

The US Military Engagement in Afghanistan's Turmoil: An Analysis of Security Situation of Afghanistan (2008-13)

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Present day global village is marked by what we call the challenges of strategic power game, oil politics, economic adventurism, military occupations and invasions in the name of 'self-defence'. The apparent contours of US military engagement policy was to defeat, disrupt and dismantle Al-Qaeda. The operational mode of policy remained in a constant state of flux, encircling not only Al-Qaeda but also Taliban in its ambit. Then Obama strategy emphasized on reinvigoration of military engagement but simultaneously encouraged reconciliation and talks with the Taliban. This paper aims to analyze the nature of the US engagement with consequent transition of security responsibility to Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). Related questions arise that is the US strategy of military operations worked and accomplished in Afghanistan? whether Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police are capable to tackle this responsibility? What is prevailing security situation and what can be likely situation on the eve of NATO Drawdown? Moreover, the U.S decision to bring about a drawdown of its forces from Afghanistan in 2016-17 also implies succumbing to the demand of the Taliban for a complete withdrawal of foreign forces half-way. Success of a solution to the Afghan problem depends upon the support of the majority if consensus of all Afghan factions is not easily achieved. But to make that understanding concrete, Afghans will also have to make sure that their territory is not used by regional players against each other.

Key Words: military, reconciliation, peace, offensive, security, taliban, deployment.

The contour of US engagement policy in Afghanistan revolves around myriad factors as neutralization of the Afghan Taliban threat by military means, training and arming the Afghan National Army and the Police, strengthen the capacity of the Kabul government to govern effectively and help in economic reconstruction of Afghanistan. Furthermore, the US is seeking global support for her policy in Afghanistan economic and technological support for Afghanistan and the management of border related issues and spillover of militancy with Pakistan (Rizvi, 2013).

Offensive realism is the sub-division of neo-realism theory, expounded by John J. Mearsheimer in The tragedy of great power politics, where he stated that International system is anarchic where states always coaxed to maximize their relative powers at the costs of other states. In comity of nation, the maximization of power is the only way possible to escape state failure, consequently it is the primary aim of any state (Brandon, 2009). Mearsheimer (2001) believes that becoming global hegemon is near impossible so that great power would always wrestle for power. Brandon (2009) has described the theory as below:

Three Tenets of Offensive Realism

1. Goal is to maximize share of world power.
2. Ultimate aim is to become the hegemon.
3. Since global hegemony is impossible, the world is condemned to perpetual great power competition.

For power maximization states are ready to offense. (Measheimer, 2001, p.3) The United States is a regional hegemon according to Mearshiemer, she is trying to become global hegemon, which is impossible so there is perpetual struggle for power. In this pursuit of power struggle and to become a global hegemon which cannot be short of offensive mode as war, turmoil, blood shedding and civilian casualties.

This paper explains the US intervention in Afghanistan in the context of Offensive Realism. The US invasion is fulfilling the three major tenets of Offensive Realism:
The US invasion of Afghanistan gives her:

1. Power maximization by Military operations in Afghanistan and her rehabilitation later on and Status of a regional hegemon in South Asian and Central Asian regions.
2. More share in the World Power cake.
3. Since global hegemony is impossible, It's better to be a hegemon in more regions for a leading world power.

Their policy has undergone many changes. Initially US pursued the Policy called "Operation Enduring Freedom". For the first seven years of the Afghan war, George W. Bush followed his one-dimensional neo-con policy in Afghanistan. There were two main objectives, firstly, punishment of Taliban regime because of their affiliation with Al-Qaeda and their refusal to hand him over to US and secondly to dash down the Taliban Regime for their complicity (Samad, 2011).

Initially, the US came with superior airpower and with the help of the War Lords of Northern Alliance, coalition forces dislodged Taliban government who melted away into the vast mountainous hinterland of Afghanistan only to reinvigorate and re-emerge. The US in 2003 thought that Afghanistan issue stood resolved hence they shifted their focus to Iraq to finish the unfinished war there and asked Pakistan to do their bit. They had used airpower to the maximum in Afghanistan country side and according to some estimate 1 million Afghans have lost their lives while another 1.5 million injured (Shah, 2013).

