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THE UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY IN AFGHANISTAN AND THE RISE OF THE TALIBAN: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

By

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Abstract
As part of the Cold War policy of truncating Soviet expansionism, the United States had supported the Mujahidin in Afghanistan in their resistance to Soviet meddlesomeness in the internal affairs of their country beginning in 1979. In ensuring this, the United States and its allies mobilized resources to carter for logistics, arms and training of Jihadists fighting the Soviets and the puppet regime it protected. These US (and its allies) supports, in no-small-measure, eventually led to a defeated Red Army, as was the case with the Americans in Vietnam. Internal jostling for power by rival jihadist groups after Soviet withdrawal in 1989 led to the rise of the Taliban-an Islamist extremist group that is today proscribed a terrorist organization by the United States, a former ally. This study adopted historical and descriptive research method. The study obtained data from extensive review of literature on the subject under consideration. Using qualitative analytical method, the study attributes the emergence of the Taliban to U.S. interest and conducts a historical enquiry into the current US – Taliban animosity. It concludes that, in spite of its brutal administrative tactics, the Taliban could still gain considerable acceptance especially if they imbibe some level of human right consideration in their governance, grant women some level of liberty including right to education, and observe other international best practices internally and internationally.
Key words: Mujahidin, Taliban, Soviet Union, Cold War

INTRODUCTION

Today, the growing influence of non-state actors including Islamic militia in global affairs is no longer debatable for instance, the Taliban controls the government in Afghanistan. They are a fundamentalist Islamist militia that is proscribed terrorist group by the United States.

Afghanistan had maintained a neutral stance in the Cold War confrontation between the United States and its allies on one hand, and the Soviet Union on the other hand, since the end of World War II due to dynamics of global politics at the time. However, from the 1950s, the influence of the Soviet in Afghanistan became relatively widespread. In the 1970s, there was an attempt to overthrow the communist friendly government through a revolt by Muslims there (Littell 1999:87). To protect the regime, the Soviet invaded Afghanistan in 1979. The invading force had hoped to boost the capabilities of communist army as quickly as possible and then withdraw. Things turned differently, guerrilla fighters called Mujahideen, who were opposed to the communist government, outmaneuvered and overpowered the Soviet military. Though the Soviet seized the Afghan cities through bombings, but could not dislodge the Mujahedeen from their strongholds in the mountains (Littell 1999:87).

The United State who saw halting the spread of communism as the 'centre piece' of its foreign policy throughout the Cold War (1945 – 1991) adopted several measures including soft spot for non-state actors. They (the US) feared that if the Soviet prevails in Afghanistan, they will

subsequently have firm grip over the Middle East and its oil supplies. The president of the United States seriously warned the Soviet of the consequences of an attempt to occupy the Persian Gulf. Jimmy Carter made it clear that such move would be "repelled by any means necessary, including military force" (Young and Kent,2004). There was, however, no direct confrontation between the major powers. The US only imposed an embargo on grain shipment to the Soviet Union and embargo on grain shipment to the Soviet Union and boycotted the Olympic games in Moscow, 1980(Young and Kent,2004)..

After ten years of fighting without a decisive victory, the heavy cost was both acknowledged by the Soviet and the Afghans. The government of Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet Union President ordered his forces to withdraw. In February 1989, the last soviet troops left Afghanistan as unrest intensifies at home. The concern of this paper is to explore Afghan – US relations after this war with a view to ascertaining the prevailing circumstances leading to the emergence of the Taliban, a group that was merely a fighting force but later took control of political affairs in Afghanistan. To effectively do this, the study employed historical and descriptive research method and review existing related materials on the subject under consideration. Structurally, the study first examines Soviet interest in Afghanistan

Soviet Interest in Afghanistan

The Soviet's ambition in Afghanistan is in furtherance of its overall foreign policy, which to use the words of Max Beloff (1949 Page no) "is less obscure and more coherent than that of any other country in the world. The objectives embrace the ultimate victory of the world's proletariat under the leadership of Moscow". This had never been changed since Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels declared in the communist Manifesto (though there have been some variations of emphasis). When the second World War ended, there was much vigour in achieving these goals.

Until 1979, Russia and the Soviet Union had maintained friendly relations with Afghanistan:

> The two states signed a treaty of alliance and friendship in 1921, a treaty of neutrality and nonaggression in 1926 and a commercial agreement in 1936. No Anglo-Russian frictions developed in Afghanistan during World War II, as they did in Iran. In their early days the Soviet made a strong bid to win the support of the Muslims of the Near East for communism, but their propaganda was poorly suited for peoples still living under Semi-feudal conditions. Soviet tactics thereupon shifted from preaching class struggle to inciting discontented minorities. (Palmer and Perkins, 2004 page no).

