

Taliban, Terrorism and War on Terror: Assessing US Involvement in Afghanistan

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Sidiqullah Sahel

Abstract

It has been 19 years of September 11 tragedy, in response United States waged a war against perpetrators. The country with some NATO member countries took the lead in war against terror, and started Operation enduring freedom on 7th October 2001, to topple the Taliban regime, and Eliminate terrorist organizations from its roots. For the purpose to be achieved, USA convened a conference in Bonn Germany, comprising All Jihadist groups, except Taliban and Hezbe Islami Hekmatyar, for formation of new administration and sharing power. Hamid Karzai was appointed as head of new interim administration in the conference on 5th December 2001, and gradually ISAF under NATO deployed around the country to suppress Taliban and Al-Qaeda forces. After 20 years of war in Afghanistan, USA could defeat neither international terrorism, nor Taliban militarily, but instead it exacerbated the security conditions of the country, and led to creation of a greater number of terrorist organizations. USA finally decided to withdraw all its forces from Afghanistan through an agreement signed between USA and Taliban on 29th February 2020. now the Question arises whether US has achieved what they wanted to? whether the country succeeded in state-building in Afghanistan? The paper finds out, that absence of unanimity and perfect policy regarding Taliban amongst Afghan statesmen and US is one of momentous reasons for prolonging Afghan war, and After crumbling the regime of Taliban, USA did not have any specific policy for state-building or rehabilitation in Afghanistan, instead their intention at that time was that of retaliation and counter-terrorism. also, continuous civilian casualties or collateral damage, reverberated peoples' optimistic attitude about USA, and absence of social justice widened the gap between government and citizens of the country, especially in peripheries, where Taliban recruited their guerrillas.

Keywords: Taliban, Terrorism, War on terror, Al-Qaeda, Bonn Conference.

Introduction

1.1. Emergence of Taliban movement

After withdrawal of Soviet Union from Afghanistan in 1989, the country was neglected by the world. *Mujahideen* resistance continued until the last Soviet backed president Dr. Najeebullah resigned on 18th March 1992, and took the power in Kabul through Peshawer accord on 26th April 1992.¹ *Mujahideen* too; could not succeed in bringing peace and stability in the country and continued fighting for acquiring power in Kabul and extracting more share for their groups. The country remained in continuous warfare between warlords and *jihadist* groups who fought against Soviet Union during 1980s. The chaos and anarchy led to emergence of a new group called Taliban.²

Talib is an Arabic term; etymologically refers to those who seek knowledge, and its plural form is Taliban, but in Afghanistan it is widely used for those who study in *Madrassas* “the place where students receive religious education” and now it is affiliated with an armed group which was created in 1990s, and the reason for this is because most of its members are people who studied in *Madrassas* inside Afghanistan and in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.³

Taliban as movement arose in late 1994 in Kandahar province of Afghanistan, spearheaded by Mullah Mohammad Omer,⁴ against the warlords and mafias existed in the country, especially in Kandahar province. Although they emerged in 1994 as a movement, but existed and fought against Soviet Union in 1980s in different *jihadist* groups, especially under Mawlawi

Mohammad Nabi “leader of *Harakat-e-Inquilab-Islami* or Islamic revolutionary movement” and Mohammad Younus Khalis “leader of *Hezbe Islami Khalis*”. Mullah Mohammad Omer himself fought against Soviet invaders under Mawlawi Khalis group.⁵

The movement is regarded as a spontaneous and reactionary movement against all the corrupt *Mujahideen* commanders; who were looting people on highways and disturbed the harmony of the people in Kandahar province. It was confined to cleanse limited areas of Kandahar from the looters, that’s why Mullah Omar for the first time in October 1994, with his 35 more commanders went for his first operation against warlords and succeeded. They did not have the policy of conquering the whole country. the newly emerged movement was welcomed wholly by the people and

residents of Kandahar province, who ensured their expenses and livelihood, which was a substantial living.⁶

Sultan Amir Tarar aka colonel Imam “a Pakistani Army officer and war specialist who remained close to Afghan *Mujahideen* and Taliban, and also served as Consul-General of Pakistan in Herat province” says in his book that during Soviet-Afghan war in 1985 there was a growing suspicion about Afghan *Mujahideen* having links with intelligence agencies of other countries, which was unacceptable for ISI and Pakistan Army. According to them each and every assistance to Afghan *Mujahideen* had to be regulated through Pakistan, and Pakistan should have the monopoly over Afghan *jihad*. For this purpose, I “Colonel Imam” was given the task of organizing a group who should be more radical, students of *Madrassas* and religious clerics instead of having modern education, and who should be able to fight in harsh conditions. So, I selected 35 men from *Mawlvi* Muhammad Nabi’s group; which consisted of mostly religious clerics and *Madrassa* students, with the passage of time the selected people learned using every kind of lethal weapons and became a radical group.⁷

After end of cold war in 1991, Pakistan desperately wanted to reach countries of central Asia through Afghanistan, in order to strengthen their trade ties with those countries.⁸ But since the northern provinces including Kabul were divided between warlords, so no shipment of trucks could pass through *Hindu kush* to Mazar, so the policy makers proposed the route of Quetta-Kandahar to transfer trucks through Herat. The newly elected prime minister of Pakistan “1993” Benazir Bhutto met General Abdul Rashid Dostum “leader of *Junbish Milli*, an ethnic *Uzbek*” and Ameer Ismail Khan in Tashkent, in order to safely transfer their shipments to countries of central Asia.⁹

Before the meeting was held with the leaders of north and south, an incident occurred in Kandahar, where the road mafia looted the truck convoy of Pakistan, which was taken back by Taliban, as they were given the responsibility of cleansing Kandahar-Herat highway and in response got a promise of monthly stipend by Pakistan government, and got support of that country, as their Pashtun ally in Afghanistan. The budding extremist movement conquered Kandahar province from commanders of *Hezbe Islami* Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Pakistani officials celebrated the victory of Taliban in Afghanistan and regarded them as their trained pupils, but Taliban considers themselves as autonomous from any outside powers.¹⁰

