

## US FAILURE IN AFGHANISTAN: HALF-BAKED PLANNING OR PAKISTAN?

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### **Abstract**

*The Global War on Terrorism, launched as a direct result of the heinous 9/11 attacks, has been waging on for almost two decades with no clear signs of victory for the US. The US on a strategic level has lost the war as the primary opponent, Taliban, holds more territory than ever. The US and NATO coalition not only planned to eradicate terrorism in the country but also had great ambitions to modernize and rebuild the country; however, little has been archived so far. Amidst these harsh realities, Pakistan being a major non-NATO ally is often blamed to sabotage the war efforts by playing a so-called double-game while supporting the Global War on Terrorism on one hand and helping the Taliban on the other. Therefore, this paper investigates the reasons for the US failure in Afghanistan on a macro-level and what role Pakistan has played. Other than the notion that Pakistan is to blame, factors, such as, the US has no real long-term objectives for the war, employing conventional methods of warfare, underestimating the opponent and the terrain, lack of coordination among the NATO member states and the sudden attention shift from Afghanistan to Iraq, played a significant role in the current outcome. After evaluating all the evidence from the last two decades, it is clear that half-baked US planning led to the eventual failure of the war effort.*

**Keywords:** GWOT, Pakistan, Taliban, NATO, Terrorism.

### **Introduction**

**T**he Global War on Terror has waged on for 19 years without any clear signs of victory. Today, the Taliban control more territory than they controlled when the war started in 2001.<sup>1</sup> With 6,951 US military casualties<sup>2</sup> and almost trillion of dollars funneled into the graveyard of empires,<sup>3</sup> this has been the longest war the US has ever fought. Many reasons have been attributed to US failure in Afghanistan. Most notably the accusation against Pakistan, sabotaging the war effort by playing a double-game; supporting the US and international coalition forces on one hand and facilitating the Afghan Taliban on the other.<sup>4</sup> The reality on the ground is far more complex than this. The reason for the US failure in Afghanistan cannot be blamed on one of the several factors that played their part in the outcome of the war. Each factor must be considered

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and evaluated regarding the role it played in adding yet another misadventure in the US portfolio in combating a guerrilla force.

The US-led war in Afghanistan or commonly known as the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) was undoubtedly a virtuous move in response to the heinous crime against humanity, allegedly committed by Al Qaeda in 2001. However, it was destined to be another misadventure by the US from the very first battle of *Qilla-i-Jhangi*, where 500 prisoners revolted in an uprising, killing one CIA official and dozens of Northern Alliance soldiers; the revolt was not halted until the US used multiple airstrikes against the fighters.<sup>5</sup> The initial phase of the operation saw the use of airstrikes followed by troops deployment. By 2002, there were some 5,200 troops deployed in Afghanistan (the number only increased with every fiscal year).<sup>6</sup> The US continued to use airstrikes throughout the war with minimal long-term benefits as airstrikes are of no use if ground troops do not move in to secure the ground gained.

The US, initially, was able to push back the Taliban with superior conventional firepower and liberated Kabul within two weeks of the advancement. However, the US failed to identify and contextualize the type of opponent they were up against. This was not a conventional war but in its own right a revolutionary war. The US was not up against organized infantry or artillery regiments but radically indoctrinated Guerrilla warriors, who had recently brought about an Islamic revival of Afghanistan with the creation of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan under the Taliban in 1996 and were in no mood of giving up their fruitful struggle away. Many of them were battle-hardened and trained fighters, who had collaborated very closely with the US via Pakistan against the former USSR. This footnote in Afghan history must be kept in mind.

The War Machine just like any other mechanism has different parts that work together. Each performing a particular function; some trivial regarding the wider picture while others play a much more crucial role. Hence, when determining the reasons behind the US failure in Afghanistan, all aspects must be considered that worked together to bring the US to where it stands today. Apart from Pakistan's supposed role, other facets of the US war machine's effort are sudden attention shift from Afghanistan to Iraq that gave the Taliban and Al Qaeda a breathing space, the US outdated and irrelevant military strategy against the Taliban and Al Qaeda, topographical misunderstanding of the region, the vast and mismanaged Pak-Afghan border and the absence of any viable government in Afghanistan. The current US-backed Afghan government has proved to be ineffective and extremely corrupt. The United Office on Drugs and Crime found troubling trends in regards to rampant bribery in the public sector of the country that is stunting any chances of growth.<sup>7</sup> The US attempt at rebuilding Afghanistan has not been successful at all and her attempt in training and properly equipping the Afghan Army and law enforcement have also met no commendable success. Henceforth, each factor must be independently evaluated, only then it can be determined what was the main reason for the US failure in Afghanistan.

