

The US in Afghanistan: Consequences of an Untimely Withdrawal

Dayyab Gillani

University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.

ABSTRACT

The following paper attempts to analyze the ongoing insurgency in Afghanistan by critically evaluating the insurgent ideology, its past, current and future relevance. The paper draws on lessons from the recent Afghanistan history and discusses the irrelevance for the future of Afghanistan. It traces the success of Taliban insurgency by highlighting the role of ‘mullahs’ and ‘madrasas’ in the Afghan society. It argues that the US policy in Afghanistan thus far has failed to isolate the public from the insurgents, which poses serious present and future challenges. By drawing parallels between the sudden Soviet withdrawal in the early 1990s and a potential US withdrawal in the near future. It also points out that an untimely US withdrawal from Afghanistan may entail an end of US engagement but it will not be an end of war for Afghanistan itself. The essay stresses the importance of a consistent long-term US policy aimed at addressing the very root causes of insurgency in the region.

Key Words: **Afghan War, Taliban, Insurgency, US Withdrawal, Mullahs, Madrasas.**

Introduction

In the spring of 2001, the US forces were able to oust one of the most controversial regimes in the world, namely the Taliban. The Taliban, who were only ousted from power and not defeated completely, started regrouping in the mountains and rural areas of Afghanistan by as early as 2002. Afghanistan, which has one of the most difficult and inaccessible terrains in the world and is composed entirely of rural areas, provided a natural habitat for the growth of an insurgency.

For a nation which had been seasoned and trained in unconventional and asymmetrical warfare (the Soviet-Afghan war, 1979-92), the US war in Afghanistan was never going to be an easy one. Yet both the United States and her NATO Allies somewhat underestimated the threat and their laxity arguably created conditions that permitted the Taliban to regroup and reorganize. This regrouping was so effective that even after years of war, the Taliban still present a potent threat to US forces and the current Afghan government.

After well over a decade of engagement in Afghanistan, serious questions are being raised about the ongoing US war and its future. The following essay is not just an attempt to explore these fundamental questions but it also aims at understanding the ongoing insurgency, the main reasons for it and its future consequences. It will primarily argue that the desired US objectives can only be

achieved through a consistent long-term policy aimed at isolating the common man from the insurgent ideology.

Furthermore, this article will argue that given the current situation, if the US forces withdraw from Afghanistan prematurely, then the war in Afghanistan may end for United States but not for Afghanistan. There are strong indications that in case of an 'untimely US withdrawal' (a term that will be described in detail later) the war for Afghanistan itself will not end but simply transform into a bloody civil war. In this respect, the events that will unfold may mirror the events of 1990's, when the Soviet forces withdrew from Afghanistan. There will, however, be one difference. This time the events might turn out to be far worse. Therefore, this research will start with a brief analysis of the events that unfolded after Soviet withdrawal in 1992.

Afghanistan, the abandoned child

"If the international community does not find a way to rebuild Afghanistan, a floodtide of weapons, cash, and contraband will escape that states porous boundaries and make the world less secure for all." (Rubin, 1995, p. 5).

Barnett Rubin made this prediction about 15 years ago in his book, *The fragmentation of Afghanistan: state formation and collapse in the international system*. In the wake of 9/11 attacks of 2001, Rubin's prediction proved to be prophetic and the United States was forced to intervene in Afghanistan for its own safety and security only a decade after Soviet withdrawal. Rubin was not the only one to make such an assumption, many other academics of his era made similar predictions but all to no avail. With the demise of USSR, the United States, who had been supporting the Afghan Mujahideen for over a decade, suddenly pulled away all its support. Having now emerged as the sole super power, the US saw no convincing reason to give any further assistance to the infant new state. In her bid to defeat communism, United States had encouraged fundamentalism. And when the U.S was able to achieve its motives, it not just distanced itself from fundamentalism but also started condemning it. Afghanistan, which had been a victim of Soviet aggression for over a decade and had faced complete destruction of infrastructure, was now left all to herself.

The natural outcome of this abandonment was complete political and social chaos. Beginning in 1992, when the proxy communist regime under Najibullah stepped aside, a political battle for power erupted in Kabul. The struggle for power came to be dominated by four distinct ethnic groups:

- The Uzbeks under Abdul Rashid Dostum (supported by Uzbekistan)
- Shia's of Hizb-i-Wahdat (supported by Iran)
- Pashtuns under Gulbuddin Hikmatyar
- The Tajiks under Massoud (Rubin, 1995).

