

US-NATO Exit from Afghanistan: Challenges and Options Beyond 2014

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Abstract

United States has announced to completely pull out its forces from Afghanistan till the end of 2014 and has started delegating control of parts of the war-torn country to Afghan authorities. Though this is a phase-wise drawdown, and the US does not plan a full exit of its troops, the post-2014 scenario in Afghanistan has captured great attention. This research discusses the challenges and options for Afghanistan beyond 2014.

Introduction

United States has announced withdrawing its troops from Afghanistan by the end of 2014. However, soon after the announcement, the US administration started using the word ‘reduction’ instead of ‘withdrawing’ troops, showing the erroneous use of the word. The US has plans to keep about 10,000 troops in the war-battered Afghanistan after 2014.

NATO allies are expected to provide around 5,000 troops if the security-related agreement is agreed to among the stakeholders in Afghanistan, US and NATO.¹ In 2009, Afghan President, Hamid Karzai demanded that 2014 should be the culmination of the foreign mission in Afghanistan, which the participants sanctioned the same year in a Lisbon NATO summit.

It was in June 2013 that 350,000 Afghan National Security Forces, comprising of Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan

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police took charge of security in the country. By November 2013, the total number of foreign troops in Afghanistan was 87,000, of them 50,000 were Americans. However, in 2012 the total number of coalition troops were 1,50,000.²

NATO will withdraw its 87,000 troops by the end of 2014 after 13 years of fighting the war against Al-Qaeda and Taliban. The United States 50,000 troops will be halved by February 2014, and troops from the UK (7,900), Germany (4,400), Italy (2,800), Poland (1,550) and Georgia (1,550) will all pull out by the end of 2014. Australia planned to pull out major chunk of its 1,029 troops by the end of 2013, leaving only 400 troops behind for non-combat operations until the end of 2014 when the mission culminates.³

While blaming Al-Qaeda for perpetrating 9/11 terrorist attacks on its twin towers, the then US president, George W. Bush waged a war in Afghanistan, where Al-Qaeda chief Osama Bin Laden was harboured. As a result of the US attack, the Taliban regime in Afghanistan was toppled. Consequently, following the Bonn Conference held in Germany in 2001, the international community installed Hamid Karzai as new president of Afghanistan.

Over a decade, the US and NATO forces backed the Karzai-led administration in several cadres vis-à-vis education, health, reconstruction. However, eliminating militants and helping Afghan government in implementing its writ remained the prime job of both US and NATO forces over the last thirteen years. Besides, the US and NATO forces also imparted advanced training to Afghan National Army (ANA) who has to ultimately shoulder the security responsibility.

During the last thirteen years, US rarely showed its desire of withdrawing its forces at a proper time, and the weakness of the Afghan forces prevented any such move. As a second strategy, the US also supported talks with Taliban to restore calm to Afghanistan before its departure. However, this move has not materialized so far.

As a part of transferring power to the Afghan government, US forces have handed over charge of Bagram prison to Afghan troops. However, parts of the prison, where notorious militants are kept are still in the control of the foreign troops. Likewise, US forces also transferred control of the restive Nirk district of the Wardak province to Afghan forces. By the same token, on political front, US have also started parleys with Taliban that has passed few phases of suspension and resumption, but remains far away from success.

Taliban opened their office in Qatar for holding talks with representatives of Karzai-led government and US, however, later the office was closed. Such steps clearly indicated the seriousness of US handing over power to Afghan government. US has pledged to complete the withdrawal process by 2014, meaning thereby that after 2014, one can expect a different Afghanistan with a small number of foreign troops. The post-2014 scenario in Afghanistan will be dealt with in the following analysis.

There could be many challenges to Afghanistan after 2014, but during my interviews with various scholars, nearly all of them opined that some existing problems, security, economic, political, civil war and foreign interference would become more chronic.

Regional Instability

It is assumed that after reduction/withdrawal of the coalition forces from Afghanistan, the militants would be re-organized/re-structured and could threaten the peace of the entire region by drawing the neighbouring countries in the war. Thus the reduction/withdrawal can endanger stability of the south and central Asia.