What then was Russia's prime motive of intervention in Afghanistan at the time they did? So many reasons for Russia's actions have been advanced but we cannot say for sure which is the real rationale behind their action. Perhaps Russia wanted to take advantage of the turmoil in Iran (at the time, Islamic revolutionaries took over power in Iran) and extend Soviet influence towards the Indian ocean and the Persian Gulf that is extremely rich in crude oil resources (Young and Kent, 2004). According to Zbigniew Brzezinski (1985), failure of the US foreign policy at the time made the Soviets to engaged in this act of miscalculation (Brzezinski, 1985). For others, the decision makers in Soviet Russia (Politburo) may have considered the intervention as an application of the Brezhnev Doctrine-USSRsequivalent of the US Marshall Plan -to preserve communist regimes when they come under threat. This doctrine was used to legalize the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Young and Kent further observed that:

> Russia's evidence on the intervention reveals a doubtful, divided leadership reluctantly acting to prop up communism in a neighbouring state which they believed lie in their sphere of interest…. The Kremlin wish to replace a leadership whose policies had become a menace to Soviet interest and who threatened to undermine local communist control… they also saw their threat to their position in Afghanistan as a special case in the less developed world, different for example from the coups against nominally Marxist regimes in Africa since the 1960s that the Soviet had taken little action to prevent.

However convincing this motivation may seem, itwas rejected by Hall and Kirk (2015: 776). For them:

> The requirement to have nothing but Marxist states sharing borders with the USSR does not seem to have been an absolute imperative. Afghanistan had, after all, existed as a contiguous kingdom for many years. In 1973 it had become a republic and only in 1978 had the communist regime of Neor MahammadTaraki come to power (after a coupdetat). The main reason for Soviet military intervention in 1979 was the fear of Islamic fundamentalism spreading from Afghanistan into its own Muslim populated regions.

All the reasons advanced so far as contributing, in one way or another to Russia's intervention in Afghanistan has its own logic. However, the intervention did not yield the much-desired result due to the number of resources and lives lost.

Afghanistan before the Russian Invasion

Afghanistan is a predominantly Muslim country, with diverse ethnic groups with nearly half of the population poverty-stricken. This mountainous country was under British control for 40 years before granted independence in 1919. In 1921 Afghanistan signed a treaty of amity with the USSR though Soviet influence was not felt in the years before World War II (Inter-War period, 1919 – 1939).

The government of Prince Mohammad Daud Khan (a cousin of the king) admitted Afghanistan into the league of non-aligned nations in 1955. After serving as prime minister for 10 years, he began to accept development aid from both opposing blocs (Moscow and Washington). In 1973, he overthrew king Zahir and became president and tried to resist Soviet apron strings by remaining non-aligned. Daud had often fallen out with the local communist party called the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) in 1965. The party split into two main factions not-too-long after its formation. One of the factions called Khalq Wasy led by Nur Muhammad Taraki and included Hafizullah Amin draws most of their support from the rural areas. The Parcham, under the leadership of Babrak Karmal leaned on support from Kabul and other Urban centres and was relatively moderate and therefore willing to work with Daud to achieve fundamental reforms for Afghanistan.

By 1978, the political atmosphere in Afghanistan changed. Prince Daud was overthrown in a coup led by a small group of communist in the Afghan army. He had excluded the Parchem from his administration increasingly in a bid to perpetrate himself in power and even attempted to clampdown on any opposition. This made them have close ties with the Khalq, their former rival.

It is important to note that the Soviet did not play any major role in the coup that toppled the Daud regime. According to the group, they have succeeded in establishing a 'Democratic Republic in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the coup was not a revolution backed by the Afghan masses. Therefore, Afghanistan was then "under the control of a small communist movement … totally unprepared for the power that unexpectedly… fell into its hands. Its misuse of that power with a combination of idealistic reformism and brutal authoritarianism started the country on a downward spiral" (Bradsher, 1983:74).

Though the government maintained a non-aligned posture of the old regime, played down on certain Marxist elements in its policy formulations, the fact remained that its background is rooted in the perennial Khalq– Parcham political/ ideological duel. Afghan political leadership was neither experienced nor elicited mass support. Many experienced administrators were sacked especially if they disagree with the Marxist ideologies introduced. Spurred by the desire to modernize and Marxism, the Khale regime push on with a holistic reform programme touching on education, land reform. As a traditional Muslim society, some aspects of these reforms were anathema to Islamic public opinion, for example, improved women's rights. By the scale of these reforms, Gupta (1986:55) noted that "never before in Afghan history had there been such a ruthless attempt to push through so many basic reforms and fundamental changes in so short a period of time".