All these ethnic groups (which also reflect the ethnic diversity and complexity of Afghanistan) had formed a loose alliance against the common enemy USSR during the war. However, even before the Soviet forces pulled out, a tussle for

The US in Afghanistan: Consequences of an Untimely Withdrawal

power erupted between these ethnic groups. Though a coalition government was the most viable solution, but it soon proved to be almost unattainable. The international community's response was slow and ineffective. The neighboring countries, particularly Pakistan, Iran and the Central Asian countries understandably also did not play a constructive role as each promoted its own national agenda. The role played by United Nations was feeble and proved to be ineffective. The funds for refugee repatriation, reconstruction and peace process by the United Nations gradually declined to lowest levels since 1980. The United States simply did not only cut its arm supplies but also found humanitarian aid for Afghanistan beyond budgetary constraints (Magnus & Naby, 1998).

As a result of all this, Afghanistan soon came to be seen as an incubator for radicals and the image of brave mujahideen was quickly replaced with radicals and fundamentalists. Events could have taken a different course if the United States, under the auspices of United Nations had taken more responsibility for Afghanistan and had helped with a peaceful transition of power in Kabul. The failure of United States and the international community not just caused political turmoil in Afghanistan but also paved the way for the most radical of all, the Taliban.

The transition from terrorism sponsorship to insurgency

In 2001 the US forces ousted the Taliban government, which was allegedly sponsoring terrorism (by supporting the Al-Qaeda network), in less than three months while suffering only a dozen fatalities (Schroen, 2005). This initial success, however, proved to be a short lived because the Taliban were not defeated completely; they were merely ousted from power and soon started regrouping again in the rural and tribal areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan. This regrouping started in 2002 and since 2005 the Taliban have launched asymmetrical attacks against the Afghan government, the US and other international security forces (Barakat & Zyck, 2010). This resurgence of Taliban has not only caused nuisance and problems for the Afghan government and US forces, but in the long run, will also have a strong bearing on the future of Afghanistan. The important question, however, is how were the Taliban able to regroup right under the nose of world's most superior forces and intelligence and when did the transition from terrorism to insurgency happen.

Firstly this research will discuss the question of what permitted the Taliban to regroup. The United States primarily committed this strategic mistake because of over confidence and underestimation of the enemy. They neglected the fact that the Taliban were only scattered and displaced but not defeated and their reemergence was only a matter of time (Kilcullen, 2009). By the time United States realized it, 'the insurgency was already well past the incubation stage' (Giustozzi, 2007, p. 161).

This negligence can be made more explicit by comparing war in Afghanistan with the Iraq war. Afghanistan, which is about one and a half times the size of Iraq

and has a somewhat larger population, had until recently received only 27 percent of the funding given to Iraq. By 2008, Iraq had cost the United States approximately \$608.3 billion (over 5 years), whereas the war in Afghanistan had cost around \$162.6 billion (over a span of 7 years) (Giustozzi, 2007a). The number of US and international troops in Afghanistan surpassed the number of troops in Iraq only in 2010 and that too when the Iraq war was almost coming to an end (“US Troops Could Withdraw from Afghanistan,” 2010). Thus, United States tendency to focus more on Iraq and failure to allocate adequate resources for Afghanistan in time goes on to show their overconfidence and strategic mistakes. Entering Afghanistan and toppling the regime is relatively easy but holding on and securing the country is much, much harder as the Soviets discovered only four decades ago (Kilcullen, 2009).

Now coming to other question of how the transition from terrorism to insurgency occurred. United States went to Afghanistan when the Taliban regime refused to hand over Osama Bin Laden, the leader of Al-Qaeda and mastermind behind the 9/11 attacks. Soon it became clear that the Taliban were not only harboring Al-Qaeda but were also supporting it. It eventually led the international community to label the Taliban regime as a terrorist regime. The failure of the Taliban regime to comply with the US demands eventually led to their sudden removal from power. Before 2001, the Taliban regime not only shared the ideology of Al-Qaeda but also supported them. Thus, the Taliban regime, when in power, were equally responsible for various terrorist activities organized and carried out by Al-Qaeda. However, when they were ousted from power, they almost instantaneously transitioned into an insurgency from being a state that sponsored terrorism. Thus, the pre-2001 terrorist Taliban transformed into ‘Neo-Taliban’ insurgents (Giustozzi, 2007b).