History reveals that after complete withdrawal of Soviet Union forces from Afghanistan in 1988, America ceased taking interest in Afghanistan and the fighters made their way to Pakistan-India eastern borders. While helping the fighters inside

Kashmir, these fighters strained Pakistan and India ties. The withdrawal of coalition forces has again sensitized India about Pakistan's interference in Afghanistan.⁴

With drawdown of the NATO troops, Pakistan and Indian efforts regarding strategic influence and foothold in Afghanistan will further escalate. "Pakistani military has always viewed the Indian presence in Afghanistan, in what it regards as its "strategic Afghan backyard," as an "existential threat", this has led Pakistani spy agency Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) to restore the Taliban to power "so that it can oust Karzai and his Indian friends."

If the terror activities persist in Afghanistan after 2014, they are likely to spill over into neighbouring countries, and Afghanistan could become "a staging ground for an Indo-Pakistani proxy war."⁵

Challenges for Afghanistan Beyond 2014

Security

For multifarious reasons, maintaining security can be one of the biggest challenges to Afghanistan after 2014. When inside attacks technically called as blue and green attacks increased, American, Australian and German trainers took precautionary measures that harmed training process of the Afghan National Army (ANA). Besides, Afghan government halted sending their troops to Pakistan for training due to the security situation in both the countries.

According to America and Australian trainers' analysis, of around 200 battalions of Afghan National Army (ANA), only one or two battalions can have the potential of carrying out an independent military operation.

Afghan National Army (ANA) and Police do not represent the entire ethnic groups of the country. The forces of the Afghans do not have the balanced proportion of the ethnic groups like Pashtun,

Hazara, Tajik and Uzbeks, therefore; technically the Afghan troops are on the 'fault line.' Due to these reasons, desertions, that is commonly known as "*Bagora*" in Pakistan is on the rise from Afghan forces. Even constant vigil is kept on Afghan forces so that they may not harm their trainers or leak secrets to Taliban. Both the US and NATO forces do not trust ANA, if this is the existing plight of an army, their future strength is really a big question mark.⁶

When US forces cease combat operation against Taliban then the responsibility of maintaining security will be shifted to ANA. In the lofty mountains of Afghanistan, where mostly the militants have hideouts, a strong air force is needed, but the Afghan air force is now passing through its embryonic stage. As NATO and US forces mostly use air force against Taliban, but a weak Afghan air force cannot carry out combat operations against the Taliban. Though Taliban also do not have foreign support and strength like the past, but still they have strong control in many areas where none can enter without their permission.⁷

However, the former Pakistan ambassador to Kabul and renowned analyst Rustam Shah Momand holds quite a different opinion about the post-2014 security situation in Afghanistan. According to him, both the US and Afghan government has signed a new agreement. Owing to this new accord, about ten to fifteen thousand US troops will remain in Afghanistan till 2024.

This well-equipped US force will assist the Afghan National Army in maintaining security. He negates the perception that US-NATO will leave Afghanistan in total lurch. Of course, the US and NATO forces will receive stiff resistance from Taliban that will be having deep impacts on the region.⁸

There are apprehensions that after 2014, the weak Afghan government would not combat Taliban and thus Taliban can again become active and can set up their own check posts like the past. Though the chances of recapturing of the government seem meagre, but the worries loom large among Afghans.⁹ According to

the US Congressional Research Service report, "There are fears that the Taliban and other insurgents will achieve success against Afghan forces once the international force is reduced substantially by late 2014."¹⁰

This is not a complete withdrawal; a small number that is not yet clear, will remain in Afghanistan. Perhaps, the US troops would not directly interfere in the law and order situation, but will jump to the field according to the needs. No doubt, the capacity of the Afghan forces to combat the Taliban that are still a potential threat to security can be a big challenge for Afghanistan.¹¹

However, according to *The New York Times* journalist Matthew, "a complete withdrawal from Afghanistan could be far costlier than it was in Iraq. It would force European powers to pull their forces as well, risking a dangerous collapse in confidence among Afghans and giving a boost to the Taliban, which remain a potent threat."¹²

The fight between Afghan troops and Taliban will continue after 2014, but the nature of the war will be changed. Taliban have lost the capability of capturing districts or cities, however, they will continue their resistance to the Afghan troops, this resistance can continue even for ten-long years. The security will be a challenge for Afghan government, but perhaps its nature will be changed.¹³

