
Discussion Paper-4

US Withdrawal from Afghanistan-Challenges and Way forward

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Prelude

This Article discusses the post-withdrawal scenario of US forces in Afghanistan by the end of summer this year and the impact of US withdrawal in Pakistan. The final phase of 20-year-old war of terror has finally began when American President Joe Biden announced 1st of May as the official start of the withdrawal till the complete withdrawal of last US and NATO forces by the end of summer 2021. The withdrawal is the outcome of Doha Agreement between the US and Taliban at Qatar on February 29, 2020. The agreement is followed by intra Afghanistan talks that resulted in deadlock between the Afghan government and the Taliban. On the contrary, Taliban is increasing pressure to hasten the US withdrawal and accusing the U.S. of violating the terms of the Doha Agreement reached under former President Donald Trump.

The theory of power sharing in the region provides a theoretical framework for the article. The article focuses on the post-withdrawal scenario of the US forces and changing dynamics of retaining US forces in Afghanistan after the denial of Pakistan for Airbases and air space for any misadventure by US in Afghanistan. Keeping in view the post-US-Taliban agreement, it is difficult to say with certainty that peace and stability may shape the future destiny of the region as America is planning to retain its 650 soldiers in Afghanistan and India is beefing up against Pakistan after the drone on Jammu Air Force base on June 27, 2021.

Keywords: Taliban, extremism, US, Afghanistan, withdrawal, Agreement, sustainability, great game.

Historical Background

The 9/11 attack were coordinated terrorist attacks on United states by Al-Qaeda on the morning of September 11, 2001. Almost 3000 people were killed that day when 2 out of 4 passenger flights slammed into Twin Towers of World Trade Centre in Manhattan, New York, USA. That paved the way for US waging their ‘forever war’ on terror supported by close US allies against Al-Qaeda and denying their safe havens in Afghanistan by removing the ruling Taliban from power. US accused Usama Bin Ladin as the mastermind behind the attack on twin towers and demanded Mullah Omar to hand over Bin Ladin that was hiding in Afghanistan. Mullah Muhammad Omer asked US if the evidence is provided for his involvement in 9/11, Bin Ladin will be trailed and punished accordingly if found guilty.

By that time in 2001, Taliban controlled 90 % of country. On 7 October 2001 US launched Operation Enduring Freedom with the help of United Kingdom, officially started their war on terrorism against extremist groups in Afghanistan. Airstrikes were carrier out at Kabul airport, Kandahar and Jalalabad. In December 2001, International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) for Afghanistan under the command authority of United Kingdom was authorized by the United Nations Security Council under the Resolution UNSCR- 1386 to provide security to Afghanistan Interim Authority in and around Kabul.

In August 2003, Northern Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) took the charge of ISAF and became the US-GB alliance member. US forces remained operational in Afghanistan independently under the direct US command and in Allied Coalition under NATO command. Taliban under the leadership of Mullah Omar launched an insurgency against the occupied US and ISAF forces in 2002 that continues to this day.

War on terrorism and Pakistan:

While the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan may have provided the rationale for the latest U.S. standoff with Pakistan, the relationship between the US and Pakistan is at the crossroads that presents a unique challenge to their respective policymaking communities.

After joining the U.S. war on terrorism, Pakistan was targeted as a collaborator, leading to terrorism against our country from the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan and other extremist groups. U.S. drone attacks in Afghanistan using Pakistan airbases and air space did not win the war, but they did create hatred in Afghans for Americans and Pakistan, swelling the ranks of Afghani terrorist groups against neighboring Pakistan.

US-Pak relationship becomes more complex due to many other issues, US demand to do more in the war against terrorism, America is evolving strategic relationship with India, recognition of Israel in the Muslim world, and the problem of religious extremism in Pakistan.