This paper is sub-divided into various sections in order to justify the questions of the nature of the US engagement with consequent transition of security responsibility to Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). Related questions arise that, is the US strategy of military operations worked and accomplished in Afghanistan? Whether Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police are capable to tackle this responsibility? What is prevailing security situation and what can be likely situation on the eve of NATO Drawdown? This research article is divided into five sub-divisions where the very first part deal with quantum of forces and defence expenditure, second part is about thinning out of allies and members of ISAF, third section embody policy shift of the US from overt to covert, fourth part is describing raising and training of Integral National Security Forces while the fifth and last section is analyzing the prevailing security environment in Afghanistan.

Method

Data Sources

This Research article is based on data collected by both primary and secondary sources. Interviews with concerned personalities (Personnel from foreign office, Retired military officers, Retired interior ministers, Political leaders) conducted and for secondary source qualitative method of visiting various libraries, to collect data from various libraries, Institution of Strategic Studies Islamabad, Jinnah Institute Islamabad, Behria University Islamabad. This sort of study will embodied of Books, national and international journals, magazines, surfing websites of foreign affairs, NATO, ISAF, The US Department of Defense and Department of State as well as reports available on concerned Embassies websites.

The Mixed Method Design

A mixed method design of research is used comprising both quantitative and qualitative methods for answering the research questions and achieving the research objectives. This enhances the strength of the findings but also make the researcher capable of overcoming the weakness of not using either qualitative or quantitative data (Brewer and Hunter, 1989). and improving the validity of research (Cook and Campbell, 1979).

The primary focus of the quantitative data here is to get an insight into the recent statistics of Afghanistan on military policy options and engagements whereas qualitative data will provide details of these engagements.

Military Engagement

The US military engagement in Afghanistan consists of numerous strategic operations in order to defeat and dismantle AL-Qaeda, which have timely stretched to Taliban and warlords as well. The US military engagement in Afghanistan has various dimensions which are described as follows;

Quantum of forces, defence expenditure

The British troops named Special Boat Squadron- were the first to enter the Afghan soil since third Anglo- Afghan War of 1919. Their entry was resented by local Afghans because they had abhorrence for any foreign occupation. (Baker, 2011) Coalition forces started with 'light footprint' strategy carved by Rumsfeld and Frank comprised 10,000 men, which was contrary to the 'overwhelming force' of Powell concept. (Kerry, 2009) Initially, the US was not utilizing Northern Alliance to the frontline and was dependent on aerial bombardment and military operation but later on started to exploit Northern Alliance. Albeit both the US and Northern Alliance were not conflated on one objective but dismantling Taliban had brought them into cooperation. The Northern Alliance was ambitious only to seize Kabul either alone or with the US assistance (Samad, 2011, p. 33). Simultaneously with the capture of Taliban and their regime change, now there occurred divergence of interest as Northern Alliance was to build up Post-Taliban settlement, about which the US was quite indifferent. The Northern Alliance was not on the same page with the US in punitive measure against Taliban that a possible rift it could trigger in the Pashtun (Baker, 2011, p. 36).

In January and May of 2008, the US reinvigorated troop's level in Afghanistan to 48,000 American service personnel with active operations. It comprised British troops of nearly 8,000 personnel. Meanwhile, insurgency had escalated with horrendous events in one of which assault was organized on prison Sarposa to release fellow captives numbering 1200 by Taliban.

Consequently, ISAF launched major Operation Code named Eagle Summit in Helmand province where heavy casualties were faced by ISAF. They used Improvised Explosive Device (IED) as an effective weapon in this regard and instigated suicidal bombing. Moreover, compared to the past when the Taliban were recruited by local patronage but now in 2008 approximately twenty percent of Taliban recruitment had been done from foreign countries who were more skilled and die hard. Resultantly, the US was in need to enhance the troops because at the end of 2008 NATO and Allied troops were around 85,000 men unable to serve the cause. President Obama summoned for surge in troops level 17,000 to Afghanistan (Baker, 2011, p. 225).

