

PEACEBUILDING IN AFGHANISTAN: SHIFTING US STRATEGIES SINCE 2001

*Amanullah Khan and Dr. Noman Sattar**

Abstract

Foreign policy tends to undergo review with the changes in foreign policy objectives. Terrorist attacks in the United States in 2001 not only altered the course of history for America but also impacted dynamics of world politics in general and South Asian politics in particular. During the last seventeen years, despite having different strategies by the three US administrations, the United States' main foreign policy goals in Afghanistan—to eliminate terrorists, bring peace in the country and transform Afghan state and society into a modern state have not been accomplished. Instability and bloodshed continue, making the country the center of attention for the international community. It is important to evaluate strategies of different US administrations toward Afghanistan since 2001. This paper, written from a Neorealist perspective, attempts to explore different dimensions of the US strategies, i.e., their strengths and shortcomings, achievements and the role of regional stakeholders. The paper argues that US policies have not worked mainly because of complexities of the internal dynamics of Afghanistan. These complexities are caused by the conflicting goals of neighboring and regional states that the US policies need to take into account.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Peacebuilding, US Strategies, Regional Politics, Smart Power, Hard Power, War on Terrorism, ISIS, India, Pakistan.

Introduction

Hard power approach had underlined US foreign policy for most of its history. The same trend is reflected in US foreign policy today. While Washington also pursues soft approach, however, predominantly, use of force, threat of use of force and sanctions have been used as instruments to achieve foreign policy goals.¹ There are obvious reasons for its reliance on hard power. Having the biggest economy of the world, advanced military industrial complex, a leader in technology and a huge geographical size make it the sole superpower of the world. In other words, we are living in an American world order, commonly understood as unipolar world order.

The US hard power approach has had consequences for peace and stability in the world. The superpower could not achieve substantial gains out of large scale military campaigns in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Intervention in Afghanistan, after terrorist attacks in the US, was justified as mandated by the UN Security Council, while the international peacekeeping body was bypassed in case of military invasion of

*Amanullah Khan is PhD scholar in Peace and Conflict Studies department, Center for International Peace and Stability (CIPS), at National University of Sciences and Technology, Islamabad. Dr. Noman Sattar is an expert in nuclear studies.

Iraq.² In both the cases, little has been achieved; rather repercussions exceed achievements. Al-Qaeda, the main set target in Afghanistan, was eliminated from Afghanistan but not the Taliban. Likewise, in Iraq, Saddam Hussein's government was successfully toppled, however it could not stabilize the country. Consequently, a new terrorist organization, Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), emerged as an outcome of the anarchy³ that destabilizes many countries today.⁴ The group which is far more aggressive in its terrorist activities than Al-Qaeda is now a reality in Afghanistan.

Keeping in view the above mentioned realities, this paper studies the US strategies toward Afghanistan. It is designed to answer key questions like, what have been the US approaches toward Afghanistan since 2001? Which of the US administration's policy worked, which one could not work and for what reasons? What are the major challenges to the US in Afghanistan's peacebuilding? How Pakistan and India factor come into play in the US strategy in Afghanistan.

A Glimpse of US Engagement in Afghanistan

Primary goal for America in Afghanistan remained to destroy terrorist safe havens and to transform the country's political, economic and social structures into a modern state in line with liberal ideology of democracy, free market economy, rule of law and human rights. Unfortunately, none of the goals has been accomplished completely. Afghanistan houses hundreds of thousands of militants yet, belonging to different groups, mainly the Taliban, Tehrik e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and ISIS. Similarly, Afghan political government stays in a fragile condition without having effective writ outside the capital, Kabul.⁵

Ostensibly, the US regional objectives restrict its earnest drives for peacebuilding in Afghanistan. Resistance from the regional countries toward the prolonged presence of the US troops in Afghanistan is also a hurdle toward peacebuilding in the country. Huge economic and human cost tied with the Afghanistan mission is yet another moral and public pressure on the US government to conclude its mission in Afghanistan.⁶ In addition, the US relations with some NATO allies in Europe are at odds, especially after the Trump administration imposition of tariffs on import of steel from Europe.⁷ The following figure demonstrates the scenario, discussed above.



