



RESEARCH PAPER

The US Exit from Afghanistan: A Way Forward

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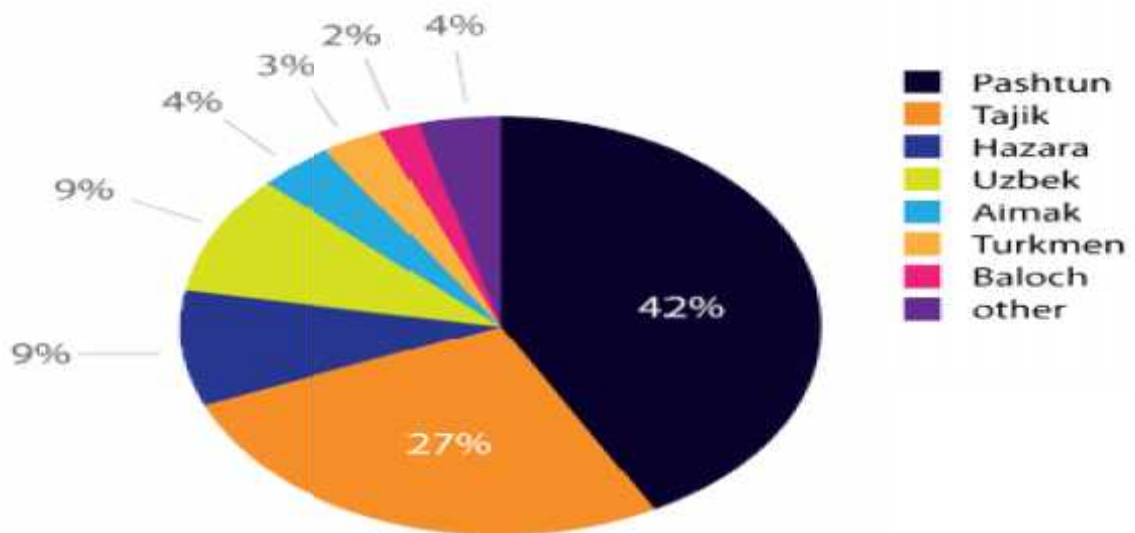
PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: February 21, 2021</p> <p>Accepted: June 10, 2021</p> <p>Online: June 20, 2021</p> <p>Keywords: Bilateral Security, Dialogue, Diplomacy, NATO, WOT</p> <p>*Corresponding Author: muhammad.waqas@uskt.edu.pk</p>	<p>Responding to the devastating attacks of 9/11, the US invaded Afghanistan. NATO Alliance has alleged and validated claims that Afghanistan supports terrorist organizations and provides shelter for radical groups. The current research provides very valuable information regarding the recent American military withdrawal from Afghanistan and its Impacts on the regional countries. The region will become more insecure and unstable, as more artillery and training from the Taliban has penetrated the area. The situation is expected to worsen as US troops withdraw from Afghanistan and the Taliban will continue to pose a permanent threat for neighboring countries. In this Research work, The Afghan issue is explored by using multiple research techniques, including comparative, quantitative, and qualitative research. The study is conducted to discover the ethnic composition, the history of encounters, and the consequences after US Exclusion from Afghanistan and its possible impact on regional countries.</p>

Introduction

The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan is located in Asia. It has shared borders with Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, China, Pakistan and Iran. It occupies a total area of 625,864 km², making it the fourth largest country according to size in the world. Approximately 4 crore people reside in Afghanistan More than 98% of its residents are Muslim, while 1% of its citizens are Christian (0.4%) and Hindu (0.6%). The national anthem of Afghanistan acknowledges 14 ethnicities; among them are the Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Balochis, Turkmens, Nooristanis, Pamiris, Arabs, Gujars, Brahuis, Aimaqs and Pasha. Almost all Afghan groups have significant populations in neighboring countries. (Schetter, 2005) These demographics have always posed an important challenge to the government. Among the biggest challenges Afghanistan faces today is maintaining harmony among these groups. It is clear that Afghan nationality differentiates Afghanistan from its neighbors as they share a historical development with their neighbors. The country has ethnic conflicts with Pakistan, Iran, which has led to Afghanistan's development as a state of diverse ethnicities. Afghans with ethnic conflict in neighboring countries, particularly Pakistan, Iran and Russia at the time, created the Afghan state as