## **The Combatants and Their Motives**

The war in Afghanistan is unlike previous wars as it does not have primarily two opposing camps; here, the forces involved are the US-led international coalition, Al Qaeda forces and the Afghan Taliban. It is, therefore, different in the sense since each of the combatants regardless of their position in the two different camps are very individualistic when it comes to self-interest.

## **The United States of America**

For the US, the War on Terror (WoT) formally began as a response to the September 11, 2001 incident, when President Bush addressed the American people and the world at large: “Our war on terror begins with Al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated.”<sup>8</sup> The Bush administration pledged to eradicate terrorism internationally with Afghanistan and the Taliban regime at the forefront. The Taliban regime was ordered to hand over Osama bin Laden and all other aides residing in Afghanistan, release all foreign nationals unjustly detained, provide protection to diplomats, aid workers, and journalists, and close down all terrorist-training facilities. The US President made it clear that there would be severe repercussions for the Taliban regime if the demands were not met. In respect to the unfavorable response from the Taliban regime, who claimed that enough proof was not provided by the US administration regarding Osama bin Laden’s involvement in the September 11 attacks. The US along with Great Britain on October 7, 2001, initiated an “Operation Enduring Freedom” with a series of airstrikes targeting key strategic cities, like Kabul and Jalalabad, and the base of operations for the Taliban in Kandahar.<sup>9</sup> The coalition forces with the assistance of local warlords were able to make swift progress and by mid-November, the Capital city of Kabul was liberated.

Notably, the US motive in this war was not as clear and apparent as it sounds. The President’s remarks at the Joint Session of Congress on the 20<sup>th</sup> of September were threatening when he addressed matters regarding human rights abuse committed by Taliban rightly so in the context of deadly attacks on 9/11; but it must be remembered that this was the same regime that supported the Taliban before 9/11 as some in Washington saw the Taliban regime as a catalyst for stability in Central Asia that would, in turn, facilitate the construction of oil and gas pipelines through the Central Asian states of Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan through Afghanistan and Pakistan to the Indian ocean.<sup>10</sup> According to Guillaume Dasquie, co-author of “Bin Laden: The Forbidden Truth,” the Bush administration and the Taliban regime were in negotiation before the 9/11 attacks; the two even reached a point when the US representatives told the Taliban that “either you accept our offer of a carpet of gold, or we bury you under a carpet of bombs.”<sup>11</sup>

Apart from the oil and gas pipeline, Afghanistan’s geographical location provided the US with a strategic advantage in countering both conventional and non-conventional threats.<sup>12</sup> The geopolitical interests of the US played a major role in this

war. Interviewing Brigadier Ishaq Khattak, an ex-military officer who served as Counsel General in Afghanistan, provided insight on US interests in joining the war. According to Brigadier Khattak, the sole US incentive to join the war was to have a presence in the region. This war, according to him, was never against terrorism, so why did the US army redirect itself to Baghdad so early.<sup>13</sup>

## **NATO and the International Coalition**

In response to the US call for an international struggle against terrorism, allied countries poured in logistical and operational support for the WoT in Afghanistan. On September 12, 2001, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) met in an emergency session and for the first time in its history implemented Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, which stated that “an attack against one is an attack against all.” All member states of NATO provided support for the war. The international coalition had one main objective that was to facilitate the WoT in Afghanistan. An interesting insight provided by Nicholas Burns, a retired US diplomat, in an interview that the NATO member states were not on the same page when it came to what their specific objectives were. Unlike the US and the UK, many countries saw this as more of a peacekeeping mission, and before committing to any action, they presented a set of demands: What would they do and not do.<sup>14</sup>

