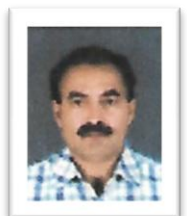


US Withdrawal from Afghanistan: Implications for India



Navin Verma

Associate Professor,
Deptt. of Defence Studies,
Meerut College,
Meerut



Ram Vijay Singh

Associate Professor,
Deptt. of Defence Studies,
Agra College,
Agra

Abstract

Today Afghanistan india has been successful in boosting economic ties and displaying its soft power.A Pentagon report titled "Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan ",released early in June , labeled India "as Afghanistan's most reliable regional partner ".The same report took a dig against Pakistan ,reminding readers of the "Afghan-oriented militant groups " that "retain freedom of action inside Pakistani territory" and are supported by "elements of the Pakistani government." The Taliban have not evolved into a political movement and have remained a jihadi force.It is highly unlikely that Taliban will accept the present Afghan constitution , and would insist on governance under Islamic law.A Taliban victory after a deal with the US will only bail out the US-without bringing peace to the country.

Keywords: Withdrawal from Afghanistan, Implications for India.

Introduction

On December 28, the US-led NATO forces marked the end of their combat operations in Afghanistan. Only over 12000 foreign troops will stay back in this land-locked nation. They will not be involved in direct fighting with the Taliban, yet they will assist the Afghan army and police in the battle against the terrorist group, who ruled Afghanistan from 1996 until 2001. Before the Taliban regime was virtually bombed out of Afghanistan, and fled to Pakistan.

In Afghanistan, India has been successful in boosting economic ties and displaying its soft power. A Pentagon report, titled "Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan," released early in June, labelled India "as Afghanistan's most reliable regional partner." The same report took a dig against Pakistan, reminding readers of the "Afghan-oriented militant groups" that "retain freedom of action inside Pakistani territory" and are supported by "elements of the Pakistani government."

Review of Literaturer

Indian Influence in Afghanistan: 2011 and Beyond Archived 25 April 2012 at the Wayback Machine. This book is based on the influence of India in Afghanistan .An unfolding breakthrough between The United States which seems to promise a full US troop withdrawal in 18 Months if the Taliban pledge an enduring cease fire , makes this long standing dilemma suddenly especially acute. India maintains support for an Afghan-owned, Afghan-led reconciliation process .New Delhi wants the Kabul government to be the key player in the talks.

"No evidence that India aiding Pak Baloch rebels" There is no evidence to substantiate Pakistan's claims that India is supporting Baloch rebels. Over the past five years, Pakistan has accused India of aiding Baloch insurgent groups through Its consulates in Afghanistan , but has not provided any evidence.India might seriously consider the option of supporting the separatist Baloch and Sindh movements of Pakistan.

"US bails out India from Balochistan wrangle" The US should support the Baloch people and other oppressed groups in Pakistan who are being Subject to grave human rights violations for demanding the right to self-determination , a senior American lawmaker has said.Resources rich Balochistan , Pakistan's largest but least populated province , has been wrackled by a long unning separatist insurgency which has seen brutal repression by Pakistani security forces.

"And The Mountains Echoed" Indian influences on Kabul is affecting Pak-Afghan ties, a minister said.India's Afghan dilemma is India's Afghanistan policy is not driven by ideological or humanitarian concerns. It is driven by a desire to limit Islamabad's influence in Afghanistan. This is because increased Pakistani influence in Afghanistan may lead to a reduced Indian presence.

Aim of the Study

The paper aims to throw light on the the influence of withdrawing the US led NATO forces in Afghanistan worldwide .After the US Taliban talks the two sides indicated the progress on the two issues.The other issues –intra afghan dialogue are yet to be discussed .The US offer of withdrawal is a tangible concession. US wanted to bring to a close the war of attrition .On the other hand the Russians and Iranians wanted to add cost to the American calculus .The paper will emphasis on the effects of US decision of withdrawing troops.

