

U.S. War in Afghanistan: From Intervention to Counterinsurgency

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ABSTRACT

US military intervention in Afghanistan was decisive and forceful, however, the Taliban's insurgency inevitably transformed U.S. military doctrine and strategy from conventional military intervention into Counterinsurgency's kinetic and non-kinetic operations. U.S. strategic and operational methodology despite exhausting all possibilities; troops' surge, air dominance/surveillance, non-kinetic peace building operations, failed to dislodge the threat of Taliban violence. An effort is made to identify the underlying factors contributory to the failure of the U.S. strategy, tactics and other challenges faced despite having unparalleled military superiority. This paper further probes the U.S. military strategic repositioning, social structure with the warlords and critically examines how the conflict drifted from intervention into Counterinsurgency irregular warfare.

Keywords: *Intervention, Humanitarian, Counterinsurgency, Strategic Culture, National Building*

Introduction

Historically, interventions by all the great powers in Afghanistan had been decisive and one-sided due to their military and technological superiority. Virtually, all fell into the trap of what appeared to be a great victory; however soon these powers (Great Britain, the former USSR and the U.S) found themselves entangled in a protracted long guerilla war, resultantly these wars were labelled as “Endless Wars”. In the post 9/11 era, three U.S. Presidents have unsuccessfully wrestled with the challenge to end the conflict in Afghanistan in order to save the prestige of the empire. After the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, Taliban were ousted from power and George Bush transferred the resources and manpower, to the war theater of Iraq in 2003. Taking advantage of the situation, the Taliban took shelter in the population and began the pre-insurgency stage of reorganization and reemergence. As a response to this threat, from 2006 onwards, U.S. claimed to have changed the hard core military strategy into non-kinetic Counterinsurgency (COIN). U.S. forces fought the Taliban well in the conflict theater but the non-kinetic operations couldn't thrive as planned because of Taliban's affective control over the population through the coercive, persuasive and supportive strategic framework. This preemptive assumption can be easily drawn from the fact that just before inking the U.S. Taliban

peace agreement, Taliban are in de facto control of more territory than at any point since the U.S.-led intervention in 2001. The scenario calls in question the ability and will of the U.S. forces to adapt to the changing character of the war from the military intervention approach to non-kinetic operational mode. It is pertinent to mention here that the outcome of any population centric intervention and COIN is determined by the interplay of number of variables such as narcotics trade, mass refugees' migration, information operation, psychological domain and peacebuilding framework, however, the focus of this paper would be restricted to clearly laid out few but important aspects elaborated in succeeding section.

The central question in this paper is to explore and study the US military intervention in Afghanistan as a whole, and subsequent transformation into COIN warfare that involves strategic and tactical pitfalls in the course of these operations. This would be better answered by probing into the inherent theoretical understanding of the morality of intervention at first place. This paper further aims to study another directly linked dimension; the U.S. military's institutional inability to map out the strategic culture within itself that could potentially lead to securing the support of the population. Given the US/ NATO troops' surge in 2009/10, which expectedly should have maintained contact and control over the population; especially in rural Afghanistan; instead allowed the emergence and promotion of the warlords, which in turn jeopardize the softer prong of U.S. COIN campaign. Thereby, the execution of important non-kinetic operation 'Winning the hearts and minds' in terms of securing and protecting the population from the insurgents, turned into 'Losing Hearts and Minds' campaign.

The rationale to probe the above mentioned questions and conceptualize debate on them comes from the fact that this war has become the longest war in American history, causing enormous human and infrastructure loss. In Afghanistan & Pakistan, 147,000 and 65,000 deaths have occurred, whereas nears one trillion dollars of expenditure has been occurred in Afghanistan COIN operations (BBC, 28 February 2020; Hoh,2019). Almost, 2,400- US troops killed, 59,000 Afghan soldiers and police got killed, 38,000 Afghan civilians were killed and around 20,000 U.S. troops wounded (Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction,2018 BBC, 2020). Since 9/11, the overall number of civilians killed in Afghanistan may counted as much as 100,000 though, the real numbers may be more than the officially described, since 20,000 Afghans died during the initial four months of the bombing campaign after 9/11(Hoh, 2019). The internal displacement of one million and external displacement of four to five million Afghans to Pakistan and Iran further destabilized the entire region. These facts and figures are not just numbers but in large it questions the academic discourse on fundamental premise of morality and humanism of intervention. In the first section of this paper, intervention and COIN paradigm, its moral standing and its further conversion into protracted guerilla and COIN operations will be discussed. In the next section, the strategic dilemma of U.S. strategy will be explored by focusing on human rights violation, the Warlords as well as the strategic and tactical complications of U.S. COIN campaign. In the final section, the analytical context and conclusions will be drawn.

