

EXPLORING INDIA'S STRATEGY IN AFGHANISTAN AFTER US WITHDRAWAL TO DEAL WITH THE TALIBAN

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Abstract

Situation in Afghanistan is changing rapidly after the intrusion and increasing dominance of Taliban and recently with the United States and the Taliban reached an agreement on February 29, 2020, which will mark a turning point in America's longest war. As a result, the majority of US troops in Afghanistan are expected to leave by the end of 2021. As a result, if this agreement is implemented properly, factions of the Taliban may have a greater foothold in Afghan politics. For a country like India, this is not ideal. So, considering all these situations and information, this paper was designed to understand the current strategies of India after America's withdrawal from Afghanistan. The research identified that in Afghanistan, the Haqqani network, a prominent Taliban branch, has assaulted Indian installations. India need the presence of US-led soldiers as well as a sense of stability in order to invest in Afghanistan's future. India's stability is under jeopardy, and it has to refocus its aspirations immediately. In today's fast-changing world, this essay analyses the dangers of India's involvement in Afghanistan and offers strategies to address them. The US-Taliban agreement states that the Taliban would not allow terrorist groups to operate on Afghan soil, but it is unclear how the agreement will be monitored and carried out. The strategies currently deployed by India includes the different trade agreements or approvals to conduct business activities for economic welfare of both nations, mutual understanding for geopolitical situations, future developments etc.

Keywords: *Taliban, America's longest battle, Afghanistan, US-Taliban, Haqqani network, Terrorist group, Ashraf Ghani, Afghan soil, Kabul's political turmoil*



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Introduction

In the New York Times (2022), the US and the Taliban reached an agreement in Qatar on February 29, 2020, to end the Afghanistan war. Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, who was recently released from a Pakistani prison and now works as a deputy to a Taliban leader, signed

a big deal in 2018. Baradar agreed to the deal only after US Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad signed it. Khalilzad has worked on this deal for a long time. The Secretary of State for the United States, Mike Pompeo, was in the first row of the crowd. The Baradar-Khalilzad deal was praised by a lot of Taliban leaders who were sitting behind them.

US Secretary of Defense Mark Esper and Afghan President Ashraf Ghani spoke at a news conference in Kabul. They issued a statement as a group. It proposed a four-step method for achieving a "full and long-term peace agreement," culminating in a "permanent and comprehensive ceasefire." In the year 2020, (Jossey-Bass). The US, its coalition allies, the UN, and Russia had all expressed support for the peace agreement just weeks ago (Foreign Affairs, 2020).

It makes no difference whether others agree or disagree with the agreement. It is a proven truth. This is an issue in the United States, regardless of who you are. There is "no appetite on either side of the aisle" to retain soldiers in Afghanistan, according to someone who has been observing the country since the 1990s. Joe Biden, a Democratic presidential candidate, stated categorically that "Those soldiers are unnecessary. I'd send them back to their respective homes." In 2020, there will be a plethora of international trade agreements. The individual stated that "any residual US military presence in Afghanistan would be restricted to counterterrorism missions." 2020 (Shende & Chaudhuri). This would imply that the number of American forces in Afghanistan would be limited to 5,000.

Second, Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISID) is gaining strength. It has close ties to the Taliban, especially the Haqqani network. The third factor that might jeopardise India's long-term goals in Afghanistan is the political turmoil in Kabul. There's a good chance that the power-sharing agreement reached between Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and former Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah on May 17, 2020, may not work out as planned.

"Everyone is weary of fighting," Trump told reporters after Khalilzad inked the pact with Baradar. He claimed the pullout would begin as soon as he said that. According to an ex-head of the US National Security Council, 9,000 troops are expected to leave the army by July 2020. "It isn't obvious what decreasing US forces to zero will genuinely look like," he adds. Also unknown is what remains of the "intellectual presence." Despite the fact that the drawdown is shrouded in mystery, it is evident that the US is returning home. India is now in a horrible state. The agreement is unquestionably beneficial to both the Taliban and Pakistan.

Without Pakistan's assistance, Taliban commanders like Baradar would not have been able to reach the negotiating table. Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate was holding Baradar as of 2010. (ISI). Ironically, he was jailed for chatting to then-Afghan President Hamid Karzai in an illegal manner. According to a close Afghan witness, the ISI warned Taliban commanders to stay away from negotiations without our approval. "Don't talk to us until we give you permission." The ISI approved the 2018 discussions. In truth, the Doha negotiations would have ended far sooner without Pakistan's assistance for the Taliban and the disputed accord.

