



US-TALIBAN RELATIONS: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The relationship between the Taliban and America can be divided into different sections. America and the Taliban were friends in the beginning, right after the Soviet Union's withdrawal; later, both parties had different opinions on different issues and after the incident of 9/11, America toppled the Taliban regime. Now the latest phase shows the Peace agreement between the Taliban and America in Doha the capital city of Qatar. This paper explains the stages of American and Taliban relations from a historical perspective. This paper also highlights the various factors involved at different times in the relations between America and the Taliban in Afghanistan. This paper explains that the peace deal between the Taliban and America might begin a new era in America-Taliban relations. The withdrawal of American troops does not mean that America is closing the Afghanistan chapter. The Ground situation is entirely different as seen on the paper. Things are complicated and hurdles are everywhere on the way to peace in Afghanistan. Spoilers are also actively derailing the development made by the Taliban and America towards stability in Afghanistan. This paper shows the commitment of



American president Donald Trump toward the withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan.

Keywords: America, Taliban, Afghanistan, Peace, Soviet Union

Introduction

Afghanistan is strategically state of great importance and a gateway to energy-rich Central Asia. After reading the pages of history, it unveils that Afghanistan has been an essential patch of land for the world powers. In its peak times, Kabul defeated the British Empire after the Soviets went empty-handed and now America will withdraw its forces. To vanquish Afghanistan has lasted a dream for the world powers, but the consequences were different in each case. The defeat of the US military in Afghanistan is a phenomenal incident in modern history. Since the beginning of the war in Kabul, the order America wanted to initiate and force over Kabul could not assist (Mirza & Malik, 2019). American President Bush clearly announced, "No state can talk with terrorists" right after the 9/11 incident. President Bush had more aggressive policies than his successor President Obama. President Bush wanted to win the Afghan war through military means. Obama administration soon realized the facts and announced to talk with modern elements of the Taliban when he came into power and supported talks with the Taliban (Perry, 2016). President Trump tried to put pressure on the Taliban to increase the troops in Afghanistan, but soon Trump realized that dialogue was the ultimate solution to end this war. Finally, the peace agreement was signed between the Taliban and America on February 29, 2020, in the capital city of Qatar. According to the deal, America is committed to withdrawing its military from Afghanistan and uplifting its sanctions against the Taliban. The Taliban also agree to take steps to stop militant activities against America and its allies. The most important thing that the Taliban will, apart from its ways from the Al-Qaeda. Taliban will engage with the Afghan government to settle the future political setup of Afghanistan (Mashal, 2020).

The international community is divided over the peace agreement between the Taliban and the United States. The peace deal is the most important happening in the history of America-Taliban ties. It is difficult to predict the outcome of this peace agreement, but one thing is clear the Taliban has become the powerful identity of Afghanistan. This paper focuses on the terms between the Taliban and America from a historical perspective.

Research Methodology

The researcher applied a qualitative method to complete this paper. The researcher read the literature related to this topic to get helpful information to complete his work. The author got assistance from articles, books and newspapers to conclude this paper. The writer contacted different personalities to get valuable information regarding his topic. Johnson H. Thomson a



researcher and Professor at Naval Staff College California, helped the researcher to complete this research work. The researcher went to various libraries to get accurate data. The author got assistance from online journals and other media outlets to find out the facts regarding his topic.

Literature Review

U.S. President Trump Policies towards South Asia with Particular Reference to Afghanistan, India and Pakistan by Muhammad Owais. In his publication, the writer explains President Trump's policy towards South Asia and, in particular Pakistan, India and Afghanistan. The writer also compares the policies of two American Presidents Trump and Obama in perspective to Afghanistan and highlights the similarities and differences. The author considers the attitude of President Trump harsh towards Pakistan as compared to India. India is a strategic partner to America in South Asia, but peace in Afghanistan cannot be traced without the help of Islamabad (Owais, 2019).