After conquering Kandahar province, Taliban deployed their forces towards other provinces, and gradually triumphed in Helmand, Oruzgan,

Zabul, Ghazni, Maidan wardak, Paktia, Khost and Herat provinces respectively. They also defeated forces of *Hezbe Islami* in *Charasiab* district of Kabul, Taliban within three months of their origin conquered 12 provinces either by force or by settlements and negotiations “by sending religious delegates”, and were welcomed in most of the provinces by the common residents of those provinces, as the people were fed up of many years’ lawlessness and atrocities of *Mujahideen* commanders.¹¹

1.2. Taliban Era (1996-2001)

By 20th March 1996 more than 1200 religious scholars were summoned by Mullah Omar in Kandahar to legitimize his rule and declare him as the supreme authority in the country and also discuss about the future course of action. The *Jirga* was an exclusive one, consisting only religious section or *Mullahs* from different parts of the country, and some Pakistani officials including their ambassador to Afghanistan Qazi Humayun and colonel Imam; the *Jirga* continued for two weeks, and finally on 4th April 1996 Mullah Omar appeared before the *Jirga* wrapped in the cloak of prophet Muhammad, and all the people in *Jirga* applauded him by shouting Amir-ul-Mominin “leader of the faithful”.¹² The *Mullahs* there regarded him as Amir-ul-Mominin “leader of all Muslims, despite knowing the fact that Amir Should be sane, and Mullah Omar was blind with an eye.

In September 1996 Taliban first entered Nangrahar province and after that conquered Kabul on 26th September 1996, and rushed into UN compound to kill the last Soviet backed president Dr. Najeebullah. Ahmad Shah Masood and his commanders evicted Kabul After conquer of Kabul on 26th September 1996 through Taliban. The group also terrorized the population by executing the former president Dr. Najeebullah.¹³ Within twenty-four hours of the siege, they imposed strict rules; which restricted individual freedom of the people, women were banned from work and their schools were closed, strict dress code from head to toe was imposed on them, all men were ordered to keep beard. TV, videos, satellite, music and flying-kite including other games were prohibited, and changed the name of Kabul radio to ‘*Shariat*’, established department for propagation of virtue and prevention of vice. Kabul was ruled by a *shura* “consul” of six people mostly Durrani Pashtuns; belonging to Kandahar province. And also changed the name of Islamic State to Islamic emirate of Afghanistan. Their rule was atrocious and religious dictatorship, which was monopolized by *Mullahs*.¹⁴

After conquering Kabul, Taliban moved towards northern provinces of Afghanistan, and after continuous warfare with Ahmad Shah Masood’s guerrillas captured Baghlan, Kunduz and Takhar provinces. In May 1997

Taliban went towards Mazare-sharif; which was a base for General Dostum¹⁵ and with the help of General Malik, the second-in-command general of Abdul Rashid Dostum, who betrayed Dostum in response of killing Malik's brother conquered Mazar too. Taliban arrogantly disarmed all Uzbeks and Hazars, closed Mazar University and prevented women from going out. The improvements towards north made some countries hopeful for Taliban's regime, that's why Pakistan, Saudi Arab and United Arab Emirates recognized their regime. But Taliban were not ready to share power with General Malik in north, hence Malik too, reverberated and assassinated thousands of Taliban in *Dasht-Laili*, Jowzjan province, and recaptured Takhar, Faryab, Jowzjan and Sari-pul provinces.¹⁶

After defeat in Mazar, Taliban re-organized their supporters and more number of *madrassa* students started pouring to Afghanistan from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Mullah Omar personally visited his fighters in Kabul to motivate them. Taliban started fighting for the lost Provinces and dominated most of the provinces, and by 2001, they were controlling 90% of the land of Afghanistan, except Panjshir valley which was under control of Ahmad Shah Massod; who resisted against Taliban and formed an alliance by the name of united Islamic and national front for salvation of Afghanistan aka Northern alliance, and was supported by countries of central Asia, Iran, India and Russia.¹⁷

1.3. Relations with Al-Qaeda

During the Soviet-Afghan war, Pakistan promoted the recruitment of radicals from different parts of the Muslim world, in order to fight against Soviet Union. It was done in compliance with USA and Saudi Arabia, as each of the following countries were chasing their interest by promoting Afghan *Jihad*; through this recruitment Pakistan wanted to create an alliance of Muslim countries which should be spearheaded by Pakistan, Saudi wanted to penetrate *Wahhabism* in Afghanistan and central Asia which can prevent Iran's influence in the region, and USA wanted to demonstrate that the entire Muslim world is opposing the Soviet invasion. That's why Pakistan provided visas to all Muslims wanted to join Afghan *Jihad*, and between 1982-92 some 35000 Muslim radicals from the middle east, north and east Africa, and central Asia poured into the country.¹⁸

After Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, these radicals started thinking about Pan-Islamism and spreading Islam through sword, they justified their contemplation by saying "if they can defeat Soviet Union, they can do it to US and other countries too". One of such Arab volunteers in Afghan *Jihad* was Osama bin Laden son of Muhammad bin Laden a wealthy Yemeni-Arab.

He first visited Peshawar in 1980 and settled there in 1982. He was one of the biggest sponsors of Afghan *Mujahideen* and had gathered most of the Arab Guerrillas around him due to his wealth, and they regarded him as their charismatic leader. After the Soviet withdrawal in 1988-89 he with his mentor Abdullah Azam “a Jordanian Palestinian who had studied theology and Taught in IIUI, and was responsible to manage all the charities flowing to Afghan *Jihad* from Arab countries” formed *Al-Qaeda* movement; The main motive of which was to promote global *Jihad* and Pan-Islamism, and were influenced by Muslim Brotherhood.¹⁹

Bin Laden returned to Saudi in 1990, and had to leave the country towards Sudan in 1992 due to problem rose between him and Royal family; which were because of Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, where king took the help of US forces instead of allowing Osama to wage war against Iraq. Osama criticized the royal family for allowing Americans to the Gulf countries, that’s why he was deprived of Saudi citizenship in 1994. Both US and Saudi pressurized Sudan to expel Bin Laden, henceforth he left Sudan and in May 1996 entered Nangrahar province of Afghanistan with his bodyguards and his family, and from there moved to Kandahar in 1997; where he was under the protection of Taliban.²⁰

