**How did the Taliban win the war against the US?**

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As the US starts pulling out of Afghanistan, Taliban are advancing across the Afghan territory clearly indicating their victory in the war against the US-led NATO and ISAF troops. The US officials on one hand accept they have lost the Afghan war although in grim words, while the Taliban have been repeatedly and bluntly proclaiming they have won the war against the US. In an interview, “We have won the war, America has lost” a local Taliban commander told BBC last April. However, a change can be seen in the Taliban’s ultra-conservatism: they are softened as compared to the 1990s.

However, a few questions need to be answered: How did the Taliban win a war against the mighty superpower? What is their strength? What strategy have they been to take a superpower out of Afghanistan?

From the 1990s till their fall in 2001, Taliban’s held a radical ideology where women’s rights were violated and non-Pashtuns and the Hazara were in a miserable condition. Girls were not allowed to go to school and women were barred from jobs. After their fall, their subsequent rise and struggle and then involvement with the outer world have made them soften and moderate. Besides, they have had some concrete strategies which put them on the path of victory against the US and ultimately paved the way for their role in the upcoming set-up on one hand and provided them legitimacy on the other. The Taliban after their resurgence adopted the following strategies:

Bad governance and corruption greatly contributed to Taliban propaganda against an incompetent Kabul administration. After all, corruption is the main indicator of a weak political administration

Ideology is one of the major elements that provided strength to the Taliban. Their strong adherence to Islamic ideology has tightly tied their organisational structure. They believe in Jihad against the foreign forces and according to their interpretation of Islam. They consider war against the US and Afghan forces as jihad, which has two results: to be a martyr or survivor. In both cases, they see themselves successful.

Secondly, propaganda has been their great strength. They called the US an occupation force and advocated for the liberation of their homeland from foreign occupation. As the Afghan society is religious thus it was easy to convince people to wage a war against the foreign forces by joining their cadres. David Kilcullen in his book ‘Accidental Guerilla’ says that no insurgency can be successful without local support. Hence, if the Taliban had no local support, they wouldn’t be so successful in their campaign against the foreign forces.

Thirdly, guerrilla warfare has been quite successful in the difficult Afghan mountainous terrain, Taliban used the strategy of hit and run.

Fourthly, bad governance and corruption greatly contributed to the Taliban’s propaganda of calling the Kabul administration incapable of ruling the country. Corruption is the main indicator of a weak political administration. Afghan masses are fed up with wide-range of corruption at government departments, which compel them to search for an alternative that could help reduce the sufferings of the masses.

Fifthly, the Taliban’s calculation of Afghan power politics has been quite accurate. The key decision they made was negotiating with the US first not the Afghan government, otherwise the position they hold now won’t be there today. Obama during his second term was persistently pressing the Taliban for negotiation with the Afghan government but they always dismissed the idea. The Taliban considered Washington as a power center that decided on Afghanistan.

Sixthly, the Taliban’s diplomacy has been quite successful over the table with the US and western powers over the years. Taliban have rarely stepped back from their core demands. The troops’ withdrawal was the Taliban’s main demand since the commencement of the peace process in 2009. Similarly, it was unusual for the world that the US was recognising the Taliban, previously terrorists, as a legitimate political force in Afghan. However, the Doha agreement was one of the huge political victories, a result of a decade-long negotiation, for the Taliban.

Hence, the Taliban being native knew Afghan dynamics well and they utilised what they needed for expanding their clout, as well as exposing the Afghan government’s weaknesses. The Taliban who have been portraying themselves as real nationalists for the last one and half decades, work for their homeland and get the foreign troops out need to contribute to peace rather than chaos. It’s time for them to deliver. However, at the same time, reasonable behaviour is needed from the Kabul administration otherwise, achieving peace in Afghanistan would not be possible.

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