Figure-1: Challenges to US objectives in Afghanistan
Source: Authors

The Bush Era: Hard Power Approach

George Bush had a harder posture on international issues of American interests. Intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq, for example, were direct military adventurisms. His administration also kept military option on the table against Iran.⁸ Roots of the current unrest in the Middle East could be traced back to the invasion of Iraq in 2003 by his administration on mere false intelligence reports about possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) by Saddam Hussein's regime.⁹ His policies, thus, had the dominant element of hard power approach.

Regarding Afghanistan, his strategy¹⁰ of sharp and powerful reaction to the 9/11 terrorist attacks were based on over optimism on his part. Diplomacy was not given due consideration to address the issue of terrorism. A global war on terrorism campaign begun that met with partial success because of conflicting perspectives on the definition of a terrorist.¹¹

Challenges are part and parcel of every military campaign especially if it is taken against a state actor. However, due to the massive killings in the terrorist attack on the soil of the world superpower, a supportive international environment helped the US to overcome the challenges. By and large, the initial years of intervention could not witness much resistance. Taliban government was easily dissolved, interim Afghan government was formed, and international donors funded Afghan government for building its own security forces. Yet, a few challenges could be listed that emerged in the subsequent years.

- After 2004. Taliban re-organized and their insurgency got momentum, many attacks on the US and NATO troops were reported.

- Mistrust between Pakistan and US grew. Pakistan officially protested against drone attacks inside Pakistan's FATA region that were seen against the sovereignty of Pakistan.¹²
- Pakistan got alarmed by the growing Indian influence in Afghanistan.
- Iran and China got alerted over the growing insecurity in Afghanistan.
- Domestic pressure in the final years of Bush administration due to the deteriorated economic condition of the US. Moreover, increase in the killings of the US forces in combat operations in Afghanistan also put pressure on the US government to wind up its military mission in Afghanistan.

Invasion of Iraq in 2003 by the Bush administration along with Britain was the first major turn in the US policy toward Afghanistan. Bush shifted focus from an unfinished mission in Afghanistan to Iraq that multiplied challenges for the US internationally and negatively affected its Afghanistan mission. Commentators opine that had Iraq war been avoided, situation could have been different in Afghanistan.¹³ At large, Bush approach reversed some of the major gains against Taliban in initial years of intervention. Afghanistan remained unstable with more violence and anarchy by 2008.

The Obama Era: Smart Power Approach

Barack Obama was more a smart statesman than his predecessor, Bush. His international approach reflected the idea of rapprochement, peace and dialogue. Withdrawing troops from Iraq, rebuilding relations with Cuba,¹⁴ and a nuclear agreement with Iran and world powers¹⁵—the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)—are some examples in this regard. His policies had comparatively a softer posture than Bush. At the same time, he used and threatened to use military force in some cases, i.e., Libya and Syria.

Obama was of the view that reckless use of force is counterproductive and creates more terrorists.¹⁶ The following were some of the turning points in the US policy regarding Afghanistan during Obama's era.

- Announced ending Iraq mission in order to focus on Afghanistan;
- Also pushed for more troops in Afghanistan, ordered for deployment of 30,000 more troops in Afghanistan;
- Gradually started withdrawing of troops in 2014 and announced complete drawdown by 2016;
- Extended the scope of his policy and included Pakistan too with his policy announced in 2009, named Af-Pak policy.

Challenges continued for his administration too. Public pressure mounted against his government to withdraw forces from fighting useless wars abroad in the face of growing number of casualties of the US troops in these missions. The decision to add more troops to Afghanistan mission during the economic crisis, at home, was definitely a bold decision from Obama. Hence, his first term approach carried on with the legacy of Bush except that he announced gradual withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan.