Pakistan stance (PM views)

Pakistan is ready to be a partner for peace in Afghanistan with the United States, but as U.S. troops withdraw, they will avoid risking further conflict. Our countries have the same interest in that long-suffering country: a political settlement, stability, economic development, and the denial of any haven for terrorists. Pakistan oppose any military takeover of Afghanistan, which will lead only to decades of civil war, as the Taliban cannot win over the whole of the country, and yet must be included in any government for it to succeed. In the past, Pakistan made a mistake by choosing between warring Afghan parties, but we have learned from that experience. We have no favorites and will work with any government that enjoys the confidence of the Afghan people. History proves that Afghanistan can never be controlled from the outside.

Loss in war (PM Views)

Pakistan has suffered so much from the wars in Afghanistan. More than 70,000 Pakistanis have been killed. While the United States provided \$20 billion in aid, losses to the Pakistani economy have exceeded \$150 billion. Our tourism and investment dried up. After joining the U.S. effort, Pakistan was targeted as a collaborator, leading to terrorism against our country from the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan and other groups. U.S. drone attacks, didn't win the war, but they did create hatred for Americans, swelling the ranks of terrorist groups against both our countries.

Militancy not a solution (PM views)

While Pakistan argued for years that there was no military solution in Afghanistan, the United States pressured Pakistan for the very first time to send troops into the semiautonomous tribal areas bordering Afghanistan, in the false expectation that it would end the insurgency. It did not, but it did internally displace half the population of the tribal areas, 1 million people in North Waziristan alone, with billions of dollars of damage done and whole villages destroyed. The "collateral" damage to civilians in that incursion led to suicide attacks against the Pakistani army, killing many more soldiers than the United

States lost in Afghanistan and Iraq combined, while breeding even more terrorism against us. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province alone, 500 Pakistani policemen were murdered.

Refugees' issues (PM views)

There are more than 3 million Afghan refugees in country, if there is further civil war, instead of a political settlement, there will be many more refugees, destabilizing and further impoverishing the frontier areas on our border. Most of the Taliban are from the Pashtun ethnic group and more than half the Pashtuns live on our side of the border. Country ere even now fencing this historically open border almost completely.

Outcome of bases (PM views)

If Pakistan were to agree to host U.S. bases, from which to bomb Afghanistan, and an Afghan civil war ensued, Pakistan would be targeted for revenge by terrorists again. Meanwhile, if the United States, with the most powerful military machine in history, couldn't win the war from inside Afghanistan after 20 years, how would America do it from bases in our country?

Extended troika (PM views)

Pakistan is part of the recent "Extended Troika" joint statements, along with Russia, China and the United States, unambiguously declaring that any effort to impose a government by force in Kabul would be opposed by us all, and also would deprive Afghanistan access to the foreign assistance it will need. These joint statements mark the first time four of Afghanistan's neighbors and partners have spoken with one voice on what a political settlement should look like. This could also lead to a new regional compact for peace and development in the region, which could include a requirement to share intelligence and work with the Afghan government to counter emergent terrorist threats.

Stance remains that Afghanistan's neighbors would pledge not to allow their territory to be used against Afghanistan or any other country, and Afghanistan would pledge the same. The compact could also lead to a commitment to help Afghans rebuild their country. Promoting economic connectivity and regional trade is the key to lasting peace and security in Afghanistan. Further military action is futile. If Pakistan share this responsibility, Afghanistan, once synonymous with the "Great Game" and regional rivalries, could instead emerge as a model of regional cooperation.

Security Challenges in Pakistan:

The US has given Stated Policy that US is pulling out Forces but not withdrawing from Kabul in terms of economic and humanitarian help and support for Afghan Forces. PM has refused to give bases to US. Transnational militant groups will increase their influence and operations resulting into bloodiest civil war in Afghanistan. The spillover effect on Pakistan will be in three perceivable forms: influx of Refugees, Export of terrorism & drugs; and Sectarian killings. These are three challenges for policing in KPK and Baluchistan with spread to South Punjab and interior Sindh reviving situation of 80's-90's.