The regime would have been termed moderate and really non-aligned but for the use of secret police to repress opposition and the Soviet-Afghan friendship treaty signed in December 1978 which rapidly increased Soviet advisers from 350 to 4,000 (Young and Kent 2004:491). As a result of this

pro-Soviet leaning, the United States did not feel very comfortable in Afghanistan and then slashed economic aid and removed its members of the peace corps, especially after the kidnap and eventual death of the US ambassador to Afghanistan (Adolph Dubs) in February 1979.
A long-nursed ambition of Russia was the institution of Marxist reforms in Afghanistan without attracting much competition from their rival, the United States.

"For the first time it had achieved ideological congruence and de facto alliance with its strategically situated neighbour" (Rubinstein 1982:162). Moscow had never directly intervened in Afghanistan until March 1979:

> By then a series of local uprisings had occurred against PDPA and Afghan refugeesbegan to stream along the long-contested South eastern border with Pakistan. The Pakistani leader, General Zia ul-Haq, was sympathetic to the pro-Islamic, anti-Communist feelings of the exiles and ready to give shelter and aid to groups which formed in opposition to the PDPA. The Afghan government's conscript army was reluctant to put down the uprisings and increasingly the Kabul government's authority was called into question (Young and Kent 2004: 491).

In Herat some of the Afghan army rebelled and killed some advisers from the Soviet Union sparking fierce debate in the Politburo as well as sending request to for Soviet intervention. Though they had favoured deployment of weapons and military advisers than direct military assistance for a government that was not supported by the masses. Also, the Soviet felt a sense of commitment even when there was no treaty of assistance in war times between both governments, to a regime they have already committed much and which was about to collapse with unforeseen consequences. Apart from that, there was equally apprehension over what might befall their forces if locked down in long and protracted guerrilla warfare in Afghanistan. The hard choice to intervene was ultimately carried.

Russia's Intervention in Afghanistan

Violence and instability within the ranks of the PDPA gave the Soviet a fertile ground to intervene in Afghanistan. At this point, the intervention was described as a catastrophe that could have been avoided, that was reacted by perceptions, personalities and ideology much more than national interest and strategy (Young and Kent 2004). By 1978 to 1979, Russia's commitment to the PDPA was increased with conscious knowledge of their unpopularity in the country. The Soviet believed that the party will earn the support of the masses in due course. The Soviet were eager to keep Afghanistan due to the revolution in Iran – a neighbour on the Western border of Afghanistan – in which they did not help the communist. If another revolt in Afghanistan is allowed, it could lead to an increasing sense of unity among Muslims in the USSR which is dangerous for the Union. There was also another fear that inaction in Afghanistan will create a space for the United States to quickly exploit and thereby gain control in a country next door to them and elsewhere in the region.

It is important to note that reaching a consensus over the decision to intervene in Afghanistan was not an easy task for the communist leadership in Moscow;

> Kosygin and the Chief of General Staff, Marshal Nicoloi Ogarkov, doubted the vision of intervention but the defence Minister, Dimitri Ustinov, was keen to act. Brehznev, old, suffering arteriosclerosis and always cautious was undecided on the course to follow but events in September – October tipped him in favour of intervention (Wested 1996page no).

In the mist of these crisis, President Taraki of …..visited Moscow, thousands of people have already fled to Pakistan and the Soviet contemplated being a part of the government in Kabul, non-communist, just as a step to fine-tuning its policies in ending the rebellion. A proposal was presented by Taraki for the removal of Amin, the Khalq's leader and hard liner, as a first step towards the implementation of certain policy trust that will make the government popular. The proposal spoke the mind of the Soviet who had wanted to limit the powers of the Khalq, and had also attributed the

unpopularity of the Kabul government to Amin, so they agreed (Hammond 1984:80). However, before Taraki returned to Kabul, Amin had taken over the government and ordered that he be arrested. This sparked armed clashes in Kabul between members of the PDPA. In October of which year Taraki was killed. The Soviet leader, Brehznev who had instituted the peace process felt he was to be blamed for Tariki'sdeath. At the same time, he felt betrayed by the actions of Amin. It was later noticed that Amin was holding secret talks with the Americans thereby signifying a possible turn-about from the Communist course (Young and Kent 2004: 492). Truly, Amin had once lived in the United States so the Soviet's fear is justified. He is equally showing the tendencies of strengthening relations with Pakistan that is also pro-West.

On these grounds, there was a coordinated plan to invade Afghanistan. The defence minister, Ustinov could convince, Gromyko, the Foreign Affairs Minister and Yuri Andropov, KGB Chief who dominated Soviet policies both internal and external as Brehznev's health deteriorates. The KGB attempted to assassinate Amin in December as a way of minimizing the cost of outright invasion but the plan failed. The decision to invade was finally taken on 12 December with the expectation of mission lasting for a very short time with a force of 75,000 troops maximum. The objectives were as follows: to topple the Amin's government and replace it with a more acceptable government that would not be penetrated by Pakistan or Iran; broaden the government; strengthen the Afghan military and ultimately resolve or end the uprising.