Overall, violence continued along with some efforts for reconciliation with the Taliban. A few additional challenges that faced Obama were as following:

- Obama administration repeatedly expressed concerns over the presence of Haqqani network and Quetta Shura in Pakistan whom it considers targeting US and allied NATO troops in Afghanistan.¹⁷
- The blame game further undermined trust in the bilateral relationship between US and Pakistan, especially after killing of Osama Bin Laden. While attack on a Pakistan Army check post (Salala)¹⁸ and Raymond Davis issue¹⁹ fueled tensions between the two allies.

The Trump Era: More of a Hard Power Strategy

Donald Trump pursued aggressive diplomacy as is evident from US engagement with the world during his first two years in office. United States' relations with the world in general appeared to be in decline. Inclusively, his administration's approach toward global politics could be summarized as following:

- Withdrawal from JCPOA;
- Trade war with China, its European allies, Canada;
- Building controversial wall on border with Mexico;
- Banning immigrants from several Muslims countries;²⁰
- Withdrawal from UN Human Rights Council;
- Controversial move to shift US embassy to Jerusalem and recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.
- An important positive move by his administration, so far, could be mentioned as the development of denuclearizing North Korea and reduce tensions in the Korean Peninsula.²¹

On Afghanistan, Trump, during his election campaign, was of the view to completely abandon Afghanistan mission and not to waste American taxpayers' money on fighting fruitless wars, rather use the valuable resources on building America again. In a tweet on January 11, 2013, he writes, "Let's get out of Afghanistan. Our troops are being killed by the Afghanis we train and we waste billions there. Nonsense! Rebuild the USA."²² However, after becoming president, he reviewed his decision of withdrawal on the pretext that hasty drawdown would lead to increase in insurgency in Afghanistan.²³

Below is a glimpse of his approach toward Afghanistan:

- Sending more troops to Afghanistan;
- A policy having elements of ambiguity and unpredictability, more focused on military use of force against Taliban;
- Threatening International Criminal Court (ICC) with sanctions in case the court proceeds with alleged war crimes by the US troops in Afghanistan.²⁴

The Trump Administration faces multiple challenges regarding its mission in Afghanistan. The prevailing complex scenario reduces any optimism for the prospects

of peace in the country; neighboring countries of Afghanistan remain concerned at developments there.

Current challenges to the Trump strategy in Afghanistan could be mentioned as:

- Presence of ISIS;
- Distrusted relationship with Pakistan, suspension of Coalition Support Fund and economic aid to Pakistan;²⁵
- Hostile relations with Iran and its alleged support to Taliban;
- Alleged Russian support to Taliban;
- Tensions with Turkey, a NATO member that supported US mission in Afghanistan;²⁶
- Low domestic and international support for Afghanistan mission;
- Human rights violations, large scale civilian casualties in air operations;
- Weak Afghan government that faces a number of domestic challenges ranging from security to economy and political instability.

Shifting US Strategies

Bush administration's policy after 9/11 attacks in the United States remained confined to Afghanistan only. It primarily aimed at eliminating Al-Qaeda and removing Taliban from power. The scope of destroying terrorists' safe havens was later extended to the FATA areas of Pakistan in the middle of 2004 with the initiation of drone attacks. However, the official policy of Bush administration, on paper, did not include Pakistan. Broadly, Bush's approach focused on military victory against the militants in Afghanistan.

In 2009, the new administration of Barack Obama, announced its Af-Pak policy. Pakistan's role was officially linked to the success or failure of the US mission in Afghanistan. The US administration realized the critical role of Pakistan for peace and stability in Afghanistan. While more troops were added to the existing number of the US forces in Afghanistan, drone attacks in Pakistan's tribal areas also continued. Positive about Obama's administration approach to Afghanistan was that dialogue process with Taliban was initiated. Taliban were recognized as a legitimate actor in Afghan politics, in other words.²⁷ They set up their office in Qatar and actively participated in many bilateral and multilateral talks. Obama's approach could, therefore, be termed as a smart power approach.

