

Implications and Challenges of the United States Drawdown Plan from Afghanistan 2014-2021

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Abstract

The qualitative and descriptive study examines the United States engagement in Afghanistan during 2014-2021 has been consisted on the paradigms of change, fluctuation and divergence. How The United States tested different approaches to deal with the domestic and regional actors related to Afghanistan? The Washington administration followed multi-faceted agenda based on the regional solution to end the proxy war in Afghanistan. Why the United States used the pressure tactic policy towards Pakistan to squeeze Taliban factor? The use of major military escalation policy and the complete disengagement approach along with political settlement were the other options for the United States to get forward in Afghanistan. On the whole the regional strategies, unilateral approach, the status quo plus approach led certain implications of the US-Afghan war. The divergent and miscalculated American policies towards Afghanistan increase the hostile environment in the region. The regional actors emerged as the major independent and concerned geo- political intrigues due to the dominant engagement of the United States in Afghanistan.

Key words: Drawdown, Strategies, Peace Talks, Diplomatic slant, Paradigms

Introduction

Afghanistan emerged one of the most volatile area in the contemporary politics of South Asia. Afghanistan has been entangled with certain negative effects i.e. ethnic riots, civil war, violation of human rights, sectarian violence, inter communal conflict, struggling economic conditions and the ongoing gigantic wave of terrorism. The most daunting factor is the presence and reproduction of the associate groups an offshoot of Taliban and Al-Qaeda (AQ) as the major concern of the United States. Therefore, the Washington administration has to review and revised its policy towards Afghanistan with a multifaceted agenda of military operations, dialogue diplomacy, reconstruction, institution building and the engagement of regional actors. The extremists and militant elements have once again prepared their organizational network to recapture and maintain its status in the post 2014 Afghan socio- political environment. These non-state actors have different objectives and targeted interests in their future program in Afghanistan. The insurgent groups feel more comfort because US and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces withdrawal plan has minimized the risk of bombing attacks. Whereas the operation Zarb-e-Azb initiated by Pakistan army in the north

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Waziristan in June 2014 has also dislodged several Taliban's associate groups from Pakistan and Uzbekistan which have increased the numbers and strength of Taliban in Afghanistan. The Afghan security would face certain capability issues in the context of weaponry power, war strategy, reconnaissance and air power strength in the post US exit plan from Afghanistan. It was reported in June 2015 that there were more than 7 thousand militants from abroad inside the Afghanistan. These extremist groups have been in filtered from Pakistan, Middle East and other countries of Central Asia. More than a dozen militant organizations with different goals and agenda are still fighting in Afghanistan in the post 2014 environment. These militant groups are striving for their respective interests with priorities and strategies even helping to each other. Although these militant organizations have different articulated objectives in Afghanistan, but they do cooperate each other against the United States as their combined enemy.

The United States currently faces several challenges including the reemergence of militant organizations like, Afghan Taliban, the high council of Afghanistan Islamic Emirate, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Hizb e Islami (HI), Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Al-Qaeda (AQ), Lashker-e-Taiyba (LeT), Lashker-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) and East Turkmenistan Islamic Movement (ETIM).(kalis, 2016).

The US Successive Policy Transformation in Afghanistan

The strategic imperatives and transformation in the US foreign policy towards Afghanistan through a successive series becomes another factor of uncertainty in Afghanistan. The United States successive transformation continued in South Asia right after the incident of 9/11 to Obama and Trump administrations respectively. Thus, the protracted Afghanistan crises remain intact and the Washington administration could not attain a definite and reasonable victory in Afghan war. The United States did not introduce and adopted the political settlement policy, but exercised military operational approach inside the Afghanistan. On the other side United States failed in bringing all the stakeholders in Afghanistan on the dialogue table to formulate any agreed and unanimous political infrastructure, power sharing agenda and governance system. The United States remained fail to sustain fruitful dialogue process and diplomatic tactic among the stakeholders in Afghanistan by engaging regional and global actors. (Naqvi, 2018). Since the United States intervention in Afghanistan after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 all the US Presidents i.e. Bush, Obama and Trump adopted different approaches and strategies in Afghanistan by jeopardizing regional strategic interests with the application of wracked and havoc slant.

