban Peace Deal. But the Taliban are also equally responsible as per the terms and conditions of the deal, the Taliban had also pledged to make efforts for maintaining peace and order in the country. But both the parties don't seem to show sincerity towards lasting peace and stability in the country.



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