## **The Northern Alliance**

The Northern Alliance, also known as the United Islamic Front for Salvation of Afghanistan, was created to resist the Pashtun dominated Taliban regime in response to the discrimination faced by many ethnic minorities of Afghanistan, namely, Hazaras, Tajiks, and Uzbeks. The Alliance was loosely organized with local warlords, each maintaining his personal or local interest before the alliance. In the WoT and its antecedent Afghan war against the USSR, there is one major similarity with regard to the nature of guerrilla forces. Militarily speaking, they were alarmingly fractured, each faction down to the individual commanders had their own interests. It was because of this major flaw in the structure that the Northern Alliance was not very successful in fighting against the Taliban regime until the US and NATO forces came in with their superior firepower. Another parallel with the previous war was the way allied nations supported different commanders and different groups with respect to their own interests. The US supported Abdul Rashid Dostum, a Soviet General turned warlord, whereas, French supported Ahmed Shah Massoud. The Northern Alliance later dissolved into the Karzai regime and political spectrum of Afghanistan. Their fractured nature did not serve them well either. The Karzai regime and its successors proved to be ineffective in running the country with heavy corruption inside the establishment.

## **Pakistan**

Pakistan entered the WoT as a non-NATO ally in 2001. It would be advantageous to note two realities here; first, Pakistan’s security agencies played a crucial role in creating Mujahidin movement in the Afghan war only decades earlier

with support not just from the western side of the Iron Curtain, but from the wider Muslim world as well. Thus, by virtue of this, many Taliban commanders were veterans of the war and some had close connections with elements in Pakistan's security apparatus. Second, the demographics of the region have to be kept in mind. The border that separates Pakistan and Afghanistan, previously known as the Durand line, does not separate different ethnicities; in fact, it cuts through a single one that being 'Pashtun'. As a result, ethnic connections are very strong across the border by virtue of the Pashtun tribal system.

Geopolitically, Pakistan had much to gain by siding with the US against the USSR. However, Pak-Afghan relations have not been stable at all due to territorial disputes along the Pak-Afghan border. Afghanistan, from the very beginning, has been hostile towards Pakistan and tension reached its zenith when Pashtun dominated Parcham Party promoted the idea of an independent Pashtunistan<sup>15</sup> in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Although the narrative was not well received nor endorsed on either side, it left an everlasting effect on Pakistan. Since then Pakistan has a strong desire that a peaceful and friendly government holds office in Afghanistan. Due to the creation of Mujahidin force in Afghanistan during the war against the USSR, various religiopolitical elements in Pakistan became sympathetic to the Taliban regime and at that time, Pakistan had good relations with Afghanistan. As the WoT was declared, US-led coalition forces overwhelmed Taliban fighters and initially, the Taliban had to retreat. After the liberation of Kabul, the coalition forces pushed the Taliban into the eastern mountain region of Tora Bora. From there Taliban started to regroup and gather their strength. It is pertinent to understand here that the 2,430 km border at that time was not fenced; local tribes moved and settled with autonomy as they had been for long.

### **Taliban: A Revolutionary Movement or Insurgency**

To understand the Afghan Taliban, it is necessary to investigate whether it falls under an insurgency or a revolutionary movement. Insurgency is defined by the US Counterinsurgency Guide as the "organized use of subversion and violence to seize, nullify, or challenge political control of a region."<sup>16</sup> Insurgents primarily seek to displace a government and completely or partially control the resources and population of a region.<sup>17</sup> A revolutionary movement, on the other hand, is much more organized and relies on the support of masses for its success. This support is gained by the moral alienation of masses from the existing government and ability to out-administer the existing government or regime; in a contrast, a revolutionary movement seeks to avoid any unnecessary use of force.<sup>18</sup>

The Afghan Taliban was founded by Mullah Muhammad Omar, a veteran of the Soviet-Afghan war. He had neither a tribal nor a religious pedigree and was simply seen as a pious frontrunner. The movement started or at least the legend goes with Mullah Omar ordering some of his key followers to arrest the local warlord who was accused of raping innocent girls. The small group numbering some 30 strong men with only 16 rifles saved the victims.<sup>19</sup> Taliban emerged on the onslaught of the civil war in Afghanistan, a post-Soviet-Afghan war among scrabbling warlords for power. The aim of

the Afghan Taliban was to “restore peace, disarm the population, enforce *Sharia* law and defend the integrity and Islamic character of Afghanistan.”<sup>20</sup> The Taliban movement quickly gained popularity and they took over Afghanistan and declared it as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan in 1996. The Taliban, although, considered by most as nothing but a terrorist organization, may very well fit into the category of a revolutionary force as it primarily relies on the masses for its support and has been successful in convincing the Afghan population towards its cause.