The influential French scholar, David Galula defines insurgency as a ‘protracted struggle conducted methodologically, step by step, in order to attain specific intermediate objectives leading to the overthrow of the existing order’ (Galula, 2006, p. 2-3). The current Taliban insurgency fits well with this definition as the asymmetrical conflict between US and Taliban has been going on for well over a decade now and is primarily aimed at overthrowing the existing political order established by the United States.

Seth in his article, *The Rise of Afghanistan’s Insurgency: State failure and jihad* argues that the conventional theories of civil wars and insurgencies fail to adequately explain the rise of Afghanistan’s insurgency as most of the scholars argue that insurgencies begin because of either grievances or greed. For Jones, the insurgency in Afghanistan is an outcome of two factors, structural collapse of the state (which has been facilitated by poor governance) and ideology (which provides motivation for the Taliban leaders) (Jones, 2008).

Jones’s distinction, however, is not really helpful as ideology and a relatively weak state are the pre-requisite of any insurgency. Galula in particular emphasizes strongly on the importance of ideology and even goes on to say that no amount of counterinsurgent tactics and techniques could compensate for a strong and

The US in Afghanistan: Consequences of an Untimely Withdrawal

dynamic insurgent ideology (Galula, 2006). Mao Tse-tung, Che Guevara and the movements they led respectively, were also driven by an underlying ideology. Mao particularly emphasized the importance of political objectives and a coherent ideology without which a guerrilla struggle is destined to fail (Tung T, 1937). Both Mao and Che were driven primarily by the Marxist ideology. In this respect, the Taliban are not very different from former insurgency movements after all. Where Mao and Che were driven by the Marxist ideology, the Taliban are driven by the extremist Islamist ideology (since, the extremist Islamist ideology is fundamental to the Taliban and will have a great impact on the future of Afghanistan, therefore it will be discussed in detail under the next heading).

Furthermore, an analysis of the available literature on insurgency and guerrilla warfare reveals the importance of terrain and rural areas that facilitate a successful insurgency. Guevara in particular emphasizes the importance of terrain and rural areas necessary for a successful guerilla war (Guevara, 1963). Afghanistan is a country, which has one of the most difficult terrain and rural areas in the world. This fact goes on to facilitate the ongoing neo-Taliban insurgency. The Taliban fighters also tend to abide by Che Guevara's "focoist" strategy, where roving armed bands arouse government opposition and instigate popular uprising (Guevara, 1963). However, despite the similarities, the insurgency in Afghanistan has after all emerged from terrorism sponsorship and that makes its character unique and different from other insurgencies.

The tragedy of Madrasas

Ideology has been identified as the driving force for the ongoing Taliban insurgency. Apart from the Taliban, there are two other insurgent groups currently operating in Afghanistan, namely, Al-Qaeda and Hizb-i-Islami (Taliban though are the largest group) (Jones, 2008). All three groups, more or less, share a similar ideology, which is a radical interpretation of Sunni Islam derived from 'Deobandism'. Deobandism is a conservative Islamic model that seeks to emulate the life and times of Prophet Muhammad (Jones, 2008). Throughout the literature available on Afghanistan insurgency, it is argued that it is primarily the leaders and their close associates that share this radical Islamist ideology and most of the Afghan population are far too fearful to oppose them (Kilcullen, 2009). However, the fact remains that despite all Western efforts, Taliban are able to recruit more people and their strength has steadily increased since 2002. Jones argues that this coercion of population is primarily due to Afghan government's failure as it has largely failed to provide safety and security to its people (Jones, 2009). This argument is supported by many other academics. That there is another factor namely, the Madrasa culture, which provides recruitment ground to the insurgents, and is more important than all other factors combined.

The first madrasa was opened in Baghdad by a Sejuq vizier, Nizam-ul-Mulk in the year 1066-67 to promote Sunni orthodoxy in the Muslim empire. From here this system of education spread all over the Muslim world (Olesen, 1995). At the

peak of Islamic civilization, these madrasas were prominent centers of learning where not only religious studies but also natural sciences were encouraged and outstanding scholars had been produced (Olesen, 1995). However, with the passage of time and with the decline of the Muslim empire (particularly during the 20th century), these madrasas transformed and have become extremely rigid and intolerant. The entire focus shifted on religious studies and the study of natural sciences was almost completely disregarded. Majority of Muslims (male population), particularly in Pakistan and Afghanistan start going to the madrasas at a very early age. Traditionally the Mullah (Islamic cleric), who is usually in charge of the madrasa, is required to teach basics of religion such as praying, fasting and reading Koran (Olesen, 1995). However, in the later half of the 20th century, particularly in Pakistan and Afghanistan their role has changed drastically. It is this drastic change, which has caused numerous problems in both the countries for over two decades now.