Refugees Influx:

Civil war in Afghanistan will create pull factor for Mujahiddin from Pakistan and push factor for Afghans as Refugee to Pakistan. A movement has already started of Afghan LEA officers and their families moving toward Iran for onward settlement in Europe and US. This is accelerating as American

withdrawal from Afghanistan would be completed much before the September deadline. Pakistan would face new influx of refugees despite the completion of fencing. And refugees would eventually like to move to the Urban centers: Big challenge for KP Police. Non acceptance of refugees by locals will be another challenge.

The refugees will bring along terrorism, guns, drugs, other smuggled goods, and commit crime which will be a challenge for police. Afghan refugees living in KPK and Baluchistan own local businesses, properties that have almost no record, as political parties have registered them on their ID cards and voter lists to vote in elections here.

Under the table deal:

Any underhand deal with Taliban where the they militants would not target the LEAs, but would have hand in other matters of Administration, would have dire effects. Police would be the biggest loser in any deal of establishment with Taliban. This would depend on how fast the Taliban and its allies take over the districts adjoining KP and Baluchistan and announce their sovereign government in Afghanistan.

Rise of Pashtun Nationalism.

If Taliban/Militants are conceded any more space by the state, it would be boost to PTM in the newly merged districts in KP, as PTM is clearly on the wrong side of the establishment. Afghan and KPK Pashtun and religious parties supporting the Taliban could cause trouble for people in those areas.

Increase in crime and terrorism

Increase in crimes like kidnapping for ransom, smuggling of goods & weapons and extortion. - Rise in organized crime for generation of funds / resources for enrolment, weapons, logistics and operations. Refugees arriving in Pakistan will be homeless and destitute. They will resort to heinous crimes including murders, dacoities and extortion. If US logistics are passing through Pakistan, their convoys may be looted. So, security of the passing troops/logistics will be on police. Withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan may increase terrorism in Pakistan and will have implications for LEAs in Pakistan and especially in KP & merged districts.

Cross Border Infiltration

The main question is, is our bordering districts equipped enough to counter this situation? Presence of agents of hostile agencies, especially in KP and Baluchistan. These agents in the garb of refugees will take shelter in Pakistan. They will indulge in terrorist activities and create mayhem in the country. Rise and activation of already existing cells of various anti-state groups in our big cities is another challenge.

After American withdrawal Taliban's will go for a complete occupation of Afghanistan including Kabul. A campaign is already launched. With the perception that Taliban's are backed by Pakistan other ethnic groups supported by India and Iran will exert pressure on Pakistan to restrain Taliban. Blasts and killings in cities of Pakistan can be anticipated in such scenario. Example is set by the blast in Lahore today.

Rise of Jihadis

Taliban will organize, and it will have spillover effects for Pakistan. This time, the Radicals have Daesh elements that are ruthless and cold-blooded. The civil war, therefore, will be intense, and so will be the influx of refugees. Afghanistan is destined to be a source of turbulences for Pakistan and vice versa so Pakistani intelligentsia and LEA professionals need to learn living with it. This time old pattern may not get repeated in Afghanistan due to cautious attitude of Pak Establishment, warming Sino-Iran relations, growing Turko-Uzbek-Pak league, Arab-Israel romance, Indo-Taliban dialogue, and etc.

Taliban's perceived victory against sole superpower will embolden all the local extremist groups, dormant presently. Police being on the front line will have to bear most of the brunt. We can do well to proactively neutralize sleeping cells and develop strong intelligence capacity. Internal intelligence coordination would be critical to thwart this threat. NACTA must convene a meeting of all stakeholders to develop possible scenarios, our potential response, and its requests.

Political Instability

Our disorder house & bad governance shall further be exposed resulting in abrupt, knee jerk decisions, complicity and irrational policies; further drift and go down, already a committee of intelligence headed by single agency has consolidated to lead all and Nacta is nowhere to be seen. Security centric state strategy shall get further consolidated and desire to make Pakistan a welfare and economic centric to get further diminished.