### **Pakistan’s Involvement in the War**

Pakistan’s involvement in the GWOT was initiated with the Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). Overnight, Pakistan became a key ally; in fact, Pakistan became the US most important non-NATO ally. General Pervez Musharraf, who was already under enormous international pressure, joined the war with this hope that such a step would improve Pakistan’s reputation internationally, counter the rhetoric that Pakistan was sympathetic to terrorist elements and gain political benefits.<sup>21</sup> Pakistan initially played a supportive role in the OEF and provided the US with vital intelligence information, air bases, and key strategic and vital supply routes. Pakistan also deployed 35,000 troops for internal security and provided operational support by allowing US warplanes to access its airspace.

Pakistan also collaborated with the US and coalition forces in capturing prominent Al Qaeda operatives. Another very important measure Pakistan took was to make an effort to seal or regulate the border in-between Pakistan and Afghanistan by deploying troops at the border.<sup>22</sup> Pakistan also contributed diplomatically in the war with its sudden policy-shift against the Taliban. Initially, Pakistan only contributed to logistical level, however, on the insistence of the US, Pakistan launched both major and minor operations against terrorist elements inside Pakistan. These operations include Operation Al-Mizan (2002-2006), Operation Rah-e-Haq (2007), Operation Sher-e-Dil (2008), Operation Zalzala (2008-2009), Operation Sirat-e-Mustaqeem (2008) and Operation Rah-e-Rast (2009).<sup>23</sup> According to C. Christine Fair in her book titled “The Counterterror Coalitions: Cooperation with Pakistan and India,” most of the US officials in Pentagon and State Department have praised Islamabad for providing extensive access to the US, both in the context of OEF and in the post-OEF phase of operation. According to an unclassified CENTCOM LNO (Liaison Officer) briefing, “Pakistan has provided more support, captured more terrorists, and committed more troops than any other nation in the Global Counterterrorism Force.

In 2007, certain non-state actors emerged as a terrorist organization known as Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). It needs to be understood that the Pakistani Taliban are drastically different from the Afghan Taliban, both in terms of structure and primary agenda. According to both Brigadier Ishaq Khattak (retired) and Ambassador Ayaz Wazir (retired), the Afghan Taliban are a political force and their main aim has been resisting foreign occupation and bringing peace in Afghanistan. On the contrary, the TTP had anti-state agenda and tried to seek sympathy as *jihadis* by a wider population.<sup>24</sup>

Compared to the Afghan Taliban, who were united under one ideology, the Pakistani Taliban under the umbrella of TTP just followed their own regional and local interests.<sup>25</sup>

### **Is Pakistan to Blame?**

Generally, Pakistan is blamed by the US to have played a role in the failure of OEF. US officials have publicly criticized Pakistan on many occasions; most notably, the current US President, in 2018, stated in a tweet that the aid to Pakistan had only given “nothing but lies and deceit” in return.<sup>26</sup> To begin with, Pakistan is blamed to have played a double-game in Afghanistan from the very start; although Pakistan formally in cooperation with the US and the NATO coalition forces, it kept on supporting the Afghan Taliban and its close affiliates primarily by providing them with secure passages in and out of the country.<sup>27</sup> It was believed that many Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters fled to Pakistan during the OEF and received medical treatment. Furthermore, as a result of mounting pressure by the US, Pakistan did launch military operations against terrorists in Pakistan. These operations were waged to target those terrorists, who were considered anti-Pakistan.

Addressing the accusations against Pakistan to have purposely facilitated the Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters coming into the country, senior journalist, Shafeeq Ahmed, in an interview elaborated how it was practically impossible to effectively guard the border. He argued that the ground realities have to be considered when talking about the issue. The Pak-Afghan border has no natural or artificial barriers; in fact, it is a virtual line separating both countries. The people too are not different on both sides. Most of them are Pashtun tribesmen separated by a virtual line only and historically had been moving in the area freely. There are villages that are on maps divided in-between Afghanistan and Pakistan, thus, monitoring and stopping the inflow is virtually impossible.<sup>28</sup> This argument was further supported by Dr. Saima Ashraf Kayani, who in her research paper titled “Global War on Terror: the Cost Pakistan is Paying” argued that the Northern Western belt of Pakistan has tribes with historical, ethnic, cultural, political, religious, and linguistic ties with the people on the other side of the border. As a result, the people of Pakistan generally did not support the WoT.<sup>29</sup>

