



US Withdrawal from Afghanistan: Implications for Pakistan

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Abstract

This paper looks on Pakistan's repercussions from Afghanistan's predicament following the US exit. According to the report, Afghanistan's political climate is similar to that of the post-Soviet pullout in that a sense of dread and peril hangs over the nation like the Sword of Damocles. This analysis also shows that Pakistan's authorities must pay close attention to and address the pressing issues caused by the perplexing and contradictory political climate in Afghanistan. This study is analytical in character and applies the interpretivist research paradigm in relation to the relativist (ontological) and subjectivist (epistemological) philosophical viewpoints. In this study, secondary data from a variety of easily accessible sources were analyzed. According to the study, Pakistan is directly impacted by Afghanistan's unpredictability. Pakistan, a participant in the Afghan Peace Process and Afghanistan's close neighbor, is immediately affected by the effects of Afghanistan's post-US withdrawal. The study also reveals that Pakistan accelerates its strategic calculations in Afghanistan, not just due to its 'strategic depth' ambitions or anxiety over Afghan nationalism, but also due to the expediency to engage defensively and balance out foreign security concerns.

Keywords: *Strategic Depth, Afghan Nationalism, Afghan Peace Process, War against Terrorism, 9/11 attacks*



Introduction

Afghanistan's constant victimization and entanglement in great powers' wrangling serve as a reminder of its geopolitical and strategic relevance. Its physical attributes provide permanency to its strategic beauty and its geopolitical importance invites global competitors to concentrate on this country. Historically, foreign rulers were interested in gaining control of Afghanistan because of its distinctive and strategic location (Goodson,2001). According to Goodson (2001), foreign rulers have made several fruitless attempts to subdue the Afghan people's innate drive for independence, ranging from Alexander's ambition for a "One World" through the Soviet Union's onslaught in 1979.

In the most immediate history, Vasily Kolesnik, the Spetsnaz officer, and staffer from the GRU's 5th Directorate headed an operation in 1979 to assassinate Hafiz Ullah Amin, the leader of Afghanistan. The operation was codenamed as Storm-333. This clandestine operation was the part of a master plan to control Afghanistan politically and militarily. The latter bigger and main operation was codenamed as Baikal-79 (Galeotti, 2021). Resultantly, the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) took control of Afghanistan. However, Afghanistan, popularly known as the "Graveyard of Empires" buried another empire, in terms of the withdrawal and disintegration of Soviet Union (Galeotti, 2021, p.5; Dalrymple, 2014).

The events unfolded and folded in the last two decades of 20th century were immediately followed by another unfortunate event in the beginning of the first decade of 21st century. Following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the United States militarily attacked and resultantly controlled Afghanistan. The celebrated nomenclature of this operation was Operation Enduring Freedom (Tucker-Jones, 2014). However, after consuming ground about twenty years, neither lasting freedom, nor a peaceful ambience was ensured in Afghanistan. Interestingly, despite US and its Allies' War against Terrorism, its numerous counterterrorism strategies and consuming approximately \$2.313 Trillion, Afghanistan became a more insecure, dangerous and a terrorists' producing machine than ever in the world (Watson Institute, 2022; BBC, 2018).

The epitome is that U.S. and its strategic allies badly entangled in the 'Graveyard of Empire' (Afghanistan). As a result, whether on purpose or under duress, the United States of America eventually began considering the peace process and exit option. In an effort to achieve a



permanent peace settlement in Afghanistan, the United States began peacenegotiations with the Afghan Taliban. After extensive deliberation, the negotiations finallycame to a unified declaration in February 2020 (Council on Foreign Relations, 2020).

In August 2021, the United States finally withdrew the last of its military personnel from Afghanistan after nearly 20 years of military presence. When the United States withdrew, the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan, which caused a refugee crisis as many Afghans fled their homeland. It also raised worries that terrorists may utilize Afghanistan as a shelter, similar to what happened with Ayman al-Zawahiri, the al-Qaida chief who was captured in Kabul and murdered by a U.S. drone strike (Schaeffer, 2022).