Methods

Researchers utilised the secondary data in this research, provided it has been obtained from diverse sources and made available for their use. It is data that has already been discovered. Apart from scientific purposes, the information may have been utilised for general purposes, like in the case of a census (Johnston, 2017). This implies that data that is irrelevant in one research may be crucial in another.

Secondary data comes in a variety of forms: books, journals, newspapers, websites, and government records, to name a few. Secondary data is more accessible than primary data, which is why it is frequently utilised in place of primary data. Secondary data sources have become more accessible as electronic media and the web have grown in popularity. At the bottom of this page, you'll find a list of some of these resources.

Books - Books are one of the first forms of communication. There are now books on virtually any subject imaginable. They are now available. To do research, you just need to locate a book that discusses the issue at hand and then select it from the library's collection of books in that field (Johnston, 2017). Books may be an excellent source of information if they are well chosen. Additionally, they may assist you in writing a literature review.

Published Sources - There are several published sources that may be used to learn more about a variety of research areas. The author and the publishing house are responsible for ensuring that the data from these sources is accurate. Depending on the scenario, printed or electronic sources may be employed. Depending on the author and the publishing business, they may or may not get compensated.

Journal- Journals are becoming increasingly useful for data collection in the modern-day. Books are dwindling in importance. This is because journals are regularly updated with new

papers, ensuring that they contain the most up-to-date information (Sherif, 2018). Additionally, when it comes to research, publications are more specialised.

Websites - It is possible that information obtained through websites is not as trustworthy as information obtained from other sources. However, there are other websites that share only authentic data and may be accessed by academics (Sherif, 2018). The majority of these websites are operated by the government or by corporations that charge users for information.

Results

Citation	Aim	Findings
Sherif (2018)	He discussed the secondary analysis and provided some information on how it works in this article.	Some of its pros and downsides are discussed as criteria for assessing the quality and suitability of previously collected qualitative research data. Several positive outcomes can occur when qualitative data is used in novel ways. The qualitative secondary analysis benefits those who conduct qualitative research, such as students and practitioners.
Johnston (2017)	Huge volumes of data can now be collected, compiled, and stored thanks to technological advancements, which may then be used for the study.	Many people are currently conducting studies utilising previously utilised data. Secondary data analysis is also increasing in popularity. According to this study, while doing research in a methodical manner, secondary data analysis is an effective technique to employ. It demonstrates how secondary data analysis may be applied to library and information science studies.
Bass (2020)	The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States of America both signed it. It was created in order to bring peace to Afghanistan. The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is a United Nations member and is recognised as a sovereign state under international law by the US and the rest of the world. The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the USA will collaborate to achieve a comprehensive agreement.	To maintain a strong partnership, the two nations are investing in Afghanistan's institutions, which are necessary for the development of democratic norms, the maintenance of the country's unity, and the improvement of people's lives. With the start of intra-Afghan talks, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan says it will begin discussions with members of the UNSC to remove Taliban members from the sanctions list by 29th May 2020, or no later than 30 days after a framework agreement and long-term ceasefire are in place.
Rubin (2020)	Since 1978, Afghanistan has been at war, with outsiders playing a significant role. The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban's self-declared Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan are currently meeting in Doha to discuss how to conclude the conflict. They hope to come to an agreement on a political road plan for the future once the US forces depart.	The Islamic Republic derives its authority from Afghanistan, a country with a diverse population. According to official entities, the nation is governed by Islamic law. In general elections, the Islamic Republic's citizens pick a new government every few years. Both sides claim to adhere to Islamic law, but they have divergent interpretations of what that implies. They all wish to live in a single nation with a stable government that adheres to the Afghan people's principles and aspirations.
Chaudhuri & Shende (2020)	The US and the Taliban will reach an agreement on 29th February 2020, which will be a watershed point in the	There is, of course, the threat of terrorism, but there are other others. The US-Taliban deal states that the Taliban would prevent terrorist

United States' longest conflict. US troops are slated to leave Afghanistan in 2021, with the majority departing by the end of that year.	groups from functioning on Afghan soil, but it is unclear how the pact will be monitored and implemented. Second, Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate is growing in strength. It has unmistakable links to the Taliban, particularly the Haqqani network. The third factor that might jeopardise India's long-term intentions for Afghanistan is Kabul's political turmoil.
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Table 1: Findings from secondary sources