Intervention and Counterinsurgency's Paradigm

Intervention and COIN remained a ubiquitous and pervasive character of international relations, to the extent that intervention has been declared a 'subject

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which is practically the same as that of international politics'. Ellery, (1921) and Stanley (1984) argue that, intervention by one state against another state is the just employment of force in order to compel the later to show obedience to international law and that all states must offer due respect to the law and cooperate to resist the transgressions of those states, who disrupt the international order and institutions (Stowell, 1921: pp 45-139; Hoffman, 1984: pp 9-32). In the line of this argument, one benchmark emerges to validate the US intervention in Afghanistan in accordance with International law and that is the UN Security Council Resolution that legally empowered US to use force against the perpetrators and abettors of the 9/11 attacks in US.

The right to intervene in self-defense is enshrined in Article 51 of UN Charter, which may be interpreted to include protection of vital interests and nationals abroad. Self-defense constitutes the overall defense that includes the various components of State, such as people territory, and government (Asrat, 1991: pp.17-45) The pro interventionist scholarship places their arguments on the plain fact that derogation from Article 2 (4) of the UN Charter which provides for State Sovereignty is possible and therefore intervention in another state is justified in order to defend the rights of foreign subjects of an oppressive ruler; under the condition of collective authorization made by the international community of states on the legally competent platform of an international organization (Walzer, 1980:pp.107-159). Jurisprudentially, U.S. follows the "Protective Principle of State Jurisdiction" to protect national interests abroad, therefore in the aftermath of 9/11, the U.S. intervened in Afghanistan," (Buxbaum, 2009: pp. 631-675). On the pretext of the protection of U.S. nationals from the terrorist attacks of terrorist groups operating and based in Afghanistan, U.S. initiated a prolonged military operation in Afghanistan which U.S. legitimized by seeking approval from UN Security Council in order to dismantle safe havens of terrorists around the world.

But the question emerges whether it was a rational policy option or an un-thought-out decision driven by circumstances or influenced by deep-seated ego, emotions and wounds rather than balance and prudence of the state craft. For Clausewitz, resort to the military means as an instrument of resolving conflicts by the state was a sensible and coherent strategy, one profoundly rooted in political arena. The study of military intervention is defined as intensely embedded in the most traditional aspects of the study of international relations and security studies, connected with states, the political motives of states embedded in national security, the exhibition of power and the construction of security, and their relations with other states on the spectrum of Balance of Power' (Croft & Treacher, 1995: p. 136). From the military perspective, military intervention can be understood as the movement of soldiers or forces of an independent country into another sovereign country, or military engagements by forces already deployed in the intended country'(Pearson, 1974: p 261). The broad umbrella of 'intervention' spreads over all adopted methodology of operation in the target country by utilizing of all possible means, for instance operating procedures for countering the rebels. However, other more defined and meaningful attachments such as COIN exist that provide if not better but refined understanding of the theory and practice of confronting the challenges of irregular militias that surfaces especially when the active phase of intervention is over.

Thomas Otte describes the armed intervention as an unconcealed military activity, i.e. the systematized and organized physical transgression of territorial integrity of

another country. Such military intervention is a measured and restricted use of force for a transitory period by a one state or group of states against a weaker state with the purpose to alter its domestic structure and control its external policies (Dorman & Otte, 1995: p 43). By highlighting the use of force for a transitory period of intervention, we assume that he proposes the practice of force for a limited time but again the extent or duration of the timeframe would be hard to outline and bracket as the nature of threat evolves and transform.

Morality of Intervention- Humanitarian Perspective

Labelling the intervention in the frame of moral, just and unjust would be discursive framework and its social construction is based on binary identification. Our understanding of intervention goes closer to what Hedley Bull, argues, intervention is 'dictatorial or coercive interference by one country into another country (Bull, 1984: p 1). This becomes least desirable and unacceptable to the larger segment of population especially those who are secluded and marginalized. With the exception of Michael Walzer, the moral standards of intervention were hardly questioned in the normative literature until the post-cold war era's humanitarian intervention' debate. Hoffman adds, that the doctrine of just war principle customarily aimed to settle order and justice, while a theory of just intervention seeks to place justice above the order (Hoffman, 1998: pp.159-160). Edward opines that, this arrangement of the new military humanism is absolute inherently flawed and humanism in the military domain is an oxymoron and paradoxical (Said, 2015: p 1). Similarly, Nigel White (1994) argues that the delivery of humanitarian aid does not necessarily involve deployment of troops, with exception of consensual peacekeeping capacity (White, 1994: p 1). In order to assess the humanitarian character of intervention, the theory of intervention reflects both inspiration and consequences in weighing the humanitarian appeal of such involvement. Michael Walzer (1980) argues that clearly defined demarcation of humanitarian with military intervention are very exceptional. The deployment of soldiers into another state is not guided by the motive to saving the humanity, since foreign citizens do not carry the importance and leverage to alter the scales of domestic decision-making (Walzer, 1980: p 107). Very often, military intervention, guided by orthodox national security concerns are being "dressed-up" as humanitarian actions (Croft & Treacher, 1995: p.130). The case study of Rwandan genocide is pertinent in this context, where the blatant genocide didn't merit an otherwise needed intervention because of the non-existence of the national interest of great powers. Henceforth, the marching armies across the territorial boundaries of other countries (authoritarian) do not aim to export democracy and neither are they imbued with the conscious propensity of liberating the oppressed people of the target country. It is the power or security maximization paradigm that would guide the states' pursuit of intervention.