The current administration of Donald Trump has sent 3000 additional troops to Afghanistan. Trump's policy further expanded the scope of its approach to India and named it as Afghanistan and South Asia strategy. He avoided giving any fixed timeline for exit and conditioned withdrawal of the US troops on the ground situation in Afghanistan. While Pakistan was asked to do more against Haqqani network, India was offered to play a greater role in Afghanistan.²⁸ Largely, his policy emphasized on achieving victory against insurgents through military operations.

Outcome of the Administrations' Strategies

The three US administrations' policies differently impacted the situation in Afghanistan, especially in Pakistan. Bush administration's hard power approach resulted in the immediate overthrowing of the Taliban regime in Kabul. It paved the way for installing an interim government through the Bonn Conference. President Bush pursued a policy of inflexibility toward Afghan Taliban.²⁹ Conversely, Barack Obama tried to achieve some visible successes for a respectful and timely exit from Afghanistan. His opened ended policy worked to some extent in terms of relative peace in Afghanistan by recognizing Taliban as a legitimate political entity. During 2006-2013, Pakistan faced grave internal security challenges.³⁰ The table below reflects major achievements of the three US administrations in Afghanistan mission since 2001.

Administration	Approach	Major Gains in Afghanistan
George Bush	Hard Power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ overthrowing of the Taliban regime ▪ installing Afghan democratic government; ▪ building Afghan army and police force.
Barack Obama	Smart Power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ killing of OBL; ▪ dismantling of Al-Qaeda from Afghanistan; ▪ closure of detention centers in Afghanistan; ▪ recognizing Taliban as a legitimate force and gaining Taliban confidence to start dialogue with; ▪ Strengthening capacity and capabilities of Afghan security forces to lead in combat operations; ▪ ending combat mission of US troops in 2014 and drawdown by the timeline, 2016.
Donald Trump	Hard power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yet to be seen

Table-1: US Strategies and Major Gains

Source: Authors

It is imperative to underscore that despite some achievements by the Bush and Obama administrations, violence in Afghanistan remained on the rise according to the available data. The positive impact of the achievements by the first two administrations of Bush and Obama is not yet visible. Excessive reliance on use of force, especially aerial bombings, resulted counterproductive with increase in civilian casualties over the years.

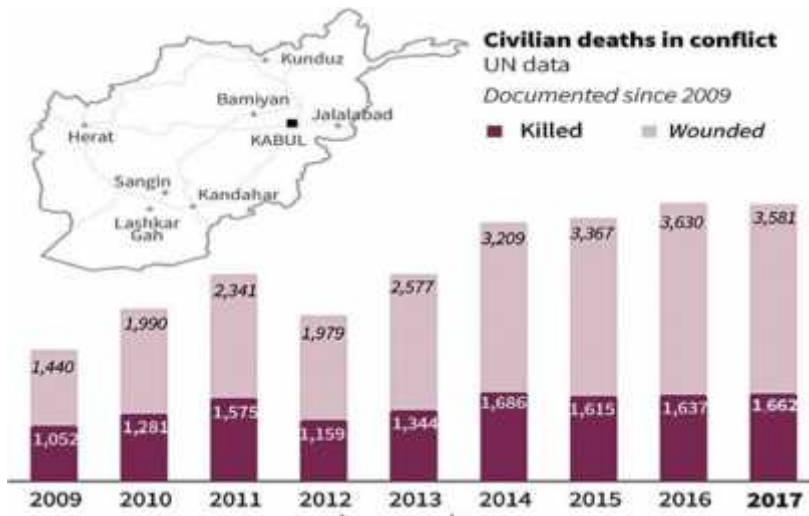


Figure-2: Civilian casualties in Afghanistan

Source: United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)

Additionally, the emergence of ISIS has adversely added to the already violent situation in the country. It gave a new dimension to violence, i.e., sectarian violence. The group claimed responsibility of multiple suicide attacks on Shia community in Afghanistan.³¹ According to the latest report of United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), in the first six months of 2018, civilian casualties hit record high despite some occasional ceasefire between Taliban and Afghan government.³² Worth mentioning is that domestic support in the US for Afghanistan mission which remained overwhelming during the Bush era, steadily started decreasing. The decline began during the second term of Bush and continues.

