



Kardan Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (KJSSH)

ISSN: 2616-8707 (P) 2958-9908 (O), Journal homepage: kjsch.kardan.edu.af

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To cite this article: Nasrat, Brishna. and Ahmad, Peerzada Tufail. Use of women's rights as a justification of invasion: An evaluation of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. *Kardan Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, (2023), 6 (2), 1-13.
DOI: 10.31841/KJSSH-6.2-2023-64

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.31841/KJSSH-6.2-2023-64>



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Published online: 30 December 2023



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Kardan Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities

6 (2) 1–13

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Kardan Publications

Kabul, Afghanistan

<http://dx.doi.org/10.31841/KJSSH-6.2-2023-64>

<https://kardan.edu.af/Research/CurrentIssue.aspx?j=KJSSH>

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Received: 03 July 23
Revised: 15 August 23
Accepted: 5 Dec 23
Published: 30 Dec 23

Abstract

In 2001, as a result of 9/11, the USA invaded Afghanistan to counter-terrorism and the invasion was legitimised by the justification of liberating Afghan women. However, the USA's claim to liberate the women of Afghanistan by waging war impacted and adversely affected the lives of Afghan women as they became vulnerable to more violence and discrimination. This paper analyses the legitimacy of the justification for waging war to liberate women and ensure their rights from the feminist perspective. The USA's ignorance and rejection of the voices of Afghan women regarding the invasion and neglecting their participation in the peace negotiations for the sake of agreement needs to be questioned. The paper focuses on how the USA justified its Invasion of Afghanistan, claiming to save and empower Afghan women through war, which is against the basic notion of feminist theory of war. The paper also highlights and examines the other reasons the U.S. provided to legitimise its invasion. The paper argues that the promotion of women's rights and ensuring women's empowerment in Afghanistan is a critical issue to be tackled; however, in a state of invasion or war, rights cannot be preserved, but they would be violated in a worse manner.

Keywords: United States, Invasion, Women's Rights, Afghanistan, War, Feminism.

Introduction

The promotion of women's rights and ensuring women's empowerment in Afghanistan is a critical issue to be tackled; however, in a state of invasion, rights cannot be preserved, but they would be violated in the worst manner. This paper argues that the U.S. used women's rights as an excuse to invade Afghanistan in 2001, and war cannot be justified in promoting rights. In 2001, as a result of 9/11, the USA waged war in order to counter-terrorism. However, countering terrorism needed suitable measures since the war resulted in the deaths of thousands of civilian casualties and further intensified militant activities in the world. USA-led intervention in Afghanistan was legitimised by the justification of liberating women of Afghanistan as the USA claimed to ensure the rights of Afghan women and empower them in every aspect. However, the war impacted the lives of Afghan women as it resulted in making Afghan women vulnerable to more violence and discrimination. The USA's ignorance of women in listening to their voices regarding the military invasion and neglecting their participation in the peace

negotiations for the sake of agreement needs to be questioned. Besides the stated reasons for the invasion, such as counter-terrorism and liberating Afghan women, there were other motivations and reasons of the U.S., which are explored and evaluated in this paper.

2. U.S. Invasion of Afghanistan from a Feminist Perspective

This section highlights the use of women's rights as a justification for the U.S. to legitimise the war in Afghanistan. As highlighted by the feminist theory, war cannot ensure rights, although it just contributes to human rights violations and makes women's lives vulnerable to discrimination and threats. This paper highlights that Afghan women suffered a lot due to the war, and their concerns were not taken into account while invading Afghanistan, regardless of the impacts the war would have on them. The paper also highlights how the U.S. used women's rights as a pretext in order to cover its real interests from the perspective of embedded feminism.