The Red Army was well received in Kabul by Amin on 25 December, 1978. He had believed that the army had come to rescue his regime from imminent collapse. However, by 27, he had been killed. Meanwhile, the Soviet had claimed that they were invited by him to formalize a treaty of friendship earlier signed. The hatred Amin's autocratic rule gravitated from the Afghan people would now be transferred to the Soviet Union (Anwar 1989: 192).

The early months of the invasion did not elicit much armed opposition from the people of Afghanistan. This was because the Soviet army was not deployed directly to the country side where the rebellion was prevalent but was targeted at the government in Kabul (Roy 1986:118). However, pockets of unrest intensified so much so that outright demonstrations were carried out in the capital by February of which year . By 1980, just a year into the Soviet occupation, no fewer than 115,000 men had deserted the Afghan military (from 150,000 in 1979 to 35,000 in 1980) rendering it impotent for the maintenance of law and order(Roberts 1999:81). . The Russian troops were left with no choice but to prosecute the war, "conceived as a quick and decisive military operation, which would be followed by a rapid withdrawal of Soviet forces, the intervention in Afghanistan became the USSR's Vietnam" (Roberts 1999:81). It became clear to Andropov full name, the KGB Chief in January 1980 when he visited the Afghan capital that the duration of the Soviet army in Afghanistan would be extended. A political solution to the crisis was initially contemplated so that the Soviet troops could withdraw as quickly as possible. However, the terms of peace that would be acceptable to the Afghan aggrieved groups was difficult to reach. This was due to the fact that the opposition itself – the Mujaheddin – were divided and inspired by faith. Apart fromthat, there was much condemnation about the invasion and considering retreat at this point clearly prove the world right. There was also the necessity for any negotiation to be conducted from a position of strength so confronting the Mujaheddin became absolutely necessary.

As the Soviet army took over combat operations following the increasing weakness of the Afghan military, there was further mobilization. From the initial 50,000 men, it soon increased to 80,000. Rather creating any form of pressure for peace, the crisis degenerated from a civil war among parties within Afghanistan to that between an invading force and the people united against a local puppet regime (Bradsher 1983: 205).

The Soviet army in Afghanistan was formed into specialist counter-insurgency units, though they initially employed tanks and ground troops to deal with the opposition. The realization that they are dealing with a special kind of warfare – insurgency – later changed their tactics. Though the Soviet forces were formed in international warfare and have little experience of insurgency (Kennedy-Pipe

1998), they had no other alternation. It was a difficult war, fighting against the masses who are supposed to drive Marxist ideology which the Soviet pursues.

The Mujahidin fought from the mountains of extreme temperatures with light weapons supplied from Pakistan where they also took shelter. The Soviet troops later adopted light weapons instead of heavy army, including helicopters to follow up the Mujahidin.

Political instability in Moscow severally impacted on the war effort. It is obvious that "with Brezhnev in physical decline and then two rapid changes of leader, there was presumably a lack of commitment to a vigorous prosecution of the Afghan campaign" (Young and Kent 2004:532).

As observed by Young and Kent, (2004), between 1984 and 85, six large-scale offensives, supported by heavy aerial bombing, including raids on refugee camps were carried out, aimed at breaking the morale of the Mujahidin fighters, and then, achieving a quick victory rather than allowing the war to drag on. However, the Soviet incurred greater casualties, with the Mujahidin still fought on.

It is important to note that the Soviet were not defeated in Afghanistan neither were they close to been defeated. The phrase 'Soviet Vietnam' is only a way of comparing the Soviet stay in Afghanistan during this war to the U.S. in Vietnam based mainly on duration and other similarities. At the peak of Soviet loses in 1984, only about 2,000 combat related fatalities were recorded. Meanwhile, its highest deployment in 1985 did not exceed 108,000 men (Young and Kent, 2004).

The Afghan government troops were not a complete liability, at least it held on to the cities where about 2 million out of the 13 million Afghans lived. This was done by cleverly exploiting the animosity between the two factions of the communists in Afghanistan – the elite and moderate urban Parcham and the rural and hardline Khalaq. The Kabul authority also contributes to the war by expanding the secret police, the KHAD. The divided nature of the Mujahidin whose factions sometimes fought one another, was an added advantage for the Afghan government and Soviets. Indeed, the fighters were not united to forge a common Afghan identify. What thwarted the unity of the Mujahidin against communism and an invading force was simply multi-ethnicity with tribal affinities. For instance, the Pathans make up about 40 percent of the Afghan populations. There were also Turkomans, Tajiks, among others. The Pathans were bandits with a history of internal feuding mostly connected with religion and division between Sunni and Shiites under the auspices of tribal warlords. Anwar (1988: 238) appropriately captured the magnitude of division in Afghan society by noting that: "warring factions have portioned out Afghanistan into separate areas of influence sharing nothing in common but hatred and lack of trust". However, in 1986, a government-in-exile was formed by the unification of seven different groups of guerrilla fighters, a move that the US was reluctant to recognize due to the volatility that characterizes politics of the Mujahidin. In all, the Mujahidin were generally well experienced fighters and resilient but also amateurs, poorly armed, especially as regards heavy weapons, and lacked a united strategy. With these lapses, they could not dislodge the Soviet from the cities and towns they held. The division and special spread of Mujahidin groups, which shows weakness in war setting, turned beneficial. Hammond (1984:157) noted that, these internal opposition "in one sense a strength: if the Soviet should succeed in destroying a few groups, many would be left. Like a bear attacked by a Swarm of bees, the Soviet army (was) being hit from all directions".

