**Afghanistan: A rear mirror view**

[**Najm us Saqib**](https://nation.com.pk/Columnist/najm-us-saqib)

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Terming it a terrorist attack on America, Al-Qaeda’s head Osama Bin Laden was identified as the man responsible for 9/11 in which nearly 3000 people died. Upon the Taliban’s refusal to handover the culprit, a month later, the US launched air strikes against Afghanistan ‘to disrupt its use as a terrorist base of operations and to attack the military capability of the Taliban regime’. British, Canadian and other NATO troops joined in the war, removing the Taliban from power. The rest is history.

Twenty years later, US troops are preparing to leave Afghanistan after seeing the demise of Bin Laden, Al-Qaeda, thousands of people and the dream of a stable Afghanistan. Even after spending billions of dollars and rendering unprecedented sacrifices by the US and its allies, the Taliban are still looking strong with their ominous capability to not only inflict harm but also to rule the country. Notwithstanding the promises of reconstruction, Marshall Plan, several political and monetary pledges, the country remains as unstable as it was two decades ago or even before.

[NIH study finds evidence COVID-19 was circulating in five US States in December 2019](https://nation.com.pk/16-Jun-2021/nih-study-finds-evidence-covid-19-was-circulating-in-five-us-states-in-december-2019)

In the event of an international dispute, it is advisable to put to use the available tools of negotiation, conciliation, litigation, mediation, good offices and arbitration before resorting to coercive means such as reprisals, embargos or intervention. The international law is available to ensurethe preservation of global peace and security. Equally so are the United Nations, the Regional Agencies and a number of multilateral treaties. The use of amicable means in addressing international disputes lies in the heart of maintaining peace and security in the world. However, the US had decided to circumvent all available means for peaceful settlements of disputes and took the military route in response to 9/11 attacks. Perhaps it did so because not only was its sovereignty challenged within its own territory but its status as the sole superpower of the world also came under clouds of uncertainty.

Insorting out Bin Laden or eliminating Al-Qaeda, the US must have launched its comprehensive plan of action only after gathering and weighing relevant information and evidence, assessing, identifying, defining and reviewing the alternative resolutions and calculating the risks and consequences involved. During the decision making process, all pros and cons would have been discussed threadbare including all related facts like the weaknesses and strengths of the opposing sides. Knowing the gravity of the issue, some space must have been kept to review and evaluate the decision enabling Washington to realign the strategy and the subsequent tactics accordingly. In designing a venture of such a huge magnitude, the strategists and policy makers must have envisioned the elements of unpredictability involved along with covering the basics such as accommodating, compromises, collaboration, disagreements, avoiding and defeating. Keeping the ultimate objectives in mind, the overall strategy must have also factored in crisis management and the subsequent conflict resolution while aiming at achieving a win-win solution.

[Fitch revises up 2021 global GDP growth to 6.3%](https://nation.com.pk/15-Jun-2021/fitch-revises-up-2021-global-gdp-growth-to-6-3-percent)

Something must have gone terribly wrong along the way as the ultimate victory still seems elusive. Either certain new objectives were included in the initial plan or there were some unstated objectives that still needed to be achieved. Otherwise, why would Washington wish to keep a tab on Afghanistan even after its troops leave the Graveyard of Empires after a considerably long stay of twenty years? If the consideration was to eliminate the bases of terrorists or bring peace in the country and provide a broad-based political government to the people of Afghanistan, the withdrawal of troops could have been delayed. If these objectives remained hard to pin down while staying inside the country for so long, how will Washington achieve these being stationed outside the country? If the withdrawal of troops is going to help Afghanistan or the juxtaposed states, why is the US being urged for a ‘responsible withdrawal’? Which one of the stakeholders in the Afghan conflict—like Pakistan, Iran, China, Russia, Turkey or Central Asian states—is pleased to see the foreign troops leaving Afghanistan in the prevailing mess is anybody’s guess. The only content stakeholder seems to be the Taliban, who are somehow still underestimating the US’ might and its power to destroy, especially when it is attacked.

[Govt increases petrol prices for rest of June](https://nation.com.pk/15-Jun-2021/govt-increases-petrol-prices-for-rest-of-june)

Coincidentally, a recent UN report has revealed that the Al Qaeda leader Ayman Zawahiri is alive and resides somewhere in the border area of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Is it some kind of a signal that the menacing Al Qaeda threat was still looming large and the US should reconsider its withdrawal plan? Given the fact that the world has seen many withdrawal plans and their postponements in the past, it would not be surprising for the South Asian experts if the US withdrew from its withdrawal plan before September. In any case, after the ultimate withdrawal of troops, there is no restriction on the US to redeploy its troops in Afghanistan, if and when any emerging situation demanded it.

All said and done, history has proved that Afghanistan cannot be ruled by any outside forces. Afghanistan will be settled on Afghanistan’s terms. The Taliban are a reality and the resistance forces are likely to prevail even if the Afghan conflict becomes another hundred-year war. As there will be no American umbrella available and there will be less funds flowing to Kabul, expect President Ghani to cry wolf every now and then. Undoubtedly, there is chaos waiting around the corner and in the event of a civil war, expect another huge influx of refugees in Pakistan and Iran. Looking at the prevailing geo-strategic regional situation, the stakes are much higher for Pakistan now than they were in October 2001. Hence, playing its hand wisely seems more important for Islamabad than playing its ‘role’ this time. Providing air bases to the US is not the only issue requiring sagacity, wisdom, restraint and farsightedness. Islamabad must prove beyond any reasonable doubt that its leverage over the Taliban is more of a myth than a reality.