Manifestation of variant Strategies

The Washington administration has applied different modified strategies in Afghanistan over the past 20 years. Each American government sought to go after the terrorists and to develop a stable socio-political setup in Afghanistan. President Bush launched Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) with the narrative of pre-emptive strike, War on Terror (WOT) and the policy of global coalition to counter and combat Al-Qaeda along with its associate groups fighting in Afghanistan. (khatak,2011). The major aim of doctrine of preemption strike was to take a strict action against the non-state actors which could pose risk and threat to the US people and armed forces in Afghanistan. Thus, the preemption and prevention

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were the vast American strategies to eliminate the terrorist's activities across Durand Line. President Bush occasionally declared that the unilateral doctrine of preemption was to achieve the objectives of the charter of United Nations. (Ahmed, 2005). President Bush declared the new American policy paradigms in the changing geo-strategic environment as the great struggle for the protection of freedom and liberty during the 21st century. President Bush also committed to extend the peace by encouraging free an open society on every continent. (Lindsey & Daalder, 2003). Thus, President Bush emphasized on the concentration over a wide-ranging interest through redefining the strategic policy of engagement, detachment, and intervention.

Obama's Clear, Build, Hold and Transfer Approach

President Obama continued to apply the US National Security Strategies (NSS) policy of rapprochement and reconciliation through Clear, Build, Hold and Transfer (CBHT). The Obama administration adopted double track strategy of military operation and dialogue diplomacy in Afghanistan to bring the Taliban and other stakeholders on the dialogue table. Pakistan, China and Russia again contributed a reasonable diplomatic share to arrange and conduct different phases of dialogues among the factions of Taliban in Afghanistan under the consent of the United States in respect to bring lasting peace in the region. However, the Obama's double track Afghanistan policy was not proved as a successful agenda. The Obama administration also introduced inclusive strategic policy towards Afghanistan known as AF-PAK policy to crush and combat the offshoots of Al-Qaeda along with all the extremist's outfits in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The major purpose of Obama's AF-PAK strategy was to secure lethal and nuclear weapons from the hands of extremists and militants non-states actors which were breeding up across the Durand Line. The other important and leading objective of US AF-PAK strategy during Obama regime was to eliminate the believed danger of sanctuaries and hideouts of Al-Qaeda and Taliban who were recapturing the power and influence in the region. (Fair, 2010). Consequently, the United States appeared quite determined to disrupt the influence control and power of Taliban through increasing the strength and capability of Kabul government and the Afghan Security Forces (ASF). The Obama administration created close collaboration with Islamabad in respect to ensure domestic and regional security.

Trump's R4+S Policy towards Afghanistan

President Trump rebutted the Obama's Clear, Build, Hold and Transfer approach towards Afghanistan and adopted a new coercive policy of Regional, Realign Reinforce Reconcile and Sustain Policy (R4+S Policy) immediately after taking charge of political power in the United States. The Trump administration declared to win the war in Afghanistan as the paramount policy perspective with refurbishment of its bilateral relations with Islamabad. The Washington administration asserted that the United States deserves victory due to its precious sacrifices, cost and huge expenditure in the War on Terror in Afghanistan. President Trump articulated the policy of wining rather than nation building denying the Afghan policy of his predecessor. The Trump administration believed that at once and sudden troops withdrawal from Afghanistan may supervene huge setback to the regional interests. There are more than twenty militants and terrorist organized groups actively working for the protected violence in Afghanistan.