Moreover, it is one of the illusionary belief of interventionists that costs can indeed be limited and objectives realized (Betts, 2014: pp 15-24). This delusion is stemming from the parallel streams in the American consciousness such as a belief of unquestionable superiority, exaggerated assumptions and confidence in the ability to control Armed forces advancement (Mandel, 2004: pp 25-69). Indeed, there has been established perception that, given the unparalleled superiority of US military, most of the Armies would resist putting up a regular, tank to tank conventional fight, let alone the rag tag Militias such as Taliban. However, the Taliban have refused to sign up for being treated as objects of firing practice for American precision

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munitions and striking firepower (Fallows, 2015: pp 73-80). Similarly, Todd (2013) and Betz (2016) argue that Leaders of the great powers, possessing the military capacity to intervene in other countries have often misjudged what can be achieved, and this perception demonstrated on number of occasion in the contemporary era that there are no “quick wins” in “easy”, or even, “fun wars” (Greentree, 2013: pp 87-97). The attritional long war that emerged following 9/11 was not part of the playbook, neither was it a cool war or quick war, rather the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan is meeting the same fate that of the other great powers. Although, the U.S. intervention dressed up as humanism to liberate and emancipate the Afghan population from Taliban’s oppressive rule but the succeeding course of events turned out to be contrary to such claims, resultantly the insurgency thrived to achieve new heights with great momentum. The morality of intervention was further called into question due to the human rights violation vis-à-vis the U.S. soldiers and Warlords that will be discussed and eventually in the analytical context section it will be seen how the morality of intervention has played part in reducing the effectiveness of U.S. COIN strategy and operations.

Shifting nature of conflict: from Intervention into Counterinsurgency

From the foregoing discussion, one very important deduction stands; that U.S. planned for quick and decisive victory in Afghanistan, but was severely unsettled by the Taliban’s traditional insurgency¹ as defined by Bard O Neil (2005). In 2006, the growing magnitude of insurgency forced the U.S. Military to re-strategize and reorganize its operational modalities to confront and deal the emerging crises with COIN strategies and operations. Given the point blank power asymmetry between the U.S. forces and Taliban, it was expected that U.S. resounding victory would lead to a gradual effort towards an institutional intervention in Afghanistan. The U.S. strategy didn’t aim at state building and Nation Building however, when Taliban launched traditional insurgency, which caused the entire focus of the U.S. military and political leaders to shift to COIN warfare. Before this paper proceeds with its arguments it would be pertinent to consider COIN, as the sub discipline of intervention or as follow up contextual course of intervener. The Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated terms (2001) defines that COIN is a mixture of wide-ranging military paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and public actions taken by a government to counter the insurgency (Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms Department of Defense, 2001). The diverse constituents of a COIN are societal, political, military, legal, economic, informational and intelligence related matters with the purpose of influencing and controlling the population (Cassidy, 2008: pp 50-121). According to Bell (2011), COIN implies a significant shift from the awe-inspiring militarized strategy of ‘shock and awe’ towards the complex art of fighting the smart wars which are largely political in nature (Bell, 2011: pp 30-33). COIN is an exceptionally complex warfare, where counterinsurgents have to establish deep understanding of not only the guerilla warfare strategies and tactics but of wide variety of others non-kinetic operations which may be alien in to the conventional militaries. Moore therefore, defines COIN as an interconnected set of social, economic, security and political measures directed towards suppressing the insurgency. A directed research project

¹ Traditional insurgency is one type of insurgency which aim to implement the ancient concepts of religion within the frame of modern landscape.

undertaken in Canada National Defense (2014) defines that, COIN is about conflict transformation; it is the course of addressing the root causes and motivation of the violence by development of robust institutions grounded in the liberal peacebuilding and ensuring political and socioeconomic aspirations for the conflict stricken people (Hill, 2014). This paper understands COIN as merger of political, security, social and legal stages through the military and civilian institutions. The subaltern strategies to counter the insurgency are related to information intelligence, and de-radicalization. In the later part of the part, the application of theoretical vision of the COIN will be tested vis-à-vis the U.S. practice against Taliban who very deftly transformed from conventional force to an insurgent organization.