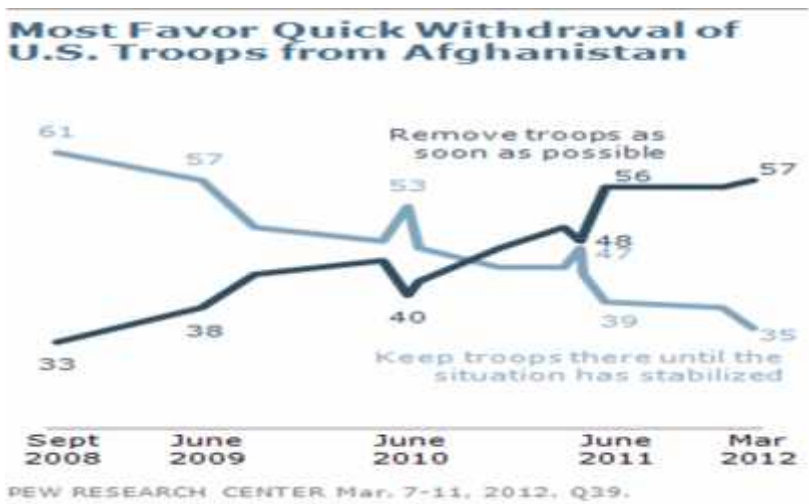


Figure-3: Public Opinion in the US

Source: Pew Research Center

Although the three administrations applied different approaches to handle the Afghanistan situation, however, mission Afghanistan is not yet completed. The partial success in Afghanistan could not be termed as durable.³³ Some commentators even reject the notion that US has accomplished its main objective in Afghanistan. They claim that US is failing in Afghanistan.³⁴

Afghanistan amidst the Politics of the Triangle

Every state and region has its own political, social, economic and strategic dynamics. Security situation in Afghanistan and success or failure of the US mission greatly depend on the local politics of Afghanistan and its linkage with the regional politics. While politics of South Asia is already complex, especially between Pakistan and India, the US policies toward the two nuclear states of South Asia also impact their bilateral relations and their role in the region including Afghanistan.

The complexity of issues and objectives of the three most influential states (Pakistan, India and US) contribute to the diminishing prospects for peace in Afghanistan. The bigger picture shows that India and the US maintain commonality of interests in Afghanistan. This is why US welcomes proactive Indian role in Afghanistan. On the contrary, there is a big factor of mistrust between Islamabad and Washington. Relations between Pakistan and the US have further deteriorated during Donald Trump's presidency.

By the end of Barack Obama's second term in office, the number of US drone attacks inside Pakistan's territory gradually decreased. The last major attack was the killing of Mullah Akhtar Mansoor, the leader of Afghan Taliban, in Balochistan province.³⁵ Notwithstanding, the continuing US concerns about the presence of Haqqani network in Pakistan's tribal areas, the current US administration of Donald Trump also refrained from conducting drone strikes inside Pakistan.³⁶

The figure below demonstrates that India enjoys support from the United States for its role in Afghanistan. While both the US and India are on the same page, Pakistan and United States play in a field of mistrust. Neither Pakistan is fully supportive of the US mission in Afghanistan nor does US address Pakistan's concerns seriously. Pakistan and India, on the other hand, also counter each other in Afghanistan.



Figure-4: Role of main stakeholders in Afghanistan politics

Source: Authors

Conclusion

US intervened in Afghanistan to respond to the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Shifts in United States strategy reflect that it is stuck in Afghanistan and the mission has become more confounding with the complex security situation. The rise of ISIS has added to the US and regional countries' concerns³⁷ about the future of Afghanistan and peace in the region. Trump's new policy seems lacking a clear direction. The situation in Afghanistan is deteriorating and apprehensions of regional countries are also growing.