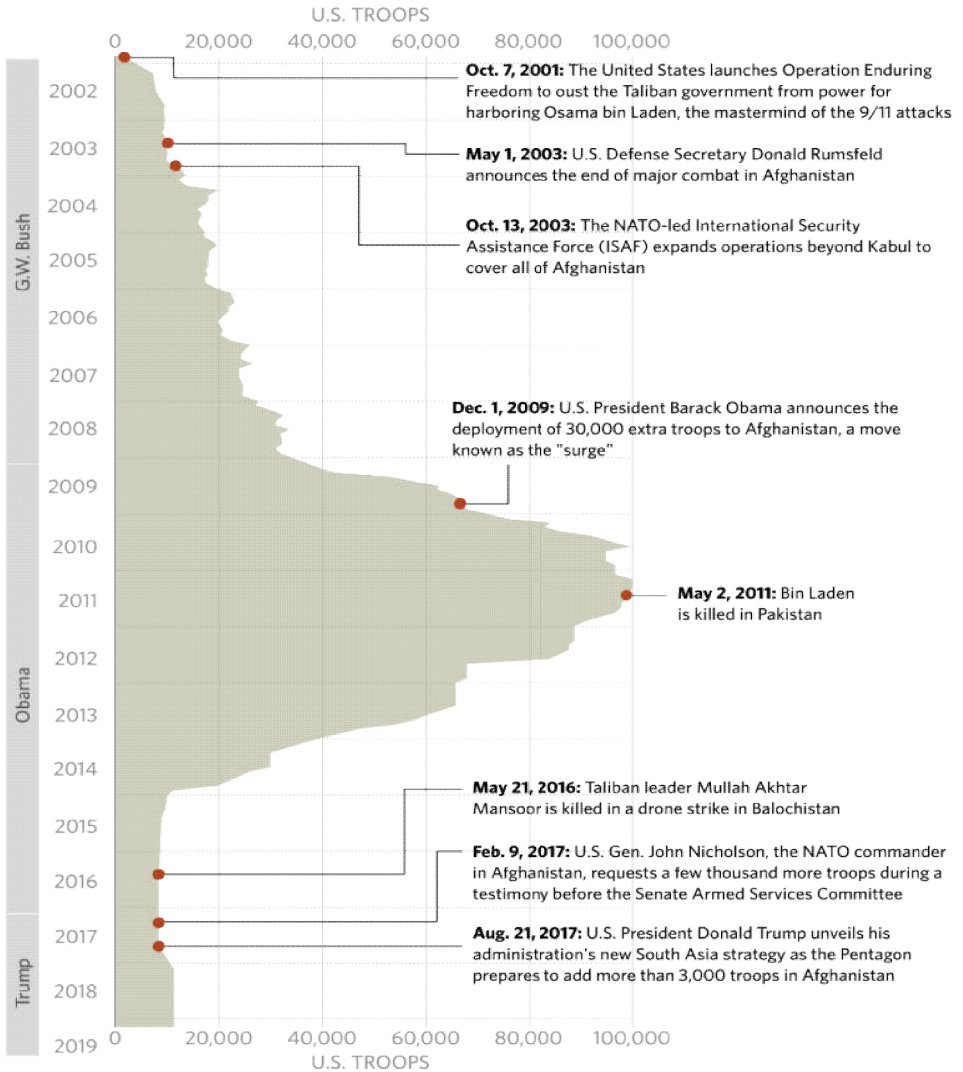
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Therefore the United States believes Pakistan still as the safe haven for violent, militant and terrorist non-state actors. Resultantly the United States continues to face an inherited challenge caused by these dissidents in the region. The United States will be quite committed to uproot and demolished the safe heavens and hideouts of the terrorists by using all the sources to preserve and protect the sovereignty of Afghanistan. The Washington administration occasionally made it clear that we are quite determine to end the risk of falling of nuclear weapons and materials in the hands of the terrorists following R4 plus strategy in Afghanistan and Pakistan. (Ahmed, 2010). Thus, the Trump administration preferred condition-based strategy over time-based approach which undermined the strategic plan of the previous Obama administration for the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan.

Figure 4. 1 U.S Troops Level in Afghanistn

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U.S. President Donald Trump is contemplating a drawdown of a few thousand troops as he pursues a peace deal between Kabul and the Taliban.