The United States Support for the Mujahidin

In line with the United States Cold War policy of thwarting Soviet expansionist design anywhere in the world, they led a multinational support for the Mujahidin following Soviet invasion. In this American-led effort, Pakistan was the most important ally, playing host to millions of refugees, training camps and a channel through which international aid got to the Mujahidin (Garthoff, 1994: 713). Pakistan under General Zia ul-Haq even sent some troops into Afghanistan though as observers following fears of an imminent Soviet advance into his country. He also strengthened relations with the West and agreed to host a U.S. electronic monitoring station previously in Iran then lost in the revolution in 1979. Aids from the U.S. and other States got to Afghanistan through the goodwill of Pakistan (Hyman 1992: 218).

Other Islamic States also assisted the Mujahidin including Iran Egypt, Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia, for instance, gave up to 2.5 million dollars in financial aid. China also took advantage of the ideological differences between her and the USSR to render assistance to the Mujahidin. In collaboration with the Egyptians, they both assisted the Central Intelligent Agency (CIA) by sending some of their own Soviet made weapons to the Mujahidin during the early periods of the war. The Mujahidin would easily claim that the arms were seized from the Soviet military and demoralize them since they could not verify the source of the weapons. This, in a way, would exonerate the USA from being labeled as bad government to support rebels against a UN recognized government. The US were responsible for turning the war in a no-win-situation for the Soviets.

The Americans seemed to have been interested in policies that will cause the Soviet more pains and loses than ending the war and appeasing the Afghan people. Reagan made countering Soviet expansion and threat around the world one of his cardinal foreign policy objectives while the new CIA director, William Casey believed that the Soviet would have to be tied down in Afghanistan to distract them from meddling in affairs elsewhere in the world (Young and Kent: 2004)

In 1984, there was significant increase in US financial and other commitment to the war which made some people express optimism that the war may not linger. However, it intensified giving people in the US the impression that much efforts and strategy had not been devised by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) prosecuting the war. In 1985, US aid was further raised up to 250 million dollars (Young and Kent, 2004: 534) . Anti-aircraft weapons were equally sent to check Soviet increasing use of helicopters. The CIA also inspired their counterpart in Pakistan to use Muslim brotherhood (common Muslim community) to instigate Islamic fundamentalism among Muslims in USSR's Asian republics in Central Asia (Young and Kent, 2004: 534). When president Ronald Reagan came on board in the USA, he changed the objective of the war from making it very expansive for the USSR, to outrightly driving the Soviet out of Afghanistan as part of US global commitment to enforce "freedom" of all peoples. The Afghan state would have to return to pre-war state of non-alignment if détente would be retained. The USSR had greater interest in Afghanistan than the Americans, a fact they soon realized. Nevertheless, the United States was so committed to the situation in Afghanistan like other major interest areas in the world. A former Soviet diplomat inquired why American commitment was so disproportionately strong when compared for example, to Warsaw Pact's invasion of Czechoslovakia. For him, "the sharp response of the United States proved a final turning point in Soviet-American relations", destroying mutual understanding that was on ground, though fragile (Dobrynin 1995: 444).

Apart from the United States and other international supports for the Mujahidin, there was outright condemnation and sanctions towards the invading power. For instance, there was a United Nations vote on January 1980 in which 104 – 18 member states condemned the invasion. Thirty Muslim States, in solidarity with fellow Muslims in Afghanistan equally met on 29 January to unanimously condemn Soviet aggression. The Communist in Western Europe were also disillusioned by the episode. The non-aligned groups were not left out in the condemnation, with some refusing to participate in the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 which is usually celebrated in the Red Square every year. The invasion also impacted negatively on other global activities, like sports. For instance, several countries including the USA, China, West Germany Japan, etc. (up to 50 countries) boycotted the Olympic Games held in Moscow, 1980. About eighty states participated however, including Britain and France.