In the current complex scenario in Afghanistan, a rosy picture may not be painted. Trump's strategy of defeating Taliban through offensive means seems failing. Recent Taliban attacks on Afghan security forces in major cities³⁸ signal an urgent need for change in the strategy. The deteriorating security situation may also affect the upcoming presidential elections in Afghanistan. Ironically, challenges are too grave in the face of limited options with the Trump administration. Privatizing security to private security companies, reportedly, is being discussed in US policymaking circles as an option; however, this might be a risky move. A viable option remains to engage Afghan Taliban in a constructive dialogue process.³⁹ Taliban too would be willing to find a win-win solution of the conflict through talks with the US.

United States need to accept that cooperation with regional stakeholders is essential for any strategy to succeed in Afghanistan. Reconciliation with Taliban also requires help from the neighboring countries. The defeat of ISIS through effective use of force could provide a common ground for cooperation. While Pakistan's role remains crucial, none of the three US administrations gained full confidence of Pakistan. It ought to be understood that peace in Afghanistan needs a comprehensive plan of action with positive contribution from all major stakeholders, both within Afghanistan and

external actors. Unilateral approaches of the US administrations have worked with partial success, and have failed to bring peace.

Now when a new government is in power in Islamabad, there lies a hope that Trump administration would seriously engage Islamabad to find a viable solution of the Afghanistan imbroglio. Imran Khan's government has also shown interest to play positive role for resuming dialogue process with the Taliban.⁴⁰ Pakistan Army also supports US and NATO mission in Afghanistan. Army Chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, reiterated Pakistan's support for the US mission by saying, "We will encourage actions by America and NATO that will bring peace to Afghanistan specifically and the region at large. But we also wish our security concerns should also be resolved."⁴¹ Opportunities for peace through dialogue should be availed to resolve the Afghan issue. This would shun security competition among the regional states, particularly between Pakistan and India in Afghanistan, and help the US wind down its military presence there.