India's Afghanistan Quandary as American Withdrawal Looms Near

President Donald Trump's decision to reduce US forces from Afghanistan from 14,000 to 7,000 was seen as the beginning of the end-game in Afghanistan. Since then, there have been two rounds of talks between US representative ZalmayKhalilzad and Taliban in December and January. Earlier, Moscow hosted a meeting of representatives of Russia, China, Pakistan and Iran with Taliban on November 9. The two competing processes, led by the US and Russia respectively, have only increased Taliban's negotiating leverage.After the last round of US-Taliban talks, the two sides indicated progress on two issues: preventing use of Afghan territory by international terrorist groups and US withdrawal. The other issues – intra-Afghan dialogue and ceasefire – are yet to be discussed. The sequence is important. Intra-Afghan dialogue, which should have been the priority in an 'Afghan owned, and Afghan led dialogue', has been relegated to future rounds of talks. The US offer of withdrawal is a tangible concession. Taliban's offer to forsake terrorism is a promissory note. There is certainly no commitment on terror groups which affect India. Sanitising Afghanistan is not enough; the root of the problem is Pakistan. The normal paradigm of conflict resolution is ceasefire, disarmament, constitutionmaking and election. Power sharing comes at the end of the process. Taliban has not accepted ceasefire. They have neither agreed to an Afghan constitution, nor spelt out their vision of Afghanistan's future. The second round of talks between Khalilzad and Taliban opened in Qatar on January 21, hours after the Wardak attack in which more than 100 Afghan security force members were killed. The talks have only emboldened Taliban to step up violence to set their terms, rather than bringing peace.

Current negotiations not only weaken the Ghani government, but also ignore the opposition who have accepted the Afghan constitution and the democratic process. What has brought this extraordinary convergence in the approach of Americans and Russians are clashing motives. The Americans want to bring to a close the war of attrition. On the other hand, the Russians and Iranians want to add cost to the American calculus. This coalition is likely to fall apart once America withdraws. If the rationale for flirting with Taliban is that they represent 'jihad in one country', their past record belies this expectation. Taliban refused to sever links with al-Qaida during or after the US campaign in 2001. What

are India's options? Is Taliban today different from those who provided sanctuary to IC 814 hijackers in December 1999? Taliban was created by Pakistan and will continue to depend upon it for support. Will a seat on the negotiating table for India be a major gain? Not if our role is simply to endorse a regime created by Pakistan. Taliban takeover in Kabul will be a prelude to further radicalisation of Pakistan and unleashing jihadis in Kashmir. India needs to strengthen the Afghan government's resolve. Afghan army together with an elected government enjoying people's mandate could provide a viable alternative to Islamabad's proxy government in Kabul. Instead of a \$12 billion bailout to Pakistan as the price of safe American exit, the money could be better spent in Afghanistan.

Departure of NATO Troops: Implications for Indian Security

Given the situation when Afghanistan and Pakistan are deep in the mess created by terrorists, the withdrawal of the US-led forces from Afghanistan would have a bearing on India's internal security apparatus, feel several experts. Many even fear return of the pre- 2001 situation or the country slipping into civil war after disintegrating on ethnic lines. This fear has further deepened in view of several reports suggesting ill-preparedness of Afghan National Forces (ANA) to fight the battle hardened Taliban insurgents. In 2014 alone, more than 5000 ANA soldiers and police have been killed fighting against insurgents. In comparison, international coalition forces fighting under the banner of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) have suffered a total of 3,485 deaths since 2001. But then the year 2014 was not the bloodiest year for the ANA, but also for Afghanistan's common civilian. If a recent UN report is to be believed, close to 10,000 people have been killed and wounded in Afghanistan. Amid such developments, departure of NATO troops has left India to fend for itself.

In fact, immediate worry for India is the impact of the Taliban presence in Afghanistan on the security situation in Jammu and Kashmir, where militancy broke out in 1989. Although tight security situation in the state has sharply brought down the level of violence in the past few years, there is fear that with the US-led NATO forces quitting Afghanistan and only skeleton forces left behind for non-combat purposes, the Afghanistan Taliban who enjoy good relations with Pakistan's army, would be emboldened enough to target India and its interests. Secondly, Pakistan may find it easy to pull out troops guarding the country's western front bordering Afghanistan and may move them towards the border with India. Once this happens, Pakistani troops would be able to strongly back militants sneaking into Kashmir under the cover of firing and shelling along the border. Experts worry that in the absence of strong international forces in the region, Pakistan with help from its non-state actors would go whole hog to affect peace and stability in other parts of the country.