After NATO exit, the extremists can again become active and can increase their activities in Afghanistan. According to chief of Awami National Party (ANP) Asfandiyar Wali Khan, "This perception will be absolutely wrong, if someone says that after NATO exit everything will be okay, if International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and Pakistan jointly do not constitute an acceptable formula, the situation in Afghanistan and region cannot change."¹⁴ Both Jack Devine and Whitney Kassel links NATO withdrawal and violence inside Afghanistan thus, "Soviet withdrawal and the subsequent rise of the Taliban with Pakistani support, as long as Pakistan continues to fund Afghan insurgents,

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violence will continue to plague any effort to govern the country.”¹⁵

NATO’s withdrawal from Afghanistan can provide a golden chance to Taliban to challenge the Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) potential to keep the country intact. The ANSF will simultaneously combat on two fronts. Firstly, it will fight against Taliban, which will use all their strength to re-take areas from army in the remotest rural territories. Secondly, the Taliban will strive to eliminate the country’s internal security and political apparatus – the police, government and the army by demoralizing and deserting the security forces.¹⁶

US ambassador in Pakistan, Richard Olson has said the US withdrawal is not an exit as US will continue its engagement with Afghanistan beyond 2014. Olson said that the US would not disengage from the region as it did in 1989 by committing a mistake. He quoted President Obama as saying, “We will build an enduring partnership with Afghanistan, so that it is never again a source of attacks against America.”¹⁷

Economy

Afghanistan’s economy is totally dependent on foreign aid that has been cut down to a great extent. Some foreign funded media outlets, including TV and Radio channels have shut down or limited their services. In case of instability, foreign investors can cease their projects in Afghanistan that will be a great blow to its economy.

According to Afghan embassy sources in Pakistan, about 2000 Pakistanis are going daily to Afghanistan for job, but in case of insecurity the ongoing uplift projects can be stopped. In case of insecurity and instability after 2014 there is also possibility that foreign donors fully stop their aid.¹⁸

There is no guarantee that Afghan economy and currency will maintain its position after 2014. In the past, Afghans were carrying

Afghanis in sacks in Chowk Yadgar, and 0.1 million Afghanis were equal to Pakistan rupees 70 to 80.¹⁹

At the moment, 50 percent foreign funds have been cut down. After 2014, the dependent Afghanistan would need to stand on its own feet, which would be something very difficult for this war-torn country. Afghans who are drawing salaries in dollars and Euros now will plunge into severe despair when dollars are stopped. Afghan government has chalked out no plans over the last decade to achieve economic independence.

After 2014, the feeble economy will aggrandize the other pressing problems of Afghanistan.²⁰ According to a *New York Times* report, “NATO forces withdrawal may also jeopardize vital aid commitments. Afghanistan is decades away from self-sufficiency — it currently covers only about 20 percent of its own bills, with the rest paid by the United States and its allies.”²¹

The poor or no economic strategies of Afghanistan will deepen the economic crisis after 2014. Afghan government has even made no clear plans regarding salaries of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan police. Strangely enough, economy, the foremost and biggest challenge, seldom becomes part of the post-2014 agenda. Taliban can therefore exploit economically weak Afghanistan.²²

As the country is dependent upon aid, therefore it has been less focused upon trade over the last decade. Vibrant trade ties with neighbouring countries could save Afghanistan economy from sinking after 2014. Besides, Afghanistan has no refined tax policy that is needed for running affairs of the country. In over a decade of its tenure, the Afghan government could not introduce a proportionate tax policy, and after 2014 collection of tax will be a great challenge for the government that would have a direct effect on the country’s economy.²³

Afghanistan has also utilized a very meagre amount of the foreign funds on uplift projects. Industries are considered as the

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pillar of the economy, but Afghanistan spent very little amount of the foreign funds on its industrial sector. Afghanistan imports are larger than its exports, the biggest export of Afghanistan are dry fruit. Rampant smuggling and corruption have almost ditched Afghanistan's economy, there is no proper check and balance system in this regard and there is a fear that after 2014, a weak economy will be one of the biggest challenges to Afghanistan.²⁴

Unfortunately, in a decade, the economic infrastructure of Afghanistan has not been paid much heed and no major projects have been launched to help Afghanistan stand on its own feet.²⁵

Civil War

There is a great possibility that post-2014 Afghanistan can witness another civil war. The possibility of this war will further increase until America, Afghan government, Taliban and other stakeholders do not strike a deal before 2014. However, now the dialogue process has become very complex, Taliban don't want to hold talks with Afghan government, and Afghan government does not support Taliban talks with America. Even the Afghan government opposed a meeting of Taliban and American officials initiated by UN in Turkmenistan. Likewise, America does not accept the Taliban's conditions of releasing of some the Taliban fighters.