groups from different ethnicities rose to prominence. The claim that “ethnic groups are distinct and distinct cultural units with clear borders and have engaged in armed conflict for centuries” doesn’t apply to Afghanistan. Afghanistan's whole history is filled with war ,confrontation, uncertainty, and resistance but its people always stood against intruders and pushed them out of their lands. A Muslim army invaded Afghanistan in 7 AD, and Mehmood Ghaznavi established a powerful kingdom in 11 AD. It was also occupied by Mongols. In 16th A.D Babar attacked India through Afghanistan. In 18 A.D, Ahmad Shah Abdali created an empire in Afghanistan. Afghans have fought three wars. The 1st war was from 1839 to 1842 against the English army, only a few soldiers were left behind to tell their people what Afghans did with them. The 2nd war was held from 1878 to 1881 against English army when they attacked Kabul. 3rd war was shortest which started in 1919 and ended on 1919 was led by General Muhammad Nadir Shah on Kabul.In last, General Nadir shah defeated the English. This will be in the history that whenever outer Powers tried to occupy Afghanistan, Afghans defeated them. In 1979, Soviet Union entered Afghanistan. (Collins, 2011) Their aim was to occupy Afghanistan. Afghans protested a lot against Russia Army and people Armed against the Soviets. Battles started between Soviet Union and Mujahedeen and in 1989 Russians had to go back. After the 9/11 terror attacks, the United States invaded and launched a global army without knowing the warring history of Afghanistan (Muzaffar, et. al. 2019) (Gall, 2014).

Percentage Breakdown of Ethnic Groups in Afghanistan

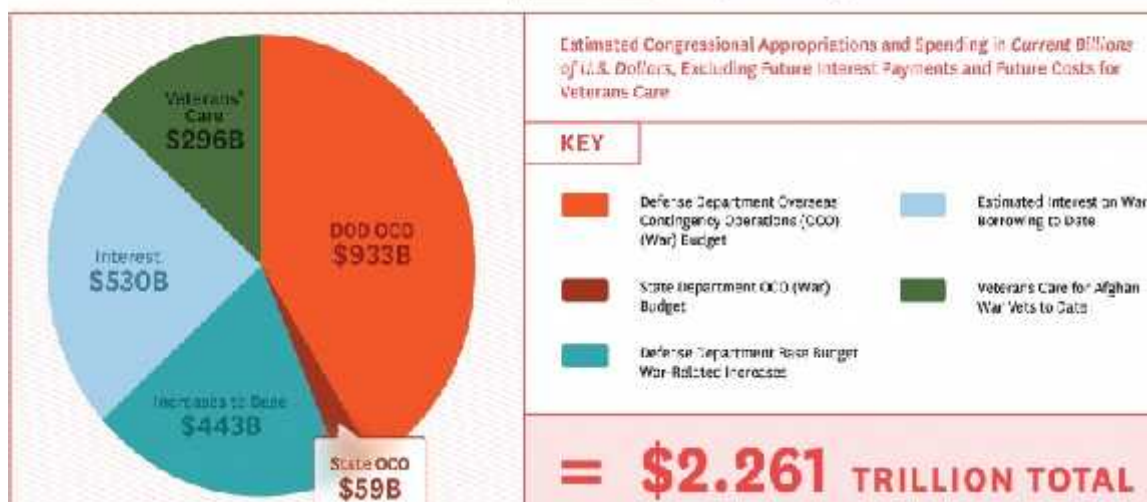


Source: <https://afghanethnicgroups.weebly.com/>

As early as 2001, the United States forces succeeded in overthrowing the Taliban, one of the most controversial governments in history. As late as 2002, the Taliban, who weren't completely defeated but were only ousted from power, began reorganizing in the highlands and rustic regions of Afghanistan. However, NATO & American government miscalculated the threat and patron those conditions that provided these groups with opportunities to reorganize and regroup. Even after years of war, the Taliban are still a serious threat to the current Afghan government and US forces. There has never been a higher, or more pressing need, for the US to withdraw from Afghanistan after almost 20