Sectarian Violence

The sectarian aspect cannot be ignored as well. Though at this spot in time, it seems dormant but regional dynamics may require igniting the sectarian emotions. Resurgence of militant groups for aim of gaining political control of the state. Afghan Taliban are fighting Afghan Forces in 26 provinces out of 34. They have vowed to enforce Islam. According to a UN report AQ is staging a comeback relying on enduring partnership of Afghn-Pak Taliban. IS has launched deadly attack on a school in Kabul. They claimed killing of Hazara labourers in Quetta and murder of Afghan commander Nek M Rahbar in Peshawar. TTP has claimed suicide attack on Serena Quetta. Three attacks were reported on FC and Police who also killed 4 terrorists of IS and LeJ in Aab e Gum operation. IS is also present in Karachi and Shikarpur a new flashpoint of sectarian extremism.

Rise and proliferation of religious and sub national groups:

Baloch insurgents will draw inspiration from changing scenario and intensify attacks in and around Gawadar. The presence of more than two dozen militant groups in Waziristan and Pakhtun Populated border areas of Zhob and Chamman are new hub of Taliban. More separatist movements could intensify in Baluchistan and Sindh than ever before. More separatist movements could intensify in Baluchistan and Sindh than ever before. Afghan and KPK Pashtun and religious parties supporting the Taliban could cause trouble for people in those areas.

Some Other Thoughts:

The Taliban uprising in Afghanistan will have spillover effects in Pakistan. But the situation will be different this time as police has to combat & contain them in NMDs first. Police despite all the improvements still lack the required resources for that. In that we must be more prepared and vigilant to counter their offensive in case. Further it will also have negative impact on religious extremists' groups in Pakistan. Need is to remain watchful of them too. A quick collapse of the anti-Taliban structures and seemingly a pro Pakistan govt there. Gathering of loose coalition of anti-Taliban forces leading to a protracted civil war like that of 1990's. Regional NSAs like Daesh and other groups will try to establish their strongholds bordering Pakistan.

In all possible scenarios, regional powers will support/oppose the local factions. Any of these situations will create pressure on Pakistani borders, hence on police in Pakistan. As far as intelligence gathering is concerned there is no match of institution of police station. However, as, sometimes conceded also that we have had bad experience, badly ignored are both treasures of intelligence viz PS and SB. No system of collection, analysis, fusion, feedback, reappraisal exists. We keep blaming politicians. But who stops us from making revival in such areas? Definitely spillover of violence and TTA brandishing their brand of ideology shall result in deep state, non-state actors and regional powers rife and conflict, with varied response and questing to hold, capture and take space to safeguard interest, shall stem wave of instability; killings, blasts, surge in insurgency.

Way Forward and Suggestions:

Spill-over from Afghan soupier would happen and regarding that Pakistan Police should gear up. Following is suggested.

- 1- We need to do the target hardening at all levels, including effective border management, vigilance, intelligence-based operations and effective monitoring of Jihadi elements and their sympathizers. Regulatory work to tackle refugee problems and Registration. It may be taken up at an appropriate level.
- 2- Strict implementation of NAP.
- 3- Continuity in capacity building of police in merged areas, CTD and police.
- 4- Police and CTDs can only ensure and should adopt proactive policy in respect of TTP, AQ, IS, their affiliates like LeJ and Baloch insurgents inside Pakistan. Prevention is better than cure.
- 5- **Counter Terrorism Department (CTD):**
 - i. 'Invigorate CTDs' is the two-word panacea. Due to a matrix of conflicting interests, many a times, district police formations feel stressed to cope with terrorists whilst clear headed CTD units can operate efficaciously.
 - ii. Place thorough professional officers in CTDs who are free from strings.
 - iii. Recheck the intelligence matrix of CTDs and place it on yellow threat level
 - iv. CTD Punjab should place intelligence operators/agents on front-line districts in KP, Karachi and Baluchistan, and if possible, behind the enemy lines in Afghanistan also.