A comparison could be drawn between the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and the Soviet Union's withdrawal, both of which left behind a divided and politically paralyzed Afghanistan in the face of a raging insurgency, unpredictability, and humanitarian crises. Multiple repercussions are being caused by these issues for Pakistan in particular as well as the entire region in general. Pakistan is in hot water because it is Afghanistan's close neighbor. This research paper addresses Pakistan's repercussions from Afghanistan's dilemmatic situation following American withdrawal.

Literature Review

Scholars like Siddique (2014), Rubin (2020), Malkasian (2021), and Fitzgibbon (2020) highlight the “strategic depth” thesis about Pakistan’s interests in Afghanistan. These scholars, however, gauge the ‘strategic depth’ thesis only through the narrow lens of Indian factor for Pakistan. For Fitzgibbon (2020), Pakistan develops amity with Afghan government, keeping the Indian factor in view. Lee (2022), however, considers Afghanistan as a ‘strategic depth’, in terms of generality meaning historically, this country has been considered as a ‘strategic depth’ by all the major powers in general and active stakeholders. Ali (2021) also counts the “strategic depth” thesis with reference to Pakistan, especially in terms of external security challenges to the country. The author, however, also highlights Pakistan’s internal security issues and in addition gives more credence to the latter than the former. For Siddique (2014) and Malkasian (2021) “Afghan nationalism” causes headache for Pakistan and that the latter tries to play its part to reduce the force of Afghan nationalism. Durrani (2021) briefly discusses America’s exit from Afghanistan



and its upshots for Pakistan. Durrani (2021) also foresees potential strained relations between the United States and Pakistan due to the former's demand for bases to spy Taliban from proximity.

Research Gap

Most of the available literature considers Afghanistan as a 'strategic depth' about the strategic objectives of Pakistan. However, this proposition doesn't show the real picture. Pakistan and Afghanistan are immediate neighbor's sharing a common history, religion, culture, and customs. According to this study, regional and extra-regional actors and not only Pakistan are the ones who view Afghanistan as a "strategic depth." Pakistan's proximity and natural propensity to Afghanistan clearly qualifies the former's predilection for the latter. Siddique (2011, p.7) also supports the "natural inclination" of Pakistan, but the author then clubs this inclination with the strategic depth proposition. Such characteristics are not shared by India, the US, or other stakeholders with Afghanistan. India, for instance is not the immediate but faraway neighbor of Afghanistan. Studies and ground realities suggest that Afghanistan is at the heart of Indian Foreign Policy and its geostrategic objectives. Its presence in Afghanistan may be of a strategic nature and not for any other reason. This study suggests that Pakistan, as a key participant in the Afghan Peace Process, is encountering numerous issues as a result of a conflicted Afghanistan in the wake of the US withdrawal. However, a stable and peaceful Afghanistan is in Pakistan's wider interest.

Research Methodology

This study's descriptive and analytical components tackle two issues. (1) What is Afghanistan's geostrategic significance? And (2) what effects the precarious situation in Afghanistan following the US withdrawal is having on Pakistan? Its goals are to (1) examine Afghanistan's geostrategic significance, particularly in light of the "strategic depth" thesis, and (2) bring attention to Afghanistan's precarious state in the wake of the US exit and any potential repercussions for Pakistan. Though studies typically focus on the 'why' kind of questions, some academics contend that in order to adequately answer the 'why' type questions, it is also necessary to address the 'what' and 'how' type issues. In order to deduce and make explicit the types of ontological and epistemological views that answer the "why" inquiries, this study addresses the "what" and "how" questions. The study uses a subjectivist (epistemological) and relativist (ontological) interpretivist paradigm. The analysis of the secondary data that was



available for the study was done using a descriptive-analytical technique. It has been made an effort to collect and analyze information from recent and updated sources.