Source: Military Times; Associate Press; Washington Post; Brookings Institute

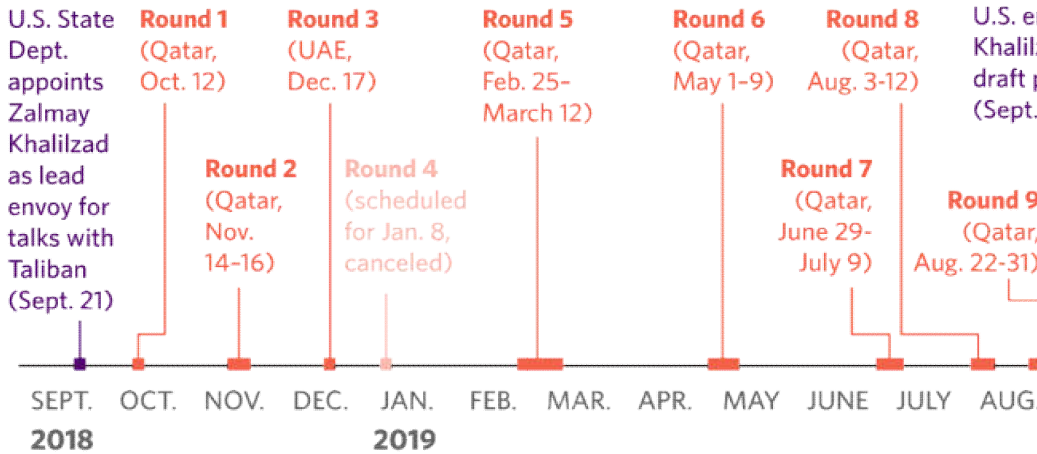
Every warring army requires to proceed a successful dialogue with an essential information of the conflict, warring parties, their aptitudes, objectives and intension in a specific conflicting area. (Giustozzi, 2020). Trump administration drew an actual picture of the Taliban role in the present and future politics of Afghanistan in the US- Afghan policy. The negotiation process was initiated in Afghanistan by the US State department under the supervision of Zalmay Khalil Zad the US envoy for Afghan affairs. Different talks rounds were arranged from Sep 2018 to Aug 2019 in UAE and Qatar to halt the ongoing violence of Taliban and to make them unarmed for the restoration of peace, stability and democratic culture. The peace talks process aimed to protect human rights, support and trust of the Afghan people, the restoration of democratic values along with the legitimate the Afghan government. Furthermore, the above-mentioned peace talks between

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United States and Taliban will require the Afghan government to develop a comprehensive political power sharing agenda with an influential role of the regional and global community. The Trump administration decided to hold US-Taliban peace talks for the enforcement of a successful transition phase in Afghanistan in the context of a capable National government and a powerful influential network of Afghan Security Forces (ASF) as the outcome of the US exit strategy from Afghanistan

The United States- Taliban Peace Talks 2018-2019

Since last October, U.S. and Taliban officials have attempted nine rounds of talks to try and secure a peace deal in Afghanistan that includes a troop withdrawal and cease-fire. On Sept. 7, U.S. President Donald Trump halted talks, citing continuing Taliban violence, leaving a deal off the table for now.



source: <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/reweighing-prospects-peace-afghanistan-taliban-us-war-talks>

President Donald Trump also applied Afghan peace talk diplomacy during Sep 2018 to 2019. The peace talk aims to invite different political stakeholders and the factions of Taliban to join a new democratic Afghanistan and to become the part of a legitimate governance system as the representatives of Afghanistan's people. There have been almost 9 rounds of talks convened to acquire a peace deal an agreement in Afghanistan. The major aim of US-Taliban peace talks included the cease-fire and troops withdrawal from Afghanistan. Each US administration during 2001 to 2019 determine its top priority in Afghanistan to eliminate the daunting threat of terrorism and to protect the country to become a safe havens for the terrorists, but it has to be done with the formation of a stable institutional and political infrastructure in Afghanistan.

Donald Trump's Diplomatic slant in Afghanistan

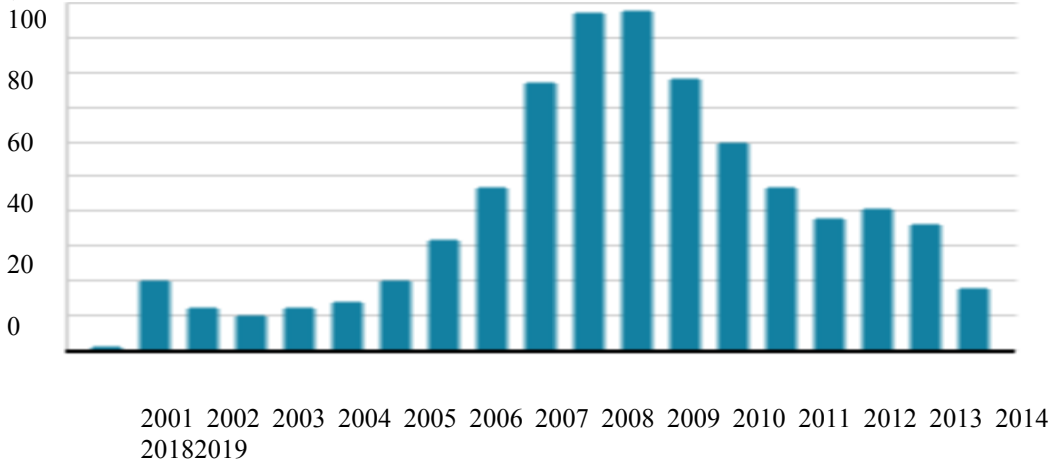
The US President Donald Trump paid a surprise visit to Afghanistan when he landed at Bagram air field at night 8:30 pm local time Thursday November 28, 2019. President Trump stayed in Afghanistan almost 3 ½ hours in the presence of about 12,000 US troops on his return back to Florida President Trump meet