2.1 Use of Women's Rights as a justification for the invasion

In a speech in November 2001, former First Lady Laura Bush stated that women in Afghanistan were suffering violence and brutality and that the U.S. and the rest of the civilized needed to protect Afghan women by invading Afghanistan. While linking terrorism with the rights of women, she further stated that another main objective of terrorism, in addition to violence and destruction, is the domination of women by men. Laura Bush specified that "the fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women." After that, the U.S. started highlighting the Taliban's abuses of women and emphasized the need for the 'War on Terror' in part to be fought for the protection of women's rights by publishing documents like "The Taliban's War against Women" through media. These statements convinced the world that US-led intervention had the objective of ensuring the rights of women in Afghanistan and helped the war to be justified on the grounds of the protection of these rights. Therefore, Mrs Bush regarded the US-led intervention as an obligation and necessity to liberate Afghan women and ensure women's rights in Afghanistan. In addition, according to Moller's arguments, the concern of the U.S. behind intervention was respect for humanity on the one hand and the security of the U.S. on the other. Mrs. Bush stated:

"Civilized people throughout the world are speaking out in horror -- not only because our hearts break for the women and children in Afghanistan, but also because in Afghanistan, we see the world the terrorists would like to impose on the rest of us." However, the statement embodies that the actual concern behind the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan was the security of Western women, not Afghan women, supported by the following statement: "If the USA does not act, the oppression women are facing in Afghanistan can become the reality of the Western world." Therefore, the above statements emphasized how much U.S. intervention was necessary to secure the security of the West regardless of the impacts of invasion, which it would have on Afghan women and people in general.

2.2 Feminist Perspective

Feminism is concerned about social, economic and political equality between men and women and argues that differences between men and women are not biological but constructed socially. In addition, the theory is critical of male dominance in international affairs. In addition, feminism argues that historically, women did not have the status of citizenship in a state and were subordinate to men. Therefore, different feminist movements occurred worldwide to demand women's rights. In this context, the U.S. War

on Afghanistan has been legitimised on gendered terms by emphasising liberating women. However, Hunt and Rygiel argue that by emphasising the term liberating women in the war waged by the U.S., the actual violence which women have suffered due to war was unheeded. They stated:

"This war story about women's liberation deflects attention away from the violence that women, in particular, suffer as a result of war, including sexual violence, loss of male family members, and the burden of caring for the young, old, and injured."

The leaders conceal the true interests, agendas, strategies, and politics during the war using a feminist discourse. When feminist discourse is misused in a political mission, Hunt refers to it as "embedded feminism." Embedded feminism is the way to use feminist discourse and arguments to claim to serve the interests of women but, in reality, undermines or opposes them. In the case of US-led intervention, embedded feminism was used to gain public support by portraying the war as one that liberates the Afghan women. Therefore, G.W. Bush emphasized Afghan women's rights to justify and gain public support for the invasion, which helped the USA to win over those who would ordinarily oppose using force. Likewise, Lynsey emphasizes that the U.S. used the language of human rights in order to legitimise the war in Afghanistan since there was not enough evidence to prove that Al-Qaeda was accountable for 9/11 and whether the Taliban was involved or not. The best way to justify the military action was to highlight violations of women's rights in Afghanistan. However, prior to 9/11, the U.S. did not show any serious concern towards the abuses women were facing in Afghanistan. Therefore, suddenly, ensuring Afghan women's rights became a serious matter and publicised by the Western media. As Stabile and Kumar state: "The sudden media focus on women's liberation in Afghanistan was little more than a cynical ploy- it served as one of the pillars on which elites sought to sell the war to the U.S. public".

Similarly, as argued by Lynsey, the U.S., prior to 9/11, was not concerned about how Afghan women were treated and suffering in Afghanistan and instead regarded it as an internal matter of Afghanistan despite many international organisations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, among other NGOs, had been raising awareness and waging campaigns against the harsh restrictions placed on women in Afghanistan. Likewise, 'The Feminist Majority Foundation (FMF)', a well-known U.S. feminist activist group, had raised the issue of the mistreatment of Afghan women's human rights. However, these campaigns had received little attention and support from the U.S. Instead, they prioritised economic and strategic interests such as the oil pipeline. For Instance, Lynsey mentions U.S. Representative Dana Rohrabacher's statement who stated in testimony before a Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee in April 1999:

"The Clinton administration had conducted a covert policy of supporting the Taliban on the assumption that the Taliban would bring stability to Afghanistan and permit the building of oil pipelines from Central Asia through Afghanistan to Pakistan even though it was "the most anti-Western, anti-female, anti-human rights regime in the world."