The peaceful talks that were suspended in March 2012 could not resume, and if the situation persists, there is a great possibility of a civil war in Afghanistan after 2014. There are frequent talks about civil war among gatherings such as the Hezb-i-Islami leaders and those Taliban fighters that have detached themselves from Taliban factions.

By the same token, a recent report released by the British defence committee has also showed concern about a civil war in Afghanistan. As a result of the civil war there is fear of a huge influx of Afghan refugees and the devastation of the infrastructure that has been constructed over the last decade.²⁶

If instead of the Afghan government, Taliban hold peace talks with America, the peace deal would not be successful, and Afghanistan can witness the nineties episode again, when after the Soviet withdrawal Mujahdin were not ready to talk to Dr. Najib-uled Afghan government that resulted a civil a war in the country.²⁷

A senior journalist and analyst Rahimullah Yusufzai says: “Hardly any one of the Taliban commanders would like to hold peace talks with the Afghan government, however, majority of Taliban do not like peace dialogue with the Afghan government, Taliban are under Pakistan’s influence, but Pakistan cannot compel them for peace parleys, the decision of peace talks rests with Taliban.”²⁸

After 2014, Afghanistan can again slip back into a civil war because both NATO forces and Afghan government could not introduce a system that is favourable for Afghans. Thus, the exit of NATO forces can cause civil war in Afghanistan. Both NATO and Taliban stood against each other in more than a decade. Even if Taliban were given part in power, this can also ring a bell of civil war, as Taliban can start taking revenge for their martyrs by the hands of Afghan or NATO forces that could trigger civil war.²⁹ Both Jack Devine and Whitney Kassel also believe that, “The withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan in 2014 is likely to be followed by a civil war between a predominantly non-Pashtun security apparatus and Pakistan-backed Taliban forces.”³⁰

Also, while the US has announced exit plans, it has not given any clear roadmap. If the US leaves Afghanistan without any political solution, then there are great chances of a civil war erupting in Afghanistan. And this instability will have backlash on the region, particularly Pakistan.³¹

However, Afghan journalist Mujeeb Angar has rejected the possibility of any civil war in Afghanistan after 2014. According to him, Afghans have now become billionaires and have also tasted power during tranquillity. They would never repeat the

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mistake of initiating war, however, no doubt there will be trouble in the southern provinces like Khost, Paktia, Pakitka and Zabul where there are great chances of foreign interferences from Iran and Pakistan. Different groups of Afghans including Hazara, Uzbek and Tajik have constructed marvellous buildings and have established small industries. They would never like to jump into war.³²

After NATO pull-out, a power vacuum will be created in Afghanistan, and history has showed that this vacuum has been filled by extremists instead of moderates.³³

Political Crisis

In April or May 2014, presidential elections are expected in Afghanistan, but currently Afghanistan has a very weak government. Karzai government has no or very weak control beyond Kabul. The upcoming presidential elections are very important because Afghanistan needs a strong leader to implement not only the writ of the government, but also bridge the gap among the conflicting ethnic groups.

Giving due share to all ethnic groups in political power can be a great challenge, as the deprivation or intolerance of any group can cause political upheavals in Afghanistan. The emerging and capturing of power by Taliban in 1996 was the main reason of keeping Pashtuns away from power.³⁴

There are great chances that the Afghan government can collapse from within, and sensing the situation the soldiers of Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan police can desert their service and join Taliban groups. Taliban have many sympathizers in the Afghan interior ministry, ANA and the Afghan police that can cause turmoil in the Afghan political situation. Once these soldiers start joining Taliban faction, then this sudden turmoil would be quite out of control, neither US and nor Afghan government would be able to tackle this big challenge.³⁵

US-NATO Exit from Afghanistan: Challenges and Options Beyond 2014

Though Afghanistan has regained more things in the past decade, it has reconstituted its army, restored national anthem and flag that were swept away. The government structure is also restored to a great extent, however, what and how aspects of the post-2014 political situation in Afghanistan are very important. Whether UN peacekeeping forces will be appointed to watch the security and political situation or what strategy should be adopted after 2014.