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Afghan President Ashraf Ghani at mid night. Both the leaders exchange concise views in respect of the current scenario in Afghanistan. President Trump announces that the United States and Taliban have been engaged in peace talks. He further said that “we’re meeting with them”, And we’re saying it has to be cease-fire, and they don’t want to do a cease-fire, but now they do want to do a cease-fire, I believe.... and we’ll see happens”. (Jill, 2019, Nov 29).A strong Afghan government with full control over its territory, people and institutions will be able to secure the country on its own. On the other side United States could not bring all the groups of Taliban and other political stakeholders on dialogue table with the participation and diplomatic engagement of the regional actors i.e. China, Iran, Russia and Pakistan. The United States spent \$1.07 trillion in a prolonged running war in Afghanistan during President Bush to Trump regimes. (Pathak, 2017).

US Cost of War in Afghanistan 2001-2019

\$Billion



Source:U.S.Department of Defense

The United States policy paradigm shift has been featured in order of considering india as an important regional actor to play strategic role in the contemporary enviorment of pakistan. The United States invited India to invest its Commodities and commuinty to pressurized Pakistan. Resulatantly india explored a great Lobbying role in Afghanistan being a new strategic partner of the United States. New Delhi has established cordial relations with Kabul through the socio-economic investment and infrastructural development. Whereas, Pakistan has lost its historical, cultural and ideological zeal of relationship with Afghanistan. On the other side the United States adopted coercive strategies towards Afghanistan to counter and contain China’s vigorous diplomatic tactic, economic rise and strategic role in the forthcoming regional geo-startegic enviorment.

Challenges and Implications of the US Afghan policy

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The United States policy in Afghanistan has been designed and articulated in the context of emerging geo-strategic environment in the post 2014 drawdown policy. President Obama and Trump applied variant approaches to curtail the US led global troops from Afghanistan. President Barak Obama preferred to use composite dialogue, diplomacy and bilateral policy as the leading factor to complete the withdrawal program from Afghanistan. The Obama administration managed to hold dialogue with different groups of Taliban with the diplomatic support from Pakistan and China, but it was not a sufficient solution to bring lasting peace in Afghanistan due to the absence of complete engagement of domestic and regional stakeholders. (Johns, 2018). The United States during President Barak Obama's regime adopted Multidimensional Afghan policy with a leading determinant of dialogue diplomacy with different warring factions in Afghanistan. The United States intended to reduce the numbers of US security troops from Afghanistan through different phases drawn by the Pentagon to execute and complete the exit of all-American forces. Because at once quit from Afghanistan would lead to the revival of Taliban control and collapse of the Afghan political infrastructure which will create internal strife, anarchy and civil war in future. Most of the analysts and few think tanks are of the view that Taliban stronger and more dominant rather than they were active and engaged in the past. The United States security intelligence considers several reasons for the challenges in beating the Taliban or to bring them on dialogue settlement otherwise a weak and ineffective government in Kabul would invite the insurgents to capture the major socio-political governance mechanism of Afghanistan which would be sheer waste and downfall of the peace keeping collective and unified efforts of global coalitions led by the United States in Afghanistan since 2001. The United States needs to develop a clear and straightforward strategy which may protect the success and achievements in Afghanistan with the solution of existing conflicts. The major task ahead to the United States is to resolve Indo-Pak conflict as a mediator and to establish of neutral Afghanistan because a unilateral approach can increase high costs and risks in the future course of action.