The behavior of Pakistan in this war was and still seems to be unpredictable to many; however, if one looks at the ground realities of the war and how Pakistan became involved, one can easily predict and comprehend Pakistan’s behavior. For starters, Pakistan did not join for clear self-interest but had to do so in the context of the international outraged rhetoric against terrorism.<sup>30</sup> As elaborated earlier that Pakistan had very close ties with the Afghan Taliban, it was the first country which recognized the Taliban government in Afghanistan. Pakistan had been trying to achieve and maintain peace in Afghanistan for decades and had invested heavily in treasure and blood. Thus, Pakistan was always hesitant in directly combating the Afghan Taliban owing to their past relations and this hesitancy was perceived by the coalition forces as a double-game. Pakistan was rightly hesitant because of the ever-increasing pressure from the US to “do more”. However, the fact remains that Pakistan launched several

military operations against terrorists which resulted in many casualties and economic losses.

Pakistan's hesitancy promoted notions of Pakistan's double-game, which led the US to bring in Indian contractors in Afghanistan for reconstruction and rehabilitation projects. Under the guise of Indian civilian contractors, the RAW operatives came in and established some 14 complexes of operation across the Pak-Afghan border. On the other hand, TTP was supported by RAW elements in Afghanistan<sup>31</sup> which led to strengthening it in Pakistan and wreaked havoc across the country. Given the ground realities, Pakistan's initial response can be seen as more of an instinctive reflex than a deliberate attempt. The argument that Pakistan played a major role in the failure of OEF, thus, does not hold merit. To better understand the scenario at hand, the scope of this paper extends to other factors that contributed to misadventure.

### **US Attention Shift from Kabul to Baghdad**

The initial success in combating the Afghan Taliban certainly boosted US morale and confidence. Al Qaeda forces were virtually wiped out within the first few months of the war and the Taliban went into hiding.<sup>32</sup> This gave the US a false hope that they were winning, thus, shifted their attention to Baghdad and on March 19, 2003, the US along with the coalition forces invaded Iraq. The US forces ignorantly dismissed the reality that gorillas and revolutionary forces are not defeated until and unless their ideology is delegitimized. The invasion of Iraq diverted the supply line from Kabul to Baghdad giving the Taliban breathing space and time to reemerge.<sup>33</sup>

The Iraq war helped Al Qaeda and Taliban forces, primarily, in two ways; firstly, the Iraq campaign increased the cost and expenses of war exponentially, and secondly, the war in Iraq broadened the battlefield physically.<sup>34</sup> A war that was initially waged in Afghanistan now stretched to Iraq. This, in turn, stretched the resources allocated to fight Al Qaeda and Taliban units, such as Delta Force and Navy Seals Team Six as well as aerial surveillance platforms like the Predator had to be shifted into Iraq.<sup>35</sup> While the surge continued in Iraq, the Taliban and Al Qaeda forces used this period to adapt and rethink their battle strategies. Most importantly, the invasion of Iraq had long-term consequences; firstly, it further legitimized Bin Laden's narrative against the West, thus, attracted more recruits to Al Qaeda. Secondly, the Iraq war left the country crippled politically and economically and this state of unrest acted as a breeding ground for new terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).<sup>36</sup>

### **US Strategic Failures in Afghanistan**

History seldom repeats itself that too in a single lifetime. What US Generals experienced in Afghanistan; it drew parallels from Vietnam. Their arrogance and confidence were elaborated by Lieutenant General Daniel P. Bolger, who commanded US forces in both Iraq and Afghanistan. He stated that "myself and other commanders thought this time we are going to fight Vietnam and get it right."<sup>37</sup> But, the reality was



that the US did not learn from their past mistakes. They fought a non-conventional war in a conventional way. This was their first strategic mistake. Further, the General in his book titled "Why We Lost" writes that US armed forces are designed, manned, and equipped for short, decisive, and conventional conflicts.<sup>38</sup> The US did not send in enough troops to effectively regulate law and order in the country and troops were not able to stop insurgents from crossing the porous border into Pakistan.<sup>39</sup> The US forces did not improvise their strategies according to the ground realities. These were still conventional and based on controlling the capital and major cities.<sup>40</sup> This approach has been much more fruitful in developed countries where a crux of the population lives in urban areas.