Furthermore, it is pertinent to highlight that the U.S., being a champion of human rights and sympathiser of women's rights, is one of the states that is not a party to the 'Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)'. Thus, the United States' continued hypocrisy in ostensibly supporting women's rights is also evident in its failure to ratify the treaty.

Furthermore, the U.S., claiming to be the leader of the civilised and reasonable world, has made the expression of "us and them" in order to take charge of liberating women from the oppression of 'uncivilised and evil'. By constructing the expression of us versus them (civilised versus uncivilised), the U.S. claimed to be the protector of the rights of Afghan women. However, the voices or concerns of Afghan women were ignored, and Afghan women's organisations were given no importance in US-led intervention. For instance, Ratna argues that some Muslim women's organisations urged the United States to refrain from using military force against Afghanistan because doing so would worsen the situation for Afghan women and people. In addition, the bombing resulted in the worsening of the refugee crisis in Pakistan, and women made up the majority of the refugees in these camps as men travelled for better financial opportunities, died due to war, or engaged in combat. Likewise, Moller mentions that 'Humanitarian Assistance for Women and Children of Afghanistan (HAWCA)' demanded that rather than waging war in Afghanistan, the USA should utilise non-military means. Likewise, 'The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA)' also requested that the United States refrain from bombing their nation because doing so would increase the suffering of the Afghan people.

In addition, the most crucial concern of the U.S. regarding Afghan women's oppression was the emphasis on the religion and culture of Afghanistan being the obstacles in guaranteeing the rights of Afghan women. As argued by Ratna, the images of women wearing veils were portrayed by CNN as a symbol of oppression. West has defined the veil as per its prejudiced and racial notion, irrespective of the meanings assumed to it by most Muslim women, which is an honour, a symbol of empowerment, a sign of freedom from West imperialism like in Iran, and a sign of pride and identity. Many Muslim women consider the veil as a religious and private matter; however, the U.S. used it as a justification for the military invasion of Afghanistan to fulfil its political objectives. However, unfortunately, the focus given to the policies and punishments which were given to women not wearing the burqa diverted the attention from the impact and the situation of women in Afghanistan, which instead aggravated rather than alleviated because of the U.S. invasion.

Nevertheless, the USA ignored all these aspects and, being the so-called champion of the civilised world, claimed the right to decide what was best for Afghan women and to serve the mission of saving brown women from brown men, as evident by the following statement of Mrs Bush:

"I understand the lives of women in America and the lives of women in Afghanistan are very different, and I respect our differences and your decisions. Yet, I want you to know that the isolation the Taliban regime forced on you is not normal – not by international standards, not by Islamic standards, and not by Afghanistan's own standards."

Similarly, Kolhatkar argues that war resulted in putting the lives of Afghan women and their families at risk. It made them imprisoned in their own homes, and increased military activity only resulted in more suffering for Afghanistan's female population. Thus, it can be argued that war could not be used to improve women's rights and lives anywhere in the world. Approximately over 70,000 Afghan civilians had lost their lives due to the invasion. Furthermore, as warned by RAWA, the invasion resulted in rising fundamentalism in the region, as it gave the non-state actors like the Taliban a reason to justify their insurgency in the name of freeing the state from occupiers.