Both Osama and Mullah Omar formed an alliance, where the relations between the two were based on reciprocal benefits; Bin Laden provided financial assistance to Mullah Omar and also technical assistance was provided by *Al-Qaeda* fighters to Taliban, in return Mullah Omar provided safe haven to Osama Bin Laden in Afghanistan, and he could reestablish his base in Khost province, which was built as a huge complex in 1986 by him for training his Guerrillas and also he could train Afghan and Pakistani fighters to wage war against India in Kashmir.²¹

On 23rd February 1998 Bin Laden in complicity with Egyptian physician and Islamist *Ayman al-Zawahiri* “who became his heir after the death” announced a new enterprise: the international Islamic front for *Jihad* against Jews and crusaders, and had prepared its manifesto, which was dictated to London based Arabic newspaper through Satellite. He declared that;

United States has been occupying the most sacred lands of Islam: The Arabian Peninsula. It has been stealing its resources, dictating to its leaders, humiliating its people and fighting its neighbors. It is using its rule in peninsula as a weapon to fight the neighboring peoples of Islam.” The Americans had declared war on Allah, his prophet and Muslims. in reply the signatories of the manifesto “hereby give all Muslims the following judgment: the judgement to kill and fight Americans and their allies, whether civilians or

*military, is an obligation for every Muslim who is able to do so in any country.*²²

After Bin Laden's call for Global *jihad* and war against USA, CIA's counterterrorist center issued an alert against activities of Bin Laden. The special unit on Bin Laden proposed suggestions to arrest him; some of the specialists proposed to attack his base in Kandahar which was least favored option, and mostly supported to pressurize Taliban to extradite Bin Laden, and a meeting was also held between Richardson "US ambassador to United Nations at that time" and Mullah Rabbani "chairman of Kabul Shura". US also collaborated with Saudi Kingdom too, to persuade Taliban to cut liaison with Bin Laden, as Bin Laden was delegitimizing Saudi royal family and their leadership of Muslim world and holy cities of Mecca and Medina. Prince Turki visited Kandahar in mid-June and met Mullah Omar to extradite Mullah Omar or expel him from the country, but all these efforts were in vain and did not have any positive outcome.²³

On 7th August 1998, two teams of suicide bombers attacked US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania that killed more than 220 people of which 12 were Americans, and around 4000 people were wounded. After investigation by Clinton administration, Osama Bin Laden was regarded the culprit behind the attacks. He was also suspected for attacks on world trade center in 1993, and also attacks in Riyadh in 1995, and Somalia in 1992.²⁴

Bin Laden regarded this as his duty to acquire weapons against US and fight against USA, which galvanized the Americans, that's why exactly 13 days after the attacks, USA retaliated by attacking Bin Laden's base in Khost province; which was a training center for *Al-Qaeda* fighters, and killed many Pakistani guerrillas. Both USA and Saudi Arabia pressurized Mullah Omar to expel the culprit from the country, but each time the demand was rejected by Mullah Omar by arguing that it is against Afghan culture of Hospitality. But in reality, Bin Laden was an asset for Taliban, against their main rival "Ahmad Shah Massod" in north of Afghanistan. This had severe consequences for the Taliban regime, as Saudi withdrew their ambassador from Afghanistan and United States imposed sanctions and frozen the assets of Taliban.²⁵

Taliban strengthened their grip on 90% of the country, except places under Northern Alliance led by Ahmad Shah Masood. Ahmad Shah Masood lobbied for himself as the only opponent and potential rival of Taliban and *Al-Qaeda*. He made a *Pashtun-Tajik* alliance; an inclusive coalition of Hamid Karzai in South, Ameer Ismail Khan in West, Karim Khalili in Bamian, Abdul Rashid Dostum in North, and *Haji Qadir* in Jalalabad and Kunar provinces

which would fight against Taliban and *Al-Qaeda*. Ahmad Shah Masood addressed parliament of European Union and discussed about the Threats posed by *Al-Qaeda* to Europe and USA. He also sent his representative Dr. Abdullah Abdullah to lobby for the alliance in USA, but the country was reluctant to oust the Taliban regime, although they were provided with non-lethal and financial assistance to fight against Taliban.²⁶ But on 9th September 2001, two Arab Journalists Assassinated Ahmad Shah Masood; who had visited him for interview, and detonated the hidden bomb planted in camera.²⁷

Two days after killing commander Masood, on 11th September 2001 a private airplane first attacked on north of world trade center, later on second plane attacked it from the south. Within an hour third one attacked on Pentagon, which took lives of more than 3000 people, and Bin Laden was regarded the main culprit behind the attack.²⁸

1.4. War on Terror

After the attack, president of USA George W. Bush appeared on TV and declared his Doctrine about war on terror; by stating that United States would not differentiate between terrorists and those who harbor them, and the country would retaliate the attacks on US.²⁹

Exactly one day after the attack on 12th September North Atlantic council and secretary general of NATO George Robertson made a decision to invoke article V of the NATO charter that an attack on one NATO member was an attack on all NATO members, and ensured their assistance to United States on war on terror, but differences about the procedure of the work between US and NATO and also reluctance of US in delaying operation against *Al-Qaeda* compelled the country to lead the operation with the help of some NATO member countries. That's why USA attacked Afghanistan through Operation Enduring Freedom on 7th October 2001, in order to oust the Taliban regime and disrupt the use of Afghanistan as a terrorist base of operations.³⁰

Northern alliance cooperated ISAF forces to enter into Afghanistan and topple the Taliban regime, and externally Pakistan provided support to USA in order to attack Afghanistan and crumble the Taliban regime.³¹ Initially 5000 troops under command of UK captured Kabul, and USA with their 8000 troops conducted counter-terrorist operations along Durand line in eastern Parts of Afghanistan "*in Tora Bora*" against Taliban and *Al-Qaeda* elements. US did not have the policy of nation-building or deploying their forces into all parts of Afghanistan, their main motive was to eliminate *Al-Qaeda* from Afghanistan and oust the Taliban regime, and within few weeks