years of military intervention. The United States launched a number of national security strategies that focuses on helping Afghanistan fight terrorism and Taliban by providing military and economic support and even demonstrates a willingness to take a hard line against Pakistan, by urging the country to eliminate militant terrorist groups operating on Pakistani soil. (Kiran, 2009)The willingness of the US to withdraw, along with the outcome of the peace talks, will have consequences not only for the future of international engagement in Afghanistan, including the Resolute Support Mission (RSM) of NATO, for Afghanistan's future as well. United States-Taliban negotiations which started at the end of 2018 as a possible turning point towards peace in Afghanistan. These talks have been seen as an opportunity. The talks consisted of four pillars consisting of the withdrawal of troops, a promise that Afghanistan won't become a platform for terrorism, an Afghan-Afghan dialogue, and a comprehensive ceasefire. There is now a consensus that in order for Afghanistan to remain stable it must remain peaceful. The US President has announced that all American forces will leave Afghanistan this September, the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 terror attacks. President of USA Joe Biden says the withdrawal will happen in full coordination with Washington's allies. This expression is often interpreted as an expression of helplessness, exhaustion, and frustration and the US is just giving Afghanistan over to the Islamist Taliban. President Joe Biden, on the other hand, said America no longer needed to stay in Afghanistan. Some Afghans welcome foreign troops' departure, but others fear that US's departure will leave them more vulnerable. There are more than 1,000 German troops among NATO troops leaving Afghanistan in September. Germany is the second largest troop contributor to the conflict after the U.S. Afghan security forces receive training and support from them. Because the security situation is worsening, the German contingent will move alongside US-led forces.

U.S. Costs to Date for the War in Afghanistan, in \$ Billions, 2001–2021



Source: <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/figures/2021/human-and-budgetary-costs-date-us-war-afghanistan-2001-2021>

Afghanistan's Geo-Strategic and Political Environment

Different regional players, such as Pakistan, India, China, Iran, Russia and central Asian states, have differing agendas in Afghanistan. As US and NATO troops work on their Pullout Scheme for 2014, Afghanistan stepped up its preparation and measures to

maintain security. Several major powers in the region, including China, Iran, and Pakistan, have realized that war in the security-prone country of Afghanistan would have geostrategic consequences and political repercussions after the US withdrawal. However, Taliban & the Al-Qaeda continue to pose a major threat to regional and international peace in Afghanistan despite the presence of 300,000 security forces. With the new Afghan-US strategy in the post 2014 environment, Pakistan, China, and Iran have solid interests in Afghanistan. Therefore, these regional powers face an uncertain future in the face of a formidable challenge. (Palka, 2001) The drawdown deadline and the post-exit environment have caused a great deal of concern among players of this region. As a result of global and Afghan military operations, thousands of Afghans have been injured or killed in the war on terror.



Source: <https://www.rferl.org/a/taliban-government-islamic-state-who-controls-what-in-afghanistan-/30644646.html>