President Trump's Strategy in Afghanistan: A Way Forward to Normalcy by Muhammad Nasrullah Mirza and Yasir Malik. In this publication, the writers focused on the Taliban's strength and American President Trump's strategy in Afghanistan. The authors explain that the Taliban are more powerful than ever in Afghanistan. The weak political system in Afghanistan and internal rifts of the political elite provide strength to the Taliban militants. America wants to end this long war of American history, but the unpredictability of President Trump creates hurdles on the way toward peace in Afghanistan. The writers explain in detail the patchy areas of President Trump's strategy in Afghanistan (Mirza & Malik, 2019).

Mediated Public Diplomacy: US and Taliban relations with Pakistani Media by Rauf Arif, Guy J Golan and Brian Moritz. The writers explain the media's role in Pakistan-America and Taliban-Pakistan relations. Both sides try to influence the media to propagate things according to their will. In this publication, the writers have discussed the relationship between Pakistani media of American and the Taliban sides. Pakistani media's role, especially in the war against terrorism, was critical. The authors discussed the media strategy of the Taliban and America from the perspective of Pakistani media (Arif, Golan, & Moritz, 214).

The Taliban at War by Antonio Giustozzi. In this book, the writer explains how to fight the Taliban militants. The author expresses that the Taliban have got more area than ever. Taliban has now become a new power in Afghanistan. Taliban have defeated America, NATO and Afghan forces at the same time. The author explains the establishment of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001. The author discusses the courage the Taliban has shown after the demise of 9/11. The Afghan government and other sponsors did not take the Taliban fighters seriously after their demise in 2001. Still, the Taliban came with more power in 2003 and now the Taliban have occupied more territory than before (Giustozzi, 2019).



The Afghan Intel Crisis (Satellite State, War of Interests and the Blame Game) by Musa Khan Jalalzai. In this book, the writer explores the capabilities of Afghan Intelligence Agencies. The author describes in detail the present condition of Afghan Intelligence Agencies. The writer believes that America never tried to develop the capabilities of Afghan Intelligence. The writer explains American interests in Afghanistan and America's efforts toward the betterment of the Afghan people. They took a clear picture of American policies towards Afghanistan and criticized the American behaviour towards the people of Afghanistan. Afghan forces are not eligible to handle Afghan territory after the withdrawal of American troops. It's the need of the hour to build Afghan forces and Intelligence Agencies according to modern techniques (Jalalzai, 2017).

Taliban Narratives (The Use and power Stories in The Afghan Conflict) by Thomas H. Johnson. The writer has explained in his book the effectiveness of the Taliban on the ground level. The Taliban have masses of support in rural Afghanistan. The communication system of the Taliban is up to the mark. The Taliban have more powerful than America and the present Afghan government. The author believes that the Taliban are getting support from the common public of Afghanistan. The writer also discusses the reasons for the American defeat in Afghanistan (Johnson, 2018).

The writers have worked on American interests and relations with Afghanistan. Most people think that America and the Taliban are enemies and they never had cordial relations. There is a need to publish more work regarding America-Taliban ties before the 9/11 event.

Research Question

1. What were the relations between the United States and the Taliban before 9/11?
2. What were the factors involved in making hostile the ties between America and the Taliban?

US-Taliban Relation: A Historical Perspective

People think that America and the Taliban are rivals due to the war in Afghanistan, the longest war in the history of America. But history defines that America and the Taliban have enjoyed cordial relations in the past. After the emergence of the Taliban, ties with America and the Taliban can be divided into four different sections. It can be seen as friendly ties, disputes and escalation, or war and peace agreements. America has been fighting with the Taliban in Afghanistan for almost two decades but never defined the Taliban as a "terrorist group".

Phase 1. Friendly Ties Between Taliban and United States

After the withdrawal of Soviet forces, a vacuum was created and someone had to fill this vacuum. Massive destruction had done by Soviet forces in Afghanistan. A large number of refugees fled to



