

## **Contentious Politics in Afghanistan and the U.S. Efforts for Peace (2008-2018)**

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### **Abstract**

Afghanistan has been a battlefield for big powers for last four decades. In 1979, Russia invaded in Afghanistan and the U.S. fought a proxy war in the region with the help of Pakistan. Russian withdrawal of forces from Afghanistan under Geneva accord in 1988 caused disintegration of the former Soviet Union in 1991. The Taliban government emerged in Afghanistan in 1994 and a regime of contentious politics started in Afghanistan. It allegedly caused terrorism at local as well as international level. The U.S. alienated itself from the region after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. In September 2001, Osama Bin Laden purportedly attacked the U.S. security hub Pentagon and economic hub World Trade Centre. America retaliated with cruise missile and invaded in Afghanistan in 2001. After the U.S. claim for killing Osama in May 2011 in Abbotabad, Pakistan, decided to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan in 2014. The U.S. wishes to sustain peace in the region after its withdrawal. It intends to ensure all the conflicting parties that they should come on table for a peaceful bargaining. The U.S. is rehabilitating Afghanistan with her allies. Afghanistan was destructed during the war on terror. This paper is based on the theory of contentious politics introduced by three American sociologists, Sidney Tarrow, Charles Tilly, and Doug McAdam. The tipping point theory is also used in the backdrop of 9/11 incident. It is explained with primary as well as secondary sources.

**Keywords:** Contentious Politics, Peace, Afghanistan, US

### **Introduction**

In this paper, contentious politics in Afghanistan and its impact on the region would be explored along with the U.S. efforts for peace in the post 9/11 era. What is the contention politics in Afghanistan? Who is responsible for this contentious politics in Afghanistan? And how it would be resolved in the prevailing circumstances? These are the significant questions; this paper is going to answer. In understanding the contentious politics we may say that it is a technique by which political actors use the radical forces to restore acceptable norms and values for a livable community.

The advent of the twenty first century is full of insecurities, insurgencies, technological development and wary world order. It is a uni-multipolar world that believes in interdependence and free trade. Non-state actors are challenging the global security process today by intervening in the affairs of the state. It is causing insurgencies through the help of fourth generation warfare. The world order is being imposed upon the transnational democracies without considering the demands of the local social capital. In Pakistan, insecurity is at large and causing insurgency in the

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north and the west of the country. Pakistan has been a front line state in the war against terrorism. It needs to develop its effective institutions to adjust itself in the world politics. The forces of globalization may leave Pakistan behind if it could not cope with the prevailing circumstances. The author has been to the U.S. and Bajore agency in Pakistan for interviewing the stakeholders that are suffering out of the global insecurity and insurgencies.

In the late 1990s and the beginning of the twenty first century three American scholars Sidney Tarrow, Charles Tilly, and Doug McAdam (here onward TTM) explained the concept of contentious politics as a source of transforming or changing the government policies by using the disruptive forces that may include social movements, interest groups, and other coercive means of bargaining. In this paper the author looks into the contentious politics concept in the perspective of Afghanistan and tries to explain accordingly instead of indulging himself in the description of the TTM. Although TTM gave a systematic understanding of contentious politics for making this phenomenon more scientific yet remained unsuccessful to give any empirical evidence for the sustainability of the concept. Since Adam to date there is only one law of nature is existing that is might is right.