Taliban from Conventional to Insurgent Force

Before the American intervention in 9/11, Afghanistan had become a quasi-state under the oppressive rule of Taliban, so similarly, they fought as conventional force against the U.S. Military. Once the U.S. forces dislodged Taliban from power, the later sought shelter within the population, and formed an irregular structure of an insurgent force and gradually shook the resolve of the entire international coalition. Meanwhile, Al Qaida, which was the real enemy consisted of maximum 150 fighters in Afghanistan, at the time of U.S. intervention (Katzmann, 2017). The Taliban had strategically and tactically adapted to the nature of war, as Preble (2019) argues that disruption of the peace is far easier than maintenance of orderly peace and Taliban trapped the U.S military. The U.S. military planners were forced to suffer economic human, and political losses without accomplishing something significant other than huge contracts to the U.S. defense corporations (Preble, 2019). Presently the territorial control of Afghan government extends to only 73 districts out of total of 407 districts in 34 provinces, whereas the Taliban are successfully swaying the “Population” through indoctrination, recruitment and social expansion within the rural areas with relative ease, while, in the cities such strategies become comparatively problematic (Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, 2018). US Congressional Research Service in 2017 reported that insurgency grew in strength, therefore Taliban started targeting the urban center as well, for example, in September 2015, the Taliban overwhelmed the Kunduz city but U.S. marines and Afghan National Army (ANA) pushed them back. Similarly, in May 2018, Taliban took control of much of city of Farah before being driven out by U.S. special operations forces and in August 2018, temporarily overran the city of Ghazni. In a nutshell, the Taliban militancy jolted Americans out of the delusional military grandeur and surprisingly proved to be cut above the average in comparison with other revolutionary militia and guerilla movements in the world.

Dilemma of U.S. Counterinsurgency: Strategic and Tactical Pitfalls

American intervention, code named Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), aimed to establish a ‘limited footprint’ in Afghanistan (Goodson, 2004: pp. 14-22). However, it turned out that the limited number of US troops on ground hindered its ability to adopt the appropriate population centric COIN response (Salt, 2018: pp. 98-126). US Secretary of state Rumsfeld was hopeful rather overestimated the ability of relatively insignificant number of troops to get the job done while his vision was erroneously reinforced by the swift military advantage in the early phase of intervention (Christia & Semple, 2009: p. 32). The US military planners basked in the success achieved in initial stage of military operations because they considered

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to have developed a new epoch of military interventions centered on this 'light footprint approach', minimum casualties and maximum speed. On the other hand, the Taliban overcame their initial confusion, gaining organizational strength from 2003 till 2008, consequently the southern and eastern ethnic Pashtun regions of the country became strongholds of insurgency (Ahrari, 2010: p. 230).

Since the US military planners had not anticipated that the Taliban would re-emerge as a threat with guerilla warfare strategies and tactics, therefore the requisite planning for the various phases and logical lines of operation was not carried out (Santos, 2011). For instance, 'The Nation Building', that is the essence of any COIN campaign was completely absent, consequently, the military Commanders' reluctance to conduct nation building efforts reduced the chances of a comprehensive winning strategy (Hoffman, 2007: p.71). U.S soldiers were not trained for these diplomatic and political aspects of COIN operations which requires great stamina, endurance and patience to plough through all these hurdles. This assertion is substantiated by the fact that majority of US marines were unaware of the actual mission and strategic purpose of deployment in Afghanistan. Vice President Elect Joe Biden on an official visit to Afghanistan conversed and probed the US marines and officers about their mission to Afghanistan. Interestingly, one answered that, "We are here to rebuild Afghanistan" while another said, "The mission is to destroy Al-Qaeda" but the most common answer came out: "I don't know" (Bolger, 2014: p. 159). This speaks of the insufficient knowledge of the tactics and strategy and the intended objectives of the U.S. troops at all tiers, similarly one can imagine the state of other NATO countries who do not possess the real time commitment to the war. The most plausible explanation for the inability of US armed forces in Afghanistan to give appropriate COIN response till to date, is that little attention was paid to the nature and requirements of COIN and stability operations (Kagan, 2006: pp. 23-44). Lieutenant Colonel Jason Dempsey argues, "I realized everyone was getting on the same treadmill year after year after year" (Dempsey, 2017). The fact of the matter is that because of its regular and conventional structure, U.S. faced enormous difficulty in transforming its strategic culture from conventional role into irregular COIN role. The state to state conventional war doctrine has been firmly embedded the U.S. military strategic culture, its training and operational paradigm, as like other conventional Armies.