If Taliban attack Kabul and the Afghan government is unable to counter them, then there are chances of Afghanistan disintegrating. The political structure is still very weak in Afghanistan and the political parties have not attained full maturity, as Afghanistan has entered into democratic processes after a 30 years political turmoil and war. Due to uncertain situation and the embryonic political environment, Afghans are hesitant to return to their home. Political turmoil, therefore, can be the biggest challenge to Afghanistan after 2014.³⁶

Though a weak political set up has been restored in Afghanistan, but still it has its importance. Large scale rigging were reported in the last presidential elections that cleared way for Hamid Karzai to presidential office. Even Senator John Kerry confessed it by saying that America knew about this rigging but has kept a compromised silence. In future too, there are chances of rigging, and also insecurity can disrupt the existing political situation. It was a very common perception about Afghanistan that, *da cha sara topak wi hakmumat da hagh wi*, (Those who have guns, will rule).³⁷

Political parties are very weak in Afghanistan, after 2014, the Jihadi groups can again become vibrant. The Parliament is divided into disunited groups comprising of disgruntled elements, this disunity and hatred can pose a grave threat to political situation in Afghanistan.³⁸

Foreign Interference

After 2014, foreign interference can mount in Afghanistan. The neighbouring countries including Pakistan, Iran and India, and even China, will again become active in Afghanistan. They will want to install their blue-eyed government in Afghanistan. Afghanistan will become a loaf of stale bread for these countries; they would not like to leave it and would not digest it.³⁹

Pakistan has always meddled in Afghanistan an affair, after Soviet withdrawal, Pakistan was also not allowing Mujahidin to indulge into talks with Dr Najib government. Pakistan was doing representation of the Mujahids, now Pakistan should cease interference and should allow or rather force Taliban to hold talks with the Afghan government.

US should impose sanctions or stop aid to Pakistan if the latter does not stop meddling in Afghan internal affairs. Pakistan government always wants such government in Afghanistan that should be loyal to Islamabad. Pakistan considers Afghanistan like its province.⁴⁰

Foreign interference can harm Afghanistan that should be immediately stopped. After Soviet withdrawal Pakistan represented Mujahidin in Geneva talks, as Mujahidin were not ready to talk to Dr. Najib. However, this time Pakistan should allow Afghans to resolve their issues by themselves. Foreign countries can help in peaceful talks, but should not impose their decisions on either side. Though, now it is not possible for Pakistan to impose its favourite government in Afghanistan, as Pakistan has domestic problems.

The former army chief of Pakistan, Mirza Aslam Beg, while talking about strategic depth once said, in case of war with India, Pakistan troops and air force will use Afghanistan, but now Pakistan cannot use Afghan soil without the will of the Afghans.⁴¹

International and regional players always interfere in Afghanistan that has always threatened political stability in Afghanistan. International community and regional countries play a game of hate and love on the soil of Afghanistan. If International community stops this game and also pressurize the regional players to cease it, Afghans can resolve their political problems.⁴²

Pakistan waits to avail a chance of filling the vacuum of creating a new Kabul regime after the withdrawal of NATO troops. The 2014 presidential elections can give a pro-Pakistan president to Afghanistan, and Islamabad can influence the Pashtun areas as a strategic depth against India. Likewise, the other neighbouring countries like Iran, China, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and regional powers – Russia, Turkey, India and Saudi Arabia always seek their own interest which are often not in accordance with national interest of Afghanistan⁴³.

Soviet Union versus US pullout

Pakistan was directly engaged in Geneva talks with the then communist regime and Soviet Union. The parleys were called as indirect talks, as they were not sitting together, but UN was facilitating the dialogue. As a result of an agreement that was guaranteed by Pakistan, the Soviet Union entirely pullout its forces from Afghanistan, and that was a peaceful withdrawal. This time, Pakistan does not seem fully interested to be a part of the peace talks, and the Taliban perhaps being hopeful of their victory in a year or two, are also not showing much interest in talks.