Afghanistan A Strategic Depth

Geostrategic Importance of Afghanistan

Afghanistan occupies a key geopolitical position as a land bridge connecting Central and South Asia and a gateway to the Central Asian region (Shams, 2015). It was once referred to as the “Highway of Conquest” (Rubin, 2020, p.8). For Lee (2022), it could also be referred to as the “Highway of Commerce” (p.30). However, this land is also known as the “Graveyard of Empires” (Rubin, 2020, p.8; Galeotti, 2021, p.5). Historically speaking, foreign rulers were interested in gaining control of this region. According to Goodson (2001), foreign rulers have made a number of fruitless attempts to subdue the Afghan people's innate drive for independence, ranging from Alexander's ambition for a "One World" through the Soviet Union's onslaught in 1979. Afghanistan also served as the backdrop for the conflict between the Soviet and American empires during the Cold War in the 20th century. In order to contain the Soviet Union's policy of expansionism, the US developed Kennan's containment strategy, which involved surrounding the country. Thus, when Soviet forces entered Afghanistan in 1979, the Americans reacted by aiding the insurgency that was waged to drive the Soviets out from Afghanistan (Martin, 2011).

In the first decade of 21st century, the United States of America following the September 11, 2001 incident attacked Afghanistan. However, it [America] also finally ticked the departure option from Afghanistan, either due to its challenging geography or the revolutionary and reactionary nature of its people. Some scholars speculatively considered U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan as the former's strategic shift from Mackinder's "heartland" Afghanistan to Mahan's 'sea power' and Spykman's 'Rimland' geopolitics (Koyuncu, 2021). Analyzing this conjecturing prediction in light of the Chinese geopolitical dynamics holds water to some extent. Because the United States is the principal strategic rival of the People's Republic of China and hence, its strategic camera will definitely capture the most vantage position to counter its competitor. However, it could also be the challenging terrain and the not so easily subduing nature of the people of Afghanistan, which compelled the United States to withdraw. For those



who oppose military intervention in Afghanistan, the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan can be another tomb in the graveyard of empires. Whatsoever is the case, major powers in general and regional actors in particular give major share to Afghanistan in their foreign policy calculations.

Pakistan's Afghan Policy: Compulsion or Strategic Depth

Pakistan and Afghanistan are neighboring countries, having common history, traditions, culture, customs, and Religion. People of both the countries have historical and longstanding relations. Scholars believe that in the past, Afghanistan was like a 'natural defense' for the people housed in present day Pakistan (Chaudhry, 2016). It was the case that after the creation of Pakistan, border between the two states mostly remained porous from 1947 to 2017. Islamabad began fencing its porous border with Afghanistan in March 2017 after coming under attack from numerous militant groups with bases in Afghanistan (Basit, 2021). Border management initiative from Pakistani side evidently shows the country's good intention to develop relations with Afghanistan on equal footing and respect for its territorial integrity and sovereignty rights. It also suggests Pakistan's intention to counter the strategic depth narrative, i.e., that Pakistan doesn't support any unchecked movement across the border. In other words, the initiative suggests that Pakistan supports rule-based strategic, economic, political, and diplomatic relations with Afghanistan. History shows that Afghanistan's dilemmatic political condition directly affects Pakistan. It, therefore, becomes natural for Pakistan to struggle for a stable Afghanistan because it has a cascading effect on it [Pakistan] when there is civil war or political instability in its immediate neighborhood. Experts believe that an instable and insecure Afghanistan has 'trickle-down effect on Pakistan' (The Express Tribune, 2021). Kondo, Andreyeva, South, MacDonald, & Branas (2018) count multiple factors contributing to the spread of violence in immediate neighborhood. The most important among these factors is weak social cohesiveness because "low levels of social cohesion are indicative of social disorder and lack of collective efficacy, which are risk factors for violence" (p. 254). To put Afghanistan on the touchstone of social cohesion, it becomes evident that this country is less cohesive and more fragmented. For Begum (2019), Afghanistan is a "Tribal Confederation" (p. 40). This study opines that a weak confederation of various tribes can't successfully promote an inclusive political system in Afghanistan. Enjoying this weakness and intra-national bifurcation in Afghanistan, international competitors find it an easy country to drag it in global wrangling and exploit its strategically important location.