The tactical miscalculation proved to be the greatest obstruction in maintaining contact and control over the local population. An acclaimed U.S. military Commander in Afghanistan, General Mc-Chrystal attempted to incorporate fundamental changes to US COIN policy in Afghanistan. He re-approached troops deployment of troops in the urban centers and large populated areas thus establishing a secure security around cities but in order to create a bulwark against Taliban attacks on US troops, he unwittingly left the rural areas to the control and influence of Taliban. General Petraeus, celebrated as the innovator of US COIN strategy, opined that the principles of COIN practiced in Iraq are also pertinent to complex situation of Afghanistan, therefore, he mapped out an intensive drive for Afghan reconciliation (Lebovic, 2019: pp 119-181). Whereas, insurgency in Afghanistan is intrinsically very different than Iraq because Pashtuns hold different cultural characters form the Arabs, having distinct social values, geography and psychology. Afghan Pashtuns are invincibly effective in mountainous guerilla warfare,

moreover, retribution and revenge undergird the *Pashtunwali*, the centuries old ethnic tribal code in addition to the 40 years' war in Afghanistan starting since 1979.

Technologically, the tactical weapons and equipment utilized in Afghanistan were incompatible with operational and military requisites of terrain and conflict, for example, the Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicle, designed to save the troops against IED attack on the roads of Iraq proved incompatible with the mountainous terrain in Afghanistan. The F-35 Stealth aircrafts were of least utility in Afghanistan as Taliban were not equipped with radar systems to detect the fifth generation aircrafts (Joseph, 2014: pp 35-90).

From hard core military intervention to civilianizing intervention involves robust Civilian and military cooperation, however, vivid absence of synchronization and combined cooperative framework between the pentagon and the state department strategic and operational priorities. In Afghanistan, for instance, the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) were created and institutionalized to perform the connection among the U.S. military, U.S. civilians and the Afghan population, with the purpose of enabling good governance and development but could not achieve significant success. Paradoxically, all developmental projects were planned and executed by foreign actors such as U.S. State Department, USAID, UNAMA and other IGOS, but not the locals, that in turn further marginalized the population (Dorrnsoro, 2009: p. 8). Moreover, the developmental structures and strategies taken by the PRTs were not in consonance with the U.S. military objectives consequently, the PRTs and the military units struggled to attain their intended objectives in isolation, thus ending up in neutralizing each other's efforts (Dempsey, 2017). By December 2018, Major General Danny Sjursen, confessed that the only option left for the U.S. military in Afghanistan was to 'lose' (Lorenzo, 2014: pp 24-89). With each passing year, the trust deficit between the U.S. military and Afghan civilian government deepened, thereby, more civilian deaths, war weariness and massive corruption at Afghan government level contributed to this schism. Therefore, multi-lateral civilian military engagement is inevitable for successful COIN strategy; this multi-tiered engagement can pragmatically include U.S. Military with U.S. civilians (diplomats, contractors), Afghan military and Afghan civilians, U.S. Military and Afghan civilian bureaucracy and U.S. civilians and Afghan law enforcement agencies.

The top US military commanders have acknowledged the defective strategic direction of U.S. in Afghanistan, for instance, General Jack Keane argues, "The U.S. strategy in Afghanistan was wide of the mark and for instance General McKiernan (commander in 2008) was the wrong guy to run the war." Besides, ex-Vice President Biden recommended to set up counterterror operations in Afghanistan with limited troops but his option was vetoed in favor of General Mc-Chrystal's much advertised COIN campaign (Lebovic, 2014: pp 89-123). President Obama in a grand show of a victory feat being pulled off in Afghanistan, ordered the drawdown of the US forces but time proved him wrong. As indicated by the Statistics, the situation went from bad to worse, around 10,453 civilian casualties (3,438 deaths and 7,015 injured) (Department of Defense Casualty Report, 2018) In four consecutive years the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) recorded more than 10,000 civilian casualties (Rattan, 2019: pp.7-21). This paper contends that Mc-Chrystal's strategy of amassing more troops, coupled with the announcement of 'draw down timeline', indeed proved to be serious

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strategic miscalculation. The premature disclosure of the operational plans can jeopardize the long term strategic objectives. The old military rationale of Sun Tzu's art of war; "If you are far from the enemy, make him believe that you are near," about keeping the fear alive in the minds of enemy through creating a threat perception was nullified (Sun Tzu, 1910). Defying the accepted military logic was exactly what brought the US at a military and strategic disadvantage because it provided the Taliban with an opportunity to strategically and tactically map out the plan to exhaust the U.S forces in time and space. In order to counter Taliban insurgency, during 2018, U.S. carried out massive bombardment of Afghanistan in comparison with all the preceding years since 9/11, for instance, both the manned aircraft and drone released 5,213 weapons between January and the end of September 2018 (Chooi Ye, 2018:pp. 10-13). This suggests that despite the massive military superiority, the undisputed ground reality is that the Taliban's numbers has increased from thirty thousand to seventy thousands and augmented their control on rural heartland of Afghanistan. They are likely to pose a considerable threat to the strategic urban lands after the U.S. withdrawal. The dilemma of U.S. COIN is not due to the tactical and operational incompetence at the junior officer or soldiers' level rather the intellectual stagnation of the military and civilian leadership has led to the existing stalemate that Taliban (rightly or wrongly) claim as a victory.