After Soviet Union exit from Afghanistan, due to inefficient and disunited Afghan leadership, civil war started, though the agreement was present to help in resolving the conflict. That was purely a failure of the leadership. This time again the situation is not different rather it is even more tense, and Taliban resistance will continue till the presence of foreign troops in Afghanistan. Afghan National Army (ANA) and Taliban, both are Afghans; it means Afghans are fighting against Afghans, which is a clear indication of impending civil war.⁴⁴

The glaring difference in Soviet and US exit is that Soviet Union completely withdrew its forces from the landlocked country. However, US have repeatedly said it would not repeat the past mistake and would leave behind a small number of troops that is not yet clear, in this central Asian country.

Not only the US, but even now NATO is saying it will also leave some troops in Afghanistan, in other words, the Soviet withdrawal was a complete exit, while the US has partial withdrawal plans, and this is the main difference, however, time will show how the outcome of both the decisions may be different.⁴⁵

Soviet Union and US are intruders, Soviets made their way into Afghanistan with the help of a small group of communist supporters, and likewise Northern Alliance has fully backed the US. The US has abolished the Islamic government in Afghanistan. Only a small percent of the communists rulers backed by Soviet Union troops could rule in the centre and they were having no control outside Kabul. In the existing scenario too, the Karazi government is confined only to Kabul. Likewise, exit of both Soviet Union and US is not much different, as only ten percent Afghans were backing Soviet troops, but the rest of Afghans joined hand to expel them, a similar situation is now being faced by US troops.⁴⁶

The NATO troop entrance into Afghanistan was the result of Bonn conference; however, there are two perceptions about the Soviet Union intrusion. According to one view Soviet troops came to Afghanistan on their own having a slogan that they will go everywhere to help the labourers, however, the second opinion is that Soviet Union was invited by two Afghan leaders; Nur Muhammad Tarkai and Hafizullah Amin, who initiated the Saur Revolution and set up the communist Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. The US, on the other hand, is pulling out from a comparatively developed, reconstructed Afghanistan as compared to the Soviet Union.⁴⁷

Soviet Union and US exist from Afghanistan have both similarities and contrasts. At the time of Soviet Union withdrawal, the world was bi-polar, and the Cold War between both the US and Soviet Union was still ongoing. As compared to Soviet invasion, now the key players in Afghanistan believe in peaceful Afghanistan and pin their own stability with calm and tranquillity in Afghanistan.

With several other changes, the nature, thinking and living style of Afghans have also changed, a new generation has now grown that believe in calm and peace. Some things are common, like US is leaving a politically and economically weak government in Afghanistan amid the mounting foreign interference as was left by the Soviet Union.⁴⁸

Options/Prospects for Afghanistan Beyond 2014

The strategy of US and NATO forces' withdrawal will have far-reaching impact on Afghanistan; if they leave behind a politically stable Afghanistan then Afghanistan can follow the track of development. If the US repeats the mistake committed in the nineties, then one can predict a dark future for Afghanistan.⁴⁹

One of the foremost reasons of instability of Afghanistan is Pakistan. Afghanistan cannot win the tussle of Durand Line from a nuclear Pakistan; Afghanistan should own it as a legal border and should seek only political solution of this issue. With the solution of Durand Line issue, eighty percent unrest in Afghanistan can be solved. Iran, Pakistan and India should cease meddling into Afghanistan, and particularly both Pakistan and Afghanistan should stop the blame game against each other.⁵⁰

Karzai-led government in Afghanistan is inefficient to find solution for future problems. The incompetent Karzi was flown into helicopter and was imposed on the Afghans. The existing government has no foreign policy. President Karzai changes his statement frequently; in one moment Karzai calls Pakistan a friend

and want to sign strategic truce with it, but then suddenly takes a U-turn. Likewise, Karzai statement of friendship and calling the US as invaders also shift within no time. A country that has no policy cannot chalk out plan for peaceful Afghanistan, but if some good leaders are elected in future then one can hope for a prosperous Afghanistan⁵¹.

Three players; America, Pakistan and Afghanistan should think beyond their minor goals in Afghanistan. Like an elder brother, Pakistan should play a positive role in Afghanistan. The prisoners should be released, black list should be abolished and the opponent group, i.e. Taliban should be given due respect and share in mainstream politics.

