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The U.S. Afghan Policy: **Current Scenario and Prospects**



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“As water retains no constant shape, so in warfare, there are no permanent conditions”

(Sun Tzu)

Afghanistan has been engulfed with complexities and flames of war for many decades. The U.S. earlier decision to withdraw its troops in May and then-recent announcement regarding extending the date of the withdrawal of its troops from the region has spurred an intense debate about the prospects of regional peace and the post-withdrawal scenario. Some international relations experts have envisaged that the complete withdrawal of American troops will create a vacuum in the country while enabling the Taliban to spread their tentacles and take complete control of Afghanistan. It can signal more strife for the country and maybe its neighborhood. Certain top American experts view the complete withdrawing ‘a grave mistake.’ However, here lies a question, is the U.S. fully getting out of the region despite having its geopolitical and economic vested interests? Would the complete withdrawal portray the U.S. as a failed state or failed superpower?

The Unyielding Land:

Afghanistan, a land of breathtaking beauty, torn by ethnic, tribal and religious divisions, has been at the center of geopolitical contests for centuries. In the almost two decades since America went to war in Afghanistan, it never provided a plausible explanation of its goals and how it planned to achieve them. As the American sought

revenge for 9/11, what sentiment did they evoke? How many enemies did they spawn in the process of 'trying to help' Afghanistan? The Taliban leaders have famously said, "Americans have all the clocks, but we have all the time."



With the induction of U.S. President Joe Biden, coupled with a lack of progress in the Intra-Afghan dialogue, it was speculated that the agreement with the Taliban could either be scrapped outrightly or its implementation would be made conditional to considerable progress in the Intra-Afghan

talks. The Doha 2020 peace agreement between the Taliban and the U.S. amid certain significant commitments. It was decided in the peace deal that Afghan soil



will not be used for any terrorist activity against the US and its allies. The U.S. would immediately begin to reduce the number of its troops in Afghanistan, completing the withdrawal by 1 May 2021. However, it did not happen. The U.S. wanted to buy more time, thereby, announced another date. This U-turn, as expected, has also impacted the Taliban moves. They blame the U.S. for not fulfilling the commitments, thus not ready to negotiate without their terms and conditions. In this aspect, there is a stalemate in the negotiation process. Months were wasted in Doha with no progress. When the talk venue was shifted to Istanbul, the Taliban refused to attend. The reason could be either



because of the U.S. decision to delay the withdrawal of troops or the inclusion of some other stakeholders in the parleys. Subsequently, the negotiations had to be postponed and remain unscheduled amid complications. It is important to highlight that the Taliban are waiting for two decisions to be fulfilled, which were made by the U.S. First, the U.S. pledged to undertake diplomatic efforts to remove the names of the Taliban leaders from the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) blacklist. The second is the release of the Taliban prisoners.

Up till now, the U.S. has not started any diplomatic effort to get the Taliban leaders names out of the UNSC blacklist. Moreover, the Afghan government has refused to realize more prisoners as it was observed that the earlier release of the Taliban prisoners led to increased violence because many of the released prisoners joined their training camps and go back to the battlefields. This situation has become an irritant because without fulfilling the commitments from both sides (the U.S. and the Taliban), there cannot be any breakthrough in the talks. Furthermore, the delay will create uncertainty and spur vindictiveness among different factions in Afghanistan and extremist groups.

The Intra-Afghan Negotiations:

The fundamental reasons contributing to the lack of progress in the intra-Afghan talks have been the myriad existing dichotomy among the Afghan factions and a reluctance to show flexibility to fulfil commitments. Both sides (the Afghan government and the Taliban), one who has to either give away authority or at least share it with others, and

others who will likely to gain a foothold in the corridors of power with the chances of a complete take-over, have shown a high degree of intransigence in addressing the issues. Still, the two sides appear far apart on major issues such as future governance, women's rights etc. There are fears on both sides which plague the prospect of a peaceful reconciliation among the warring groups.

Existing Options and Outcomes:

On the other hand, the Doha peace process has provided historical opportunities to establish consensus for power-sharing and achieve sustainable peace. In this aspect, there can be three major options for resolving the power-sharing issue. First, the



incumbent government can become a part of the Taliban dominant government as an inclusive political settlement with modifications in the present constitution, not entirely replacing it with a new one. Second, an interim setup in consensus through the intra-Afghan negotiation for a specific period followed by an election. Third, the Taliban can become a part of the current government. Among the stated options, the third one seems quite difficult as the emboldened Taliban may not opt to become a part of the current government. This is a significant aspect to understand that the Taliban are not asking for a piece of land but full control over the state. They consider that the US/NATO and Kabul regime intend to win a war on the table, which they have lost on grounds.



Therefore, the Taliban seems not averse to first and second options. If any of these options agreed upon by the Afghan new political setup and ceasefire to end the violence shall be declared and practiced simultaneously. Obviously, without reaching a consensus on a new political setup, there will be no end to the war.

Despite the foreign invasion, the Taliban remained the *de jure* government in Afghanistan. They believe their *de facto* status will be revived and that it will only be a step away once the U.S. troops are gone. It has been anticipated that the Taliban take-over is no guarantee that peace would result. As a matter of fact, this could signal the advent of a fresh wave of hostility. Warfare is still going on, and one cannot predict permanent circumstances. Afghanistan hovers between the two mindsets. The one in view of negotiated settlement exclusively on its terms, and the other asserting both its *de jure* and *de facto* legitimacy to rule the country. It is the fusion of clashes among the U.S., the Taliban and the Afghan government. It is the clash of ultimate power and resilience, clash of ego, and the quest for maintaining hegemony by the U.S. while achieving its vicious vested interests. Nevertheless, not reaching a consensus in finding an appropriate solution would be detrimental to regional peace. Against this backdrop, the people of Afghanistan may continue to suffer and bear the horrific outcomes of this brutal conflict.