### **Pre 9/11 Era**

Afghanistan is a land locked country and had been in war since its beginning owing to the warlords' power politics. Without tracing back in history, focusing on this research frame we look into the warlords emerged in the post 9/11 era in Afghanistan. After the disintegration of erstwhile Soviet Union in 1991, America went back from the region without settling smoke in Afghanistan. Afghan Mujahideen who got money and weapons in the wake of fighting so-called 'war on terrorism'. The said Mujahideen became powerful and affluent and decided to rule over Afghanistan. They challenged the Afghan Soviet backed government and started swaying in whole country. Taliban were of the opinion that they won the war against the heavy weight former Soviet Union and now they have money and weapons, can easily control and rule over Afghanistan. It was unacceptable for the neighbouring states like Russia, India and Iran in the West specifically. It was also undesirable for China in the far north east and three Central Asian States like Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan located in the north of Afghanistan. Pakistan in the south of Afghanistan remained the most affected country regarding its security owing to the Russian intervention in Afghanistan. More than five million refugees came to Pakistan and still almost three million Afghan refugees are living in Pakistan and causing a heavy toll on Pakistan's political economy. After the collapse of Soviet Union, Mujahedeem named as Taliban by the West and became popular as a militia in the South Asia and Central Asian region. In the 1990s, Afghanistan remained under war conditions owing to the Soviet backed ruler Najibullah's bad governance that came to an end in 1992, replaced with anarchy and chaos in the country as Mujahideen were controlling the South of Afghanistan under the leadership of Gulbadin Hekmatyar. His Hezb-i Islami

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and the Junbish-i Milli forces of Abdul Rashid Dostum made an alliance and captured Kabul. Kabul, southern and eastern provinces of Afghanistan were under the control of Mujahideen in 1994. In the same year Ahmad Shah Massoud took control of Kabul and started a process of national consolidation and decided to adopt a democratic process for the resolution of prevailing crises. He also invited Mujahideen for talks which they refused to join. In 1996 Mujahideen allegedly took financial support from Saudi Arabia and militia training from Pakistan regained their control over Kabul and forced Massoud to retreat.

Ahmad Shah Massoud and Dostum formed an alliance popularly known as Northern alliance to regain control over Kabul. Pakistan Chief of Army Staff General Pervaiz Musharraf is said to send Pakistani support to Mujahideen against Northern alliance in 1997. During the encounter in the Battles of Mazar-i-Sharif 1997–98, Mujahideen defeated northern alliance. From 1996 to 2001, Osama Bin Laden and Aimuzawahri were operating their AlQaida movement from Afghanistan.

### **The Post 9/11 Era**

The U.S. faced a cruel act of terrorism in September 11, 2001, in which it lost more than 3000 innocent people's lives. It infuriated the U.S., retaliated with cruise missile billion dollar a piece Friedman, (2000), against Afghanistan in 2001. "War on terrorism" started against AlQaida and its hide outs for sustaining piece in the world. The U.S. has to face a lot of criticism regarding its attack on Afghanistan but "there was a very broad international consensus on the operation in Afghanistan — over 60 countries, along with inter-governmental organizations (IGOs) such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), were signatories of the contract" (Rubin, 2008). Thus, support of international actors convinced the U.S. to go for war against terrorism in 2001. The U.S. spent

### **The U.S. efforts for Peace in Afghanistan (2008-14)**

The U.S. efforts for rehabilitating Afghanistan after a more than decade long war on terrorism seems a herculean task. Obama administrations has been started working on this task since 2008 and finally drew a conclusion that the NATO forces must be reduced in number for the end of conspiracy theories related to the U.S. forces presence in the region. Although there is a big question mark on the presence of NATO forces in Afghanistan yet the U.S. resolved to reduce the U.S. army troops on a large scale by 2014. After the increasing number of casualties the U.S. allies started thinking to withdraw their troops from the hot spots in Afghanistan. The U.S. commitment was very much there in fighting against terrorism. The following table will show that how different countries has been started reducing the number of troops owing to their killings in Afghanistan since 2001 to 2010. Although number of casualties is far greater than the table shows:

**Table 1**

*Afghanistan coalition military casualties, 2001–10*

Year	USA	UK	Other	Total
2001	12	0	0	12
2002	49	3	17	69
2003	48	0	9	57
2004	52	1	7	60
2005	99	1	31	131
2006	98	39	54	191
2007	117	42	73	232
2008	155	51	89	295
2009	317	108	96	521
2010	368	94	99	561
<b>Total</b>	<b>1 315</b>	<b>339</b>	<b>475</b>	<b>2 129</b>

**Source:** <http://icasualties.org/>.

It is a known fact that under the umbrella of the NATO forces the U.S. troops were in the greater number. We also see in the table that number of the U.S. is also greater than any other country in Afghanistan. Although there were also other countries who were supporting the American stance on crushing terrorism in the world yet they increase the support to the U.S. The following table will show the country wise support for eliminating terrorism from the world. This support was more in 2009 and 2010. The following table is giving only two years survey regarding the military support provided by the U.S. allies.