American should come up with clear policy about Afghanistan. Afghanistan should stop labeling Taliban with such terms like 'country's enemies'; Taliban should create such situation to make safe exit for US possible. US have not been defeated in Afghanistan so far, and the Taliban should realize this fact. Through peace talks, Taliban can provide a safe gateway for US to leave Afghanistan; instead their resistance can justify US forces presence for another decade in the war-torn country.⁵²

Afghanistan should expedite political process as 2014 is now upon us. Afghanistan should activate, strengthen and register political parties. As in the absence of political parties, local groups that are mainly based on ethnicity can become functional that can repeat the history.⁵³

Prospects for peace seem very dim in Afghanistan, Taliban do not like to talk to the US-backed Afghan government. Though Karzai has many times offered peace talks to Taliban, but Taliban have rejected it on the plea that Afghan government is not independent and function under US influence. The only and best solution can be that US should fix a date for its complete withdrawal, since in the presence of US forces peace can hardly be restored in this central Asian country.⁵⁴

Conclusion

Though the US-NATO forces claim the toppling of Taliban regime as a great success, however, now they are entangled in the strategy of “entrance and exit”, to many the exit of foreign forces can repeat the history in this central Asian country.

The basic question is US-NATO forces are not transferring a calm and peaceful Afghanistan to Afghans, they are transferring a turbulent Afghanistan, where struggle for peace is going on and calm is yet to be restored,

The despaired Afghans were thinking that the ouster of Taliban would restore prosperity, peace and tranquillity to Afghanistan. The Taliban were gone, but Afghans still hope for calm that is pinned with US troops’ exit now. Can the weary Afghans, who have attached high hopes with foreign troops’ withdrawal, hope to accomplish their long-awaited desires? The question has only confused, entangled and tricky answers.

The nature and style of withdrawal of the foreign troops and potential of the Afghan National Army (ANA) to guard the porous border and maintain internal peace is very significant for post-2014 Afghanistan.

The resentment of the masses against the US forces, the indifferent and corrupt Afghan government and strength of Taliban in the southern parts of Afghanistan can have a far-reaching impact on post-2014 Afghanistan. The Afghans are also not happy with the US reconstruction efforts, Taliban can exploit such grievances and can win the angry and frustrated masses support easily against Afghan government and the remaining US troops, this can cause a civil war.

After the Soviet Union withdrawal, fight for power in Afghans was before us; there is again a fear that the same situation can be repeated after US-NATO troops exit. Afghanistan has always been affected by internal and external conflict. Foreign interference in

Afghanistan has always deteriorated the situation in this landlocked country and foreign actors can again become active after US-NATO forces' withdrawal.

Karzai was imposed on Afghanistan as result of the Bonn conference, and the later elections in Afghanistan were never considered transparent, what will be the future of the country where governance and leadership crisis runs deep. So far, Afghanistan has been dependent on foreign aid; all affairs of the country are run on foreign donation, with cut of foreign aid, the economic crisis in Afghanistan can become much deeper after 2014.

The ethnic groups, warlords and drug-traffickers tried to capture the government after the Soviet withdrawal that caused a civil war; the same situation can be repeated again. Pakistan plans to repatriate Afghan refugees; their rehabilitation is obviously going to be another big challenge for the Afghan administration.

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- 23 Interview with Rifatullah Orakzai, Reporter BBC, April 3, 2013.
- 24 Interview with Daud Jabarkhel, Afghan journalist in Peshawar, April 3, 2013.
- 25 Telephonic interview with an Afghan analyst Abdul Ghafoor Lewal, based in Kabul, April 14, 2013.
- 26 Interview with Tahir Khan, Reporter of BBC in Islamabad, April 1, 2013.
- 27 Shir Jan Ahmadzai, Afghan analyst interview with *BBC Pashto Service*, www.bbc.co.uk/pashto/multimedia/2013/04/130410_im_mini_debate_uk_on_afghan_civial_war.shtml
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- 35 Interview with Rustam Shah Momand, ex-ambassador Pakistan ambassador to Kabul, April 2, 2013.
- 36 Interview with Prof. Dr. Fazal Rahim Marwat, Vice Chancellor of Bacha Khan University Charsadda, April 4, 2013.
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