The Uncertain Security Environment

The allied forces led by the United States in Afghanistan have suffered extensive casualties and the financial costs since 2001 to 2019. Almost 2400 American soldiers and over 1100 troops from the allies along with 100,000 Afghan civilians have lost their lives in this war. (Neta, 2018). Besides these lives costs the United States has spent almost \$900 billion as the direct costs on the war and reconstruction in Afghanistan for the year of 2019. Another important and identified challenge still remains quite obvious in the presence of uncertain Afghanistan's security situation which leads Taliban to continue to make gains and success. (Thomas, 2019). Consequently, such uncertain current security environment losses the control of government particularly in the rural areas of Afghanistan.

The Equipment and Resources Task

The US led NATO military forces continue to invest the huge resources, personnel and weaponry equipment into the Afghan conflict. The allied forces still require more financial concentration and advice to consist the Afghan forces for the

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successful conduct of military operations inside the Afghanistan. It requires physical infrastructure i.e. buildings, offices, training grounds, technology and equipment to sustain the capabilities of the allies. Therefore, the United States Defense department direly needed to maintain Afghanistan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) intact and equipped to face the challenging situation in Afghanistan during the forthcoming years in the post drawdown environment. (Bergen & sterman, 2018).

The compromised living Standard of Afghan People

Although the life standard of Afghan people has improved a little bit due to the joint efforts of US led NATO forces and international community during the last two years. The working and rights of female faction has been given better position as compare to the previous situation of the Taliban regime since 1994. The United Nations Human Development Index (UNHDI) has revealed the dimension of human development and the living standard of Afghan people as improved rather than in the recent years. Afghanistan's ranking has not been improved in a sufficient or an attractive number as it stood on ranking 168 out of 189 countries. (UNHDI, 2018).

The Political Instability Factor

The political governance system of Afghanistan still remains unstable and faces swear challenges. The Afghan political institutions have been eroded in the evil of corruption. The groups and stakeholders have been caught in the conflict of power sharing consensus and agreement. Consequently, the question of national unity and integration rises in the contemporary political system of Afghanistan. Resultantly instable and poor outcomes of political governance have undermined the efforts and costs of the United States and its allies working for socio-political stability in Afghanistan for last 20 years. Thus, the future threat of danger, political uncertainty and chaos seems a real challenge ahead. The overall weaker Afghan political infrastructure with a fearful government in the presence of Taliban resurgence would invite to a destructive collapse of the Afghan political system. Consequently, the civil war, anarchy and other local and external terrorist groups would be in position to rebuild their hideouts and sanctuaries in Afghanistan. (Tellis, 2017).

The Menace of Re-emergence of Taliban

Although the United States and its allies have put a considerable security, political and economic progress and efforts to bring stable, socio-economic and political environment in Afghanistan. It is still perceived that the Afghan government will be unable to continue perform its appropriate role and rule due to weaker law and order situation that can provide space to revive Taliban insurgency. The Afghanistan's probable civil war among different warring factions will be another threat. Furthermore, the sudden or rapid collapse of the Afghan political regime can create a critical situation as the neighboring countries will also be vulnerable for prevailing Taliban effort to use their proxies. There can be a protracted civil war like situation in Afghanistan which can cause security dilemma for the regional powers and a huge economic and strategic loss to for the United States and its allies forces in Afghanistan (Goraya, 2013).

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The Violent and Corrupt Social Culture

The security situation in Afghanistan seems quite procures and uncertain due to repeated incidents of violence, anomic activities and the sporadic terrorist attacks since the declaration of US military exit program 2014. The central and local Afghan governments could not acquire the complete command and control particularly in the remote and rural areas of the country. A corrupt and divergent political patronage system continues to implement uncertain reforms which led the national unity of Afghanistan remained divided. Different factions of Afghan government seem still failed to bring persistent peace, stability and prosperity for the people of Afghanistan. On the other side the Afghan government since 2016 has followed the sheer dependent policy on foreign funding and Afghan support program which caused the shrunk of economic growth. Furthermore, the working of political and economic institutions has been compromising with the drawdown policy international forces especially due to the absence of a solid, coherent and strong working infrastructure. The widening of differences between Pakistan and Afghanistan on security issues have also generated uncertain and ambiguous circumstances in the region. (Tomas & Wagner, 2013). The United States decision to provide of \$23 billion per year financial support to Afghanistan as a subsidies program seems quite uncertain especially when Al-Qaeda's core has been reduced to incoherence.