Kilcullen in *The Accidental Guerrilla: fighting small wars in the midst of a big one*, has identified the structure of authority in Afghanistan, both past and present, which he calls the 'tribal governance triad' (Kilcullen, 2009, p. 80). The tribal governance triad refers to the traditional informal power system in Afghanistan that has 'three poles of authority', the jirga, mullah and the government representative. A similar system has been prevalent across the Durand Line in FATA (federally administered tribal areas) and Waziristan in Pakistan. Traditionally in this tribal governance triad the jirga (the group of tribal leaders) occupied a central stage and the role of the mullah was limited to advisory status, as merely an arbitrator of faith and a provider of religious educational services. The mullahs have traditionally had a lesser social status as compared to tribal leaders and certain castes as Syeds (who draw their lineage from Prophet Muhammad P.B.U.H) (Kilcullen, 2009). The mullahs have frequently sought to challenge this existing order in their favor. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan provided them with just the right opportunity.

In an ethnically divided country, the many communities of Afghanistan sought a common cause to fight the evil of communism; Islam provided this common cause. This provided the mullahs with the opportunity they had long been waiting for to challenge the existing governance order. The United States and much of the western world at that time was also concerned with only one thing, containing Soviet expansion and the rising power of mullahs was not only welcomed but was also fully supported. Thus, the mullahs in Afghanistan were elevated to high status and became honored and commanders. The tribal elders had lost power and authority and the mullahs had gained the upper hand (Kilcullen, 2009). This transition of power from the elders to mullahs and change in the tribal governance triad had a huge impact on the politics and society of Afghanistan. The mullahs, who had long been waiting for such an opportunity made the best of it and embarked on a quest to instill radicalism and fundamentalism in the society so as to make their position strong and unquestionable. After the exit of Soviet Union, the mullahs sought a new enemy (to retain their elevated status), this time it was

The US in Afghanistan: Consequences of an Untimely Withdrawal

the United States and the rest of the western world. Just as the mullahs were able to rise up and strengthen their position by opposing the communists, by declaring the US and the West as enemies of Islam, they were able to redeem their superior position.

The madrasas, which are spread all across Afghanistan, provided the Mullahs with the perfect platform to promote and propagate their agenda. Unfortunately, across the border in Pakistan, things have been more or less the same. The military dictator, General Zia-ul-Haq promoted the policy of 'Islamization', which actually promoted his own personal political agenda. The extremist literature became part of the madrasa curriculum. Initially the US also supported this policy as such an extremist curriculum was encouraging and breeding hatred against the communists. Soon the "madrasas became the recruiting grounds for the militant wings of various sectarian religious groups." (Ashraf, 2009, p. 26). This process of Islamization led to the first major sectarian clashes in Pakistan since her independence and continues till date.

The mullahs, who are supposed to lead Muslim prayers and teach the young children to read Koran, have become religious leaders and insurgent commanders. The manner in which Mullah Omar (an ordinary mullah), was able to gather madrasa students around Afghanistan and form a block (Taliban) that were able to defeat the most powerful warlords of Afghanistan, tells the whole story. The Mullah Omar success story, clearly shows how powerful the mullahs and madrasas have become. Therefore, any strategy aimed at the future of Afghanistan must take into account the madrasa factor. As indicated above, the madrasa problem is not exclusive to Afghanistan; Pakistan also is suffering from the same problem. The fact that the insurgents in Afghanistan have a sanctuary in Pakistan is because there are many like-minded people across the border, particularly in FATA and Waziristan. Many of these people are also product of madrasas and are likewise guided by similar radical mullahs (Ashraf, 2009).