End Notes

- ¹ American policy makers believe that it is the country's hard power that ensures that America remains indispensable for the world economic and political stability. Ian Bremmer, "Obama or not, U.S. still needs hard power," *Foreign Policy*, February 9, 2009, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/02/09/obama-or-not-u-s-still-needs-hard-power/>
- ² Brendon O'Connor and Martin Griffiths, "Making sense of anti-Americanism," in *The Rise of Anti-Americanism*, ed. Brendon O'Connor and Martin Griffiths, (London: Routledge, 2006), 2.
- ³ *The Rise and Fall of ISIS: From Evitability to Inevitability*, Report 2016-2017, The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, available at: <https://hcsc.nl/report/rise-and-fall-isis>
- ⁴ It has, so far, engulfed Syria, Yemen, Libya and Egypt in the Middle East. Nonetheless, areas under ISIS have been recaptured by the Iraqi and Syrian government forces in their respective countries; however, the organization still operates in pockets in the two countries. Egypt also battles ISIS militants in its Sinai region.
- ⁵ Afghan people are unsatisfied with the performance of the Afghan government. Their basic demand stands to protect their lives and properties which the government has so far been failed. At times, people protested in the Afghan capital and demanded resignation from Afghan President Ashraf Ghani. "Kabul anti-government protest turns deadly" *France 24*, June 2, 2017. Also refer to, Nematullah Bizhan, "Building legitimacy and state capacity in protracted fragility: The case of Afghanistan," The LSE-Oxford Commission on State Fragility, Growth and Development, April 2018, 4. <https://www.theigc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/afghanistan-report-v3.pdf>
- ⁶ Rod Nordland, Ash NGU and Fahim Abed, "How the U.S. government misleads the public on Afghanistan," *The New York Times*, September 8, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/09/08/world/asia/us-misleads-on-afghanistan.html>, to avoid public pressure, the U.S. government releases untrue statistics that contradicts with those of its friendly government in Kabul.
- ⁷ Larry Elliott and Richard Partington, "Trade war" What you need to know about US steel tariffs," *The Guardian*, May 31, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2018/may/31/trade-war-what-you-need-to-know-about-us-steel-tariffs>
- ⁸ "Bush says all options are on the table with Iran," *The Wall Street Journal*, June 11, 2008, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB121318018735663891>
- ⁹ Phil Shiner, Andrew Williams, ed. *The Iraq War and International Law*, (Portland, Hart Publishing, 2008), 64.
- ¹⁰ The term 'strategy' has been used interchangeably with 'approach' at different places in the paper.
- ¹¹ The US and regional countries have different orientations and approaches to deal with 'terrorists'. The US, for example, blames Haqqani network and Afghan Taliban for violence in Afghanistan. Pakistan, on the other hand, does not consider Afghan Taliban as a terrorist group as they do not hurt Pakistan's national interests. Pakistan's former advisor to Prime Minister on foreign affairs, Sartaj Aziz, admitted that Pakistan has some influence over the Afghan Taliban but not control. *The Express Tribune*, October 28, 2015, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/980666/pakistan-has-some-influence-on-taliban-but-no-control-over-them-aziz/>.
- ¹² Though, status of drone attacks is controversial before international law, however, to some sources such attacks were carried out with the consent of Pakistani authorities. In other words, there was a tacit support for the drone attacks if not a written agreement. See, Amnesty International report (2013, p.53.) titled "Will I Be Next? US Drone Strikes in Pakistan," <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/12000/asa330132013en.pdf>
- ¹³ David Rohde and David E. Sanger, "How a "Good War" in Afghanistan went Bad," *The New York Times*, August 12, 2007, <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/12/world/asia/12afghan.html>
- ¹⁴ His administration opened US embassy in Cuba and Obama visited the country as the first US president in nearly a century.
- ¹⁵ The five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany.
- ¹⁶ Remarks by former President Obama on the Administration's Approach to Counterterrorism, at MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, Florida, on December 06, 2016. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/12/06/remarks-president-administrations-approach-counterterrorism>
- ¹⁷ Pakistan denies any such presence of the network and asked US to share information of the group activities and safe havens. Pakistan Army also assured that US that its fight against terrorism is indiscriminate. "Indiscriminate action taken against terrorists," *Aaj TV* webpage, January 8, 2018, <https://aaj.tv/2018/01/indiscriminate-action-taken-against-terrorists-isp/>
- ¹⁸ As a result, Pakistan closed its borders for US supply to its troops in Afghanistan for six months.
- ¹⁹ The American killed two Pakistani s in Lahore. For detail refer to, Raymond Davis, *The Contractor: How I Landed in a Pakistani Prison and Ignited a Diplomatic Crisis*, (Dallas: Benbella Books, 2017)
- ²⁰ Jennifer Lee Barrow, "Trump Travel Ban: Lawful But Ill-Advised," *Harvard Journal of Law & Public Policy*, Vol.41, Issue 2, 692.
- ²¹ It depends on level of trust between the two countries; also an effective mechanism to move smoothly according to the mutually agreed terms and conditions. North Korea would like to see practical actions from the US to ease sanctions on North Korea while US may not do so unless it sees pragmatic steps from the North regarding denuclearization.
- ²² From the president official twitter page: <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/289807790178959360?lang=en>
- ²³ David Jackson and Jim Michaels, "Cautioning against 'hasty' pullout from Afghanistan, Trump clears path for more U.S. troops," *USA Today*, August 21, 2017 <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2017/08/21/donald-trump-send-4-000-more-troops-afghanistan/585488001/>