Implications of the US policy Paradigms in Afghanistan

The US engagement in Afghanistan in the post 2014 environment has been consisted on the paradigms of change, fluctuation and divergence. The United States tasted different approaches to deal with the domestic and regional actors related to Afghanistan. The Washington administration followed multi-faceted agenda based on the regional solution to end the proxy war in Afghanistan. The United States also used the pressure tactic policy towards Pakistan to squeeze Taliban factor. The use of major military escalation policy and the complete disengagement approach along with political settlement were the other options for the United States to get forward in Afghanistan. (Hartman, 2002). On the whole the regional strategies, unilateral approach, the status quo plus approach led certain implications of the US-Afghan war. The divergent and miscalculated American policies towards Afghanistan increase the hostile environment in the region. The regional actors emerged as the major independent and concerned geo- political intrigues due to the dominant engagement of the United States in Afghanistan. Furthermore, these regional powers like, Russia, China, Iran, Pakistan and India became the stakeholders in the complicated peace building process in Afghanistan. The President Obama's multi-faceted Afghan policy provided more space and room to the militant and extremists' factions which have been fighting against the global coalition. Whereas the paradigm shift in Afghan policy by containing Pakistan's geo-strategic role and giving status to India as the new regional strategic partner in Afghanistan proved as a major blow to the peace process in Afghanistan. Thus, the Trump's policy shift in Afghanistan nurtured the proxy war, re-emergence and capturing of different rural and urban areas by Taliban. On the other side the changing policy of United States in Afghanistan have escalated traditional rivalry between India and Pakistan which caused a strategic dilemma and imbalance of power in the region. Consequently, the principle of peace full co-existence, dialogue diplomacy, Indo -Pak nuclear peace talks and the Kashmir

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conflict have broad the region at the stake of danger. Furthermore, the coercive strategic approach of Washington administration once again escalated the element of distrust between Pakistan and the United States. Despite a long struggle and a huge materialistic cost invested by the United States in Afghanistan the domestic and external constraints i.e. growing NATO resentments, Afghanistan as an epicenter of geo- political intrigue, the rise and influence of regional actors still exists in Afghanistan.(Rais, 2011).

Conclusion

The United States has played a significant role as the alone super power during the first two decades of 21st century. The research entitled Implications and challenges of US drawdown plan 2014 to 2021 aims to apply the rational choice dimension to answer the research question. The preference has been given to explanatory potential of the existing literature including different actors, agencies, rational calculus and successive variant strategies applied by the United States in Afghanistan during 2014 to 2021. The research work aims to concentrate on conceptual considerations of the United States in Afghanistan as the alone super power with a complete control, power capturing aptitude and hegemonies designs in the post drawdown plan 2014. The United States introduced the policy of diplomatic engagement of different domestic stakeholders in Afghanistan, but could not determine a persistent mechanism of multilateral regional engagement which produced confrontational circumstances due to the divergent goals and interests of the regional powers in Afghanistan. Furthermore, these regional powers like, Russia, China, Iran, Pakistan and India became the stakeholders in the complicated peace building process in Afghanistan. The US multi-faceted Afghan policy provided more space and room to the militant and extremists factions which have been fighting against the global coalition. Whereas the paradigm shift in Afghan policy by containing Pakistan's geo-strategic role and giving status to India as the new regional strategic partner in Afghanistan proved as a major blow to the peace process in Afghanistan. Thus, the Trump's policy shift in Afghanistan nurtured the proxy war, re-emergence and capturing of different rural and urban areas by Taliban. The changing policy of United States in Afghanistan have escalated traditional rivalry between India and Pakistan which caused a strategic dilemma and imbalance of power in the region. Consequently, the principle of peace full co-existence, dialogue diplomacy, Indo -Pak nuclear peace talks and the Kashmir conflict have broad the region at the stake of nuclear flashpoint. The coercive strategic approach of Washington administration once again escalated the element of distrust between Pakistan and the United States. Despite a long struggle and a huge materialistic price invested by the United States in Afghanistan the domestic and external constraints like growing resentments against NATO forces and regaining of Afghanistan as an epicenter of intrigues, the rise and influence of terrorist actors still exist in Afghanistan.

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