In addition, Kolhatkar argues that the U.S. empowered the warlords through different dealings from the public's gaze. These warlords believed that women should not be provided with freedom. The author mentions:

"Human Rights Watch's Rachel Reid testified to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 2010: "The Afghan government, often with the support of the Bush administration, has empowered current and former warlords, providing official positions to some and impunity to the rest." She added, "Backroom deals with extremist and abusive commanders profoundly undermine the rights and security of Afghan women."

Furthermore, Kolhatkar strongly criticised the U.S.'s claim of promoting women's rights in Afghanistan and letting Afghan women express their views by pointing out that Malalai Joya, a Member of Parliament of Afghanistan, was removed from parliament for being a critique of U.S.- backed warlords and U.S. occupation. Malalai Joya had demanded that warlords who receive support from the United States be held accountable on a global scale for their war crimes. Instead, the U.S. permitted the warlords to uphold their grip on political authority, confirming that Afghan democracy remains fragile and discriminatory against women. Also, Malalai Joya had raised the concern that Afghan women could not be liberated by bombing or American forces.

3. Impact of Invasion on Afghan Women

Regarding the impact of armed conflict, there are different perspectives. Gender neutrals focus on significant impacts in armed conflicts related to territory, resources increased, and losers and winners of wars. They consider the impact of armed conflict on people's lives to be of minimal concern. In comparison, some give more importance to men's experiences in armed conflicts and consider men victims and most affected in war. They believe that men are central players in war, whether they are in the capacity of soldiers, prisoners of war, generals, war organisers, combatant pilots, foot soldiers, war offenders, and so forth. In contrast, women are considered less affected and impacted by armed conflict indirectly. Women's experiences of facing financial damages, killings and injuries in armed conflict have been considered collateral damage and were typically not regarded as deserving of specialised attention or how states must balance both the aspects of "security" and "insecurity" caused by the war.

On the other hand, scholars like Cynthia Enloe reject the belief that only emphasises men being affected and playing roles in armed conflict. She believes that women play roles in armed conflict as wives, chefs, nurses, sutlers or laundry workers of combatants. Even though, in the contemporary world, we do have women as soldiers, which means direct involvement of women in armed conflict. However, international organisations, human rights groups and academicians have now started to concentrate on the impact of armed conflict on non-combatant women. The most common suffering which women experience in armed conflict is sexual violence of different types, whether being forced into prostitution or sexual trafficking or facing sexual assault even by protectors like police and peacekeepers during wartime. In addition, women are also frequently killed and injured.

Furthermore, armed conflicts cause inflation and other economic challenges in states, which do have economic impacts on women as they battle the loss of their financial means of support. Especially in conflict zones, women face economic hardships, especially when they lose the only breadwinners, such as husbands, brothers, fathers, and sons. In addition, in armed conflicts, women and their families become refugees in

other states or internally displaced persons, and due to this, women lose access to proper healthcare facilities, educational opportunities and other social services.

In addition, leaders ignore women when formal negotiations for the peace process are held, even though they play significant roles in establishing communications between conflict parties and creating platforms for the peace process through different campaigns and marches. Furthermore, during the peace process, opportunities for education, training, and employment were also given to men, while women were excluded.

In addition, Marcin mentions that the war resulted in the participation of women in the insurgency, whether for taking revenge for the death of sons, husbands and brothers or for rape by foreign forces. The claim that ensuring security in civilised countries and improving conditions of women in Afghanistan, however, instead resulted in the killing of thousands of people and destroying homes of many families. The war also resulted in encouraging men to believe in their fundamentals to the extent of extremism, which led to participating in insurgency. The war also compelled men to leave their families and go to the areas where work was available, and women felt helpless as they were left behind to care for their families with scarce or no resources. In that process, women were frequently mistreated domestically or in the refugee camps. So, it is contrary to the claims and justifications of the Western leaders, especially the U.S., that the military action would ensure rights for Afghan women and empower them. However, they were compelled into starvation, poverty, or prostitution, and their standards of living plunged. Besides, the invasion of the U.S. in Afghanistan made women vulnerable to violence and discrimination.