A Bilateral Security and Exit Agreement 2015

An agreement on bilateral security would take effect on January 1, 2015, and would last until the end of 2024. (Dobbins & Malkasian, 2015) The future course of U.S. actions in Afghanistan from the vantage point of security, peace, stability and future governance, the two States concluded a number of provisions and principles that are different from other countries. Afghan security would be supported by US forces, and smaller NATO forces would conduct appropriate operations against Taliban and their allies. Counterterrorism operations were led by Afghan forces, while the U.S. adhered to Afghan sovereignty and uphold Afghan people. During the first official peace talks held in Murree in July 2015, a Taliban delegation met with the Afghan government. US and Chinese observers also attended the talks, which were arranged by Pakistan. Afghanistan continues to receive

financial aid and funding of the United States to assist in the security forces and reconstruction process. Under the agreement, all U.S. and NATO soldiers remaining in Afghanistan must respect its laws, values, and sovereignty. The United States will not engage in any illegal activity on the soil of Afghanistan. Imports, exports, personnel, and exit procedures should be conducted by the Afghan government. (Qarqeen, 2015) An Afghan-Bilateral Security Agreement also included specialized services and expectations of contractors. American experts and decision makers determined that powerful and senior partners were needed to support the transitional process of institutional building and the sociopolitical environment; otherwise the Afghan fighters would possess the guns, and so on. Thus, Afghanistan's domestic political environment would turn violent once again. Hence, rational assessment, infrastructure of building, and support of political mechanisms will ensure that Afghanistan does not fall into total chaos in its future.

Dialogue Diplomacy and Taliban Peace Deal 2020

At the Doha Peace Conference under the leadership of Zalmay Khalil zad, the Taliban political chief of Mullah Abdul Ghani and Secretary of State Zalmay Khalil zad signed a peace agreement on February 29, 2020. (Basit, 2020) A historic deal outlined in Afghanistan specifies that the contingent will be completely withdrawn by the end of 2021. Afghan Taliban leaders and the US officials pledged to pursue dialogue over how to best address insecurity by setting up a program so that all Afghan prisoners could be released by March 2020. In addition, Taliban leaders guarantee that there will be no further Taliban attacks against the United States or its allies, and the Afghan government has confirmed that it would also uphold its ties with Taliban. The United States and the Taliban violated the ground rules but ignored the agreements they had made by attacking the Taliban and by using allied forces to kill several Afghan soldiers in Kabul because there was a lack of mutual trust. Nearly 50 countries, including the U.S. Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, signed a landmark deal between the Taliban and the United States. Peace in Afghanistan is only possible if local and international cooperation and environment are equal in nature. Pakistan and international institutions alike viewed US-Taliban historic deals as a sign of hope in the region. (Analytica, 2020) There is a view that the only solution to stop the war in Afghanistan lies in long-term effective dialogues and soft negotiations with the Afghan people. Pakistan is crucial in bringing the Taliban to the peace table and in signing the peace agreement between the United States and the Taliban. The United States and Afghan forces need Pakistani pressure to maintain control over spoilers. The fact that Pakistan played a positive role in bringing peace to Afghanistan is now increasingly recognized. International players and Pakistan's neighbors both have an interest in a peaceful Afghanistan, despite their differing interests and efforts to assist. Peace cannot be achieved without hard compromises among Afghan parties. The fate of Afghanistan depends solely on the Afghans themselves. (Lodhi, 2021) Pakistan's approach to the peace process appears to be unsatisfactory to Afghanistan. On several occasions, the Afghan government used delaying tactics to sabotage this peace initiative. In order to hinder this peace initiative and further their interests on Afghan soil, the spoilers are seeking to sabotage it. The peace agreement was supported by Ashraf Ghani and those stakeholders who thought the Taliban would accept the deal and not attack if it was implemented. The relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan and the role of Pakistan in the Afghan peace process is addressed.

US Exit from Afghanistan and its Impacts on the Region

The news that US forces will pull out of Afghanistan by the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks sent shockwaves through the region's fault lines. The decision will affect a number of sponsors in Afghanistan and outside the country; almost all of the countries in the region will be affected. A growing concern for security and stability in the region has led several nations to consider possible alternate methods of maintaining normal relations with the Taliban and Afghan government. (Nirupama, 2021) Details of the US withdrawal and its impact on Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, China and Iran can be found in the following heading.