Obama in his presidential address of 2009 stated that in comparison of 160,000 troops deployed in Iraq, these 32,000 US troops in Afghanistan are inadequate to accomplish the policy end, therefore additional 30,000 troops would be deployed with specific timeline (Obama address, 2009). He ordered for transition of security to Afghan integral forces because the US would start withdrawal from 2011. Furthermore, Obama outstretched the war zone to Pakistan through his 'Af-Pak strategy' termed Pakistan as 'center of gravity' for terrorism which needed to be dealt militarily because both these countries are capable to perpetrate the future terrorist attack of 9/11 type against the US.

By contemplating the outcome, Obama administration's strategy of troops surge in 2009 was termed futile by security experts because it had failed not only to achieve the set objectives but had also turned Afghanistan more corrupt, hostile and client to the outside world. To cap it all, the counterinsurgency motive of "clear, hold, build" has not been fulfilled. This surge was only able to clear few districts, it had worked on the clear and hold objectives but "build" option was far away to be practiced.

At the time of General McCrystal there was rising Taliban momentum and their expansion to the north and west of Afghanistan. General McCrystal emphasized on political means besides military, because the intricate nature of Afghanistan turmoil where three main Taliban groups namely Quetta Shura Taliban, Haqqani Network and Hizbi Gulbaddin exists cannot be settled by one phased engagement only. Accordingly, Obama ordered for additional forces of 30,000 in 2010 for limited time period to be drawdown in 2011. Keeping statecraft in consideration, Obama appointed Richard Holbrooke as envoy to Pakistan and Afghanistan.

In 2010 major operation, code named Operation Mushtarak (Combined) comprised 15,000 American British Afghan troops was launched to curb insurgency. (McCrystal Assessment) The coalition launched Operation Hamkari in 2010 which was fruitful in securing central government control in Kandahar.

However, the US military engagement can be operated further only if it is really fulfilling the policy ends by hitting targets and if it is otherwise then better to replace the David Patreaus strategy of counter-insurgency with counter terrorism because the former has infuriated Afghans and consequently rise in anti-American sentiments. (Fatemi, 2010)

Thinning out of allies- members of ISAF

The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was established on 20th December 2001 while the United Nations Security Council legitimized it as an organ for collaboration of international patronage and aid related activities. ISAF was included into the working wing of NATO. Small sized teams known as Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) were distributed to every nook and corner of Afghanistan. From 2003 onwards, aid and foreign donations were flown to Afghanistan to rebuild and reconstruct country by PRT. (Baker, 2011, pp. 211-12) Originally ISAF was tasked to target Al-Qaeda but later on Taliban

Another tactic of pouring money among Afghans has been carried out whereby to use them as spy for collecting information and to disjoin them from Taliban. Moreover, other covert activities can be stretched from more than 400 operating bases to dozen of prisons in all parts of the country. The US officials investigate and persecute the suspected criminals in these prisons in such callous ways that cannot be validated either by Afghan or International law. Beyond exit only the covert activities will be operated. As the US is to withdraw but they would leave minimum forces there, drones, some aircraft and ground troops to protect their people. (Munir, 2013) The US military will keep sizeable container, air force, CIA operatives, helicopters in Afghanistan to make subservient government so that no Afghan government could emerge who can ask them for leaving Afghanistan. (Mohmand, 2013) The US would leave 12000-15000 troops, whose policy would be shifted mostly from overt to covert. This decision would be conceded by Afghan government, through Loya Jirga. (Sherpao, 2013) Recently the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) has been conceded by Afghan Loya Jirga. Hamid Karzai has been headstrong in his stance against some of this agreement's provision.

Raising and training of integral Afghan security forces, composition- training- equipment-defence expenditure-capabilities

General Stanley McChrystal's introduced security transition related reforms has been fruitful now because integral Afghan forces are not only recruited and aptly trained but they are very cooperative towards NATO's cause of eliminating militancy from Afghanistan. (Hanlon, 2011) This strategy was to build ANSF capability through 'embedded partnering' that is to fuse two military forces in a single team, to utilize ISAF's combat power and technology and to render situational alertness to ANSF so that they can tackle the sensitive security in more efficient way. For combatting militancy the equipment in Afghanistan mostly comprised The Russian Klashinkov, American weaponry and French made weapons because Ahmad Shah Massoud, who was panjshir or Tajik closely allied to the French.