- ²⁴ Owen Bowcott, Oliver Holmes and Erin Durkin, "John Bolton threatens war crimes court with sanction," *The Guardian*, September 10, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/sep/10/john-bolton-castigate-icc-washington-speech>
- ²⁵ "US suspends \$300 million in military aid to Pakistan," *Asia Times*, September 2, 2018, <http://www.atimes.com/article/us-suspends-300-million-in-aid-to-pakistan/>
- ²⁶ The contradicting role of the US and Turkey in Syria, controversy over the Fethullah Gulen after the failed military coup in Turkey, Ankara's deal with Russia for buying S-400 advanced missile defense system, and the issue of the detained American pastor, Andrew Brunson, are the main sources of the current tensions between US and Turkey.
- ²⁷ As a group, Taliban have not been put in the US State department list of terrorist organizations.
- ²⁸ Santosh Chaubey, "Why US policy change on Afghanistan matters for India," *India Today*, August 22, 2017, <https://www.indiatoday.in/world/story/india-afghanistan-pakistan-china-us-president-donald-trump-1030749-2017-08-22>
- ²⁹ Taliban were not invited in the Bonn conference as a legitimate actor of Afghan politics which is considered a big mistake on the part of the western coalition.
- ³⁰ The insurgency of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) was at full force during this period of time. Pakistani authorities believed TTP to have links and support from Afghanistan.
- ³¹ Casey Garret Johnson, "The Rise and Stall of Islamic State in Afghanistan," USIP Special Report 395, November 2016, 13.
- ³² "Civilian deaths in Afghanistan hit record high," *UN News*, July 15, 2018, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/07/1014762>
- ³³ Two points are essential here regarding the end result of the US approaches since 2001: First, the US partially achieved the objective of eliminating the Al-Qaeda threat. Although, Al-Qaeda has lost its power to conduct any such big attack like the September 9, however, the ideology of the terrorist group remains alive yet. Effectively dealing with the ideology of the group needs joint comprehensive actions at a large scale in multiple ways. Secondly, another group, ISIS, poses a bigger threat to world peace now.
- ³⁴ Seth G. Jones, "Managing the Long War: US Policy toward Afghanistan and the Region," Testimony published by RAND Corporation in April 2017, 2. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/testimonies/CT400/CT472/RAND_CT472.pdf. Another latest report (May 2018) by Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) concludes with similar findings, "between 2001 and 2017, U.S. government efforts to stabilize insecure and contested areas in Afghanistan mostly failed." <https://www.sigar.mil/interactive-reports/stabilization/index.html>
- ³⁵ Adam Entous and Jessica Donati, "How the U.S. Tracked and Killed the Leader of the Taliban," *The Wall Street Journal*, May 25, 2016, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-tracked-taliban-leader-before-drone-strike-1464109562>
- ³⁶ There could be mentioned multiple reasons for this: one, that Pakistan has somehow developed its own drones capable of missile attacks on the militant targets; second, the US might have believed that Haqqani network is no more a potential threat to the US mission in Afghanistan; third, Pakistan has taken a firm stance against drone strikes inside Pakistan, calling it a violation of its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Pakistan Air Force Chief had even warned that Pakistan's fighter jets would shoot out any drone entering into the Pakistani air space. See, "US Drone in Pak airspace to be shot down: Air Chief," *The News*, December 8, 2017, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/253528-us-drone-in-pak-airspace-to-be-shot-down-air-chief>
- ³⁷ Massoumeh Torfeh, "ISIL in Afghanistan: A Growing Threat," *Al Jazeera*, August 20, 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/08/isil-afghanistan-growing-threat-17081313122968.html>
- ³⁸ Taliban are seizing more areas and killing Afghan security forces in record numbers. Reportedly, Taliban killed 22 Afghan soldiers and policemen a day in 2016. Since then death toll is kept secret by the Afghan government. "The Death Toll for Afghan Forces is Secret. Here's why?," *The New York Times*, September 21, 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/21/world/asia/afghanistan-security-casualties-taliban.html?emc=edit_th_180922&nl=todaysheadlines&lid=138881810922
- ³⁹ It is generally believed that Taliban may not be defeated militarily. The best option is to integrate them into the mainstream Afghan politics and recognize them as a potential political force. They could prove an asset for the Afghan government in its fights against ISIS.
- ⁴⁰ Iqbal Khan, "Turns, twists of Afghan Peace Process," *Pakistan Observer*, September 19, 2018, <https://pakobserver.net/turns-twists-of-afghan-peace-process/> "The world must do more against terrorism," *Dawn*, September 6, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1356002>.
- ⁴¹ "The world must do more against terrorism," *Dawn*, September 6, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1356002>