Similarly, the explanation for how women were treated in Afghanistan and an emphasis on the veil is insufficient. The veil was used to defend and justify the American bombing of Afghanistan, the transgressions of international law, and the staggering number of civilian casualties that followed. However, the significant issues through which women were suffering, such as their conditions in refugee camps, humanitarian crisis, sexual violence and scarcity of essential resources due to the Invasion of the U.S., were not taken into consideration or addressed adequately.

As argued by Ratna, women have been attacked, especially those who were alone and without male companions, in the refugee camps and were coerced into providing sexual favours in exchange for access to foods that are necessary for survival. Also, the situation compelled women, especially those who lost their lone bread earners, to migrate for employment to support their families. Therefore, the labour markets in urban areas witnessed an increase in the number of women. Furthermore, the West and industrialised world, instead of making the immigration policies lenient, made them strict, like France, Italy, and Austria closed their doors to Muslims. The USA and U.K. were also reluctant to open their doors due to 9/11. Such policies made the situation of women worse and placed women at greater risk of exploitation, compulsion, violence, and deception. So, the way the invasion of Afghanistan by the U.S. made Afghan women vulnerable to violence and different kinds of discrimination is unjustifiable.

4. U.S. invasion of Afghanistan: Evaluation of reasons

Some of the justifications, inexplicit reasons, or motivations behind the U.S.-led intervention in Afghanistan in 2001 are:

4.1 Reasons given by U.S

The 9/11 attack provided a reason for the U.S. to wage war on Afghanistan, and on September 20, George W. Bush announced the "War on Terror". He stated:

"Our War on Terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found; stopped and defeated..... we will take defensive measures against terrorism to protect Americans."

The invasion of Afghanistan began on October 7 2001; air strikes and bombings began against targets in Afghanistan under the collective defensive mechanism of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Looking at the reason or objective (War against terrorism) provided by the U.S. to legitimise the war in Afghanistan, there is confusion about whether the killings of innocent children, men and women by U.S. bombings are justified on which basis. In addition, as argued by Howard Zinn, the war resulted in the spread of 'terrorism', not the prevention of terrorism, since it amounted to a gross violation of human rights. Also, the war compelled Afghans to escape to other states in order to save their lives, resulting in adversely affecting the basic needs of Afghans. So, it can be argued that the war led by the U.S. in Afghanistan did not seem against terrorism but more against helpless Afghans by making them vulnerable. Both war and terrorism are unjust when they result in the killings of innocent people, even if just means are used to prevent others by rendering them unjust. However, this was ignored in the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, in which bombings of innocent Afghans were taken just to reach the objective of preventing unjust terrorism.

As Howard Zinn elaborates, war and terrorism share a characteristic as in both cases, innocent people are murdered in order to accomplish what the murderers recognise to be a just goal. He argues that killings of innocent people by terrorists are on purpose while, as in war, innocent killings are labelled as collateral damage. Zinn further argues that how the killings of innocent people by war are regarded as an accident repeatedly, even if the numbers cross the figure of deaths that occurred in the act of terrorism. He regards the responsible state actors as guilty as terrorists.

The U.S. could have resorted to nonviolent means in response to 9/11. The paper argues that the option of negotiations taken by the U.S. in 2020 to solve the conflict with the Taliban could have been preferred in 2001 as well. It would have resulted in saving Afghanistan from the damage; however, instead, the U.S. approach in 2001 towards negotiations was negative, although the Taliban was interested, as indicated by then Afghanistan's deputy prime minister Haji Abdul Kabir. In addition, in 2001, even the Taliban was ready to discuss the trial of Osama Bin Laden by a third state and was asking for evidence from the U.S. Taliban were asking the U.S. to stop the bombings and provide evidence of the accusations of 9/11 and open negotiations. However, the U.S. had decided that there was no room for negotiations and discussions with the Taliban. The U.S. continued the bombings irrespective of the fact that Afghans' lives would be in danger.