What is required, therefore, is a structural change at the grass root level. This can only be accomplished through a consistent long-term policy aimed at revising the madrasa system and curtailing the role of mullahs in both Pakistan and Afghanistan. Earlier ideology is identified as the main driving force for the current insurgency. By revising the madrasa system, the ideology of this neo-Taliban insurgency will lose its attraction. Such a strategy will be able to isolate the insurgents from the public, which is one of the most important attributes of a successful counter insurgency. As Galula points out that the objective of any insurgency is population itself. The insurgent is successful if he is able to win over the population and the counterinsurgent is successful if he is able to alienate the insurgent from the population (Galula, 2006).

The uncertain future of current Afghan government

After years of engagement, the United States has not been able to make any substantial difference in Afghanistan. With national and international pressure

mounting continuously and with US patience running out, an early exit from Afghanistan is on the cards. The US President Donald Trump, just as Barack Obama before him has repeatedly insisted on quick withdrawal from Afghanistan (NBCS News, 2019). While it is true that both Obama and Trump have not been able to deliver on their commitment, their repeated assertions have had a detrimental effect on all the reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. Such politically motivated assertions are highly demoralizing for the nascent Afghan government society and the neighboring countries. As a result of all this, Afghanistan has been in a state of perpetual confusion over US withdrawal for almost a decade now.

Setting unrealistic withdrawal deadlines (Motlagh, 2010) seriously undermines not only United State's credibility but also raises questions over its pledged commitment to the region. The current Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, just as Hamid Karzai before him, is understandably apprehensive about an untimely US withdrawal. With the Taliban insurgency still in full swing and with the "Taliban-HiG-Haqqani" (Cordesman, 2008) trio, the concerns of Ghani government are genuine. The pertinent question is whether the current Afghan government will be able to hold on to power once the US forces pull out of Afghanistan. This is the central question that troubles both the American and the current Afghan government.

Jones points out that one of the reasons for the rise of Taliban insurgency is the structural collapse of the Afghan State created by the US itself (Jones, 2008). Many other academics have also highlighted similar problems and emphasize the importance of establishing a strong government and infrastructure. So far the US and its NATO Allies have been engaged in reconstruction efforts, particularly in and around Kabul. One of the fundamental objectives of such reconstruction efforts is to establish a secure environment in which the people and goods can circulate freely and licit political and economic activity can take place free from any kind of intimidation. The main focus, therefore, has been on building and strengthening the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Afghan National Police (ANP).

Both ANA and ANP, however, have been plagued with high rate of attrition and corruption since their inception. The ANA in particular, since its beginning has been torn between two opposite roles that is 'acting as the auxiliary indigenous force of an occupying power or becoming a central/national army' (Giustozzi, 2007a, p. 48). This uncertainty of its role had a huge impact on its 'viability as an effective anti-insurgency force' (Giustozzi, 2007a). In 2001, United States allied itself with a number of warlords to defeat the Taliban and other insurgents (Jones, 2006). Though such a strategy successfully ousted the Taliban regime but in the process it also strengthened the warlords.

The warlord system is one of the curses of Afghanistan, which continuously undermines the national army and poses a direct threat to the stability of the central government. A sustained long term commitment on the part of US is required to remove these warlords and replace their militias and private armies with ANA and ANP (Jones, 2006). Although it is true that both ANA and ANP

The US in Afghanistan: Consequences of an Untimely Withdrawal

have had some positive changes since 2010 but they still have a long way to go and this can only be achieved under US and NATO supervision. If the US decides to quit Afghanistan before ANA and ANP have fully matured and developed, then the current Afghanistan regime will not be able to sustain itself and the country will again fall victim to civil war. This possible future scenario is discussed in detail below.

Worst -case scenario

Although the United States and the Ghani government have been trying for the last couple of years to find a way to reconcile differences with the Taliban and other insurgents. However, all such efforts have proved to be futile. Firstly, all such efforts were half-hearted because USA is not willing to pardon the important leaders of the insurgency (as it will undermine the whole war in Afghanistan). Secondly, 'the likelihood that either side will accept an offer of mediation or negotiation is highly limited given the present circumstances in which both sides perceive themselves as realistically being able to militarily defeat or at least outlast their opponent' (Barakat & Zyck, 2010, p. 196).