US Exit and its impact on Afghanistan

The situation in Afghanistan is still uncertain and unstable, despite the US pretensions to stabilizing the country. Over the past two decades, confusion has continued about the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. United States commitment to the region will be questioned if unrealistic withdrawal deadlines are set. Taliban insurgents continue to grow stronger, while terrorists and the Al-Qaeda continue to flourish in Afghanistan. The Hezbe-Islami Gulbuddin (HIG) group and the Afghan Freedom Group (AFG) are concerned about any premature withdrawal. (Farani, 2021) The Question is whether the Afghan Government and Military are strong enough to fight against those terrorist groups that the United States has not been able to defeat. The most likely answer is no because the Taliban are now more confident, encouraged and mature in their combative Strategies. The Afghan government is not willing to negotiate an agreement with the Taliban, so there are maximum chances of civil war erupting within Afghan borders as the Taliban are motivated to attack their opponents. Both Afghan and American governments are both troubled by this profoundly troubling question. One's claim that the collapse of the Afghan State, itself created by the US, would be one of the major motivations for the emergence of the Taliban insurgency. There have been a number of scholars that have discussed the same issue and stressed the necessity of strong government and infrastructure. So far, the US and NATO Allies have committed themselves to reconstruct the efforts around Kabul but all in vain. It is still a corrupt and powerful system because it keeps dividing the factions in the Government of National Unity. Despite the country's low economic growth, foreign aid has remained a major source of financing for the government. Since the United States knows the Taliban will soon retake power, it wants to distance itself from the shame of losing the war and simply play smart. It is crucial that the rebuilding efforts include creating an environment where people can move freely, as well as to allow economic and political activity to take place without fear of intimidation. This has caused the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police to be the main targets of the current effort. Most likely, Afghanistan will regain its peace and stability. Ultimately, if peace persists, the ties with Pakistan will strengthen and regional security will be ensured, encouraging much easier trading in the region. Pakistan is always prepared to help Afghanistan establish peace since Afghanistan's peace is important to the region. It seems the future of Afghanistan rests in the Taliban's hands, and the government shall be on the receiving end.

US Exit Plan and its Impacts on Pakistan

In the region, Pakistan is a prominent player due to its strategic, cultural, and ideological affinities with Afghanistan. During the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan,

when Pakistan offered a safe path to NATO forces through its territory, the Afghan population furiously retracted their loyalty towards Pakistan. Although the Pakistani government has played a crucial role in facilitating talks and dialogue diplomacy between the Taliban, the Afghan government, and the United States yet the local Afghans, Taliban and their proxies have blamed Pakistan for this horrific loss. Moreover, they think whatever has happened to them can be attributed to Pakistan's support of NATO forces.(Shams & Saifullah, 2015) Furthermore, Pakistan continues to push a strong domestic policy that attempts to depoliticize internal affairs in a bid to reduce the danger of anarchy in Afghanistan. (Rafique & Anwar, 2019) An anonymous Pakistani commentator describes how the US, the EU, and other nations made their commitments towards \$12 billion pledges at a donors' conference held in Geneva in November, but only if a sustained ceasefire was achieved and progress was made on human rights. According to her, economic leverage will ensure peace in Afghanistan, not military power. However, optimism is hard to come by. A Taliban spokesman spoke about the fundamental differences between the government and the Taliban during an interview last November in Doha. Abundantly clear when he dismissed the idea of a ceasefire until the causes of the war are discussed. (ARAB NEWS May 8, 21) With the withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan, the strategic environment has changed constantly. A growing Indian involvement in Afghan politics has led to reservations and apprehensions for Pakistan. In addition, the Islamabad administration sees its present and future role in Afghanistan, but intends to limit India's involvement. (Usman, 2020) Due to the fact that Aerial Drones are used across the border, Pakistan is particularly vulnerable. Moreover, Pakistan has expressed serious concerns on the Indian role in Afghanistan to the security and balance of power in the region. The United States must engage the Islamabad government in bringing the warring forces, particularly the Taliban, to the negotiating table. Hence, Pakistan's strategic, diplomatic, and regional role is vital in achieving a lasting peace in the future in Afghanistan. The Pakistani government is aware of the hostile activities of the suicide attacks of terrorist groups on public places, Cross-border conflicts and confrontations at the border. Pakistan is committed to achieving a peaceful resolution to the Afghan issue because it is important to its national security as well. It is important that Pakistan remains vigilant, watch closely, and respond accordingly in case any threat arises from Afghanistan.