The Taliban have shifted their tone in their pronouncements as discussions on a US-led retreat begin. Because of the necessity for international collaboration in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic, they have become more accommodating. On 17th March 2020, a Taliban official stated that the Taliban was eager to collaborate with the World Health Organization and other international organisations to combat the coronavirus. Taliban leaders have considered temporary ceasefires to allow for vaccination campaigns in Taliban-controlled areas. Because of the delicate and protracted health crisis, it is apparent that the Taliban's increasing diplomatic participation has grown more significant (Foreign Policy, 2020). On the other hand, the outbreak will undoubtedly lead the Doha Agreement's schedules to be postponed. There is a lot of concern about what will happen after the US and its allies leave Afghanistan. It's also about the smallest military unit that may be employed for simultaneous terrorist missions. There is currently no additional information available about the latter. 46 When determining how many troops should remain behind, it's like entering a "world of unknowns," according to Joshua White. Some of what the US did aid their swift departure. Democracies and civil freedoms were promoted, and this helped a bit. It makes little difference whether this is referred to be a pullout agreement or the beginning of a peace process. The words they write will have an impact on the world they live in. The deal does not provide that there would be less violence when it is signed. Indeed, the US government has been unconcerned by the increase in bloodshed in Afghanistan since the Taliban agreed to the Doha Accords (Foreign Policy, 2020).

Discussion

Numerous anti-India terrorist groups seek refuge in Afghanistan. India wishes to ensure that Pakistan does not have significant influence in Afghanistan. On the other hand, the removal of American forces from Afghanistan is likely to constrain India's capacity to intervene within the country. Having a Taliban-led administration might be detrimental to India. Pakistan's strategic footprint in Afghanistan is expanding, which might be extremely detrimental to India.

However, New Delhi's policy toolkit for resolving Afghanistan's increasing problem is severely constrained. This is because India's policy toward Afghanistan has always been a synthesis of idealistic ideology and regional power politics.

American Exit Emboldens the Taliban

Due to the absence of the US, the Taliban feels stronger. The spectre of a pro-Pakistan dictatorship in Kabul remains extremely serious in the aftermath of the Joe Biden administration's decision to withdraw American soldiers from Afghanistan. Afghanistan's institutions, which have been constructed and maintained with such blood and treasure over the last two decades, are threatened by the Taliban's desire to resolve the conflict by military force. The Afghan government has been unable to broker a peace agreement with the Taliban. The violence has stretched to Afghanistan's international boundaries, with the majority of the country's neighbours attempting to combat the Taliban while simultaneously attempting to contain the crisis (MEI, 2021). The fear that anti-India terrorist organisations may seek refuge in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan is quite serious for India.

With the prospect of a peace agreement dwindling, there are worries that things would deteriorate worse if Afghanistan's central government collapses. Kandahar and Kunduz, two significant cities, are on the verge of being besieged. Al-Qaeda is alleged to have a base there and is operating under the protection of the Taliban. This is according to a newly released United Nations study on Afghanistan (Dawn, 2021). Numerous media outlets have reported on the Taliban's strict application of Sharia law in areas under their control (VOA, 2021). The Afghan people seem unconcerned when the Taliban assassinate them in order to attain political objectives that they have been unable to accomplish diplomatically. When they surrendered, Afghan Special Forces members were recently assassinated by the Taliban in Dawlat Abad, Faryab Province. The Taliban assassinated Danish Siddiqui after ascertaining that he was an Indian photojournalist (India Today, 2021).

The formation of an Islamic Emirate has long been an objective of the Deobandi-leaning Taliban. They wish to increase the influence of Pashtuns throughout Afghanistan at the cost of other ethnic groups (Rubin, 2020). Many people who lived in Afghanistan 25 years ago under the Taliban's severe rule are concerned about this. On the other hand, the Taliban's seeming incapacity to address the needs of all Afghans would exacerbate the civil war scenario.

India's Taliban Outreach

Among other things, India has been a vocal backer of Kabul's democratically elected government, arguing that an Afghan-led and Afghan-controlled peace process would be preferable to one dominated by the Taliban. It appears to have shifted its position on the Taliban after recognising how useless it was to continue in this manner. India's foreign minister, S Jaishankar, was virtually active in the intra-Afghan discussions in Doha, Qatar, which began in September 2020. This increased the likelihood of India agreeing to talk with the Taliban. India's Ambassador to Qatar was also present when the US and the Taliban struck a peace pact in February 2020! (Dec. 2020, India Today).

