



WHY DID THE UNITED STATES AND ITS ALLIES FACE A STRATEGIC FAILURE AND NOT ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS IN AFGHANISTAN?

Mohammad Ajmal Zurmati

Ph.D. Scholar & Analyst of International Relation

Abstract: The United States and NATO ended their occupation of Afghanistan in August 2021 after spending two decades of extensive war in Afghanistan. The United States now has neither a military nor a diplomatic presence in Afghanistan, as the Afghan government has so far not been recognized and the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs is trying to get its government recognition by neighbouring countries and the world.

The events of 9/11 led the United States to unilaterally decide to occupy Afghanistan and then sought the cooperation and support of NATO countries for military operations in Afghanistan. From the beginning, the US occupation of Afghanistan pursued two main strategic goals: first, Afghanistan should not be the baseline of the al-Qaeda network, and secondly, it should prevent hostile forces not to acquire nuclear weapons in Pakistan. Now, why the United States did not achieve its goals in Afghanistan and why it faced a strategic failure, this study has been conducted to critically highlight the answer.

Keywords: Afghanistan, US strategic Interest, Withdrawal, state building and Obstacles to peace

Introduction

After 21 years of intense fighting and heavy casualties by NATO and American troops and the loss of millions of dollars, some US military strategists and politicians in Washington still believe that the US government has not failed in Afghanistan, but today its military strategy opted for Afghanistan has failed and it is more visible to the people of Afghanistan and the world than ever before. The reasons for the US defeat and interests in Afghanistan are discussed by many experts and institutes in strategic studies around the world, and each institution and senior expert offers different insights into the US defeat in Afghanistan during the 21 years of invasion (Acemoglu, 2021).

Today, 21 years later, many analysts and political scientists disagree on 9/11, and they think that al-Qaeda at the time was not big enough to launch such a complex attack on the United States, so this is an internal job organized from within the United States. Even if one assumes that 9/11 was carried out by al-Qaeda, there is no reason that Afghanistan should pay the price of invasion. The Bush administration at the time could have resorted to another method, which involved lower financial costs and killings. The Taliban were ready to negotiate with the US government when 9/11 happened but still, the Bush administration decided to invade Afghanistan militarily and skip diplomatic solutions. From the beginning, many Afghan and Western scholars have called the Freedom Operation and Afghanistan invasion illegitimate and called for US non-interference in Afghanistan, and this dissatisfaction has grown among the people over the past 20 years, and the United States has finally decided to leave Afghanistan and for the time being, withdraw from pursuing their hidden interests in Afghanistan and South Asia. Thus, the legitimacy of the Afghan war was debated from the outset between the nations of the world and did not have the support of the majority of Americans and Afghan political elites, nor was a global and regional consensus adopted to advance the war (Ayotte & F. Dunford, 2021).

The US government has never wanted to pursue a clear strategy for peace and stability in Afghanistan, with more emphasis on pre-existing strategies of regime change that led to instability in the region. The US invaded Afghanistan in 2001 and changed the Taliban regime, later in 2003 on Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen war led by Saudis in 2015 Yemen. The US strategies review in Afghanistan shows that the United States has put state-building in the slogan after the invasion of Afghanistan and has not given it the necessary priority. The United States wanted to use Afghanistan's strategic position to advance its interests in Afghanistan and the region. When the Bonn Conference was convened in December 2001, they did not make the necessary efforts to build a state and tried to include the warlords in power and use them to pursue their own interests in Afghanistan. In fact, this type of state-building model in which the minority roles the state, will eventually result in failure. The United States and the international community should have made stabilizing Afghanistan a priority in its long-term strategy (Aminyar, 2018).

Many American policymakers believe that one of the failures of the United States in the war post 9/11 in Afghanistan was that they did not prioritize the war and that they were struggling in Afghanistan to achieve their strategic goals. Therefore they randomly changed their military commanders and troops to advance US interests in the region, not to fight the Taliban and al-Qaeda. In fact, the war in Afghanistan required more commitment and financial resources, which the Americans and NATO countries were not willing to finance, so they decided that they should leave Afghanistan, and maybe they made a secret deal with the Taliban to leave Afghanistan. It is still debatable how a small group with limited resources can bring the United States to its knees. After 9/11, the George W. Bush administration and later the Obama administration made promises such as peace and democracy to Afghanistan, but in reality, they failed to bring democracy and peace to this war-torn country. The US government was failed to administer properly the fund and financial assistant to rebuild Afghan institutions. Which has left the Afghan people frustrated, and with each passing

year, the Afghan people feel that the US government in Afghanistan is pursuing its own hidden interests and has never sought state-building and peace-building in Afghanistan (Acemoglu, 2021).