In November, Afghanistan's new regime led by President Ashraf Ghani had expressed unhappiness over India's delay in supply of military

hardware. However, those who are familiar with the Modi government's South Asia strategy say India is in no way turning its back on Afghanistan, the country where Delhi has invested more than \$2 billion for infrastructure and institution building. According to some diplomats, Delhi is in direct touch with Russia, China, Iran and Central Asian nations bordering Afghanistan. These countries have a shared fear that once the Taliban get strengthened in Afghanistan, they would have to face the music. Now that the US-led international troops have completed the drawdown process, the immediate consequence of this withdrawal that any country has to bear after Afghanistan would be India. In coming days it would have to face Pakistan as sponsor of non-state actors like Taliban and Lashkar-e-Taiba on its Western and Northern border and attack on its interests in Afghanistan and the Central Asian region from the Taliban and Haqqani group. How Delhi would cope with all this, would be a much watched affair both for strategists as well as foreign watchers.

India has so far committed over \$3 billion in aid and assistance to Afghanistan, taking up several infrastructure and humanitarian projects. The Zaranj-Delaram road, a high school in Kabul, the Salma dam and a 220KV DC transmission line are among several ongoing Indian projects in the country. New Delhi has also invested in bilateral and trilateral capacity building programs with the training of more than 3,500 diplomats and security personnel, while granting scholarships to 1,000 Afghan students each year.

According to a 2017 Gallup poll, which interviewed 1,000 adults, 60% Afghans approved of the job performance of India's leadership and 34% disapproved with 6% refusing to answer. It was the highest approval rating of India by another country in Asia. According to the survey, Afghan adults are more likely to approve of India's leadership than Chinese or U.S. leadership. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Afghan President Ashraf Ghani inaugurating the Salma Dam. Salma Dam, officially the Afghan-India Friendship Dam, is a hydroelectric and irrigation dam project located on the Hari River in Chishti Sharif District of Herat Province in western Afghanistan. The Afghan cabinet renamed the Salma Dam to the Afghan-India Friendship Dam in a move to strengthen relations between the two countries. The hydroelectric plant produces 42 MW of power in addition to providing irrigation for 75,000 hectares of farmland (stabilising the existing irrigation of 35,000 hectares and development of irrigation facilities to an additional 40,000 hectares of land).

Conclusion

The Taliban have not evolved into a political movement and have remained a jihadi force. It is highly unlikely that the Taliban will accept the present Afghan constitution, and would insist on governance under Islamic law. A Taliban victory after a deal with the US will only bail out the US — without bringing peace to the country. Afghanistan could easily break out into ethnic, sectarian, regional and tribal tensions. There is also the question of the increasing profile of the Islamic State remnants now in Afghanistan, with their alliances with others. As Andrew Bacevich put it very bluntly, "The United States' war in Afghanistan began with an illusion that it was incumbent upon the US to liberate and transform that country. The war in Afghanistan will end, as the Vietnam War ended — in shame and abandonment." (*The war in Afghanistan isn't a 'stalemate.' The US has lost.*)

There are reports of the Islamic State in alliance with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan gaining some presence in northern Afghanistan, close to countries like Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, which have had traditionally close ties with Russia. They also have a presence in Nangarhar and Paktika provinces bordering Pakistan. It is possible they will later drift to other pastures east or north. With the recent discovery of ISIS cells in Delhi and UP, a likelihood of such cells having been established or functioning under the banner of ISIS elsewhere as well would be a matter of great worry for the Indian security apparatus. It is unlikely the Arabs operate them, but merely some locals using the franchise's name, or induced to do so.

References

1. Crossette, Barbara (7 March 1989). "India to Provide Aid to Government in Afghanistan". *New York Times*. Retrieved 3 June 2008.
2. "'No evidence that India aiding Pak Baloch rebels". *The Indian Express*. 27 May 2009. Retrieved 9 March 2012.
3. "US bails out India from Balochistan wrangle". *Times of India*. 31 July 2009. Retrieved 9 March 2012.
4. <https://web.archive.org/web/20070614010937/http://www.aisk.org/misc/woik2007issue42.pdf>
5. "Donald Trump's Afghanistan policy presents India a chance to increase sphere of influence in South Asia.", *Firstpost*, 23 August 2017.
6. "India, Russia and China in Race to Expand Influence Over Afghanistan; Preventing Re-Talibanization After 2014". *The World Reporter*. Retrieved 30 March 2013.
7. *Indian Influence in Afghanistan: 2011 and Beyond Archived 25 April 2012 at the Wayback Machine*, "Global Bearings, 2 November 2011.