neighbouring states Pakistan and Iran. America took it as a chance to eliminate the Soviets' influence in Afghanistan. America, with the help of Pakistan, supported Afghan Mujahedeen to enhance its influence. America had already funded Mujahedeen fighters against Soviet forces. A large number of NGOs started working in Afghanistan to protect the interests of America. The Taliban established its government in Afghanistan in 1996 and American companies welcomed the Taliban and hoped peace would prevail in Afghanistan. The White House also stated that America would hold talks with the Taliban to establish diplomatic ties (Diplomatic Discourse, 2010). America had been engaged with Taliban leaders from the late 1990s. American Presidents Clinton and Bush negotiated with the Taliban to get favour for the American companies. American companies wanted to Construct gas and oil pipelines from the Central Asian States. United Nations also officially announced negotiating with the Taliban, but these efforts were dissolved in 2000 after the Cole attack. America also had been contacted by Taliban leaders even after the attacks on US embassies in Africa. American officials met with the Taliban in March 2001 and even in August later this year before the few weeks after the 9/11 incident (Borger, 2004). American friendly gestures with the Taliban were due to Afghanistan's strategic importance and to containing Iran. Iran had a significant presence in Afghanistan and links with the anti-Taliban forces at that time, while the Taliban had good relations with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. America wanted to counter Iran through the Taliban. American Congress provided 20 million dollars to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to counter Iran during President Clinton's administration and this money flowed to the Taliban (Khan, 2018).

Phase 2. Disputes and Differences Between America and the Taliban

Taliban took control over Kabul in 1996 and became a state force from local forces. Taliban wanted their recognition in the International community as a legitimate force in Afghanistan. Taliban met various times with the American delegations after the Taliban came into power to discuss matters related to the Taliban and the United States. The Taliban wanted two things from America, the first was the recognition of the Taliban government and the establishment of diplomatic ties between America and the Taliban government and the second was the adoption of a non-interference policy from America (Cristol, 2019). The Taliban wanted to get recognition from America because president Burhan din Rabbani had set up his government in Herat, a northern city of Afghanistan. Although the President was in exile, his government had a seat in the United Nations (Khalilzad, 1997). Taliban wanted to get a seat in the United Nations and recognition by the United States could be a plus point for the Taliban. The Taliban also worried about the American interference in Afghanistan's internal matters; it was a big worry for the Taliban to implement Sharia laws in Afghanistan. On the other hand, America requested the Taliban to stop the civil war, give fundamental rights to women and hand over Osama bin Laden to America. These requests by the Americans showed their priorities in Afghanistan. The first request to end the civil war was due to the American companies' pressure on the American government to construct a pipeline from Tajikistan via Afghanistan to Pakistan. The second



request to provide fundamental rights to women was due to the feminist movement's pressure on the Clinton administration. The third request was made to get Osama from the Taliban because Osama was involved in various militant activities to harm American national security (Yousafzai, 2019). America always used moral conceptions to get its interest. During this period relations between the Taliban and America deteriorated. America was keen to construct an oil pipeline from Tajikistan to Pakistan via Afghanistan, but due to the instability in Afghanistan, it was impossible. External actors like Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, India, Iran and Russia were involved in prolonging the civil war in Afghanistan. The Taliban imposed strict laws in the Country and women were mistreated. With the emergence of the feminist movement in America, the Clinton administration was feeling unease. America needed to put pressure on the Taliban and work for the fundamental rights of women. The United States put pressure on the Taliban. It adopted strict policies against the Taliban, but several visits were made by the American officials to retain relations at an average level. The most important thing was Osama's presence in Afghanistan. Osama issued a fatwa to kill Americans and its supporters are the religious duty of every Muslim (Lewis, 1998). Al Qaeda attacked in Kenya and Dar re Salaam on American embassies on August 7, 1998, and killed over 200 people and injuring over 4000 (Solomon, 2020). America demanded Osama from the Taliban, but the Taliban refused to hand it over Osama bin Laden to America. Relations between America and the Taliban deteriorated rapidly after the Taliban refused. America put sanctions on the Taliban and increased its support to the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan. Al Qaeda hit America hard on September 9, 2001, resulting Afghan war. America launched the Afghan war on October 7, 2001, to dismantle the Taliban government and the nexus of Taliban and Al Qaeda.