Most of the high-ranking cabinet posts were given to the Northern Alliance at the Bonn Conference, while the majority of Northern Alliance leaders were involved in internal strife and were practically involved in the destruction of Kabul. The insurgency escalated, and the United States, for the most part, relied heavily on the group's misguided operative reports, which resulted in the bombing of civilian areas and heavy casualties. The Northern Alliance, which already had political conflicts with a number of Afghan tribes, especially the Pashtuns, developed further after they came to power in Afghanistan. The leaders of the Northern Alliance tried to seize this opportunity and remove or imprison their political opponents for giving false information to US Combat forces. History shows giving too much authority to a minority group is against basic social principles. Thus, the implementation of this policy by the Americans caused more insurgency and ultimately made it difficult to win the long-lasting war in Afghanistan (Aminyar, 2018).

For the United States, a real victory in the long-running war in Afghanistan means peace and stability in the region and the establishment of Western-style democracy. But the US government and its strategic allies have never been able to achieve their goals, such as establishing a stable government. They did not have a comprehensive strategy to enter Afghanistan and control the situation after winning the war with the Taliban. Their only plan was to change the Taliban regime, which led to irreparable mistakes. Thus, the United States and the international community have never achieved a real victory in the war in Afghanistan, which is the creation of a strong central government dependent on Western democracy.

The US-led international community in Afghanistan did not have a real analysis of the free market economy and democracy, which in turn was resisted by the Afghan people and never consolidated in such a pro-Islamic society. On the other hand, in a civilized society, a system must be formed based on the majority vote to ensure the social participation of the people in the government. The Afghan government should build a mixed economic system to develop the Afghan economy, not a free-market economy, which cannot improve Afghanistan's fragile economic situation. Furthermore, US-led NATO military mission in Afghanistan made serious mistakes that sparked sentiment among the Afghan nation, including continuing night operations, arbitrary house-to-house raids, and the imprisonment of civilians, most of who were reportedly killed. In some cases, American soldiers have been accused of insulting the bodies of those killed in direct combat, and the use of alcohol during the military operations, which intoxicated soldiers, have killed scores of ordinary Afghans. The support of the Afghans has never been achieved by force and killing, but their support must be won by the right practices (Aminyar, 2018).

The only way to end the war in Afghanistan is to start inter-Afghan negotiations in which all parties could participate and long-lasting stability could be returned to Afghan land. All this is possible if neighboring countries and world powers seek their interests in a stable Afghanistan. One of the tested models of the peace deal in Afghanistan was the Afghan government's peace agreement with Hezb-e-Islami Afghanistan led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. Though most of the provisions of the agreement were not implemented by the

Afghan government, it can still be considered a peace agreement. At the time, the US government was reluctant to the agreement because it did not want the Afghan issue to be resolved peacefully, and also Hezb e Islami's long-lasting opponents strongly oppose this agreement and they interpreted this agreement as reducing their share in Ashraf Ghani's government (Johnson C. G., 2018).

The US strongly relied on warlords and minority groups in the ongoing war post 9/11 against al Qaeda. The study shows that they never considered the ground realities of Afghan society and ethnic contexts in nation-building and state-building. Even though, they ousted the Pashtuns tribes in the Afghan army and considered them a national security threat. They were told that the majority of Pashtuns supported the Taliban resistance in Afghanistan. Afghans need convergence and unity among different ethnic groups, not ethnic prejudices that have damaged national unity. State-building and nation-building are both interdependent and could be developed together in order to achieve a secure environment in the long run. The theory of increasing marine troops in Afghanistan which is backed by US military and military strategists is also not practical considering Afghanistan's geography. They didn't consider the terrain, mountains, and tree jungles of Afghanistan, which has never been conducive to a face-to-face battle, but guerrilla warfare can lead to victory that is often made with smaller facilities.

