**Afghanistan and beyond**

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The desire to remain in power is perhaps the most dangerous pursuit in the political history of mankind. It convinces one that he is God-sent, the only savior, then it paralyses you before digging your grave. President Ashraf Ghani is no exception. In the face of an imminent victory of the Taliban, he is still looking for a straw in the sea of violence to keep floating. Stepping down and paving the way for a negotiated settlement of the Afghan conflict is not an option for him. Banking on America’s verbal support to his Kabul administration, he is counting the days of his glory while desperately looking for a safe exit.

All stakeholders in the Afghan conflict have a fair idea why the twenty-year long stay of the US forces in Afghanistan culminated in a not-so-responsible withdrawal; why the US wants President Ghani to continue; why the Afghan forces’ salaries and food would be provided by the US; why securing Kabul airport is more important than defending Kandahar; or why the US does not trust Pakistan anymore and instead would like India to take lead. If so, then for how many years are we going to yowl about the twenty-year stay of foreign forces in Afghanistan and the eventual US withdrawal?

[Biden defends withdrawal, says US gave Afghans 'every chance to determine' future](https://nation.com.pk/17-Aug-2021/biden-defends-withdrawal-says-us-gave-afghans-every-chance-to-determine-future)

In international relations, complaints and verbal protests make you weak and expose your predispositions but by no means enable you to get the desired results. Complaints are meaningless unless countermeasures are strategised and implemented. Forget about winning an argument on an international negotiating table if you do not have the capacity to inflict harm or render timely assistance or contribute substantially in addressing a challenging situation.

The peace talks between the Taliban and the Kabul-nominated Afghan negotiators that began last September have made no substantial progress. Meetings held by various troikas in Doha or elsewhere have only been able to reiterate what is being propagated in the past two decades proffering a political solution to the Afghan conflict. On the other hand, President Biden does not regret his decision of the withdrawal. In fact, he has told the Afghan leaders in no uncertain terms ‘to come together’ and ‘fight for themselves’ as his country has already done enough by spending over a trillion dollars, training over 300,000 Afghan forces and suffered death and injury to thousands of US personnel. There goes the most important guarantor of peace in Afghanistan.

[UN Security Council urges halt to violence, talks to end Afghan power vacuum](https://nation.com.pk/17-Aug-2021/un-security-council-urges-halt-to-violence-talks-to-end-afghan-power-vacuum)

Simultaneously, a scapegoat was required and Pakistan was absolutely not a difficult choice. No wonder PM Khan is convinced that the US sees Pakistan as useful only in the context of the mess it is leaving behind after twenty years of fighting. The obvious clash of narratives is adding a different kind of chaos to the already murky situation. To top it all, efforts are underway to settle bilateral scores at every opportune time either to evade the truth, play victim or look tall in the eyes of the world. Then there is a barrage of allegations being levelled on each other thereby trying to efficiently play the blame game to gain some space or stay relevant to one’s standpoint.

Notwithstanding the ominous writing on the wall, all stakeholders are reiterating the pledge to having a political solution to the Afghan conflict while the Taliban are set to attack Kabul. In the ever diminishing space for negotiating a settlement formula, everyone is talking but no one is listening. No one knows how and when the desired broad-based government will be placed in Kabul. On the other hand, living in a constant state of strategic denial, all concerned are eagerly awaiting the inevitable to happen and see the other shoe dropped. No one is ready to concede a point yet everyone is reading out carefully worded statements emphasising the need to address and resolve the conflict amicably knowing full well that bullets neither read nor hear.

[UK plans to host virtual G7 leaders meeting on Afghanistan](https://nation.com.pk/17-Aug-2021/uk-plans-to-host-virtual-g7-leaders-meeting-on-afghanistan)

Pakistan must have analysed in detail what the US had in mind with regard to Islamabad’s role in the latest phase of the Afghan conflict. Islamabad must have weighed its options and the extent to which it could accede to Washington’s requests. One wonders if the overall future Pak-US relations were also considered especially in the context of America being the largest importer of Pakistani goods.

In the next few months, Afghanistan is likely to be settled one way or the other. However, the recently added frictions in Pak-US ties would be there to haunt Islamabad for a long time. It is hoped that in boasting about the strong Sino-Pak ties, the Pakistani visionaries would not let Pak-US relations suffer as badly as the Pak-Iran ties did whereby an erstwhile close friend was lost somewhere in the Afghan transit trade corridors. In the big swamp of the Afghan conflict, let us not forget that there is a whole world out there to handle and life does not begin and end with Afghanistan. Just a polite reminder that the United States of America is still the sole superpower of the world and it’s newly found RSS driven ‘strategic partner’ firmly believes in the philosophy of Hindutva. Perhaps, Ashraf Ghani is not the only one hoping against hope