It is important to note that there were avenues for negotiation but either side would be ready when the other is. For instance, peace talks under a UN mediator, Diego Cordovez started in June 1982. Pakistan stood in for the Mujahidin during negotiation with the Soviet backed government in Kabul. By 1984, they have held a fourth session, Diego faced with the challenge of shuttling Kabul and Islamabad since the warring parties refused to meet directly on a round table. The supporting powers did not approve of these talks early enough and even when there was a dead-luck in 1983, the peace plans proposed by Andropov (the KGB Chief) did not receive any support from Washington, neither did it get the requisite backing of other prominent personalities in Moscow especially the leaders such as Gromyko, Ustinov and Nikolai Ogarkov due to the interplay of the US foreign policy.

Andropov had initiated this move in order to be able to address internal problems in the USSR. It was partly the Selfish interest of the Pakistan leader Zia that truncated the negotiation process. He wanted to exclude Karmal, seen as a Soviet stooge. He also refused a power-sharing government with the communist in Afghanistan.

The Rise of the Taliban

The history of the Taliban goes back to the political wrangling of the early 1970 and became fully nurtured after the Soviet invasion. By 1970 political aspirations in Afghanistan was much with two categories toping the chat; Marxist groups on the one hand and Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood – inspired and fundamentalist Islamic groups- on the other side.

From 1979 when the Soviet campaign began, the Pakistani army had created – in collaboration with the US and other parties assisting the Mujahidin – the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). This agency coordinated 40 Mujahidin groups who were mainly composed of Islamic conservatives and Islamic radicals, a structure that was expected to be sustained. Secular forces were excluded. ISI's responsibility was to distribute supplies from US and others effectively, inspire young fighters consistently to have steady fighting force to deal with the Soviet forces.

Eventually, Soviet forces finally withdrew in 1989 after Mikhail Gorbachev signed a deal with the Mujahidin. Without assistance from the Soviet, the already weak Afghan forces were made further vulnerable without the requisite fund to purchase arms and even ready fighting force to protect the communist regime. The regime eventually collapsed marking the end of secular government in Afghanistan.

A civil war quickly began as Mujahidin groups jostle for control of the various patches of the country amid lawlessness, abduction, looting, robbery, murder, corruption and other forms of vices.

Meanwhile, over a dozen of the groups coordinated by Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) had formed an interim government to pilot the affairs of the government, a development which further deepened the civil war: There was much frustration;

> Against this backdrop, the students, or the Taliban, emerged as saviours in 1994. They had come from the madrasas of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Their leader was Mullah Muhammad Omar, who had earned a reputation for being pious and assisting in the fight against the Soviet. He had the support of Osama bin Laden. (https://www.idiatoday.in/miteractive/immersive/taliban-rise-fall-comeback-us-afghanistan-history.

The regime of this group was described as one of the most brutal in the world, despite its seemingly good name 'Student'. Women were completely excluded from public life in all ramification; education, job, etc. There was also execution without fair trial, ban on music, as well as imprisonment of men seen without long beard. The Taliban abides by a philosophy of law-predating Islam and based on a tribal code of the Pashtuns. They also adopted Wahhabism (extreme interpretation of the Koran and Sharia laws) which was the main ideology in the Madrasas especially Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. By 1996, they were fully recognized by the government of Afghanistan in control of 90 percent of Afghanistan before Osama bin Laden's terrorist attack on the US on 11 September, 2001. These recognitions came mainly from Sunni dominated states of Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and United Arab Emirate (UAE).

The United States' Face-off with Afghanistan

The United States was not as much concerned with the brutal regime of the Taliban since they took full control of Afghanistan in 1994 except the general condemnation received from elsewhere in the world. Both countries came into collision after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon. Afghanistan became a centre of international focus when it became known that Osama bin Laden was not only hiding there but the country had been al-Qaeda's safe haven since 1996. There were bases for training jihadist in Afghanistan in remote mountains. Not only did Al-

Qaeda camps operated in Afghanistan, some members of the Taliban military were actually trained in those camps (the Arab Brigade, an elite wing of the Taliban military).The US president then George W. Bush had demanded that all Al-Qaeda elements be expelled from Afghanistan and Osama bin Laden be handed over to his government for prosecution. But this contrast sharply with the tradition of the Pathans who strongly believe that refuge must be offered a refugee, the gravity of his offence, not withstanding. According to Bergen (2001 page no):

> The Taliban leadership subscribe to the ancient and elaborate Pathan tribal code of conduct, pukhtunwali. Pukhtun-wali puts an enormous premium on two concepts: malmastiya, "the obligation to show hospitality to all visitors…" and nanawati; the offering of asylum…The Taliban finds handing over bin Laden as unimaginable as a Christian priest in the Middle Ages would have found it to hand over someone who had sought sanctuary in his church.

The Taliban out-rightly refused to grant the United States' request. The fact that the regime was already underserve trade sanctions and isolated diplomatically worsened the situation since it became difficult for talks to be initiated on the matter directly or through the mobilization of local opposition against the Taliban government. This was due to the ethnic composition of the country (various ethnic groups were jostling for political control over the centuries). As it becomes crystal clear that the Taliban would not give up on protecting bin Ladin, military force became the only option. For the time, the Bush Doctrine was invoked (preemptive warfare). However, to conquer Afghanistan was an easy task as demonstrated by the earlier Soviet attempt. This is due to the fact that the country is landlocked with few large cities and major roads. Communication facilities to link up with the rest of the world were also very poor.