In Afghanistan, 72% of the population resides in rural areas<sup>41</sup> and whosoever is dominant in rural areas has real power. The US army has been targeting insurgent strongholds in villages with aerial bombardment. Aerial bombardment as safe as it is for the US soldiers carries a huge risk of civilian casualties. In 2017, the Bureau of Investigative Journalism reported that out of 852-1445 people killed as a result of airstrikes 13-149 were civilians.<sup>42</sup> The US is over-reliant on mechanized forces to destroy enemy strongholds. Afghanistan does not have plane fields and paved roads on which mechanized forces can easily maneuver. This incapability at times became an obstacle for US soldiers, who preferred staying in their Humvees over trekking the Afghan countryside.

Further, the US forces deployed soldiers of the Afghan National Army (ANA) to hold the areas liberated. The ANA, although, equipped and trained by the US and coalition forces proved to be highly incapable of fighting and also had high levels of desertion cases.<sup>43</sup> The recent declassified Afghanistan papers by the State Department also shed light on several other factors that contributed to the failed war effort. General David Richards, former Chief of Defense Staff, in a declassified interview, highlighted that there was no long-term strategy involved in Afghanistan. The US had long tours, but force-rotations changed the strategy and forced everything to be short-term. Every time, there was a rotation, the momentum built by the last commander was broken.<sup>44</sup> The General regenerates what a retired US Diplomat, Nicholas Burns, stated in regards to NATO. Every nation had its priorities and commanders ended up listening to their respective capitals.<sup>45</sup>

Lastly, the most intriguing aspect of the US war effort is how badly they lacked intelligence. General Daniel P. Bolger mentions this in his book, referred earlier, however, referencing one of the countless testimonies of US war veterans translates to the severity of it. Jonathan Rosario, an Infantryman deployed at Kandahar province in 2009-2010, stated that "they were telling us to go into the villages and ask them, where is the Taliban? And the first time we asked the question, they were like, 'Oh yes, I'm Taliban.' And we were like, 'Uh, do we shoot this guy? He just admitted he's Taliban.' So, we asked [interpreter] and he said Taliban means student. They are all students out here! So that was confusing."<sup>46</sup>

## **Underestimation of the Opponent and Terrain**

A fundamental mistake, the US made, was the underestimation of the unforgiving terrain of Afghanistan. Afghanistan is a mountainous country with deep valleys and gorges. The mountains of Afghanistan are ideal for hit and run guerilla tactics and Afghans have over time mastered this art. Everyone, from Alexander to the Britishers, had their noses rubbed in Afghan soil.<sup>47</sup> The inhospitable terrain, constant invasions, and regional rivalries have turned Afghans into a warrior race. Winston Churchill, while serving as a young officer fighting the Pashtuns in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, wrote: "Every inhabitant is a soldier from the first day he is old enough to hurl a stone till the last day he has the strength to pull a trigger."<sup>48</sup> Afghans knew their ground and were well set in it. They, just like any other guerilla force, were well camouflaged into the society at large. The greatest challenge, the US faced, was determining who is an insurgent and who is not.<sup>49</sup>

## **Inefficient Afghan Government**

The alternative, the US gave to the people of Afghanistan over the Taliban government, was the democratically elected Karzai regime. The Karzai regime, although, democratic but proved to be highly corrupt and incompetent. Billions of dollars were funneled into Afghanistan. This aid instead of rebuilding Afghanistan found its way to the sticky hands of the Afghan political elite.<sup>50</sup> According to the Transparency International's Corruption Perception 2017-Index, Afghanistan ranked 177 out of the 180 countries.<sup>51</sup> The Kabul Bank scandal was another example, where the Afghan elite exploited not just poor Afghans who had trusted it with their savings but indirectly the US taxpayers as well; it is known as the biggest per capita fraud in history.<sup>52</sup> Presently, Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, both are struggling to hold the power corridors in Kabul without realizing that the Afghan Taliban have already forced the US-led coalition forces to leave the country.

## **Conclusion**

The US efforts in Afghanistan were doomed from the very start as they failed to do their homework before waging a war in the graveyard of empires. Their military strategies were outmoded and irrelevant to the battlefield. They did not take into account the geopolitical and geostrategic interests of the country; they named their primary non-NATO ally. Furthermore, the internal dynamics of Afghanistan were not taken into account when paving a path forward, thus, one may reasonably argue that it was the US half-baked planning that untimely sealed the country's fate.

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