Deviation from Counterinsurgency: Warlords and War Crimes

In order to exercise the monopoly over violence, the counterinsurgent (state) should logically disarm all the armed groups, warlords and other active stakeholders in the post intervention stage of countering the insurgency. COIN framework aims to secure and protect the population from the influence of armed groups; however, the dilemma of the post conflict peace building is top down approach to handle the crises. The underlying problem with this approach is that it offers solutions for peace that may be unrealistic or impractical as well as negates the local populations' understanding of peace, by not taking into account their political or social demands and aspirations. In Afghanistan, the international community practically engaged and communicated through the local Warlords, instead of the civil society, was unwittingly a practice to privatize the war and in the process losing the 'population centric COIN. Arming the warlords to fight the Taliban, was an exceedingly counterproductive move because it further weaponized the Afghan society. In the pursuance of short term gains, U.S. military chose to seek cooperation of the warlords, and the Northern Alliance leaders who were alleged to have committed serious human rights abuses. As a consequence of this strategy, U.S. actually empowered the forces working against good governance and long-term political stability.

One of the predominant outcome of 2001 Bonn conference was the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR), achieved significant success from 2003 until 2005 bringing about the reintegration of around 63000 Taliban into civilian life (Bose & Ibrahimi, 2017: pp. 122-144) However, it barely challenged the social, economic and political privileges that are central to the members of an armed militant group. The informal structure of perks and privileges at the base of warlords' networks remained functional and rather popular which legitimized their role as militant commanders, reinforcing their outreach to post-Taliban political architecture. Moreover, the militias did not actually demobilize and disarm rather segregated their political and military wings; militants merged into formal security

structures or were recruited into the private sector contractual firms by both Afghans and Americans. These formal and informal armed structures were prepared to be mobilized in the ethnic wars for acquisition of power in Kabul. For example, after the alleged rigging in the 2014 elections, the former commander *Jamiat-e-Islami* from Balkh province, Atta Mohammad Noor, the present Governor of Balkh threatened to raise and reactivate the armed wing (Bose & Ibrahim, 2014).

Prominent warlords claimed that their respective militant groups have transformed their internal organizational structures from wartime militias to peace time law enforcement bodies. The cases of Ismail Khan and Juma Khan Hamdard, by contrast, illustrate two scenarios which shows serious deviation from the population friendly COIN as these warlords failed to make the transition. Ismail Khan, on the one hand, worked to establish himself as the 'emir' of Herat, after returning to Herat post-Taliban era in 2001, consolidating a tight grip on capital and socio-political spectrum in Herat Province. Juma Khan Hamdard, on the other hand, was a key commander in his own right but remained over-shadowed by stronger warriors. As a minority Pashtun from Balkh, Juma Khan ensured his survival following the shifting tides of conflict and winning himself governorships in the northern provinces of Baghlan and Jawzjan. Unable to deliver credible governance, Juma Khan nonetheless served the regime in Kabul as a local proxy, provoking and destabilizing powerful northern strongmen and settling the score with other warlords. In other cases, the distribution and embezzlement of large sums of money among the warlords was observed since 2008, as argued by John Sopko, the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR) (Lorenzo, 2014: p.111). Stories of human rights abuses committed by Northern Alliance and US military kept surfacing from Afghanistan, for instance, Captain Dan Quinn recounts that a commander of Northern Alliance (U.S. supported) sexually molested an Afghan boy in one of the U.S. military base (Malejacq, 2015: pp. 41-44) As a matter of fact, U.S. empowered the warlords (mainly the Northern Alliance) who allegedly committed more heinous human rights violations in comparison to Taliban. The violent and mischievous methodology of the warlords –cum- governors made the matters worse for the U.S. Military in terms of alienating the population; as a natural consequence made it easier for Taliban and other insurgent groups to consolidate their positions in the rural heartland.