USA achieved relative victory over Taliban; as most of them retreated from all provinces of the country, which paved the way for formation of a new government in Afghanistan.³²

After relative victory of USA over Taliban, UN special envoy Lakhdar Brahimi convened Bonn conference in Germany, which consisted of Anti-Taliban *Jihadist* groups; Northern Alliance led by Mohammad Younus Qanooni, Rome delegation led by Abdul-Satar Seerat, Peshawer delegation led by Syed Hamid Gylani, and Cyprus delegation led by Humayun Jareer. The conference started on 27th November and after several days of negotiations about the form of Government and head of the new Administration, the conference agreed on formation of an Afghan interim administration “AIA” led by Hamid Karzai on 5th December 2001, and power was shared amongst members of the conference on ethnic basis and the role played by them against Taliban. The power transferred from Burhan Uddin Rabbani to Hamid Karzai on 22nd December 2001, and he was appointed as head of AIA for six months, and was elected as head of transitional government by a *Loya Jirga* in June 2002.³³

The peacemaking in Bonn conference was completely different of the other such efforts in the world, because the most important duty of peacemaking is to develop institutions that could reintegrate the former enemies, it should make a compromise between the opposing parties, and reunite them through negotiations with each other, But in Bonn conference two major parties “Taliban and *Hezbe Islami of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar*” who were part of civil war were deprived of attending the conference. And all other parties involved were the ones who were opposing Taliban, so it was a win-lose situation, not a win- win peacemaking effort, so the basis of new Administration was set up on ethnic basis, which resulted in continuation of war against the new regime and allied forces.³⁴

After establishing Afghan Interim Administration, foreign aid started flowing into the country, and NATO allies provided financial assistance in Tokyo summit in 2002. Germany provided assistance in training Afghan national police, UK provided assistance in counter-narcotics, Italy for justice, Japan provided assistance in Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR), while USA led reconstructing Afghan National Army, and also contributed with other countries too. But the assistance provided by US and other countries was much lesser than any other nation building after World War two.³⁵

In 2004 USA provided \$ 549 million to Afghan National Army, in order to build ANA and build ministry of defense, and deployed 8000 ISAF forces in

Kabul to provide security assistance to humanitarian organizations and also provide security to presidential election. USA also built provincial reconstruction teams in 19 provinces by the end of 2004, in order to provide both civil and military assistance in those provinces. Beside all the assistances provided by ISAF the security condition deteriorated, Taliban groups re-emerged and started targeting Government officials and Humanitarian aid workers. DDR failed because the warlords still enjoyed great social and political hegemony and were not cooperative in making the project succeed. Opium and poppy cultivation increased, and were mostly cultivated in Areas under the Taliban's influence, as it financed their operations against government and USA.³⁶

Germany and other NATO allies including President Karzai proposed that NATO should take the lead of ISAF mission in February 2003. On October 13, 2003 UN Security Council Resolution 1510 officially passed the deployment of NATO's role outside Kabul. NATO first deployed towards Northern provinces "Balkh, Kunduz, etc." of Afghanistan in 2004 and in summer 2006 expanded towards western and Southern provinces of the country, and the only place which remained out of NATO's reach was eastern provinces; which is in contiguity with Durand line and is inhabited by Taliban and other insurgent groups.³⁷

The main motive behind NATO for leading the War on terror after 2003 was to fight Al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters in different parts of Afghanistan, and also support the growth of Afghan National Security forces "ANSF" through the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan (NTM-A) which includes training, equipping, and providing financial assistance to both Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police, in order to develop the strength of ANSF to fight against terror and provide security to their country. as a result, in May 2010, number of Afghan National Army was 119388 troops, who were actively participating in ISAF operations, and Number of Afghan local police was 104459. But both were mostly dependent on US and allied forces, and couldn't lead operations against insurgents.³⁸

From one side international community and USA were busy in building a new democratic State in Afghanistan, on the other front Taliban were all set to retaliate their defeat through operation enduring freedom (OEF). That's why 2002 onwards they started re-gathering and recruiting new Guerrillas into their movement. The new recruitments were mostly from the Madrassas across Durand line which were refugees living there. At the beginning of their insurgency movements they started setting their bases in Eastern and Southern provinces of Afghanistan, which could be easily

managed from Peshawar and Quetta *Shuras*. The incentive behind the new recruitment to Taliban as per Afghan Government and ISAF is financial desires, which is logical to an extent, because absence of Social Justice and inability of the new government in distributing resources in a justified manner, marginalized a section of society, which compelled them to join Taliban. But ideology and religious factors are also important driving factors for recruitments into the group. the third important factor which strengthened Taliban's movement is the recklessness of ISAF and Afghan Government in conducting air-strikes which resulted in civilian casualties and collateral damage, and compelled relatives of the victims to join Taliban. First and third Group mostly constitute Young Guerrillas residing in villages and fighting against Government and International security forces, but the second are clerics who command and direct these warriors.³⁹

The insurgent and terrorist attacks by the Taliban and other terrorist groups started 2002 onwards, and they mostly targeted the Government and Humanitarian Aid workers, as they were the easy targets and could easily pressurize government by such acts, Taliban did not target ISAF, because of their increased number in 2004, the attacks deteriorated security condition in Southern and eastern provinces, and three factors were responsible for the increase in insurgency by the Taliban: first. ANA was unable to defeat Taliban and other insurgent groups, second, despite increasing number of ISAF forces in 2004, it was 1 soldier per thousand inhabitants which was quite low, third. Both Taliban and Hezbe Islami could easily receive assistance from across Durand line, all these made it difficult to Afghan Government to subjugate Taliban.⁴⁰

The attacks on ISAF also increased with the passing of each and every year, especially after 2006, and it reached its peak in 2010, which was the bloodiest year for ISAF; where they lost around 600 forces; 400 of them were from USA, which was 69% higher than previous years. The attacks on allied forces averaged 1100 per month in 2009, 1000 per month in 2008, 800 per month in 2007 and 2006, and 400 in 2005.⁴¹