The ANSF, particularly the ANA and the Afghan National Police (ANP), are battle-tested and have military experience. In Afghanistan, most of areas have been handed to ANSF to carry out security provision. The Afghan National Army operates independently for many security operations. (Rizvi, 2013) ISAF are only called when some grave security situation arise. Out of five tranches in security transition two have been completed and third is in process. There is rapid increase in the level of ANSF as it is apparent from their number in five southeast provinces including Kandahar of Afghanistan which has been more than 50,000 in comparison of current ratio 20,000 of NATO. Nearly 85 percent of operations are conducted by ANSF. ISAF now advise and remain at the back of ANSF. (Hanlon, 2013) US forces are now greatly replaced by integral Afghan forces in active military operation, and they just assist and guide these integral forces in tactics – 'American brigade combat teams and Marine regiments' have been converted to security force assistance brigades, which observe, support and catalyze task of individual small unit security force assistance teams who collaborate with individual Afghan units.

Meanwhile, the annual cost of maintaining the Afghan forces is estimated at up to \$10 billion, whereas Afghan tax revenue totals less than \$2 billion, which leaves a huge gap to be filled by the American taxpayer. The ground reality is that the US is spending an amount of \$ 10.5 billion a month on the conflict; 20 percent is the rate of attrition of the Afghan national army. (Mohmand, 2012) Senator John Kerry was ignited over military monthly expenditure of US troops in Afghanistan as \$10 billion which is a great strain on economy, and there seems no positive outcome of such military engagement. (Ahmad, The Nation, 2013) The US economy has been adversely affected by these colossal expenses in Afghanistan.

It is foreboding that Afghanistan security and stability which is depended on Afghan national security forces but the dilemma is that these forces are not capable to grapple security. The onus connected with both Afghan national Army and Afghan National Police, is that they are unable to subdue perpetrators which has resulted insecurity about lives of common people. Like Afghanistan's political set up Afghan national army is also corruption ridden and some of deserving and distinguished Kandark (a battalion in the ANA) are deprived of promotion because they have no access to the upper echelon and to grease the palm of officials for their promotions. These types of battalion are always posted to hard areas. Afghan National Police is infamous for both sleaze and ethnic strife. There is no counter crime capability in ANP and only nominal training towards this capacity build up has been taken. Moreover, no workable counterinsurgency forces have come into focus at yet, worst of all there are increased killing, unfair use of force, robberies which have become matters of routine. ANP is complicitly involved in extortion cases wherever it find opportunity. ANP is complicit in equipment theft and besides all the logistical problems are also ahead to them (Defence Report, 2012).

As regard the performance then the capability of ANSF is going to flourish but still there are some hard areas like Lashkar Gah and some parts of Helmand province where contesting groups namely, Tajiks, Hazaras, Ghilzai Pashtuns, Uzbeks, Durrani Pashtuns and their subgroups are not pliant on the issue of powerhold. These areas have remained under Taliban influence but now ANSF is striving to exonerate these areas from Taliban clutches. As Afghan government is incapable to handle criminals with iron hands so Taliban has taken advantage of this space by fostering their own trial and punishment systems which will render another feather in their cap. Third tranche is acid test for their capability on the eve of foreign forces exit. Albeit Afghan National Army (ANA) has become enlarged in size as well as with improved quality but their capability could be tested in the coming years, when they would tackle with insecurity on the eve of exit. There is ethnic

fissure in Afghan National Army between two major factions Tajiks of North and Pashtun of South and this ethnic strife will exacerbate which can be fissiparous to its structure (Brown, 2012).