Additionally, U.S. Population centric COIN received an unnerving blow due to fact that U.S. soldiers committed human rights abuses, and in turn caused great resentment in the Afghan population. Moreover, the perpetrators of the such crimes were rarely brought to the book or held accountable in the line of international law. The international participation in peace building or state building are expected to conform to international law, human rights standards and monitoring because intervention would completely lose legitimacy if the peace keepers are immune from legal checks and judicial accountability. Chelsea Manning, who exposed the US armed forces arbitrary highhandedness and later jailed for it, argues that on May 4, 2009, in retaliation against the Taliban attack in Afghanistan's Province Farah, the U.S. military resorted to excessive and blatant use of force through scorch earth campaign (Gentile, 2009: pp 5-17). Indiscriminate Airstrikes were carried out on buildings in the village of *Granai* and Air Force B-1 bomber dropped 2,000 lb. and 500 lb. bombs, killing an estimated 86 to 147 women and children in *Granai*. Wretched videos of US Marines, posted on internet in which they filmed urinating

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on Taliban corpses. Frequent stories of the US armed forces personnel experimenting with marijuana, hard drugs, liquor, and beer, while rear-echelon types trialed with painkillers, subsequently engaging in rowdy behavior came out of Afghanistan (Gentile, 2009: pp 5-17). Colonel Harry Tunnel's task force carried out indiscriminate killings of Afghan civilians for fun sport and keeping their fingers as mementos. The Quran burning horrific incident at Bagram in February 2012 and Sergeant Robert Bales murdering of Afghan civilians, were the incidents that fanned the insurgency and called into question the basic premise of intervention (Coll, 2018: p 425). Such incidents provoked the population especially the fence sitters and General Mc Crystal opined that this is the recipe of our failure. (ISAF Brief, 2009). Another aspect of the war is the psychological burden of war on U.S. marines, those who performed their duties in Afghanistan and Iraq, displaying extreme leaning for committing suicide (six times higher than their civilian peers), a fact substantiated by suicide of more than 9000 US ex-service men from Afghanistan and Iraq (Hoh, 2019). Despite nineteen years of war in Afghanistan, and presence of US/NATO forces, unsurprisingly the Taliban movement has seen a growth in numbers instead of decline. In a nutshell, the privatization of war led to massive weaponization and decrease of Afghan state's control over violence which in turn resulted in loss of the legitimacy of the state and complete absence of ability to provide security to the people.

Analytical Context

Morality of intervention directly determines the response of the communities whose emancipation through intervention regardless of the fact that liberal and people friendly labels are attached to intervention, such as 'Humanitarian', 'Just' or 'Benign' intervention, but in essence it will always be ruthless, costly and detestable. The various logical lines of COIN operations such as, "Non Kinetic", and "Winning hearts and minds" and "Nation Building" have largely emerged as clichés, which had been replicated from other theaters of the past communists' insurgencies of Vietnam and Malaya (British). This top down approach and one size fits all kind of situations has served as recipe of failure, given the fact that liberal peacebuilding and democratization were very alien concepts to the centuries old tribal structure of governance. Afghans' definition and understanding of emancipation was way off the mark than that was introduced to them by the U.S. military and civilian leadership. Even the Pentagon and State Department didn't have a unified strategy COIN and peacebuilding strategies. The fundamental downfall of the whole premise of intervention and the myth of so called population centric COIN led to the realization of peacebuilding project of negotiations and peace talks at multilateral level as the only possible route to end the conflict. It is in the backdrop of growing domestic pressure, increasing casualties and rising cost of war, that the Trump administration has extended the olive branch to the Taliban and declared that, "the hour has come to at least try for peace and Great nations do not fight endless wars" (Preble, 2019). Consequently, U.S. envoy Zalmay, drummed up support for the peace agreement and on 29 February 2020, the U.S. and Taliban hammered out an agreement containing assurances to prevent Afghanistan becoming the safe havens of AQ and ISIS; cease fire; gradual and phase wise U.S withdrawal from Afghanistan, prisoners Swap and intra-Afghan dialogue on 10 March 2020. Nonetheless, the U.S. failure to pick the accurate time for negotiations jeopardizes the possibility of concluding a successful agreement with the Taliban.

The negotiations are offered when the counterinsurgent stands at a position of strength but on the contrary, Taliban find themselves strategically well placed to dictate the terms of negotiations. In this case, the ink was barely dry on the peace agreement when the Taliban raided the ANA positions in order to gain an advantageous bargaining position with the Afghan government in the intra-Afghan dialogue. Now, U.S. faced two opposing dilemmas; if U.S. does not help the Afghan government against the Taliban attacks, it is found guilty of not protecting an ally. If it retaliates against the Taliban (which it did), the chances of escalation of violence are high. Over and above, the entire U.S. investment into Afghanistan political and institutional building is disarrayed due to the political wrangling amongst the various ethnic and political groups in the post 2019 presidential elections. Meanwhile, due to the apparent U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, the former warlords are mulling over to mobilize their militias in the face of new emerging threats from the Taliban. To reverse the great powers' strategy in Afghanistan, Leon Trotsky (1920) rightly argues "You may not be interested in war, but war is interested in you".