The worst-case scenario is likely to happen in case of 'untimely US withdrawal'. Untimely US withdrawal implies that the US forces would leave Afghanistan before establishing a stable government which is capable of sustaining itself and managing the country as a whole. Moreover, an untimely US withdrawal also implies that US forces would leave before fully addressing the fundamental issue of Islamic radicalism. Under the given time frames by US government, (Lamothe, Hudson, & Constable, 2019) such an untimely withdrawal is certainly on the cards and the worst-case scenario is fairly plausible. Furthermore, with the national and international pressure mounting on the United States government, the US forces may quit Afghanistan completely soon even if the basic objectives are not achieved. The worst-case scenario that will result because of this may mirror the events of Soviet withdrawal, with the only difference that this time it will be far much worse. Thus, in case of untimely US withdrawal, the war in Afghanistan will not come to an end, on the contrary, it will become far more intense as the Taliban and other insurgents will come out of hiding and a full scale civil war will break out.

The events that unfolded after Soviet withdrawal in 1992 are strongly relevant to the future of Afghanistan when the US forces will withdraw in the near future. Apart from the four main ethnic groups; Pashtuns, Uzbeks, Shias and Tajiks (as identified in the beginning of the essay), the equation this time is going to be far more complex because of the addition of Taliban (who were previously able to defeat all other groups). Thus, what could be expected is a possible backlash with all these different ethnic and sectarian groups clashing with each other for the control of Kabul in a yet another civil war, which may devastate the country beyond imagination.

Furthermore, since no concrete steps have been taken to revise the madrasa system in Afghanistan, or to challenge the authority of local mullahs, the country will keep producing radicals who pose a challenge to not only the stability of Afghanistan but also to its neighboring countries and the western world. Although the Taliban have recently attempted to modify their negative public relations, by lifting bans on music, television, kite-flying, dog-fighting, and shaving (Lamothe et al., 2019) but as Galula pointed out that an insurgent has no responsibility and is free to 'lie, cheat and exaggerate' because he is judged only by what he promises (Galula, 2006). Therefore, the international community should not be misguided by such empty promises.

The role of the neighboring countries also does not look very promising, especially in the event of untimely US withdrawal. Iran, as before, will promote the cause of Shias in Afghanistan, whereas Pakistan as always will support the Pashtun Sunnis to protect their own political and regional interests. It is rightly argued by many leading academics that stability in Afghanistan is not possible without full cooperation of a stable Pakistan. However, Pakistan, primarily because of its India centric foreign policy and lack of faith in the permanence of the current Afghan government has understandably been playing a very apprehensive role (Weinbaum, Marvin & Humayoon, 2009). Weinbaum and Humayoon in *The Intertwined Destinies of Afghanistan and Pakistan* have beautifully captured the essence of this worst-case scenario, "Without an international presence for the foreseeable future, Afghanistan's constitutional government seems unlikely to survive. A takeover by the Taliban would be almost certain to renew the regional civil conflict of the 1990s. Pakistan and other neighbors could then be expected to intervene as patrons to warring Afghan groups and create their separate geographical spheres of political influence." (Weinbaum et al., 2009, p. 101).

Conclusion

This essay has been an attempt to understand the ongoing insurgency in Afghanistan, its intricacies and future implications. It has attempted to highlight the importance of insurgent ideology and its current and future repercussions. Furthermore, it has pointed out that because of political imperatives, the chances of untimely US withdrawal are very high, which will have severe consequences for Afghanistan, its neighbors and the international community. The main arguments in the essay can be summed up as follow:

- The collapse of State and international abandonment after Soviet withdrawal paved the way for the radical Taliban who soon posed a threat to the entire international community.
- The Taliban who had previously sponsored international terrorism, transformed into insurgents after they were ousted from power in 2001.
- The ongoing Afghanistan insurgency is a product of the extremist Islamist Ideology.

The US in Afghanistan: Consequences of an Untimely Withdrawal

- This very extremist Islamist ideology is taught in various madrasas across Afghanistan and Pakistan, which provides the recruitment ground for the insurgents.
- The inability of the United States to address the problem of madrasas and mullahs poses a serious threat for both present and future.
- The unstable and ineffective current Afghan government has undermined the counterinsurgency effort and casts a dark cloud over the future of Afghanistan.
- An untimely US exit from Afghanistan will result in a worst-case scenario encompassing absolute chaos.

Afghanistan presents a special case of insurgency because this insurgency has grown out of terrorism. However, like all other insurgencies, it is driven by a strong ideology. Since the Taliban insurgency has mushroomed out of terrorism, therefore any counterinsurgency effort must be geared towards eliminating any future threat of terrorism.