Earlier in 1998 and 2000, the United States had bombed strategic location in Afghanistan following the African embassy attacks and bombing of USS Cole respectively. However, these bombings had very limited effect on Al-Qaeda activities in Afghanistan. A new pattern or approach was therefore required in 2001 to destroy the Taliban regime and uproot Al-Qaeda from its stronghold.Military strategists call this new approach "asymmetric warfare" it requires the use of different tactics and weapon (Stressguth 2004: 38).

Afghanistan been the first battle field in the global war against terrorism also provided an opportunity for the experimentation of new techniques and weapons in what military strategist refers to as the Afghan Model. In this situation, there was coordination between the ordinary military forces and special forces and intelligence agencies (for example, the CIA, NSA), who fought with local Afghan guerrilla groups opposed to the Taliban regime. Strategic Taliban military positions such as air defence systems, ammunition and fuel dumps, barracks, lead quarters buildings, bridges, roads, telephone exchanges, etc., were carefully identified by the intelligence agencies and destroyed by the conventional military forces. This was followed by bombings by American pilots on emerging targets which came up as a result of the former attacks, as carefully directed by special forces units on the ground.

Rather than moving tanks and heavy weapons like other major wars, in the Afghan model strategic individuals like Osama bin Ladin were targeted. Rather than making efforts to capture cities and territories, efforts were made to disperse and apprehend a small group of fighters that are disguised by mixing up with the civilian population. By the Afghan model of warfare, the US did not invade directly but entered the country through small special forces and the Northern Alliances that was the staunchest opposition to the Taliban's government. These groups worked closely with other paramilitary groups organized by the CIA. The Northern Alliance moved from its bases situated in Northern Afghanistan, quickly captured Mazar-e Sharif which was of strategic importance to the Taliban. Before long; Kabul was overrun.

There were other key strategies adopted by the United States to quickened their victory in Afghanistan (even if their main target bin Laden was not captured). There was a well-coordinated public relations armed at giving the Afghan civilian population the impression that the United States had not come to

destroy their country (overrun cities, create famine, destroy villages, kill civilians, among other acts of war), but rather save the Afghan people from an authoritarian and brutal government (Streissguth, 2004: 39). As a result of these plans, there was much effort to avoid actions capable of causing collateral damage, that is, great civilian death and damage to property. Therefore:

> …Bombing that would probably not cause collateral damage could be carried out with only the approval of military leaders in the field. But if a bombing ran the risk of causing high collateral damage, Bush himself would have to approve the attack. The only exception to this rule was a proposed attack on bin Laden himself, which did not need advance approval (Streissguth, 2004).

Apart from maintaining public relations, the Afghan model also employed psychology with the intention of instilling fear in the enemy and lower their moral. This is sometimes done by the direct radio broadcast from helicopters as shown in one of these broadcasts:

> Our forces are armed with state-of-the-art military equipment. What are you using, obsolete and ineffective weapons. Our helicopters will rain fire down upon your camps before you detect them on your reader. Our bombs are so accurate we can drop them right through your windows. Our infantry is trained for any climate and terrain on earth. United States soldiers fire with superior marksmanship and are armed with superior weapons. You have only one choice…. Surrender now and we will give you a second chance. We will let you live. (Bergen, 2001: 61).

Millions of leaflets were also dropped by US helicopters describing the war as that of liberation warning the people not to fight for the Taliban regime. They were also adviced to stay away from military barracks, supply depots, air field, and other places that the military may target. The leaflets adviced local Afghans to give up the enemy Osama bin Laden who took advantage of their hospitality to bring trouble upon their country.

The United States also carried out air drop of food and medicines in Northern Afghanistan, a technique referred to as "Snowdropping". The target civilian population got some of the humanitarian relief packages, however, the bulk of it went to the Taliban who claimed it with their guns.

The United States had wanted a coalition effort in the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan and elsewhere and not a war to be undertaken by them alone. They therefore appealed for international support. In response, some European states offered some assistance including Russia and Britain. For Russia, their air space was used by the US for humanitarian air drops. They equally agreed to assist in search and rescue operations especially in incidences where US planes are shot down over Afghanistan. The Americans were also able to set up bases in some central Asian republics through Russian assistance who used a combination of force and diplomacy to compel agreement. Britain, on its part, agreed to share intelligence from its agents in Afghanistan and also offered its special forces to the effort. France brought medical supplies as humanitarian assistance. Vaccination of Afghan children and food supply were offered by Belgium. Medical services were also offered by Spain, among others. At last, the Taliban were defeated.