Prevailing security environment in Afghanistan

The former Afghan president Hamid Karzai has control only in Kabul and hardly in the areas around Kabul. The rest of mostly sixty two or seventy percent of Afghanistan is under control of Taliban forces and tribal warlords. It is nearly impossible for the US to sustain the recruitment of integral Afghan forces for security purpose if such incompetent governance prevailed which is the situation altogether contrary to Iraq. Afghanistan central government has neither control on Southern part nor in other areas (Rubin, 2006). After one and half decade of war in Afghanistan the situation is still turbulent with strong Taliban's insurgency. The US latest report has clarified that in comparison of 2011 there is escalation of insurgency which has devastated security of Afghanistan (Mohmand, The News).

There were two main objectives behind invading Afghanistan, firstly to dismantle Al-Qaeda and secondly, nation building but unfortunately after decade of this military engagement there seems no apparent positive omen about security. Albeit Al-Qaeda has been trembled by killing of its central command Osama Bin Laden but this organization is firm and has strengthened its roots. NATO role has been suspicion in all this violence because in spite of various military operations there is escalated insurgency and majority of Afghan provinces are under ruthless flames of terror (Lepri, 2012). Basically Afghanistan is a graveyard of several empires not only due to weak strategies of those superpowers but also by intricate nature of Afghanistan, where the people are more stubborn and hateful to outsiders and it is quite impossible to get their favor and essence of how to rule them. ISAF failure is also due to lack of unanimous persistent decision on which international community could concede.

The futility of the US military engagement in Afghanistan is apparent from the remarks of the US concerned officials as the war's chief salesman, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, reiterated that the U.S. has no territorial designs on a land whose terrain and people sent two empires packing in recent centuries. Once the U.S. decapitates al-Qaeda, the bulk of the American military force will pull out of Afghanistan. The US Air Force Colonel expressed his frustration that Afghanistan military engagement has caused no apparent good omen and now there should be just proper strategy to come out of this quagmire (Time Magazine, 2001).

The need is to analyse the US invasion in legal background. The US claimed that it was 'armed attack' which demanded the use of force, ensured by the UN resolution of 1368 and 1373, guaranteed the US to invade Afghanistan. But the 9/11 assaults were not carried out by any state Afghanistan was not directly involved in these attacks. The US has taken another mode 'Pre-emptive Self-Defence'. (Yost, 2008) International Law has no provision for it, Customary law validate it only on following grounds, if a state is targeted and assaulted by another state, the targeted state have exhausted all other defensive mechanism, this defensive strategy is in proportion to the danger impending, the threat is inevitable. (Wallace and Ortega, 2009) So in this background there was no such imminent threat and on this basis the two UN reports have refuted this pre-emptive action of the US (Christine, n.d. p. 212). The lesson learnt after decade of 9/11 is that war between Islam and the west was not inevitable and even today it is not inevitable (Aljazeera video, 2013).

Inside Afghanistan there was no national consensus for this intervention. Second, the U.S/NATO strategy in Afghanistan was that while through a high tech war they would topple the government of the Taliban, the dirty work on the ground would be done by the forces of the Northern Alliance, mostly Tajiks and Uzbeks. For the same reason, politically only elements belonging to the Northern Alliance or strongly opposed to the Taliban were co-opted by the U.S/NATO. The neutral Pashtuns who were not opposed to the Taliban but were not pro-Taliban either were side-lined in the new dispensation.

Resultantly four things happened. First, the forces of the Northern Alliance effective in the Tajik-Uzbek-Hazarajat areas, turned out to be of no use in Pashtun areas – the hub of the Taliban. They simply could not fight with the Taliban on Pashtun ground. Eventually, while the elements belonging to Northern Alliance came to fill positions in the new dispensation or get top posts in the security services, it mostly fell to the lot of the U.S/NATO forces to do the fighting on the ground. Second, the Bonn Accord about establishment of a new democratic order in Afghanistan acquired little ownership among the majority Pashtun ethnic group in Afghanistan. As a result, its political support base inside Afghanistan remained very narrow. Third, the Taliban who had just melted into the Pashtun areas in the face of a U.S/NATO assault regrouped and started giving tough resistance to the U.S/NATO forces in these areas. Fourth, in this situation a legitimate international military intervention sanctioned by the UN came to be seen as a purely foreign occupation by a large number of Afghans since mostly it was a war not between Afghans but between the Afghans and the U.S/NATO forces. The building of the Afghan National Army to fight the Taliban against this background became extremely difficult. That difficulty persists to this day.