Firstly, the United States must be ready for a long-term commitment as time is very crucial and an analysis of counterinsurgencies shows that ‘over the long run, governments tend to win more often than not’ and the factor of time runs against the insurgents (Connable and Libicki, 2010, p. 16). Secondly, it is suggested that a long-term policy aimed at revising the madrasa system and curtailing the role of mullahs in both Pakistan and Afghanistan. Such a strategy will drastically contribute towards eliminating the extremist and radical elements from the society and will isolate the public from the insurgents. This solution is not really far-fetched, if General Zia was able to revise the madrasa system in Pakistan in less than a decade and spark off sectarian violence, and if the US was able to indirectly support them to promote anti-communism, then it is possible to revisit the madrasas again and undo the wrong that was done almost three decades ago.

References

- Ashraf, N. (2009). The Islamization of Pakistan’s educational system: 1979-1989. *The Middle East Institute Viewpoints: The Islamization of Pakistan, 1979–2009*, 25-27.
- Barakat, S., & Zyck, S. A. (2010). Afghanistan's insurgency and the viability of a political settlement. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 33(3), 193-210.
- Connable, B., & Libicki, M. C. (2010). *How insurgencies end*. RAND National Defense Research Inst Santa Monica CA.
- Cordesman, A. (2008). *Follow the money: Why the US is losing the war in Afghanistan*. Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies.
- Galula, David, foreword by John A. Nagl “Counterinsurgency warfare: theory and practice” (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, c2006).

Dayyab Gillani

- Galula, D. (2006). *Counterinsurgency warfare: Theory and practice*. Westport, CT: Praeger Security International.
- Giustozzi, D. A. (2007a). Auxiliary force or national army? Afghanistan's 'ANA' and the counter-insurgency effort, 2002–2006. *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 18(1), 45-67.
- Giustozzi, D. A. (2007b). *Koran, Kalashnikov, and laptop: The neo-Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan*. London, England: Hurst.
- Guevara, C. (1963). *Guerrilla warfare: A method*.
- Jones, S. G. (2006). Averting failure in Afghanistan. *Survival*, 48(1), 111-128.
- Jones, S. G. (2008). The rise of Afghanistan's insurgency: State failure and Jihad. *International Security*, 32(4), 7-40.
- Jones, S. G. (2009). *In the graveyard of empires: America's war in Afghanistan*. New York: WW Norton & Company.
- Kilcullen, D. (2009). *The accidental guerrilla: Fighting small wars in the Midst of a big one*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lamothe, D., Hudson, J., & Constable, P. (2019, August 1). *US preparing to withdraw thousands of troops from Afghanistan in initial deal with Taliban*. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-preparing-to-withdraw-thousands-of-troops-from-afghanistan-in-initial-deal-with-taliban/2019/08/01/01e97126-b3ac-11e9-8f6c-7828e68cb15f_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.078b5af3d04
- Magnus, R., & Naby, E. (1998). *Afghanistan: Mullah, Marx, and Mujahid*. Boulder, Colo., Oxford: West view Press.
- Motlagh, J. (2010, November 22). *Afghans: Divided Over NATO's New 2014 Target*. *Time*. Retrieved from <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2032511,00.html>
- News, NBCS. (2019, August 3). *Trump vows to draw down troops in Afghanistan* [Video file]. Retrieved from: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/military/trump-wants-pull-all-troops-out-afghanistan-2020-election-n1038651>
- Olesen, A. (1995). *Islam and politics in Afghanistan*. Richmond, Surrey, England: Curzon.
- Rubin, B. R. (1995). *The fragmentation of Afghanistan: State formation and collapse in the international system*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Schroen, G. C. (2005). *First in: An insider's account of how the CIA Spearheaded the War on Terror in Afghanistan*. New York: Ballantine.
- Tung T. M. (1937). *On guerrilla warfare*.
- US Troops Could Withdraw from Afghanistan Ahead of 2011 Deadline*. (2010, March date?). *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/7411285/US-troops-could-withdraw-from-Afghanistan-ahead-of-2011-deadline.html>
- Weinbaum, M. G., & Humayoon, H. (2009). The intertwined destinies of Afghanistan and Pakistan. In J. Their (Ed.), *The future of Afghanistan* (pp.?): The United States Institute of Peace.

Biographical Note

Dr. Dayyab Gillani is an Assistant Professor at Department of Political Science, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.