There was much to be done after the defeat of the Taliban; the stabilization of the country in order for it not to be a den for terrorist elements in the future. The Bonn Agreement, therefore, became a road map for the introduction of a democratic government to take the place of the Taliban. A twenty-nine-memberinterim government under the leadership of Hamid Karzai was appointed in December 2001. In July 2003, the Loya Jirga – a traditional grand council – was appointed by Karzai to write a new constitution for the country. The structure of the government, timing of election, fundamental rights of Afghan citizens, among other things, were well enumerated in the new constitution.

An International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) of five thousand men was placed in charge of internal security in Kabul. This team composed mainly of German or Dutch soldiers also trained a new police force for Afghanistan. The ISAF confined its operations to Kabul and as a result the rest of

the country side was left porous for warlords to take advantage. These warlords especially Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (leader of the Hizb-e-Islamic party) seen as the strongest, organized other groups andlaunched attacks on the ISAF, on US troops, the new government in Kabul and its leader Hamid Karzai. Most people of the world wonder if the US is only interested in destroying unfavorable regimes or truly care about people in those countries passing through hard times (Rashid Ahmed and Rubin Barnett, 2003).

The Taliban Returns to Power

Decades after their defeat at the hands of the United States and the Northern Alliance, the Taliban made their way back to Kabul on 15 August 2021 after destroying the Afghan military. The Taliban and Al-Qaeda element had control parts of the country since 2001 when they were defeated and had been launching attacks on the government and its supporting forces. These foreign troop were, however, beginning to withdraw following a deal with the United States in 2020. Without waiting for complete withdrawal, the Taliban fighters quickly overran the country and within weeks were in full control.

Foreign forces already making arrangements to leave were confused by the velocity at which the Taliban advanced from one city and region to the other and accelerated their exit from the country. Government leaders in the Western backed government equally left including thousands of foreigners who feared the brutality of the Taliban government, though, in the deal with the Americans, the Taliban committed to national peace talks, which never took place, and to preventing Al-Qaeda and other militants from operating in areas that the Taliban controlled (BBC News, 12 August, 2022). By the deal, they were also expected to ensure human rights prevail and also allow the girl child education.

The Taliban still rule the country without any opposition, seemingly. And, as Felbab-Brown (2023) puts it:

> Over the years, the Taliban's rule progressively hardened and become more authoritarian and dogmatically 1990s – like. The Taliban's exclusionary pastitun-centred rule has turned highly repressive towards all forms of opposition. At the national level, it provides few job opportunities, let alone decision-making roles, for minorities and those associated with the fallen Afghan republic. Individual rights have been eviscerated and women's access to education, jobs and even the public sphere for travel and medical care has been decimated.

For Hakimi and Price (2022) "Even if Afghanistan does not fall back into outright conflict, there is no end in sight to the suffering of the Afghan people".

Conclusion

Afghanistan is not a country that could be occupied by an outside power for too long a time due to a combination of factors, the terrain, resilience of its numerous ethnic groups when confronting foreign invasion, among other peculiarities.

The United States national security interest in Afghanistan necessitated the invasion just as any other power would. This happened in spite of the fact that they (the USA) had contributed to the rise of this group. At that time the Taliban and indeed, the entire Mujahidin did the bidding of the US- helping curb the spread of Soviet influence across the world. However, things later turned around and the Taliban became an ark enemy following the attacks on the world trade centre and the pentagon and discovery that the perpetrator, Oama bin Ladin was hiding in their country. These differences and later invasion notwithstanding, both countries could settle its major differences some day since there is no permanent friend or enemy in international relations but interest. This will happen if the Taliban government abandon its support for terrorism and brutal tactics and embrace the prevailing standard of governance which revolves around some level of human right observances. The Taliban are becoming increasing potent and there is very limited internal opposition to their reign. This implies that they may likely be in control of Afghanistan for a very long time especially if they could play the

alliance politics with other like-minded states effectively. Like the communist party of China who was iron fisted in its governance (especially in its early days) but performed what became known as the 'Chinese miracle', the Taliban could change for the better if the international community mounts considerable pressure on them to end its style of governance and embrace a more humane kind of government that is citizen-betterment centred. This would be effective if much premium is not placed on religion but on the economy and other aspects of societal needs. At the moment, the Taliban government is been considered for proper global recognition in the United Nations, a move that appear unusual in interstate relations following their track record of human right abuse. It concludes that, inspite of its brutal administrative tactics, the Taliban could still gain considerable acceptance especially if they imbibe some level of human right consideration in their governance, grant women some level of liberty including right to education, and observe other international best practices internally and internationally. However, it is obvious that overwhelming foreign policy of the major powers in to another geopolitics zone generate some reactions from the affected areas, thus increase global tension. Therefore, major powers should be cautious in foreign policy towards another region with different peculiarities.

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