As soon as it became evident that the Taliban could not be defeated militarily, India changed its course. Individuals in India's foreign policy elite rapidly recognised that they no longer possessed the luxury of being virtually isolated from the Taliban. This decision was taken in light of the potential repercussions of Pakistan's engagement in Afghanistan. Additionally, some scholars argue that India's attitude toward the Taliban should be altered. "Indian diplomacy was entirely unprepared when it came to publicly communicating with the Taliban, even as the group gained an increasing international reputation," according to a former Indian official. Additionally, it is known that the Taliban desired dialogue with India at the time, but Delhi remained staunchly loyal to President Ashraf Ghani. Being obstinate typically comes at a high cost (India Today, 2021). India has already lagged behind other nations in the area, such as Russia, China, and Iran, in terms of gaining Taliban allies.

India and the Taliban have established a direct line of communication. These discussions are claimed to be confined to Taliban members who are "nationalist" and uninvolved with Pakistan's security services. Jaishankar made a stop in Qatar in June 2021 on his way to Kuwait and Kenya. Zalmay Khalilzad was also present when he spoke with Qatar's Foreign Minister and National Security Advisor (NSA) (India Today, 2021).

America's Approach towards Pakistan

Pakistan is strategically located near China, Afghanistan, and Iran. The majority of al-Qaeda operatives and nearly all of the Taliban's top commanders currently reside in Pakistan. Pakistan is more critical to the United States' national security than Afghanistan for the reasons stated previously. Islamabad wishes to re-establish contact with Washington and disentangle itself from Afghanistan as the US withdraws its troops.

Pakistan's strategic significance to the US stems from its geographic position. It is adjacent to nations that have influenced and will continue to influence US foreign policy, such as Iran, China, Russia, Afghanistan and India. Due to its geographic position and the "network of links" that Pakistan has developed over the years, which benefits both the US and China (MEI, 2021). On the other hand, if the Biden administration decides to "ultimately outsource Afghanistan to Pakistan," New Delhi will retaliate. This would result in strengthening Washington's political and economic relations with Islamabad (MEI, 2021).

Pakistan's stronger ties with the US during the Cold War have proven to be Islamabad's single finest foreign policy initiative. It has consistently outperformed its peers in both the military and the economy. This is not to say that Washington and Islamabad have not had their share of ups and downs in the past. The US has had to restart and reset its relationship with Pakistan several times in the past. This would not be the first time since 11th September 2021 that a new political deal between Washington and Islamabad has been considered. While little can be stated for certain about how the US and Pakistan will collaborate in the future, one thing is certain: they will be inextricably bound to the outcome of Afghanistan.

Despite several setbacks, Pakistan's ruling elites continue to prioritise its ties with the US. Pakistan is attempting to convince the US that it is worth more in the aftermath of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. Khan hopes that the Biden administration will be as "civilised" and "even-handed" with the US as India and the United Kingdom have been with them (India Today, 2021). "Delhi will be closely watching Pakistan's response to the new dynamic between the United States and China and the escalating situation in Afghanistan" (India Today, 2021).

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Conclusion

In the past, rushing out of Afghanistan has always resulted in an unmanageable calamity. Political, economic, military, and diplomatic factors must all be included in India's strategic strategy for Afghanistan. Afghanistan is expected to become unstable, with a civil war erupting, with negative effects on Afghanistan's neighbours. Because the main foreign powers appear to be disregarding the Taliban's military takeover of the country, any political reconciliation is likely to take place on the Taliban's terms. Because the Taliban exist in Afghanistan, India has made touch with them. When new tools and a larger toolbox are required, it's a one-of-a-kind circumstance, but it doesn't always signal the death of existing ones. India has protected its interests in Afghanistan through soft power and non-military methods, and it will continue to do so through its capacity to assist the nation in flourishing.

India must maintain contact with all key individuals, particularly in Afghanistan. New Delhi is fearful of being hit by the consequences of Pakistan's aggressive behaviour. Hence a pro-New Delhi administration in Kabul seems unlikely. New Delhi will be overjoyed if political negotiations begin to make it feasible for Afghanistan to have a neutral administration.

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