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**Afghanistan: a history of blunders**

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“The only thing we learn from history" – in the words of German philosopher Friedrich Hegel "is that we learn nothing from history”. Consequently, “those who fail to learn from history” – as per British PM Churchill – “are condemned to repeat it”.

All the main stakeholders in Afghanistan like the United States, Taliban and Pakistan etc have badly failed to learn from Afghanistan history’s black chapter of the 1990s and are on the path of committing the same blunders. It seems history is bent on repeating itself in Afghanistan, with repercussions of unmanageable magnitude.

In 1989, the (former) USSR left Afghanistan – ‘the bleeding wound’ as Mikhail Gorbachev called it – without healing it and without bringing any reconciliation between the smug Mujahideen and the weak and handicapped government of the then president Dr Najibullah. The reconciliation between the two warring parties was also ignored by the Mujahideen’s supporters in the Geneva Accord signed in 1988. Moreover, the US abandoned Afghanistan after bleeding the USSR (Soviet Union) for a decade and disintegrating it with the help of Afghan blood. These blunders led to the civil war and chaos of the 1990s which ultimately paved the way to the rise of the Taliban.

Though the US and Pakistan were said to have learnt from their blunders of the 1990s and committed that they would not be repeated, unfortunately, the fact is that they have learnt nothing from the past and have been repeating the same blunders. In addition, the Taliban are also repeating the same blunders committed by the Mujahideen in the 1990s.

Reconciliation between the Dr Najibullah government and Mujahideen was a prerequisite for peace and stability in the post-Soviet withdrawal. But the Soviet Union, the US and Pakistan agreed on a roadmap in the Geneva Accord and left intra-Afghan reconciliation for the future. This weakened Dr Najibullah's government and boosted the morale of the Mujahideen.

The Mujahideen considered Dr Najibullah's government as a puppet of the Soviet Union and thus gave no importance to it. And, while the Mujahideen's victory became possible with the sophisticated weapons of the US, overflowing money by the Arabs, unflinching support by Pakistan and blunders of the Soviet Union, they started to attribute it to their own strength and faith. So, they insisted on the occupation of Afghanistan by force. Meanwhile, different Mujahideen groups became embroiled in a civil war that devastated Kabul and created chaos in Afghanistan. This brought the Taliban on the scene who ultimately defeated and kicked out the Mujahideen and established their regime. The US also faced the music of its blunders when Afghanistan became a nightmare and a basecamp for Al-Qaeda. The 9/11 incident brought back the US to Afghanistan – but this time as an occupier.

Now the US is going back after two decades of a futile stay in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, it has repeated the blunders of the 1990s and pushed Afghanistan towards devastation, civil war, and chaos. Ideally, the US should have brought about a reconciliation between the Afghan government and the Taliban prior to its withdrawal. That would have helped the US pressurize the warring parties for a meaningful solution.

However, instead the Americans bypassed Kabul and signed an agreement with the Taliban in Doha. Though this short-sighted and untimely deal with the Taliban secured a safe exit for the United States, it severely weakened the Afghan government and boosted the Taliban’s confidence, morale and arrogance.

President Ashraf Ghani also considered reconciliation with the Taliban to be the end of his own government. Which is why he did not seem too pushed about reconciliation. Pakistan, being prone to any fallouts of Afghanistan, should have pressured Kabul and the Taliban for reconciliation prior to facilitating the US-Taliban deal. But Islamabad too left the intra-Afghan reconciliation for the future and helped the US-Taliban deal.

In addition to these blunders, some fallacies and misconceptions are being nurtured especially in Pakistan and in the Taliban’s mind. Most of the people in Pakistan miscalculate and compare the defeat and exit of the US with the Soviet Union – which is utterly baseless. The reality is that only the US forces are leaving Afghanistan, not the United States. The US will keep exercising its influence in Afghanistan and it will have remote control not only of the Afghan government but the Taliban as well – either directly or indirectly.

Moreover, the US has neither disintegrated physically nor bankrupted economically like the Soviet Union. Both economically and militarily, the US still enjoys the top position in the world powers, with 24 percent share of world GDP and over $700 billion of the military budget. In addition, the US still dominates world politics and has considerable influence over international institutions.

As long as American troops were present in Afghanistan, the most difficult task of bringing stability was on their shoulders and the easiest task of creating instability was in the hands of anti-American powers. But now once all the American forces withdraw, Washington's dependency on Pakistan will end. The equation will reverse and the challenging task of stability in Afghanistan will fall on neighbours like Pakistan.

The easiest task of creating instability will fall in the hands of the United States, which has both expertise and a long history of creating trouble for its opponents. So, the US can easily exploit the situation in Afghanistan by utilizing different players just by spending 10 percent of its annual expenditure in Afghanistan.

It is common sense that if the US wants to create trouble for Russia, China, Iran and Pakistan, then the easiest way to do so is to cause instability in Afghanistan. That is why intra-Afghan reconciliation is the primary need of Pakistan and other regional powers, and they should use all means at their disposal to bring together Afghan warring parties for a meaningful reconciliation.

Like the Mujahideen, the Taliban also harbour the misconception that they have defeated the US. But in reality, their so-called victory is heavily indebted to American blunders in Afghanistan and the role of Russia, Iran and Pakistan etc. Moreover, the Taliban have also miscalculated that they can occupy and rule Afghanistan by force. Undoubtedly, they can occupy a large part of the land but cannot sustain it and cannot run the country. Afghanistan's economy is weak, fragile, and aid-dependent. A Taliban regime will need money and resources to run the country and it will be impossible for them to get the requisite resources, money and aid from outside.

Moreover, they should also keep in mind that as long as they were fighting against the US, they had the sympathies of some of the local population and regional powers like Russia, Iran, and Pakistan etc. But the local population and regional powers will not support their fight against Afghans and will not endorse their regime.

The Taliban should not make decisions on the basis of the current weak position and broken morale of the Afghan government. This time strong resistance will not come mainly from the Afghan government but from Tajik, Uzbek, Hazara, and Turkmen nationalities of Afghanistan.

Though today these communities seem somehow weak or uninterested, if the Taliban establish their regime by force, then some regional powers – like in the past – will jump on the bandwagon in support of ethnic resistance. If today they do not come out in direct resistance, the only reason is that Afghans are fed up with war and bloodshed. But if the Taliban cause war and bloodshed in Afghanistan like the Mujahideen did in the 1990s, then Afghans will certainly rise and the Taliban's fate will not be much different from that of the Mujahideens.

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