The insurgent operations were carried out not only by Taliban but by other Terrorist Groups as well. *Hezbe Islami* Gulbuddin Hekmatyar was the second largest insurgent group which made 10% of the warriors and were dispersed in different provinces of Afghanistan, especially in eastern provinces of Afghanistan. Various Salafi groups which constitute not more than 1% of the fighters existed in Kunar and Nuristan provinces in 2011. By 2010 there were hundreds of *Al-Qaeda* cadres who existed to cooperate with Taliban as their advisors and technical experts. Beside these Groups various Pakistani

Jihadists including *Lashkar-e Taiba* were active in eastern provinces which made 3-4% of the Armed groups. *Jihadists* from countries of central Asia especially Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan was also active in Northern provinces, which had influence in Uzbeks of Afghanistan.⁴²

Opium production blossomed in 2006, and it led to intensification of war by Taliban, the parallel growth of Poppy cultivation and violence in Southern “Helmand, Kandahar” provinces attracted George W. Bush towards it. Opium production was a major source of income for Taliban after 2001, for fueling its insurgent operations, because the group had received widespread support from Pakistan and Gulf Countries in 1990s, but with soaring pressure from United States, these countries could not support the movement publicly after September 11, hence it was necessary to achieve self-reliance. For this purpose, Taliban in all areas under their influence allowed opium production, and imposed religious taxes “*ushr, zakaat*” on the people. President Bush tried to reduce Opium production by proposing aerial spraying the crops in Helmand and Kandahar provinces, which was strongly opposed by President Karzai and his Cabinet. That’s why it is said that; not allowing the aerial spraying resulted in growth of Taliban, because their financial sources could not be drained.⁴³

The soaring number of attacks on US and NATO convoys by the Taliban in 2007-2009, resulted in easing the rules for their forces by attacking any suspicious activity, which increased the possibility of civilian casualties, to which Hamid Karzai showed strong opposition, moreover the rift in relations between Hamid Karzai and US officials widened on civilian casualties in result of night raids in countryside by NATO and US forces.⁴⁴

Despite the intensification of night raids and surgical operations against Taliban after 2006, ISAF and US forces could not achieve absolute victory over the insurgents, hence in March 2009, president Obama ordered immediate increase of 17000 troops into the country, by reaffirming the role of NATO to disrupt, dismantle and defeat *Al-Qaeda* in Pakistan and Afghanistan.⁴⁵ also the counter-terrorist cell emphasized their soldiers on Kill and capture strategy. the deployment of forces culminated, when president Obama announced 30000 more troops in the summer to 2010, in order to ensure success over Taliban and *Al-Qaeda*. He also announced transfer of responsibility from NATO to Afghan National forces in July 2011, and by 2014 ISAF mission would end in Afghanistan, and ANSF would completely take charge of the affairs.⁴⁶

NATO and US forces intensified their operations in 2010, 2011 and 2012 in countryside in order to withdraw their forces after defeating Taliban

militarily. USA carried night raids in rural areas which resulted in civilian casualties and also imprisoning people in Bagram prison which was controlled by USA. President Karzai opposed night raids, and objected against civilian casualties, he also tried to transfer the control of Bagram Prison from USA to Afghan Government; because it was a matter of national Sovereignty for Karzai. After negotiations and discussions about Bagram, Afghan Government succeeded in Taking charge of the prison, and the agreement was signed by General John R. Allen “Commander of US forces in Afghanistan” and Abdul Rahim Wardak “The then Afghan defense minister” in March 2012.⁴⁷

In June 2010 Barack Obama announced that 10000 and 23000 corps would withdraw from Afghanistan in 2011 and 2012 respectively. Thereafter US government started negotiating with Afghan Government about US-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership agreement aka Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and United States of America, through which US would limit their forces in Afghanistan in an official framework which would have the responsibility of training and equipping Afghan national forces. president Karzai taking advantage of the partnership imposed certain preconditions on USA; that the soil of Afghanistan would not be used against other countries, Afghanistan would be considered as an important ally of USA without being member of NATO, the responsibility of all the detention centers should be transferred to Afghan government, ending night raids and civilian casualties,⁴⁸ defending Afghanistan in case of foreign invasion, and providing financial assistance to Afghanistan. And referred the agreement to *loya Jirga*, and *Jirga* too reiterated the demands of Hamid Karzai, and the agreement was signed by President Karzai and Barack Obama on May 2nd 2012.⁴⁹

Considering the deteriorating security in Afghanistan after 2012, Obama administration decided not to withdraw all NATO/US forces from the country, but a number of troops would be left in nine provinces “nine security bases would be given to US” in order to provide assistance to Afghan National Army until the end of 2024. The official negotiations about the Bilateral Security Agreement between both the countries started on 10th November 2012, USA wanted the agreement to be signed until October 2013; where they demanded Afghan Government to provide nine security basis to NATO in Afghanistan, and would be given immunity from judicial trials in case of any human rights transgression, in return US would support Afghan forces until 2024. President Karzai set up his own conditions for signing the agreement; which is ensuring security to the people of

Afghanistan, eliminating night raids in countryside and civilian casualties, defending Afghanistan in case of foreign aggression, and also ensuring financial assistance “providing rent for all the bases which would be given to US”. All these conditions prolonged the negotiations about BSA, and the relations between both the countries strained, consecutive meetings, video calls transacted between the leaders, but could not reach to a conclusion. Karzai called for a *loya Jirga* on 21 November 2013, which approved the Agreement, but Karzai reiterated his conditions for signing the agreement. The agreement was finally signed by the newly elected government of Ashraf Ghani on 30 September 2014, which was an addition to the Enduring Strategic partnership agreement signed in 2012. With this agreement ISAF’s mission on war on terror ended at the end of 2014 and responsibility for security was transferred to Afghan forces, with this a new phase of resolute support on 1st January 2015 began, in order to assist and advice Afghan forces.⁵⁰