US Exit from Afghanistan and Its Impact on India

Once the US troops leave Afghanistan, there will be instability in the region. Recently, India cooperated with Afghanistan's democratic government. India has a number of economic, political, and security concerns in Afghanistan. There was no end to relations between India and Afghanistan with the end of the War on Terror. (Raiphea, 2013)The primary objectives of Indian assistance include: enhancing security, building human capacity, addressing geostrategic concerns, and supporting agricultural growth and other key economic sectors of the Afghan economy. There were divergent views among Pakistani respondents about the factors that affected Indo-Afghan relations soon after the September 11 attacks. (Ganguly & Howenstein, 2009) The Government of India has expressed concerns that if the Taliban will be in control they could pose a serious threat to India as they are potential trained militants and terrorists and mostly trained by Lashkar- e Taiba & Jaish -e- Muhammad .In addition, Pakistan's relations with the Taliban have been a source of concern for India, since Pakistan has supported the Taliban for a number of years.(Chalk & Hanauer, 2012)The Haqqani group is one of the most powerful factions of the Taliban in Afghanistan, which will put India's assets at risk. The Indo-Afghan nexus

relies heavily on stabilizing Afghanistan and enforcing democratic reforms due in large part to its geographic location and Pakistan's role as a regional guarantor.

US Exit Policy from Afghanistan and its Impact on China

China has significant interests in Afghanistan and should be considering and preparing for its future as a neighboring state. China Pakistan Economic Corridor may suffer as a result of the instability in Afghanistan. The Chinese media refer to the current agreement between the U.S. and the Taliban as being the equivalent of Washington's "horrible" departure from Vietnam in the 1970s. By delaying its withdrawal from Afghanistan, the United States seems to have been concerned not only about Afghanistan's implosion, but also about any reputational damage it may incur due to that implosion. Besides, Beijing instinctively believes that American troops in its backyard are a serious strategic threat. Taliban rule in Afghanistan may result in unrest among Uighurs living in Xinjiang Autonomous Region. It could also play a greater role in Afghanistan as an ally of Pakistan. By the end of 2021, the US and its allies will withdraw formally from Afghanistan, and Chinese analysts believe China will not be able to fill the security vacuum left by Washington. Afghanistan's future looks less certain than ever with the U.S. withdrawal just around the corner. (Perlez, 2012) The implication of this dilemma is that China wants America to cease its involvement; however, the withdrawal must be made in a responsible way in order to avoid a power vacuum that would disrupt the region. China will ultimately deal with whatever move the United States makes regarding Afghanistan, however, as Washington will decide whether to invade or not. According to China, the US has made a reckless decision to leave Afghanistan. The US will leave behind disorder for the Afghans and regional nations to clean up if it follows through on its threats to significantly reduce assistance to Afghanistan. In China, the "peace" achieved by the United States only benefits the United States itself — not Afghanistan or the region. With a \$2 trillion expenditure and 2,400 military casualties the United States plans on leaving Afghanistan, but Taliban power remains a powerful political force and Afghan security remains precarious. Although initially limited, China has continued to trade with Afghanistan and will continue to give Afghanistan millions of dollars of aid. Sino-Afghan security ties are undergoing a fascinating transformation under the National Unity Government. Afghan and Chinese officials have also responded positively to the NUG's provisions concerning security and defense cooperation. Top Afghan security officials visited China in 2015, including the Afghan defense minister, interior minister, foreign minister, and national security advisor. While China is becoming a major player in Afghan security, this does not mean it can replace Western assistance or fully meet Afghan security needs. There has been no Chinese outreach to Afghanistan. To assure long-term geopolitical and economic goals, China should be cautiously optimistic when developing its strategic plan.