Accumulatively the three challenges of reconstruction, reconciliation and restoration of peace and stability could not be addressed timely. These challenges remain to haunt Afghanistan with no clear signs of solution.

The US invaded Afghanistan after 9/11, in order to use pre-emptive power mode, to use force before imminent threat happened to the national interests. The US as major power is militarily engaged in the minor state, Afghanistan. The 9/11 was pre-text for the US to invade Afghanistan, because Afghanistan was not directly connected to that incident. The contours of US military engagement policy was to defeat, disrupt and dismantle Al-Qaeda. The operational mode of policy remained in constant state of flux, encircled not only Al-Qaeda but also Taliban in its ambit. Then Obama strategy emphasized on reinvigoration of military engagement but simultaneously came to the reconciliation and talks to the Taliban. It seems the Afghan war is now all about American politics. Obama could have certainly made the peace move two years ago. He could have averted the violence, bloodshed and displacement in Afghanistan produced by the surge, as well as the huge cost involved in the exercise. The strategy of reconciliation has been with no fruitful outcome so the US is to exit from Afghanistan, leaving behind nine military bases (Mohmand, Sherpao, Ghazanfar & Munir interviews, 2013). NATO will remain in Herat and Mazar-i-Sharif in order to serve the US underlying objectives, to control Iran and China from those basis. The US is also on alarm from Russia and China as stake holders in Afghanistan. As the US has realized this threat and perhaps this can be one of the reasons for its draw down from Afghanistan soil and to be shifted towards Asia Pacific to have access to Thailand, China, Malaysia, Singapore. If contemplated about the remaining troops, then majority of the troops will be of France and UK who are closest ally of US. Australia and Canadian are in lower number now. In Kabul there will self protected system so that in emergency they could protect themselves by using air and will have fortress or cottage like dwellings (Ghazanfar, 2013).

By analyzing the US engagement in Afghanistan's turmoil, it stretched to the John Mearshimer's theory of Offensive realism from the very nature of offense being inflicted by the US in order to maximize her power, to reach the status of global hegemon. The minor state Afghanistan has been destabilized in security, political aspects. Afghanistan security situation, which has been upset by the US military engagement for more than one reason, by rising insurgency, weak central control, corruption, poor law and order situation and hatred and acrimony against the foreign occupation. No doubt the Afghanistan as minor state has no concern with hegemon status or to maximize power, the more it seeks is to focused on its Boundary defense, refugees issue and how to exploit the natural resources. The US according to Mearshimer is in struggle to become global hegemon and that is impossible due to geography and water are main obstacle in this regard. The US in the past has remained offshore balancer in Europe and North East Asia by deploying military troops there and developed logistical infrastructure so that to ensure the US bases there (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 389). The US is using buck passing and offshore balancer strategies against China, Russia, and Iran on Afghanistan ground. The US engagement in the region is not only Afghan centric but focuses on South Asia, Central Asia and East Asia as well. In fact, after exit strategy from Afghanistan, the US pivot will be in East Asia – Pacific to contain China. The US also seeks Pakistan – India amity while building up India against China. In Central Asia, the US seeks to increase its leverage while blocking Russia and China.

Conclusion

The United States of America engagement in Afghanistan is a long war that served no purpose. American media is with feeling that Afghanistan invasion was an irrational decision because in spite of huge expenditure to economy there is no apparent omen of victory. Washington concedes that US invasion has just intensified extremism, militancy and Taliban's momentum in this region. America is the ultimate sufferer with in the shape of lives, money and civil liberties lose. It has tarnished our (Washington) promise to stand for dignity and grace of human.

The US invaded Afghanistan on the pretext of 9/11 by waging an unrelated "war on terror" which is now generally considered as the 'wrong war.' No other nation has done greater damage to its own global prestige and credibility because of its misdirected policies and misplaced priorities. The offenses of the US have perturbed the security of Afghanistan with uprising in insurgency, Taliban and warlords are fighting with their own agendas in order to strengthen their power holds. The US sponsor government has led to corruption, ethnic strife and instability.

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