The most critical question arising from the above discussion which merits analysis is that where does the U.S. policy stands today? A U.S. military intervention that was legitimized through international law, had wide international military and moral support, constructed the aim of freedom of the oppressed Afghan population but eventually found itself distanced from the same Afghan population that it appeared to protect. It's so called 'population protection COIN' didn't serve the original purpose of bridging the ever wide gulf between US and the Afghan population. David Petraeus compiled the first mega volume FD 3/24 emphasizing the security and separation of the population from the insurgents. Did it happen? Besides, the non-military and civilian centric aspects of 'Nation Building' and 'State Building' were pursued with ever increasing vigor and intensity; but with top down and institutionalized policy direction that neither fulfilled the needs and necessities of individuals nor guaranteed any sense of emancipation. The focus should have been the local view of emancipation not the western notion of emancipation or the 'liberal peace', which failed due to its inherent structural propensity to support and propel the bottom up strategies.

The contours of the liberal peace and its institutions were built with the gradual and consistent effort for centuries in the developed world, however, in the post conflict societies such as Afghanistan, it was very difficult to transform the institutions and liberal democratization on the same footing. U.S as well as the Afghan society, were at the horns of two opposite dilemmas, on one hand Afghanistan was going through democratization and on the other the warlords were armed to teeth to fight the Taliban; thereby massively privatizing the war, which affected the everyday life. There is a need to deconstruct the Afghan conflict and introduce the indigenous form of emancipation that affect all segments of Afghan society. The objective and subjective review is made by reaching out to the communities and people to map out unanimous peacebuilding strategies. The notion of realist-liberal (victor's peace, liberal peace) needs to be supplanted with more indigenous form of peace, and conflict resolution should be framed in line with the cultural sensitivities of the Afghan people.

Conclusion

The transformation of U.S. strategic culture from conventional war to irregular war didn't successfully take place primarily in Afghanistan due to its inherent rigid organizational structure. Transferring the authority and obligation to maintain security in Afghanistan to ANA and Afghan police, was a futile exercise because the on ground realities were different to the much celebrated and over-projected outcomes. The unit of measuring the success in irregular and asymmetric warfare is not the deployment of sophisticated and technologically superior forces but a prolong political engagement with the population. Ontologically, U.S. premature shifting of resources from Afghanistan to Iraq in 2003 allowed Taliban to regroup, further until 2006, U.S. military and civilian leadership did not place the due focus and training on the irregular warfare. U.S. force should have employed a substantial footprint of regular forces in the conflict theater but Bush administration's handling of Afghanistan in the period of 2002 to 2008 was fraught with such inconsistencies. When they realized that the insurgency is not fizzling out, they adopted a COIN and Peace building approach which was incompatible with the threat matrix. By the time, troops were surged in 2009/10 the Taliban had become strong enough to strategically and tactically resist the operational capabilities (limited in effective COIN or asymmetric warfare) of the increased number of U.S. and NATO troops. Moreover, the Taliban's absolute control of the center of gravity in guerilla warfare, the 'Population', denied the U.S. and NATO aid agencies any significant overtures and developmental works to win the hearts and minds of the population. The nature of conflict, socio cultural conditions and historical experiences of Afghanistan are very important to frame the appropriate response.

The fundamental impediment to the U.S. policy in Afghanistan from intervention to COIN stems from the U.S. military leaders' failure in the strategic domain. US top military commanders found it hard to adapt to the form of irregular warfare in an unfamiliar terrain with an adversary possessing a strong and distinct culture. With the exception of General Mc-Crystal, no other General left a significant mark on the Afghan conflict theater. Theoretically, the U.S. Army's military intervention and subsequent COIN campaign was the reflection of its experience in Vietnam and other countries, where the challenge and nature of threat was different from Afghanistan as every conflict is unique. The policy of rearming the private militias to resist the Taliban was a very short term policy directive; it was counterproductive because it eventually empowered the same warlords of Northern Alliance who undermined good governance to snatch share in power struggle and undermined the U.S. COIN efforts. To sum it up, U.S. failed in Afghanistan for many reasons but the most significant are: adaption to the nature of complex irregular war, excessive use of force, privatization of the violent conflict, the alienation of the population and excessive use of air power. Moreover, one of most significant non-kinetic COIN strategy, to engage the Taliban in reconciliation process remained amiss for long until 2017 when meaningful peace talks were initiated with Taliban. These failures were further augmented by civilian leaders' strategic incapacity to take charge of the political aspects of the war.

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