In addition, then U.S. President George W. Bush provided another reason for the invasion as the "Nation building" of Afghanistan and to continue its presence in Afghanistan in 2002. However, the current president of the US, Joe Biden, rejected the reason by stating that the U.S. never intended to be in Afghanistan for nation-building. These contradictory statements of U.S. presidents indicate that the U.S.'s intentions regarding its presence in Afghanistan were not apparent to the world. The given reasons were excuses to continue their presence and covered the concealed reasons for the U.S.

presence in Afghanistan. For instance, as Samar argues, from the past till now, women's rights have been used as a political tool by different groups and governments to achieve their interests. She further points out that in the peace negotiations of 2019, the Afghan women's rights issue was neglected despite knowing the fact that the safety and security of Afghan women is a fundamental prerequisite for achieving long lasting peace in Afghanistan. Afghan women were left out of the peace talks in Afghanistan, and the peace negotiations failed to provide safe assurances regarding women's rights as a result. The destiny of Afghan women and girls was put at risk because the international community failed to uphold its obligations in exchange for a concrete, inclusive and positive peace agreement.

4.2 Other Reasons

The U.S. invasion of Afghanistan on the pretext of safeguarding the rights of Afghan women was indeed motivated and driven by the concern and apprehension of the West that such cultural and religious restrictions would not imposed on Western women. It became one of the central reasons for waging war in Afghanistan. However, the so-called concern completely ignored the consequences which Afghans would face due to war, and instead, the justified reason embodied the selfish interests behind the invasion. Suppose the condition of women's rights in Afghanistan was considered a severe threat to Western women, which must be encountered by war. Nevertheless, how could the invasion, which resulted in making the lives of Afghan women vulnerable to every kind of discrimination and threat, be justified? The U.S.-led coalition forces are accountable for the sufferings of Afghan women, making the lives of Afghan women worse. However, these sufferings were of no serious concern for the actors involved in the conflict.

The paper argues that there are many hidden reasons or motivations behind the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan; one of them would be extending U.S. influence in Afghanistan and the region. For instance, Emily Stewart argues that the intention was to create a pro-American government in Afghanistan, which would result in extending U.S. bases and prolonging U.S. military strength in the region. In addition, the US-led invasion helped and made the military contractors and warlords richer. However, Afghanistan did not develop much since Afghanistan's situation related to economic disparity, social mobility, poverty, security, infrastructure, human rights, etc., did not change or develop, which was identified as one of the reasons behind the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan.

Likewise, the 'War on Terror' also served as an excuse to advance U.S. energy interests in Afghanistan and the region, as some anti-war activists contend that the War in Afghanistan has largely been an additional "oil war." The Bush Administration's preference for a regime change and all-out War in Afghanistan was significantly prejudiced by the desire to install a new government that would be more supportive of U.S. economic interests in Central Asia. Even though Afghanistan does not have a large amount of oil or natural gas reserves, it is situated in a region with plenty of natural resources, including oil and gas. As mentioned, the "richest new source of oil" is positioned in Central Asia's Caspian Basin, shared by the former Soviet states of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan. In this context, Martha Hamilton concluded that

"The largely untapped subterranean treasure" in the Caspian Basin may be "the third-largest reserve in the world, after the Persian Gulf and Siberia. The possibility of bringing those huge energy reserves to market has touched off a scramble by international oil and gas companies to get in on what may be one of the world's last great energy plays."

Similarly, Klare explained that one of the reasons behind the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan was to: "Consolidate U.S. power in the Persian Gulf and Caspian Sea area, and to ensure the continued flow of oil."