The security conditions exacerbated after 2014 as well, and it did not show any sign for amelioration. It has been figured out that the total military expenditure of United States from 2001 to the end of 2019 has been approximately \$ 778 billion in Afghanistan. \$ 44 billion has been spent on reconstruction projects in collaboration with USAID. And spent \$137 billion on reconstruction in last 18 years. The total estimate of US expenditure in Afghanistan is above \$ 2 trillion. It is mostly spent in improving security of the country by providing both financial and technical assistance to Afghan National forces, assistance for promoting good governance, counter-narcotics and infrastructure development. Beside financial assistance USA has lost more than 2300 troops within 19 years of war in Afghanistan, and number of wounded soldiers exceeds from 20660. Beside this the civilian casualties are more than 100000, only within 5 years of president Ghani’s 1st term 45000 Afghan national security forces have lost their lives.⁵¹

After spending excessive amount of money in Afghanistan; USA could not achieve what they wanted to, and they not only failed to defeat Taliban and international terrorism militarily, their existence resulted in creation of new militant Organizations in the country. Also, they failed in establishing a peaceful democratic state in Afghanistan, and the country is still one of the most unstable and fragile states in the world. There are plethora of reasons which led to failure of USA and Afghan Government in curbing terrorism and insurgency in Afghanistan; the first and foremost is that the basis of Government in Bonn conference was held wrong, it was not a peace agreement, because in peace agreements rival parties come together and through compromise and negotiations they reach into a settlement, but in

Bonn Taliban and *Hezbe Islami* were not invited, and the power was given to members of Northern Alliance and other groups based on their ethnicity and their role played against Taliban. After attacking on Afghanistan on 7th October USA did not have a vision and policy of nation-building for Afghanistan, their main motive was retaliating the incident of 9/11 by curbing both Taliban and *Al-Qaeda*, but in contrast to USA, NATO worked for Nation-Building in Afghanistan, so there was clash of opinion between member countries of NATO and USA. Taliban were provided safe havens by Pakistan after defeat through Operation Enduring Freedom in 2001, they had their hubs and councils in Quetta and Peshawar, from where they could easily operate within southern and eastern provinces of Afghanistan, and gradually deployed to the whole country. and also, the behavior of NATO with local population in countryside was mostly disrespectful towards the culture and religion of Afghans, which created a sense of suspicion amongst most of Afghans against NATO and USA. Counter-insurgency operations by NATO especially night raids, civilian casualties, and execution and torture of political prisoners especially the ones with no offences increased grievances of the people, and people started opposing existence of USA in Afghanistan. All this provided a good opportunity for Taliban to propagate against Government and USA and recruit more people into their movement.⁵²

Besides above mentioned reasons, several other factors played a role in strengthening Taliban movement; which were absence of Social Justice in Afghanistan throughout last 20 years, billions of dollars have been spent in Afghanistan for reconstruction and development, most of the humanitarian Organizations started functioning as shadow Government, but most of the money spent in Afghanistan went to some specific number of people, it did not reach to the people in countryside. Government was led by corrupt and inefficient leaders, who could not provide services to the people in rural areas, that's why most of the people remained uneducated and unemployed in rural areas, and they fall into the hands of Taliban as raw material, who could be easily brainwashed and recruited to the Taliban in order to fight against Government. Also absence of unanimous definition of Taliban between Government officials and US made it difficult for Government to fight against Taliban, because Ministry of Defense of Afghanistan regarded them as terrorists⁵³, Ministry of Interior Affairs regarded them as proxy fighters, most of the politicians were sympathizers of Taliban, to some people in countryside they are the freedom fighters, president Karzai mostly called them as his brothers.⁵⁴

After 17 years of continuous warfare and bloodshed, US president Donald Trump in a speech in August 2017 revised the strategy for Afghanistan by referring to a political settlement with the Taliban, and the first high level direct negotiation between Taliban and US officials transacted in Doha; capital of Qatar in July 2018.⁵⁵ Zalmay Khalilzad “an Afghan-born US Ambassador to Afghanistan during George W. Bush ” was appointed as special representative of President to reconciliation of Afghanistan in September 2018. Consecutive meetings between Khalilzad and Taliban exchanged in Qatar, UAE, Pakistan. Khalilzad also met the officials of Pakistan for easing and facilitating the peace-talks with Taliban, and the negotiations between both the parties were carried out in 10 phases with ups and downs in it. Finally, the agreement was signed between USA and Taliban “by Zalmay Khalilzad and Mullah Abdul Ghani Beradar deputy head of Taliban movement” after almost 19 months on 29th February 2020. The agreement stated that US forces would withdraw all its forces from Afghanistan within 14 months, and would remove sanctions on Taliban leaders, and would facilitate release of 5000 Taliban prisoners from Government custody. In return Taliban committed not allowing terrorist groups including *Al-Qaeda* for using Afghan soil against US and any of its allies, and would not recruit, facilitate, or equip any of terrorist organizations, and would go for intra-Afghan dialogue. Though the agreement is said to be conditional, to the commitment of both the parties for reducing violence.⁵⁶

After the agreement with US, Afghan government and Taliban started intra-Afghan dialogue on 12th September 2020, although it was supposed to start on 10th March 2020, but delayed for six months because of discontent about the prisoner’s release, although the government released all the remaining Taliban prisoners by August 2020 as a sweet gesture for peace talks, but intra-Afghan negotiations seems a difficult phase, since there is huge difference of opinions regarding future course of actions between both the parties, and also lack of trust between them makes the future of the country bleak and with such vague conditions the country seems to be moving towards an unknown trajectory.⁵⁷

2. Conclusion

USA intends to end the War in Afghanistan by agreeing for withdrawal of their forces on 29th February 2020, and would completely withdraw within fourteen months.

Based on findings, USA has spent \$2 trillion from 2001-2019 in Afghanistan. Most of the assistance provided by USA concentrated on equipping and

assisting Afghan National Defense and security forces, and counter-terrorism; to vanish both Taliban and *Al-Qaeda*. But After spending excessive amount of money and losing more than 2300 troops, the country could defeat neither Taliban nor *Al-Qaeda*, but instead their existence led to formation of other terrorist groups; ISIS, and other terrorist groups from central Asia and Pakistan, which deteriorated the security conditions of Afghanistan.