The Afghan army also needs NATO financial and logistical support, and the vast emphasis was put on troop's numbers not the quality of the army, which has led to the failure of combat strategy. The US-led night raids on Taliban forces had happened in most cases without coordination with ANA. This has also angered the Afghan people against NATO and the United States, and this can never bring stability to Afghanistan (Ayotte & F. Dunford, 2021).

During the wars in Afghanistan, the role of Pakistan can never be ignored, Pakistan has always tried to ignite this war and never pursue its interests in Afghanistan stably. Pakistan has never been a reliable ally of the United States and the Afghan government and has always played a double game against Afghanistan. Interestingly, US forces destroyed their bases as they left Afghanistan and transferred and donated military equipment to Pakistan, but the White House never put political pressure on Pakistan during the Afghan war and did not want Pakistan to move closer to China and further twist this relationship between the United States and Pakistan. The United States never criticized Pakistan's policies toward Afghanistan during its invasion post 9/11, which means that the United States supported the warlords and the intensity of the war in Afghanistan. The majority of these warlords have close ties to Pakistan, and the United States supports them in Afghanistan's political structure to further their own interests.

These warlords have now become the mafia of cultivation and drug trafficking, and with the arrival of the Americans, the cultivation and trafficking of drugs have increased in Afghanistan, which is smuggled to Pakistan and then to European countries. In some cases, there have even been claims by experts that the United States is allowing ISIS to conduct military operations and exercises in northern Afghanistan so that it could be a threat to Central Asian countries in the future, but the United States has denied the allegations (Korkodinov, 2019).

One of the other mistakes made by the United States and its international allies that led to their failure in the war and state-building was their support of Hamid Karzai during the transition period and the presidency. While Karzai did not have much good management and leadership experience from the beginning, the George W. Bush administration saw him as the right person to implement US strategy and long-term plans in Afghanistan. Hamid Karzai was able to maintain close ties with the Republican Party and he has given many Afghan precious gifts and government medals to US high-ranking officials on their unannounced visit to Kabul. During these 13-years of power and presidency, Hamid Karzai never resigned, and even under political pressure, he maintained political ties with the leaders of the Northern Alliance and gave them high government positions in his government, which diminished his popularity among the people.

Many senior US experts, such as Barnett Rubin, believe that to succeed in the long-lasting US war in Afghanistan and accelerate the state-building and peace-building process, it needs a clear strategy and trusted national and local partners; Afghan politicians have never been a good trusted US government allies and they inherited a corrupt past for future generations. That is why the people of Afghanistan hate their politicians, and good governance and reform should not be expected of them (Barnett, 2020).

The United States has provided billions of financial aid to Afghanistan post 9/11 but the US government has never been able to properly monitor the number of funds donated to Afghanistan. According to a report by Transparency International, Afghanistan is one of the most corrupt countries in the world, and this itself calls into question the efforts of the United States and the Afghan government as to why this systematic corruption has not been diminished over the past several years in Afghanistan (Watchdog, 2020).

Some studies show that the US government itself is involved in this corruption and never wanted to ensure transparency, but today corruption in Afghanistan is one of the major challenges to state-building and creating a secure environment. And on the other hand, when you talk about the implementation of democracy in a traditional society like Afghanistan, you have to consider the proper functioning and context for democracy. Democracy could not be forced upon people or allocation of money can be given in order to gain public support for the implementation of democratic values.

Afghans have made countless casualties and they wanted their country to develop and the rule of law must be applied equally to all, but when Afghanistan Independent Election Commission announced the result of the controversial election of 2014 in which none of the parties accepted the result and the United States instead of supporting the winner of the election and identifying the problem, proposed another plan under the name of the national unity government, which led to the decline of democracy and Afghan constitution. All of the above shows that the United States did not try at any stage to reach a regional consensus to resolve the Afghan long-standing conflict.

Meanwhile, Pakistan, as a strategic ally of the United States post 9/11 was not a reliable strategic partner and did not want US interests in Afghanistan and the region to be served. In fact, Pakistan challenged the long-term interests of the US in the region together with other countries such as Iran, China, and Russia (Bolton, 2020). All the literature mentioned above shows that the United States has failed to achieve its strategic

goals in the region and Afghanistan. The toughest obstacle to these strategic goals is the fierce resistance of the Taliban and the lack of support from neighboring and regional countries to win the long-lasting Afghan war.

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