

THE CURRENT POLICY ON AFGHANISTAN INCREASES HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

By September 11, 2021, the American war in Afghanistan have completed almost two decades and encompassed four presidential administrations. The United States has spent over \$1 trillion on the longest and unwinnable war in its history. It has accounted for more than 3,500 coalition deaths, of which more than 2,300 have been US soldiers. Furthermore, 20,660 US soldiers have been injured in action. Similarly, according to a study conducted by Brown University in 2019, the national military and police in Afghanistan have lost more than 64,100 lives since the conflict began in October 2001. Meanwhile, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) began systematically collecting civilian deaths in 2009, almost 111,000 civilians have been killed or wounded.

A war started on October 7, 2001, as the United States attacked Afghanistan, authorized by President George W. Bush in reaction to 9/11. The US wanted to punish the Taliban for providing a safe haven for al Qaeda, the terrorist group that had perpetrated the attacks. Osama bin Laden (OBL), the head of Al Qaeda, controlled the Al-Qaeda activities from Afghanistan. OBL eluded the US military for a decade, but the Taliban rule was overthrown in weeks. The United States and its allies remained in Afghanistan to back Kabul's new administration formed under President Hamid Karzai. The Taliban, on the other hand, quickly regrouped as the US opened another war in Iraq against Saddam Hussain.

For years, there was a lull in the war and it grew as the US tried to debate the question of winning the war in Afghanistan. It pushed hard against the Taliban to defeat them on the battleground however, as the Taliban leader once rightly said “You have the watches and we have the time”, US was never able to defeat the Taliban.

The United States desperate to find out its way out of Afghanistan finally sat with its enemy across the table to negotiate a peace deal. The deal signed between US representative Zalmay Khalilzad and Taliban leader Mullah Ghani Baradar, known as the Doha peace deal 2020 provided a safe exit for all foreign forces especially US forces.

As foreign forces were withdrawing from Afghanistan after winding out a 20 years' war, the Afghan government under President Ashraf Ghani was fighting against the Taliban. It shows how partners against the Taliban broke away from one another. As the US representative for Afghanistan recently in an interview blamed the Ghani government for not being serious about

the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. This lack of seriousness on both sides provided an opportunity for the Taliban to once again take control of Afghanistan.

Humanitarian Crisis

Now as a war in Afghanistan has come to an end and all foreign forces have returned to their home bases, the Taliban are ruling Afghanistan. The long cycle of violence that started in 1979 has come to an end, however, there is still a crisis in the country. A country that was aided by the US and its allies for all its expenditure, Afghanistan's access to foreign finance has been cut off. The Afghan central bank's overseas assets worth around \$10 billion are frozen, with an expectation that Taliban performance will be the key to unlock the frozen assets. However, this position has only hurt the common Afghan, a citizen who oscillated between the warring parties for the last many decades. As chaos prevails, desperate Afghans have been abandoned by the very countries who had vowed to support them.

With millions on the verge of famine and practically the whole population on the verge of destitution, Deborah Lyons, the Secretary-General's Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) said "To abandon the Afghan people now would be a historic mistake — a mistake that has been made before with tragic consequences."

According to UNDP estimate, some 23 million people are in severe need of food, while the \$20 billion economy is expected to fall by \$4 billion or more, and 97 percent of the 38 million people are on the verge of poverty.

According to the World Health Organization, 3.2 million children are in danger of acute malnutrition by the end of 2021, with 1 million likely to die. According to the Canadian-based International Forum for Rights and Security, acute hunger is forcing families to extreme measures, including selling their children to live.

Twenty-seven of Afghanistan's 34 provinces are experiencing acute malnutrition, with ten of them facing catastrophic circumstances. In Afghanistan, half of the children under the age of five are severely malnourished, and one in every four pregnant and breastfeeding mothers is malnourished. Malnutrition causes stunting in at least 35 percent of children.

In the meantime, donors contributed almost \$1 billion in relief during a United Nations donor summit in September. In late October, the US announced an extra \$144 million in aid, increasing

the total amount of US aid to Afghanistan and Afghan refugees to approximately \$474 million this year.

Similarly, Germany has already committed \$57 million in aid. Separately, the European Union offered a 1 billion Euro aid package for Afghanistan and neighboring countries in October. However, the scope of this long-brewing disaster will necessitate additional resources as even with \$7 billion in aid from the US and other Western countries before the Taliban's takeover, Afghanistan was still coping with serious humanitarian issues.

Although, the countries in the region like Pakistan, India have steered consultation process with the international community on Afghanistan in their respective capitals, the US, EU, and NATO are still struggling to distinguish between extending cooperation and recognition of the Taliban-led government.

The US long wait to look forward together with finding a shared objective with its allies to move ahead will harm its already weak reputation of being a defeated power. It will only provide China and Russia more space to decide the Afghan issue among themselves, cutting off the US from the decision-making process. Moreover, its desire to see the Taliban fulfill their commitments to not allow terrorists to pose a threat to any country is right but it needs to up the game before it's too late and the Taliban are being replaced by another terrorist group.

In short, the United States' overnight withdrawal, without following the agreements set forth by the previous administration has setup a humanitarian catastrophe. Afghanistan will be pulled into agreements with China and Russia out of necessity, not by choice. The United State's long shadow as the world's only superpower continues to become shorter and shorter, and unless there is a one hundred and eighty degree change in foreign policy our adversaries will grow while we shrink.