Afghanistan's constant victimization and entanglement in great powers' wrangling exposes the country to perpetual social, economic and political crisis. In 1979, the former Soviet Union and in 2001, the United States of America respectively attacked Afghanistan. These attacks, on one hand bitterly disturbed the social, economic, political and security condition of the country and on the other hand, they forced a big segment of the society to move to Pakistan. Pakistan inevitably welcomed the Afghans and accommodated them in the country. These attacks also gave birth to resentful and revengeful Afghani population. Resultantly, Afghanistan became a smoldering ember for both the aggressors and neighboring countries in tandem. In the context of Social Contagion Theory, Pakistan is the only country, which is in hot waters. It is the case that Pakistan always tries to develop good relations with all the stakeholders in Afghanistan. This analytical study concludes that Pakistan's Afghan policy is because of compulsion and not otherwise. In other words, Pakistan's Afghan policy is defensive and protective rather than intriguing or provocative in nature. Lodhi (2022), a former ambassador of Pakistan to UN also supports this proposition, in terms of "cooperative relations with Afghanistan are a strategic compulsion for Pakistan".

Scholars consider Pakistan's Afghan policy, in terms of the 'strategic depth' proposition and they connect it to the Indian factor (Siddique, 2014; Rubin, 2020; Malkasian, 2021; Fitzgibbon, 2020). The Indian factor, however, is a cause, not an effect, and a reason is more to blame for this and that than an effect. India gives loan share to Afghanistan in its foreign policy objectives. For Paliwal (2017), India lends a political hand to the Afghan government because, if it doesn't, it will lose political influence in a neighboring nation of significant strategic importance.

Paliwal's (2017) sweeping statement straightforwardly supports the strategic depth thesis in favor of India. In other words, it is India and not Pakistan, which considers Afghanistan as a strategic depth. This proposition also supports Chanakya's foundational principle for the Indian foreign policy in the region, in terms of 'your neighbor is your natural enemy and the neighbour's neighbour is your friend' (Siddiqui, 2020). The epitome is that the strategic depth thesis, as it relates to Afghanistan, best serves India rather than Pakistan.

Us War Against Terrorism

Implications for Pakistan

Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the United States and its coalition allies,



including NATO countries, launched a military assault on Afghanistan. The main goal of the American and allied effort became "rebuilding Afghanistan," with the aid of an Afghan national army that could assume control of national security and a democratic, pluralistic, and open Afghan government whose authority would extend across the entire country (Kissinger, 2014). As a result of this war, Afghanistan is now politically unstable, experiencing an economic crisis, has a fractured population, lacks inclusive institutions, and is insecure. The efficient reconstruction of Afghanistan, in the opinion of Sopko (2021), who was also the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, required a thorough comprehension of the country's social, economic, and political dynamics. But American authorities frequently worked in the shadows.

Afghanistan's political unrest, economic woes, demographic disarray, and insecurity badly affected Pakistan. According to an estimate, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan suffered \$152 billion loss and roundabout seventy thousand death casualties in the war against terrorism. In return, the United States provided only \$20 billion to Pakistan. However, almost 80 percent of this aid came under the coalition support fund (Ahmed, 2021). Crawford (2021) rightly puts Pakistan within the "War Zone" area along with Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria (P. 14). For Crawford (2021), military of the United States of America designated "main war zones in Afghanistan [and] Pakistan" (p. 14). Although Pakistan was neither involved in September 11, 2001 attacks, nor did it have any connection with the perpetrators of these terrorist attacks. Nonetheless, it [Pakistan] became a war zone area for U.S. military not because of any other reason but because of its natural geographical attachment with Afghanistan. It is this natural attachment, which always causes social, political and security implications for Pakistan emanating from the dilemmatic condition of Afghanistan. A significant portion of Afghan society moved to Pakistan as a result of the Soviet Union's invasion of that country in 1979, and the U.S. onslaught following the 9/11 attacks encouraged terrorism, extremism, and bombings throughout the area in general and Pakistan in particular.

Afghan Peace Process: The Role of Pakistan

The US war against terrorism in Afghanistan took approximately two decades to enter into a possible peaceful settlement. During these two decades, Pakistan was the only country in the region, which compulsively faced the flames of terrorism, extremism and bomb blasts, the most



immediate repercussions of the war. It was the case that Pakistan magnanimously took interest in the development of a peaceful ambience in Afghanistan. Studies suggest that Islamabad was also urged by the United States to play a significant role in motivating the Taliban to engage them in peace negotiations (Idrees, Rehman & Naazer, 2019). As discussed above [see 4.2.], Pakistan always tries to develop good relations with all the stakeholders in Afghanistan. In this context, Islamabad has also developed working relations with the Afghan Taliban. Enjoying these relations, Pakistan played an important role in advancing the Afghan Peace Process.