There must be plethora of reason for failure of US mission in Afghanistan, but the most important are; absence of proper strategy for State-building after the crumbling of Taliban regime, as the main goal of USA was counter-terrorism not state-building in Afghanistan. Second, the Bonn agreement was a failed treaty, as it distributed the power amongst the warlords of 1990s, who remained opposition to Taliban. Third, USA continued operations in rural areas which resulted in civilian casualties, and also imprisoned the innocents from these areas by the name of Taliban and *Al-Qaeda*, and disrespecting the culture of Afghan by night raids, which led to the increasing grievances of people from both USA and Afghan government. also, inefficiency and corruption of Afghan Government, and absence of social justice led to the emergence of shadow government of Taliban in rural areas, and people mostly referred to it for their issues, this resulted into new recruitments to Taliban movement. and also, absence of proper and definite strategy among government and USA led to the failure of operations against Taliban.

The peace-agreement has created a triumphant feeling amongst Taliban guerrillas, as they defeated NATO and US forces and compelled them to withdraw from Afghanistan. In such situation the Question arises as who is the actual winner of the war? The wars in 21st century end with negotiations and compromises between the rival parties, and there is no absolute winner of the war, and the US-Taliban war is not an exception to this convention. So practically, neither of the parties is winner or victorious of the war, because USA could not only abolish terrorism in Afghanistan, but it exacerbated the security situation by creation of new terrorist groups. Taliban too, morally lost the war, as they assured US of something to which they were not ready in late in 1990s; that is breaking relations with *Al-Qaeda* and guaranteeing not posing threat to US from the soil of Afghanistan. If Taliban would have eliminated their relations with *Al-Qaeda* and wouldn't provide safe havens to terrorists, it wouldn't have costed the lives of tens of thousands of Afghans. Now Afghans are going through intra-Afghan dialogue, preserving democratic values and Islamic republic of Afghanistan

would be an achievement of Afghan Government and international community, if not, all their efforts would go into vain.

Notes and References

- ¹ Peshawer accord was signed between 7 *jihadi* groups in Peshawer, according to which Sibghatullah Mojaddedi was appointed as acting president for two months, followed by Burhan Uddin Rabbani for four months, after this a council would elect an interim government for eighteen months to prepare for national elections, the agreement was not accepted by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar “leader of Hezbe Islami Afghanistan. For details see, Barnett R. Rubin, *The fragmentation of Afghanistan, (USA: Yale University press, 2002)*271-272.
- ² *Ibid*, 265-277.
- ³ Mullah Abdul Salam Zaeef, *Taliban: le Kandahar ter Mazar*, (Kabul: Aksos Book store, 2017)17.
- ⁴ Mullah Mohammad Omer was a Ghilzai Pashtun “a sub -branch of Hotak Tribe of Pashtuns”, who was born to a poor and clerical family in Khakrez district of Kandahar province in southern Afghanistan in 1959 or 1960, he was child when lost his father, he studied in Madrassa in Kandahar, and was compelled to leave his studies in between twice, once during the soviet invasion, second during formation of Taliban movement. He was regarded a brave, piety and a stubborn person. Abdul Hai Motmaen, *Mullah Muhammad Omar, Taliban aw Afghanistan*, (Kabul: Afghan publications, 2017)70-71.
- ⁵ Ahmad Rashid, *Taliban: the story of Afghan warlords*, (London: Pan Macmillan, 2001)19.
- ⁶ Abdul Salam Zaeef, *Taliban: le Kandahar ter Mazar*, 32-59.
- ⁷ Ahmad Rezwan Tarar, *story of Afghan Jihad, (Peshawer: Pakhtunkhwa press,)*45-57.
- ⁸ Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars, the secret history of the CIA, Afghanistan and Bin Laden, from the Soviet invasion to September 10, 2001*, (New York: Penguin, 2005)289-294.
- ⁹ Ahmad Rashid, *Taliban: the Story of Afghan Warlords*, 26-27.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid*, 27-30.
- ¹¹ Abdul Salam Zaeef, *Taliban: le Kandahar ter Mazar*, 78-109.
- ¹² Shaista Wahab and Barry Youngerman, *A Brief History of Afghanistan*, (New York: Penguin, 2007) 214.
- ¹³ Steve Coll, *ghost wars*, 333-334.
- ¹⁴ Shaista and Youngerman, *a brief history*, 218.
- ¹⁵ Abdul Rashid Dostum was born in Shiberghan province in 1955, he was an ethnic Uzbek; who joined Afghan Army in 1978, and used to escort trucks of USSR into Afghanistan. He is best known for flipping sides and treachery, that’s why he made alliance first with Dr. Najeeb, then with Ahmad Shah Massod and with Hekmatyar. For more details see Ahmad Rashid, *Taliban, the story of the Afghan warlords*,56.
- ¹⁶ Abdul Hai Motmaen, *Mullah Muhammad Omar, Taliban aw Afghanistan*,144-160.