President Obama proclaimed in White House, he will keep 8,400 U.S. troops in Afghanistan until the end of his term in January 2017. ([https://cic.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/national\\_unity\\_government\\_final.pdf](https://cic.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/national_unity_government_final.pdf)). He said that the circumstances allowed him to slow down the pace of withdrawing the US troops from Afghanistan. Contrary to this, the Taliban demand the complete withdrawal of foreign troops as a condition for ending the war. Obama denied that the withdrawal was possible without any political settlement between the rival groups in Afghanistan. (GAGNON, 2016). The White House had issued such statement at the end of Afghan officials (President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Officer

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Abdullah Abdullah) visit to Washington in March 2015. “Remain the surest way to achieve the full retrograde of U.S. and foreign troops from Afghanistan.”<sup>1</sup>

For such settlement it needs an international peacekeeping force that President Ghani and CEO Abdullah introduced as the International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF). After the departure of the ISAF there was an almost turmoil in Afghanistan as the influence of Taliban started increasing in Afghanistan since the remaining US troops could not sustain the resistance and gave way to Taliban to control the major parts of the troubled land.

It forced the parties and all stake holders in Afghanistan to implement the National Unity Government agreement signed in September 2014. “The Bonn Agreement of December 2001, which codified a first draft of that settlement, asked the UN Security Council to authorize an international stabilization force for Afghanistan.” ([https://cic.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/national\\_unity\\_government\\_final.pdf](https://cic.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/national_unity_government_final.pdf)). This issue sustained till efforts made over different terms and conditions on settlement. It continued until the drafting and approval of the Afghan constitution in 2003-04. Even it remains to the later stage in electoral clashes and its repercussions on the presidential drives of 2009 and 2014. Although the international military presence kept assuring that there would be no transgression of boundaries yet the promise not fulfilled in letter and spirit. In the so called war against terrorism the US hegemony was accepted in the region in 2001 owing to the regional weak governments especially the defacto government of Pervaiz Musharraf in Pakistan gave way to the US in 2001 against AlQaida and Taliban. It forced all militant groups in Afghanistan to make new government in Afghanistan at the Bonn Conference. It allowed the UN Security Council to give permission of the deployment a force under the UN for the security of Kabul and its regional areas. It was ISAF, which the Security Council later endorsed.

Contrary to this, it is observed that terrorism has become a cliché in the twenty first century owing to the certain errors made by the West during the so called war against terrorism. These errors cumulatively transform the terrorism into errorism. The West in the domains of constructing truth, public policy, and estimation makes errors. All these three gray areas put the NATO forces in to a war that may never end and put the U.S. political economy in to untidiness. Clausewitz words are the best interpreter of the U.S. today: that the scholars’ words may be useful and harmful for the country in the war conditions.

The U.S. policy makers usually depend upon data gathered by the scholars. The scholars join the U.S. universities from the world over and mostly earn the scholarships from the Western donor agencies. These scholars inveigle the U.S. policy

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<sup>1</sup> The White House, Remarks by President Obama and President Ghani of Afghanistan in Joint Press Conference, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/03/24/remarks-president-obama-and-president-ghani-afghanistan-joint-press-conf>, 24 March 2015).

makers to stay in the country longer with a fabricated data. This erroneous data leads to a misappropriate policymaking. The Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan wars usually considered mistakes by the U.S. public opinion. In this perspective, economy and business in the U.S. is at stake. Barrack Obama's efforts for upholding peace in the world are commendable and a source, bridging the gap between the West and the rest.