Pakistan has always supported a peaceful, democratic and politically inclusive Afghanistan because the former will also benefit from regional peace if the latter will be in peace. In continuation of this intent, Islamabad has magnanimously offered its support for a consensus-based peace agreement among all the stakeholders. In 2018, the United States started peace talks with Afghan Taliban in Doha, Qatar, to conclude its longest war and bring lasting peace in Afghanistan (Qazi & Chughtai, 2020). Attempts from both sides [US & Taliban] experienced multiple setbacks with no hopes for concluding a viable and unanimous agreement. However, after many ups and downs the United States and Afghan Taliban signed a mutual agreement in February 2020. This agreement was made possible due to the high-minded efforts of Pakistan. For Gul (2021), the credit of US- Taliban peace deal goes to Pakistan. U.S. Department of State (2020) also acknowledges the role of Pakistan, in terms of “Pakistan did make positive contributions to the Afghanistan peace process, such as encouraging Taliban reductions in violence” (p. 150). Richardson (2021) opines that the United States and its other allies have recognized Pakistan’s efforts to persuade the militant organization to participate in peace negotiations.

U.S Withdrawal from Afghanistan: Implications for Pakistan

The original wording of the agreement between the Afghan Taliban and the United States of America states in Part Two (Paragraphs 1 and 2) that Washington and its strategic partners will periodically reduce their military presence in Afghanistan. The statement states that the United States will initially reduce its forces to 8,600 in 135 days and that a full pullout will take place 14 months following the declaration of agreement (Bass, 2020). Part One (Para 4) of the declaration states, “The United States commits to facilitate discussions between Afghanistan and Pakistan to work out arrangements to ensure neither country’s security is threatened by actions from the territory of the other side”. However, the United States left the country



(Afghanistan) in midnight between August 30 and 31, 2021 without any proper arrangements and Afghan Taliban immediately took its political control of Afghanistan without any resistance (Aljazeera, 2022). The United States' all of a sudden withdrawal left behind social, structural, security, political, and economic ruins in Afghanistan. Government officials fled the country, security forces left their barracks, bureaucracy became invisible, society plunged into perpetual trepidation, and economy became paralyzed. The whole country is now picturing "a deep humanitarian crisis" (Mansoor, 2022).

In December 2021, the government of Pakistan complained that the US's failures in Afghanistan throughout the course of its 20-year war against terrorism must be borne mostly by Pakistan. Islamabad slammed western media for accusing Pakistan of playing a "double game" and damaging the country's reputation abroad rather than giving Pakistan the credit it deserves (Khan, 2021). Islamabad also laments that Pakistan is the victim and that 9/11 had nothing to do with us. Pakistan joined together with the US to fight back, and as a result, it saw a significant backlash (Dawn, 2021a). For Kaura (2021), it is too early to properly understand the long-term foreign policy consequences of this crisis the Biden Administration has created, it however, threatens to derail Biden's home agenda, and Pakistan should bear the brunt of the blame. Hence, Pakistan is facing the brunt of unfounded and baseless allegations/blames with regard to Afghanistan.

After withdrawal from Afghanistan, the United States tellingly needed bases in the region for surveillance and future geostrategic dynamics against Afghan Taliban and other regional competitors. In May 2021, Imran Khan, the then Prime Minister of Pakistan in an interview to *Axios on HBO*, categorically declined the US strongly prospected demand for bases in Pakistan. Responding to a question of Jonathan Swan (interviewer), Imran Khan squarely declined any possible demand of the United States with, 'absolutely not' (Dawn, 2021b). This was the case that Imran Khan, the former Prime Minister of Pakistan clubbed his removal from office through a no-trust motion by the opposition parties with the US factor. Khan termed the move a U.S. conspiracy for regime change in the country. Hence, the ensuing domestic political turmoil in Pakistan may be gauged in the context of US withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Recent studies suggest that the United States of America left politically instable and economically weak Afghanistan in the hands of Afghan Taliban. Institutional decay, lack of