Likewise, Ahmed Rashid claims that business interests largely influenced the 1990s U.S. policy regarding Afghanistan in the region's resources. He further mentions that a Corporation in California-based UNOCAL started talks with the Turkmenistan government in 1995 about constructing oil and gas pipelines from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan to Pakistani ports. Executives from UNOCAL began negotiations with the Taliban shortly after they took control of Afghanistan in 1996 in order to protect the pipeline agreement. However, the Taliban's adherence to religious fundamentalism prevented normal diplomatic relations at the time, but it did not present a major barrier to a possible business contract. Rashid further mentions that in 1997, Taliban representatives were invited to Houston by UNOCAL Vice President Marty Miller and other company executives. Miller suggested a lucrative contract to the Taliban representatives and believed an official contract would be reached soon.

Although the Clinton Administration covertly supported UNOCAL's efforts, these discussions ultimately failed. After Al-Qa'ida attacked the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, the Taliban decided against the pipeline deal, and Washington's willingness to do business with them came to an end. In addition to ordering cruise missile strikes on Al-Qa'ida training facilities in Afghanistan, President Clinton also gave the go-ahead to kill Osama bin Laden. The United States also made an effort to convince Taliban leaders to hand over Bin Laden as the Bush Administration had secretly picked up talks with the Taliban soon after taking office. French writers Jean-Charles Brisard and Guillaume Dasquie argue that the Bush Administration operated arduously to "decouple" bin Laden from the Taliban and set the groundwork for U.S. diplomatic recognition and pipelines for oil and natural gas. According to Brisard and Dasquie, Washington viewed the Taliban as a potential ally who could help maintain stability in Afghanistan and profit from the proposed pipeline. However, American officials insisted that the Taliban hand over bin Laden and extend an invitation to other Afghan political forces to join their government in a series of meetings in Washington, Islamabad, and Berlin. When the Taliban refused to accept these demands, U.S. officials warned them to take armed action against them. As Brisard revealed at one point in the negotiations, these officials told the Taliban, "Either you accept our offer of a carpet of gold, or we bury you under a carpet of bombs."

As a result, the United States government's decision to support a regime change and all-out War in Afghanistan was significantly prejudiced by the collapse of US-Taliban negotiations. In addition, Shaun Casey stressed that there is no proof that the Taliban regime was involved in the attacks against the United States. Furthermore, Howard Zinn highlighted that the U.S. government did not take the other alternatives before using military force as the last resort to bring Al-Qa'ida to justice. Zinn has also noted that even the Taliban regime's proposal to hand over Bin Laden for trial to a third country was rejected by the U.S. government. Similarly, according to Phil Gasper, the Bush Administration's refusal to seriously consider these alternatives demonstrated that the Taliban's overthrow and the establishment of a new, more pro-business government had already been set forth as the main goals of the impending war.

All of these arguments demonstrate how the Bush Administration's objective of advancing U.S. economic benefits and influence in the region motivated how it wanted

to apprehend and punish Al-Qa'ida in Afghanistan. The alleged "War on Terrorism" waged by the Bush Administration was primarily motivated by the desire for "profits and power," according to Gore Vidal. To have its influence, obtain economic interests and act as the torch-bearer of human rights, especially women's rights, influenced the decision of the U.S. to invade Afghanistan. However, it prioritised its national interests over human rights by overlooking the suffering of Afghans due to the imposed war in the last 20 years. In the end, the U.S. withdrew its forces from Afghanistan on August 15 2021, ending a long war of two decades. Even the withdrawal did not consider the Afghan interests but took place to serve U.S. interests. As argued by Amit Bansal, there were differences between the two parties, Republicans and Democrats of the U.S., regarding the continuation of the War in Afghanistan. Joe Biden, being a Democrat, opposed the continuation of the purported "War against Terror." He further argues that shifting attention from Central Asia to the Asia-Pacific by the U.S. since China began to show off its influence also influenced the decision to end the War in Afghanistan. In addition, the war was causing considerable economic costs for the U.S. without acquiring the desired outcomes despite the U.S. having spent more than 3 trillion dollars in 2 decades of war. Hence, the decision to withdraw was made because the U.S. leadership did not consider spending such a considerable amount reasonable.