- ¹⁷ Ahmad Rashid, *Taliban, The Story of Afghan Warlords*, 58-63.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid*, 128-130.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid*, 130-132.
- ²⁰ Steve Coll, *ghost wars*, 9-10.
- ²¹ Steve Coll, *Directorate S: The CIA and America's Secret Wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan*, (New York: Penguin press, 2018)68.
- ²² Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 380.
- ²³ *Ibid*, 383-402.
- ²⁴ Shaista and Youngerman, *A brief history*, 221.
- ²⁵ Ahmad Rashid, *Taliban: The Story of Afghan Warlords*, 134-140.
- ²⁶ Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 561-64.
- ²⁷ *Ibid*, 574-582.
- ²⁸ Steve Coll, *Directorate S*, 29-40.
- ²⁹ Zalmay Khalilzad, *The Envoy: from Kabul to White House My Journey through a Turbulent World*, Lutfullah Lutf trans (Kabul: Aksos press, 2016), 136.
- ³⁰ Andrew R. Hoehn and Sarah Harting, *Redefining NATO's Role: 9/11 to Afghanistan, in Risking NATO, testing the limits of alliance in Afghanistan*, (US: Rand Corporation, 2010) 13-16.
- ³¹ After the 9/11 incident meetings between Pakistani and US officials increased, US ambassador Wendy Chamberlin consecutively met President Musharraf for his support, and made it clear to him that You are either with Us or against us. Beside this USA had some demands from Pakistan; which were “stop Al-Qaeda operatives at your border, the USA should have access to Pakistani Naval and air-bases, Pakistan should provide intelligence and immigration information about terrorist suspects, they should publicly denounce the September 11 attack, and should cut diplomatic relations with Taliban if they continue harboring Al-Qaeda, which were accepted by Pakistan and Musharraf ensured that he is with USA. For more details, see; Steve Coll, *Directorate S*, 50-53.
- ³² James Dobbins, et al, *Afghanistan: in America's Role in Nation-Building, from Germany to Iraq*, (USA: Rand Corporation, 2003)133.
- ³³ Abdul Karim Kurram, *forty years in Storm*, (Kabul: Aksos Book Store, 2019) 157-170.
- ³⁴ Astri Suhrke, Kristian Berg Harpviken, and Arne Strand, *After Bonn: conflictual Peace Building, third world Quarterly*, Vol.23, No. 5, *Reconstructing war-torn societies: Afghanistan* (October 2002, Taylor and Francis Ltd) 877-878.
- ³⁵ In 2004 US provided \$ 160 million to the police and \$ 123 million to counter-narcotics, which was less than assistance provided to Kosovo, Bosnia and Haiti. Both Germany and US trained 33000 police out of estimated 50000 by the end of 2004, which makes 175 police per 100000 inhabitants which is very less compared to other countries. For more details, see: Seth G. Jones, et all, *Afghanistan: in establishing law and order after conflict*, (USA: Rand Corporation, 2005)70-75.
- ³⁶ *Ibid*, 81-89.
- ³⁷ Andrew R. Hoehn and Sarah Harting, *a greater role for NATO in Afghanistan, in Risking NATO, testing the limits of alliance in Afghanistan*, (US: Rand Corporation, 2010)25-29.

- ³⁸ *Ibid*, 33-35.
- ³⁹ Antonio Giustozzi, *Taliban Networks in Afghanistan*, (USA, US Naval War College, 2012), 20-23.
- ⁴⁰ Seth G. Jones, et al, *Afghanistan, in establishing law and order after conflict*, 89-92.
- ⁴¹ Andrew R. Hoehn and Sarah Harting, *Risking NATO*, 38.
- ⁴² Antonio Giustozzi, *Taliban Network in Afghanistan*, 65-67.
- ⁴³ Steve Coll, *Directorate S*, 266-279.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 301-307.
- ⁴⁵ After accelerating the war on terror, US commandos raided in Abbottabad; a small and beautiful city near Islamabad, which is also a military hub of Pakistani Army, in May 2011, where Osama Bin Laden was hiding for six years, and released all his commands from over there. Bin Laden was killed by Marine forces and the corpse was drowned in a river by US special forces. For more details, see: Carlotta Gall, *The Wrong Enemy, America in Afghanistan 2001-2014*, (India: Penguin random House India, 2014) 255-258.
- ⁴⁶ Mats Berdal, *A mission Too Far? NATO and Afghanistan, 2001-2014, in War, Strategy and History*, (Australia, ANU press, 2016) 165-166.
- ⁴⁷ Abdul Karim Kurram, *forty years in Storm*, 312-325.
- ⁴⁸ Although tensions between US and Afghan Government continued after the Agreement, as US continued their operations which resulted in civilian casualties, not only these eastern provinces of Afghanistan also witnessed rocket attacks by Pakistan about which US government was completely reckless for details see; Abdul Karim Kurram, *forty years in Storm*, 395-401.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 369-395.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 514-598.
- ⁵¹ Reality check team, *Afghanistan war: what has the conflict cost the US?* BBC News, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-47391821> 10/04/2020.
- ⁵² Mats Berdal, *A mission Too Far*, 165-177.
- ⁵³ The word Terrorism has been widely used after 9/11 in America and International media played a role in referring the term mostly to Islamic movements. Throughout history it has been defined differently and has been used by different actors. It was first used in French revolution during 1789-99; when Government attempted to consolidate its powers and intimidate its opponents many of whom supported the old monarchy. During second world War it had been used by the established governments to repress their own people. Acts of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, Stalinist Russia. But in Today's World it is referred to the activities of revolutionary movements opposing their Governments either in a defined territory or world order in general like *Al-Qaeda*, *ISIS*. Terrorism has widely been defined as the acts of violence committed against the innocent people or non-combatants in order to intimidate them and pressurize Governments to achieve their political purposes, which they cannot achieve by other means. This word is a socially constructed phenomena; society reacts differently to the same actions of intimidation by coercive authority of government and insurgent groups. that's why some Groups may be regarded as terrorist for some people, but for others they might be the Heroes, who are fighting for self-determination, separation, or independence. Like the Kashmiri

Separatist Groups against India, Taliban in Afghanistan and so on. For further details, see. Ziad Munson, *Terrorism*, (USA: Sage publications, 2008) 78-79.

- ⁵⁵ Although the negotiations between Taliban and USA started in 2010 secretly, when Tayyib Agha Jan first met US officials in Munich Germany. For more details, see <https://www.rferl.org/a/us-taliban-peace-deal-appears-within-reach-after-decade-in-making/30109848.html>. 12/04/2020. The meetings and backdoor diplomacy continued between the two rival parties until Taliban opened their Political Office in Qatar in June 2013 with the help of USA and Government of Qatar, having a white flag as their symbol, to which President Karzai showed a strong opposition, and regarded it as legitimizing the movement. For more details, see, Abdul Karim Kurram, *forty years in Storm*, 428-446.
- ⁵⁶ Secunder Kermani, Taliban peace talks: what to expect from the new round?, BBCNews, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-54016760>. 22/12/2020
- ⁵⁷ Shamil Shams and Masood Saifullah, Intra-Afghan talks: A long, complicated process with no guarantee of success, Deutsche Welle, <https://www.dw.com/en/intra-afghan-talks-a-long-complicated-process-with-no-guarantee-of-success/a-54895936>. 22/12/2020.