**Table 2**

*Public support for sending more troops to Afghanistan in NATO member states, 2009 and 2010*

NATO member	Support, 2009	Support, 2010
Bulgaria	2%	2%
France	4%	4%
Germany	7%	7%
Italy	6%	4%
Netherlands	4%	4%
Poland	5%	2%
Portugal	4%	2%
Spain	7%	6%
Slovakia	2%	3%
Romania	5%	6%
Turkey	14%	16%
United Kingdom	11%	7%
United States	30%	25%

**Source:** German Marshall Fund of the United States, Transatlantic Trends, June 2009 and 2010 surveys.

This survey shows the U.K. concerns about its casualties also shown in the Table 1. Thus, it reduce the support in 2010 up to forty percent as compare the U.S. that reduce the support almost thirty percent in the same year. Gradually, the support for staying in Afghanistan is declining day by day and the figures in the year 2018 may be dismal and unacceptable for the US government. It forced the Trump administration to devise a new strategy for South Asia.

In August 21, 2017, Trump announced a “new strategy” for Afghanistan and South Asia that includes the following points:

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- 1) to adopt an open approach instead of timetable based policy in Afghanistan
- 2) the policy of engaging all available resources that may include diplomatic and economic activities to support the US military in Afghanistan
- 3) a revised regional plan to threaten Pakistan by favouring India in a strategic engagement
- 4) expanded targets for the U.S. troops.

In the implementation of the new Trump strategy is still vague and facing uncertainty owing to some non-serious steps like aggressive attitude towards Pakistan and polite policy towards India may aggravate the US crises in Afghanistan if Pakistan stops the US logistics that usually go to Afghanistan through Pakistan. Therefore, the New US strategy is unknown to the experts that what would be the number of increasing troops in Afghanistan in future as Trump denied to tell anybody about the future policy in Afghanistan. Trump criticized the past US governments for using “arbitrary timetables” in Afghanistan. The US president has decided to make any strategy regarding Afghanistan according to the prevailing situation instead of preplanned strategy. This move is welcomed by few US strategists in the favour of not withdrawing the total troops from Afghanistan. The U.S. commander in Afghanistan, General John Nicholson, believes that with the new US strategy they are going to win the war in Afghanistan.

### **Conclusion**

The contentious politics in Afghanistan demands the withdrawal of all foreign troops from the region. The U.S. and its allies are making efforts in rebuilding Afghanistan’s schools, hospitals, industry and other infrastructure very efficiently that it could sustain after the departure of foreign troops. The U.S. intend to install democracy in Afghanistan through a democratic electoral process that has been started more effectively in 2015 when votes were recounted and chances of rigging were reduced at a large scale. It is a pertinent example of adorning Afghanistan with democratic values successfully. President Hamid Karzai was ruling Afghanistan under the U.S. supervision and general elections held in Afghanistan this year and Asgraf Ghani successfully took oath as the new president of Afghanistan. The U.S. efforts for peace in Afghanistan seem very pragmatic that transfer of power happened very peacefully as well as democratically in Obama presidency.

On the other hand the Trump government adopted a strict expression in its Afghan policy that is making the peace process difficult in the region. Donald Trump victory in the US spoiled the whole efforts of the US to make the region in the subcontinent more peaceful. By now the US is declining its influence in Afghanistan as almost 52 percent area of Afghanistan is under the direct control of the Taliban. The US forces

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are denying using the land paths for their survival known as surrendering the land in military parleys and using the air ways for its operations. Still the US is trying hard to make a safe exit from Afghanistan. It has to rely heavily on Pakistan for a peaceful political settlement in Afghanistan and Pakistan always assisted the US in maintaining peace in the region. The geographical and strategic interests of Pakistan are changing in the region very speedily owing to the China Pakistan Economic Corridor. Pakistan is engaged in constructing the economic corridor for sustaining its political economy as the said corridor is a dream project of China, Pakistan and some other countries in the global politics. This corridor is not regional but of global nature. Thus, the US has to be vigilant of Pakistan' national interests and national security. Otherwise, Pakistan does not have any option but to leave the US in sojourn. The mutual respect and cooperation is the only way out for the peaceful political settlement in Afghanistan.



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