Phase 3. The United States and the Taliban Direct War

America and its allies' forces toppled the Taliban regime and tried to clear Afghanistan from the militants. America did not want to repeat the mistakes of Soviet forces and joined hands with the United Kingdom to provide air support to the Northern Alliance. President Bush wanted to eliminate terrorists by force and closed the door to dialogue with the Taliban. The Taliban fighters fought well with the American and NATO troops and did not allow them to occupy the whole of Afghanistan. The United States increased its troops from time to time to defeat the Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters. At the end of the Presidency of Bush, there were 68000 troops in Afghanistan. Later, at the end of 2010, under the presidency of Obama, the strength of American and NATO soldiers reached 150000 (Chughtai & Qazi, 2020). President Obama started to provide money to the foot soldiers of the Taliban to achieve America's interest in Afghanistan. First, Obama adopted a reintegration policy toward the Taliban. The Obama administration wanted to neutralize the Taliban militants through its reintegration policy. After the ceasefire message from Mullah Omer on the eve of Eid in 2010, America decided to come one step forward and changed its policy from reintegration to reconciliation. America decided to bring Taliban leaders to the talks table with the Afghan government directly (Tarz, 2010). President Obama was much aware of the destructive strategies of the Bush administration in handling the Afghan war. Due to the bad strategies of



Americans, the Taliban had secured about half of the Country's control between 2005 to 2009. This war was becoming harmful to America's interest in the region. Obama knew about the importance of Kabul and Islamabad in the region. But this war would become the "White Elephant" for America's economy. The cost of the war increased by about 100 billion dollars from 2005 to 2009 (Cordesman, 2009). America tried to end this long war but could not get success. Taliban reorganized itself and controlled a large part of Afghanistan. President Trump took office in 2016 and promised in his election campaign to end the Afghan war. President Trump took commendable initiatives to conclude the Afghan war and announced to talk directly with the Taliban without the Afghan government (Sameem & Sediqi, 2018). America is now in a hurry to bring back its soldiers from Afghanistan.

Phase 4. America and Taliban Peace Talks

President Trump took charge as the 45th President of America with an aggressive attitude. It was a difficult task for President Trump to prevent America from an embarrassing defeat in Afghanistan. After consultation with various dignitaries, the President announced his Afghan policy after six months in 2017. Trump's policy was not different from Obama's policy in terms of military presence in Afghanistan. In his speech in 2017, "President Trump talked about the political solution of the Afghan war". Trump accepted the proposal to engage the Taliban with direct talks. But on the other hand, the President increased military presence in Afghanistan. This initiative created hope of getting desired results for America in Afghanistan (Lee, 2017). Trump, in his policy about Afghanistan, strictly warned Pakistan to end its ties with terrorist organizations working in Pakistan against the interests of America. Otherwise, America will cut down the military aid to Pakistan by 300 million dollars. President also accused Pakistan did not show its 100% results in its fight against terrorism. On the other side, America encouraged India to expand its presence in Afghanistan. India had already invested billions of dollars in Afghanistan, but India did not want to send its military to help America against the Taliban in Afghanistan. Trump's policy about Afghanistan was badly criticized by the experts in South Asia as well as in America. According to many experts, this policy will help Pakistan to establish its ties closer with China and India already had invested a significant amount in Afghanistan. India cannot send its foot soldiers to assist America in Afghanistan. Moreover, Trump's warning to Pakistan will create more problems in America's relationship with Pakistan (Ganguly, 2017). Trump administration often said that they have everything to get success in Afghanistan. Jim Mattis, Defense Secretary, said the Trump administration could achieve what two earlier administrations could not achieve in Kabul. Jim Mattis was criticized by most American Military Experts; they think the Trump administration has no clear plans for Afghanistan. Trump wants to win this war through military means, but it is impossible to win. Trump does not know about the ground realities in Afghanistan. In 2018 Trump's Afghan policy will show its result, as said different officials from the Trump administration (Shinkman, 2017). In 2018 Trump decided to engage the Taliban directly without the presence of the Afghan government. These peace efforts were welcomed, but it put a question



mark on Trump's policy about Afghanistan to win the Afghan war through the military. Even a surge in American troops in Afghanistan and a cut in military aid to Pakistan could not stop the Taliban momentum (Jaffe & Olivo, 2018).