US Exit Program and its Impact on Iran

In January, Iran hosted a meeting with Afghan leaders to assess the progress of ongoing talks between the United States and the Afghan government. During intra-Afghan dialogue, Afghan government representatives and Taliban leaders meet regularly in order to bring them into the mainstream. It is not Tehran's intention to completely control its neighbors in Afghanistan. Instead, Tehran is interested in preserving its eastern border, fighting against drugs, and taking care of its Afghan refugees. (Milani, 2006) Tehran has long demanded the withdrawal of all foreign forces, which they blame for insecurities in

the region. Researchers believe the pullout of U.S. troops from Afghanistan could give Iran room to maneuver inside its war-torn neighbor in which it shares cultural and religious ties. It is possible that Iran will face similar problems as it did during the Afghanistan civil war after Russian disintegration when Tehran faced a large influx of refugees and an antagonistic Taliban government. The threat perception would be increased if Taliban rule were to take place in Kabul as Iran shares borders with Pakistan and Afghanistan. (Solangi& Hasan, 2019) Iran, a country closely linked to the Hazara people of Afghanistan, is nowadays more inclined to play both sides. Even though Iran has a long standing hostility toward the Taliban, and a deep ideological divide, it has opened channels to them a few years ago, and hosted a Taliban delegation at Tehran. A Taliban victory in Afghanistan would undoubtedly spur Tehran government to action, which wants an increased US military presence in Afghanistan. Only Iran opposes bilateral security agreements between Washington and Kabul. Instability in Afghanistan may affect the law and order situation in Iran. If war breaks out after the evacuation of US troops, Iran would not be able to accept Afghan refugees.

Conclusion

The paper points out the "unexpected & sudden withdrawal of US forces from the soil of Afghanistan will cause a significant boost in creating insecurity, the number of terrorist attacks, and disability in the region. Over the last 20 years a combined military operation of NATO countries has not achieved its objectives of wiping out all the Taliban and terrorist groups from Afghanistan. Therefore Foreign policy makers, think tanks, and other leaders of America are increasingly convinced that a military solution will not work in Afghanistan. Since the military was deployed here in 2001, the United States has lost billions of dollars and thousands of lives for nothing. As far as the exit of the US is concerned, it will inevitably impact the interior situation of Afghanistan and the countries of the region. As the internal situation of Afghanistan is concerned, the Afghan government has two options: either to follow the Sit-and-Talk policy with the Taliban or become ready for civil war. Conditions in the region are likely to further deteriorate, it's important for countries to remain vigilant and watch closely what happens after the US exit. There is a lot of power in the hands of the Taliban; they claim to want all parties in the peace process dialogues. There are some warlords and stakeholders who don't want or try to be violent toward each other, but Afghanistan's government appears hesitant to call them in Politics. There is also the possibility that withdrawal could offer the chance for lasting peace in the region. Afghanistan could provide a short and safe transit route for trade and transportation to central Asian countries. The statement concludes that a peaceful Afghanistan is necessary for regional peace and stability. The following steps may promote peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Recommendations

- Taliban should be allowed to be part of the government and State affairs.
- The affected Areas should have access to education, health care, and economic opportunities.
- The U.S. must empower its ambassador in Kabul to do whatever it takes to ensure that the U.S.'s campaign can be successful.

- Regional countries should conduct broad diplomatic engagements with all parties in Afghanistan.
- A U.S. strategy should be devised that both protects the gains from Afghanistan and ensures its peaceful resolution.
- In Afghanistan, there should be a counterterrorism department and its security forces should have full support of weapons & intelligence.
- All regional players should call on the table, regardless of whether there are bilateral options for major escalation or disengagement. These options tend to carry high risks and high costs.

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