- v. Though thoroughly undesirable but as last recourse, Special operation units of CTDs should keep taking out critical radicals.
- vi. Keeping proactive regarding sectarian issues. Here, the role of CTD is important. Besides, the sub-nationalist sentiment due to petty matters is on the rise in Sindh. Similarly, Baluchistan is also boiling at sub-optimum temperatures now as they are no very well trained. The radicals might lure it in their favor. Therefore, it needs consideration.
- vii. CTDs should be in liaison all over Pakistan. A system should be devised so that CTDs of all provinces are aware of information, targets, and situation at the same time and liaison with other agencies.
- viii. Intelligence coordination among LEAs is suggested.

6- Police:

- i. Police Intelligence set be upgraded, geared, optimize to collect, collate, predict scenarios; field police units be appraised of situations and pragmatic response for different scenarios be planned and CTD must review it's working, based on past lessons learnt and go after active groups and sympathizers (all chiefs of police organization must regularly online exchange thoughts).
 - ii. Additional Force with proper training in counterterrorism especially in NMDs.
 - iii. Training for existing Force.
 - iv. Police & CTD must have solid evidence against terrorists using Afghan soil against Pakistan.
 - v. Police need to be put on high alert against all such groups with foreign links like TTP, LeJ, Ethno- Nationalists, religio-political and political.
 - vi. The capacity of police should be augmented in terms of manpower, better infrastructure, logistics, modern gadgetry, and trainings.
 - vii. Security of police personnel/ establishment, sensitive installations, important personalities should be enhanced.
 - viii. For community building, Police must ensure that local bodies elections in the newly merged districts are held in time.
 - ix. Police must quickly deploy trained Police strength in NMDs in KP, improve its performance in efficient service delivery, intelligence gathering and to keep close liaison with all stakeholders: Military, FC, IB, Scouts, PTM, other political parties etc.
- 7- Pushing the Stakeholders at policy level to come up with the National stance and Narrative that may keep things clear and farther from gray will help police act decisively.
- 8- Neutralize all potential militant elements by strict surveillance and monitoring by devising joint proactive policy by Intelligence Bureau, CTDs and SBs.
- 9- Close monitoring of social media / electronic media and penetration in the core groups, simultaneously advocating alternative state narrative.
- 10- Professional handling of incidents of organized crime and identify all gaps to plug collection of Chanda, Charity, Bhatta or crime proceeds etc.
- 11- Cross border intrusion of TTP taking refuge and shelter in Afghanistan, Afghan Taliban, AQ and IS can only be checked and stopped by Army and FC through fencing and other measures.
- 12- Counter Terrorism Strategy of Pakistan may be reviewed.

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- 13- Afghan refugees living here, they own local businesses, properties that have almost no record, as political parties have registered on their ID cards and voter lists to vote in elections here.
 - 14- Data of all Afghan businessmen and residents at each police station and district.
 - 15- Fencing on Pak-Afghan border should be expedited.
 - 16- Refugees should be restricted to camps and should be kept under close surveillance. They should not be allowed to diffuse into the local population.
 - 17- Besides, the Pukhtoon Nationalist Movement is also likely to get serious dent with the removal of the present regime in Kabul, along with their American & Indian buddies.
 - 18- Logistic support such as good weapons and transport.
 - 19- Policy of vigilance, engagement, and action if and when required needs to be followed.
 - 20- The State must draw a clear policy/strategy for the police and the LEAs including the Rules of Engagement.
 - 21- Beside Commence & Enhance coordination on regular basis with all other stakeholders to take preemptive actions, to deescalate acts of terrorism & response collectively for subversive activities & take related measures for rescue & relief.
 - 22- Begin Preparing contingencies for eruption and likely prolonged organized violence; budgeting and community policing; put into practice NISP 6R; NAP related points to counter terrorism be rebooted.

Remarks

Situation is indeed challenging, already many serious incidents have taken place. We need a national action plan to be effective. NISP should be enforced with full vigor.