Conclusion

In 2001, as a result of 9/11, the USA waged war in order to counter-terrorism, and the justification of liberating Afghan women legitimised the intervention. However, the USA's claim to liberate Afghan women by waging war impacted and affected the lives of Afghan women in various ways. Like, the war resulted in making women vulnerable to violence and discrimination. Women suffer a lot in armed conflicts by facing sexual violence, deaths, economic crises, and scarcity of essential resources. Also, women's rights cannot be protected and achieved only by war and without looking for other ways, while it further violates the rights of women. Similarly, the U.S. invasion cannot be justified by the rhetorical statements of saving brown women from brown men since the war resulted in making the conditions of women in Afghanistan worse and exposed them to more violence, harassment, discrimination and severe humanitarian crises. Furthermore, the Afghan women's concerns were ignored by the leaders since they had demanded that the U.S. opt for other means. As a result of the war, thousands of Afghan women lost their lives and were forced to move to refugee camps without any basic facilities.

The paper argues that the justification of women's rights was used by the U.S. in order to legitimise the War in Afghanistan and win over those who would generally oppose using military force. Although prior to 9/11, the U.S. did not show any serious response towards this issue, and also, women's concerns were ignored in the Afghan Peace Process as they were ignored in 2001. Similarly, in the peace negotiations of 2019, the Afghan women's rights issue has been neglected despite knowing the fact that the role of Afghan women is a fundamental prerequisite for achieving long-lasting peace in Afghanistan.

The paper further argues that war cannot prevent terrorism since war results in the killings of innocents and the violation of human rights as terrorism does. War cannot be taken as just a means to prevent terrorism by rendering (terrorism) unjust, even though both have the same results. Warmongers must be regarded as guilty as terrorists for the killings of innocent people, and their crimes should not be covered and disguised as collateral damage or accidents. Moreover, the paper argues that the U.S. should not have

closed the doors of negotiations in 2001 with the Taliban, as that would have saved Afghanistan from the destruction of the imposed and unjustified war. If negotiations can take place after 20 years to end the war with the same actor against which the war started and even without any concrete and tangible results and the Taliban again in power, it could have taken place 20 years back as well.

Furthermore, the U.S.'s contradictory reasons indicate that there were inexplicit reasons behind the invasion and the continuation of the U.S.'s presence in Afghanistan. The reason for protecting women's rights was more about the protection of Western women, not Afghan women, because if it were about the protection of Afghan women, then they should not have had to face the destruction. Also, the war would not be used as a means to ensure their rights; instead, focus should have been given to the demands of Afghan women about what they want and, most notably, how they want it. In addition, the other implicit reason for the invasion was the motivation to advance the U.S. economic interests to construct an oil pipeline in the region and to influence the region through military bases in Afghanistan. Bush Administration's decision in favour of a regime change and all-out war in Afghanistan was significantly influenced by the desire to install a new government that would be more sympathetic to U.S. economic interests in the Central Asia region. The drive for "profits and power" was central to the Bush Administration's so-called "War on Terrorism." Lastly, the end of the two decades of war took place on August 15 2021, with the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan, and the withdrawal did not consider Afghan interests but served U.S. interests.

The U.S. legitimised the War in Afghanistan by providing various justifications, but the reality was not in alignment with the justifications. The means, the intentions and the ends of the war were motivated by the self-interests of the U.S., not of Afghanistan and Afghans. The paper argues that the international community should not allow such interventions as states use any strategy to reach their national interests since they do not care about the means; they prioritise the end, which is their national interests. However, it should provide suitable measures for resolving matters to ensure human rights and not to violate them. Lastly, the paper argues that Afghanistan needs to be domestically stable enough not to allow other states to use different excuses for intervention. The paper further argues that Afghans should empower Afghan women and ensure their rights. The gross human rights violations, particularly the women's rights resulting from the U.S. war in Afghanistan, need to be highlighted.

Contributions

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