integrity, and freezing of donor's fund by the United States and other coalition partners are all adding more to the prevailed untoward condition in the country (International Crisis Group, 2022). The ensuing humanitarian crisis couples with the uncertain political condition in Afghanistan is disturbing Pakistan more than any country in the region. To count, it [Pakistan] has countenanced roundabout fifty militant groups, sixteen thousand terrorist attacks, eighty thousand death casualties, and over \$150 billion economic loss from 2006 to 2015 (Khan, 2021). The magnitude of loss, which Pakistan faced, evidently suggests that the country has suffered more than any country sans Afghanistan. The latter was the epicenter of both the US war against terrorism and terrorists' attacks. However, its flames severely engulfed Pakistan being the immediate neighbor of Afghanistan and the non-NATO ally of the United States in the war against terrorism.

In September 2022, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, the incumbent Foreign Minister of Pakistan lamented the neglectful attitude of international community in general and America in particular towards Afghanistan, in terms of inadvertent costs and enormous glitches (The Express Tribune, 2022). Lawmakers of Pakistan have already warned the policy makers about the consequences of humanitarian crisis in Kabul for Islamabad. For lawmakers, this crisis can cause national security headache for Pakistan (Khan, 2022). Again, Part One (Para 4) makes it the primary responsibility of the United States to develop arrangements so that neither country's security be disturbed from other side. However, the perpetual heedlessness of America is leaving Pakistan nowhere but to appeal to the international community to take responsible, contributing and pragmatic decisions with regard to the Afghan predicaments.

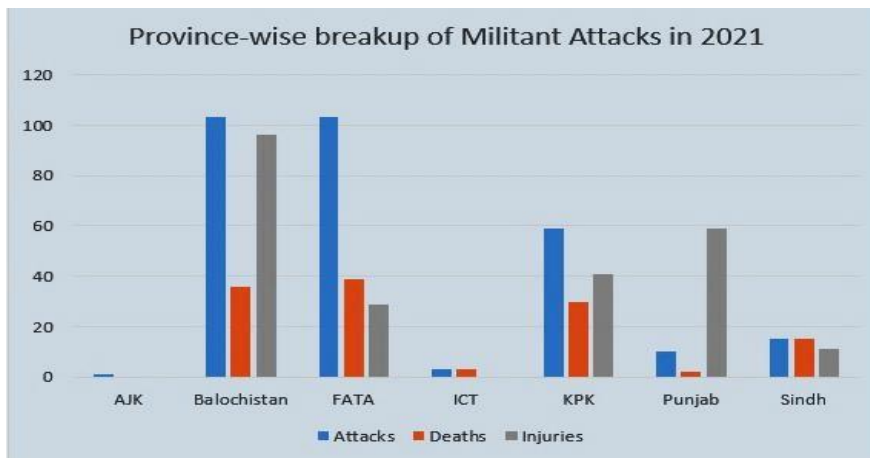
Mdiha (2022) rightly counts three concerns of Pakistan essentially connected with a dilemmatic Afghanistan, in terms of insecurity, resurgence of TTP and refugee problem. Madiha (2022), however, in continuation of Malkasian's (2021) proposition, translates Pakistan's dealing with Afghan Taliban, in terms of Afghan Nationalism trepidation. Lodhi (2022) calls it 'strategic compulsion'. For Lodhi (2022), Islamabad is also lamenting human rights violation in and reemergence of terrorists from Afghanistan, especially in the context of US withdrawal from the country. Sensing the concerns of Pakistan with regard to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, the latter groundlessly blames Islamabad for facilitating Washington's drone attacks in Afghanistan (Syed, 2022). The ensuing uneasy relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan



suggest that Islamabad is bitterly entangled in a nutcracker i.e. both the US and Afghan Taliban are blaming Pakistan to hide their own mistakes. Pakistan has already suffered from the US war against terrorism in Afghanistan.