President Trump appointed Zalmay Khalilzad, his advisor, to see the peace and reconciliation process with the Taliban in Afghanistan. Zalmay has served America in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the United Nations as the ambassador of Washington. His main task was to bring the Taliban and Afghan government to the peace table and secure the interests of America in Kabul (Kelemen, Hadid, & Romo, 2018). America has spent almost 1 trillion dollars and lost approximately 2400 soldiers in Afghanistan. Now President Trump wants to save his subsequent election to end the longest war in American history. The American public does not want to continue this war in Afghanistan anymore. Most Americans think the Afghan war is not in favour of the United States; we are fighting a blind war no one knows the end of this deadly war (Johnson, 2020). Pakistan is the most critical Country in the South Asia region and peace in Afghanistan is not possible without the efforts of Islamabad. Soon after President Trump's threat to cut down military aid to Pakistan and knowing about the role of India in Kabul, President Trump wrote a letter to Prime Minister Khan to seek Pakistan's help in the war against the Taliban in Afghanistan. Prime Minister Khan assured President Trump about his help in the Afghan peace talks. It was a dramatic change in Trump's behaviour regarding Pakistan. Two weeks earlier, Trump bashed Pakistan for providing safe havens to terrorist organizations in Pakistan. President Trump realized soon that the withdrawal of American forces cannot possible without the help of Pakistan (Janjua, 2018). On the other hand, prosperity and stability in Afghanistan directly proportionate the weight of pressure the Washington administration put on the Taliban militants to stop their actions. Trump's policy of reconciliation was warmly welcomed by the Afghan government and other prominent Afghan leaders. The Afghan government also welcomed the idea of modernization of Afghan military forces. Afghan government thinks in this way; they will be able to defeat Taliban militants in a long war (Rahi, 2017). From October 2018 to September 2019, 9 rounds of talks were conducted in Qatar between the Taliban and America. The core issues like withdrawal of foreign forces, commitment from the Taliban to protect its soil from terrorist organizations, and power-sharing formulas were discussed. Both sides were confident of ending the longest war of history soon (Qazi, 2019). After the nine rounds of talks in Doha, on February 29, 2019, a peace deal between the Taliban and America has signed. This peace deal will pave the way toward permanent peace in Afghanistan. Zalmay Khalilzad and Mullah Ghani Baradar signed the historic agreement in Doha. According to this deal, the US will withdraw its forces within 14 months. But within the first 135 days, the US will reduce its troops to 8600 in Afghanistan. Afghan government and Taliban both will release prisoners as a goodwill gesture. Gen. Mark Milley said, "we are thankful to the American soldiers who sacrificed in Afghanistan. The only way to end this long war in Kabul is the way of negotiations. America is committed that Kabul will never be a safe place for terrorism". America plans to remove Taliban members from the sanctions list to get its aim by May 29, 2020. The Afghan government will talk with the Taliban to establish the future political



setup of Afghanistan. The most important thing about Intra Afghan Talks is to execute a ceasefire in Afghanistan (Maizland, 2020). President Trump is in deep trouble regarding his withdrawal policy from Afghanistan. The non-serious behaviour of Afghan leaders and the Covid-19 pandemic make it challenging to end the long American war history. Tensions are seen in the statements of American and NATO officials. One of the NATO officials in Afghanistan said, "World is fighting with Covid-19 pandemic and it is bizarre that Afghan leaders are fighting for power, they should unite for the interest of public health and peace" (Gul, 2020).

Conclusion

America and the Taliban had friendly relations right after the emergence of the Taliban. Under the president Bush administration, the ties between the Taliban and America became hostile. During Obama's tenure, things began to change and the Taliban were the strong political force of Afghanistan and America tried to begin talks with them. After two decades of war, the United States and the Taliban signed a peace agreement on February 29, 2020, in Qatar. According to the agreement, America will leave Afghanistan and the Taliban will never allow using Afghan soil against America and its allies. The peace agreement is a historic moment for the people of Afghanistan and the Taliban. The peace deal is like a ticket for America's withdrawal from Afghanistan and its sign of victory for the Taliban; the internal politics of Afghanistan will harm the hopes of bringing peace and stability to the Country. The Taliban have gained recognition through a peace deal with America and the whole world now recognizes a potent political force in Afghanistan. The new political setup of Afghanistan cannot be completed without the presence of the Taliban. Through this peace agreement, a new chapter of relations begins between the Taliban and America, but peace in Afghanistan looks complex on the ground.



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