**[The US dumps Afghanistan](https://nation.com.pk/05-Mar-2020/the-us-dumps-afghanistan%22%20%5Ct%20%22_new)**

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The US has finally moved to bring its disastrous Afghan Campaign to an end. It suffered from many basic flaws right from the outset; an inconsistent policy, a lack of a well-defined strategic direction, an ambiguous end state, persistent mission creep, baffling troop withdrawals and surges and gross infighting in the main echelons of the Obama and Trump Administrations, being the more prominent ones. (US’ Egress from Afghanistan, by this scribe, The Nation, 08 January 2019). Although a façade of an agreement between the Tehrik e Taliban Afghanistan (TTA) and the US has been arranged, yet the fact remains that as per its wont, the US is once again abandoning one of its major international undertakings, rather unceremoniously. Quite akin to its ingress into Afghanistan, the US’ egress too does not inspire much confidence. It smacks of stark self-interest (Elections 2020), indecent haste, a lack of forethought and blatant disregard for a responsible management of the aftermath of its exit from the region. It has apparently ditched Afghanistan and has no qualms about the future direction it takes domestically or its role in the evolving geopolitical, geostrategic and geo-economic imperatives of the region.

Goodbye Afghanistan!

The main pillars of the agreement are all difficult to implement except for the egress of the US and Coalition forces. Intra-Afghan talks, neutralizing the dangerous Terrorism Central (Al Qaeda, IS, TTP, JuA, IMU, ETIM etc) and enforcing a viable ceasefire (CF) will all pose serious challenges. Most importantly, without a Marshal Plan of sorts, Afghanistan will quickly degenerate into economic insolvency, chaos, unrest and internal strife. It will destabilize the entire region (BRI-CPEC included), too. The agreement itself has many peculiarities. It has been reached between the TTA and the US and is being imposed upon the rest of the Afghan nation including the National Unity Government (NUG) and other political forces - all who were never part of the negotiations! This is an illogical approach to resolving the Afghan quagmire. It should have been an all-encompassing venture.

By negotiating with the TTA the US has literally accepted them as the future rulers of Afghanistan. It now wants it to unify the Afghan nation and manage the aftermath of its exit too. The term “Afghan led Afghan owned peace process” has been quite a misnomer. Do the Afghans have within themselves the capacity and patience to reach and enforce a viable and peaceful solution? It has always been a fractious society of many ethnicities, persuasions, loyalties, clashing egos and interests and is severely polarized post the US invasion of Afghanistan. They have been killing one another, remorselessly. This raises questions on the viability of the intra-Afghan dialogue too. It is critical that it succeeds. Left to the Afghans alone, it will only lead to further destabilization. Therefore, it needs to be chaperoned extremely sensitively and deftly by the US and Pakistan.

Other matters to be considered are the form of government that will emerge. The two antagonists have opposing political philosophies to pursue. The TTA desires an Islamic Emirate while the NUG and others prefer a western style of secular, democratic, parliamentary form of Government. How and where will the twain meet? Can they agree to a hybrid Constitution that enshrines Islamic laws, tenets and principles and allows a democratic parliamentary mode of their implementation? Will both Afghan parties accept the current Afghan Constitution or will they first go in for a new legal framework-constitution and thereafter go in for fresh elections?

Furthermore, does the TTA have the capacity and the wherewithal to defeat and disperse Terrorism Central comprehensively? Will these terrorist groups readily submit to the diktat of the TTA or will some of them still remain subservient to their paymasters and spoilers like India? It will perhaps require a regional and/or joint US-TTA-ANSDF effort to snuff out this terrorist menace. The US has not enhanced the warfighting abilities and capacities of the ANSDF sufficiently to overcome these terrorist groups on its own. Time will thus be of critical importance. Terrorism Central must be neutralized before the US completes its egress. An unambiguous plan of action will be necessary.

A CF at the national level will be the most difficult to achieve. The TTA is used to projecting its power and imposing its writ and will wherever it operates. The other Afghan factions as well as Terrorism Central are bound to resist its freedom of action. This might lead to a veritable civil war and must be tackled at the outset.

The US is apparently exiting Afghanistan without a thought to the management of Afghanistan and the region, thereafter. It did so in 1989-90 too, leaving Pakistan in limbo. Immediately thereafter, it imposed economic, military and other sanctions on Pakistan thus taking away from it the capacity to deal with the aftermath of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, too. The rest is history. Pakistan must prepare for all contingencies. Pakistan, (Iran) and China, as a subset of the CRIPT-SCO (China, Russia, Iran, Pakistan and Turkey) must undertake bold foreign policy initiatives and position themselves to get proactively involved in the management of Afghanistan’s transition to an unadulterated Afghan rule, as and when required. It is in their national and collective interests. They must incorporate Afghanistan into the CPEC immediately and provide them an opportunity to prosper economically. Without a domineering central authority and/or left to its own dynamics Afghanistan’s internal front is likely to collapse under ethnic and political pressures and degenerate into a civil war. It will lead to the eventual balkanization of Afghanistan. That will destabilize the region, suck in neighbours like Pakistan, Iran, China, Russia et al and even peripheral India. The Afghan cauldron will go onto the boil again and this time it might be without too many checks and balances. Afghanistan must not become another Vietnam!

The US thus must bring its Afghan Campaign to an orderly, responsible and well managed closure. Failing which, it will become incumbent upon Pakistan, (Iran) and China to move proactively to pre-empt Afghanistan’s and the region’s descent into chaos and unmitigated disaster!