Pakistan's main security issue is the threat posed by turbulent Afghanistan. After launching the National Action Plan (NAP) against the threat of terrorism in response to a terrorist attack on Army Public School (APS) in December 2014, Islamabad has very carefully muted the noise of terrorist attacks. 133 children were among the 149 people who died in the terrorist attack on APS (Kaphle, 2014). Operation Zarb-i-Azb and Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad (removal of dissension) were coordinated with the NAP in 2014 and 2017, respectively (Dawn, 2017). These effective efforts significantly decreased the number of terrorist attacks, sabotage attempts, and acts of extremism in the nation. However, with the US's departure from Pakistan, that country is extremely worried about the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan's (TTP) revival. A report from the independent think tank Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS) claims that the number of terrorist strikes in Pakistan increased by 56% in 2021. According to statistics, there were 294 terrorist incidents, 395 fatalities, and 629 wounded. The article states that as a result, 188 terrorists were killed and 222 were detained by the security forces. McDonald's, 2022. The PICSS analysis links the spike in terrorist attacks in Pakistan to the military offensive by the Afghan Taliban, which reached its height when the US withdrew and the Taliban took control.

Figure 1



Source: Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (2021).



According to another estimate, the security forces of Pakistan countenanced 105 death casualties at the hands of TTP in early 2022. Security forces also forcefully and befittingly pushed back the TTP offensive (Khan, 2022). Studies suggest that Pakistan remained relatively peaceful for six years from 2017 to 2021-22.

However, the US hasty withdrawal and incompetency of Afghan security forces to deal with Taliban provided opportunity to the latter and they easily took control of Afghanistan. The Taliban's unopposed take over motivated and resultantly encouraged the TTP to re-emerge and re-start their militant activities in Pakistan.

Recognition of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan is another issue hanging over the head of Pakistan like a Sword of Damocles. Islamabad is badly entangled between two extremes. Either it should recognize the Taliban Regime on the face of prevailing condemnation or it should wait for international response on the face of Taliban's uneasiness. In either case, Pakistan is subjected to face the music.

In case, Islamabad recognizes the Taliban government, it would bear international criticism. In case, Islamabad waits for international response, Taliban becomes stiffer with regard to it. In January 2002, the Taliban government pleaded the international community to formally recognize the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Gul, 2022).

However, International community is perpetually ignoring the Taliban's recognition demand. The more the time passes, the more the Taliban becomes a headache for Pakistan. Because being an active partner in Afghan peace process, Taliban expects more from Pakistan than other country.

Conclusion

Afghanistan is the immediate neighboring country of Pakistan. Both the neighboring states have common history, customs, traditions, culture and religion. Being sitting in close proximity with Afghanistan, Pakistan inexorably bears the brunt of social, political and economic problems of the country.

Hence, a peaceful Afghanistan is in the larger interest of Pakistan. Historical background shows that Afghanistan is at the crossroads of major powers geopolitical interests. Afghanistan's constant victimization and entanglement in great powers' wrangling serve as a reminder of its geopolitical and strategic relevance.



Its physical attributes provide permanency to its strategic beauty and its geopolitical importance invites global competitors to concentrate on this country. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the United States of America militarily attacked on Afghanistan. This war took roundabout 20 years and it finally ended with US withdrawal from and subsequent Taliban seizure of Afghanistan. The Taliban government is still waiting for its recognition by the international community in general and Pakistan in particular. However, neither country has yet recognized the Taliban regime. The Taliban regime's recognition issue couples with economic and political instability in Afghanistan are causing security, diplomatic, social, political, and economic problems for Pakistan.

Key Findings

This analytical study finds that:

- The situation in Afghanistan following US withdrawal is tantamount to USSR withdrawal, in terms of social, political and economic issues.
- Being situating in its close proximity, Pakistan is directly facing the repercussions of humanitarian, social, political and economic problems in Afghanistan.
- Pakistan is not a single actor, which considers Afghanistan as a strategic depth for fulfilling its regional geostrategic dynamics. All the major powers in general and regional actors in particular are using Afghanistan either as a launching pad or as a tool for protecting or advancing their geostrategic and geopolitical objectives.
- Taliban's successful treaty with the United States being a non-state actor has opened a new window for IR theorists. Because the usual proclivity of IR theories considers States as a principal actor galvanizing the dynamics of International Relations. The Taliban's successful peace agreement with the United States of America has given it [non-state actor] equal credence in International Relations.

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