**Enough is enough**

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From shock to blame-games, politicians and media in the US and Nato states are now seeking scapegoats for the Afghan debacle where they saw the entire Afghan National Army (ANA) disintegrate and Afghan President Ghani flee out of Kabul as the Taliban marched into Kabul unhindered.

Twenty years of military occupation by the US and Nato had merely seen the removal of the Taliban only to end in the return of the Taliban. Answers to the following two questions will explain the success of the Taliban: Why did the Afghan Army not fight? Where did the trillion plus US dollars disappear to in Afghanistan?

However, those are questions for the American people, their allies and perhaps historians to examine. What has always been clear to Imran Khan and many of us in Pakistan – a country that has suffered the most, after Afghanistan, as a result of being dragged into wars that were not Pakistan’s wars – is that there could never be a military solution to the Afghan crisis. Decades before Imran Khan became prime minister he kept stressing this point repeatedly and calling for dialogue amongst all Afghan factions. By the time the US was ready to make an agreement with the Taliban in Doha, it was from a far weaker position than if it had taken this step a decade earlier.

Perhaps it is a trifle unfair to solely blame President Biden for the entire Afghan debacle, given that he inherited not just the war but also the Doha agreement and a withdrawal commitment. Given the situation on the ground, it would not have been different had the US delayed its withdrawal. In fact, the outcome is better than many expected. There has been little bloodshed; the Tehreek-e-Taliban (TTA) have stated that they want an inclusive government; will protect the rights of women and girls; will not allow Afghan territory to be used against any country for attacks; and will not provide sanctuary anymore to the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) for its India-supported terrorism agenda against Pakistan. Equally important for Pakistan is the Taliban statement recognizing all international borders.

As the country that has suffered the most from the fallout of foreign occupations and wars in Afghanistan, these statements of policy by the Taliban are a positive declaratory start towards establishing peace and stability which will only gain credibility once actions reflecting these commitments are undertaken by the new Afghan government that is formed.

The world forgets that Pakistan has repeatedly been the victim of the fallout of refugees and terrorism – first from the Soviet invasion and then the post-9/11 US and Nato occupation of Afghanistan. Both times Pakistan’s military dictators involved the country in these wars and the political governments that followed were unable to take a strong position to extricate Pakistan from these disastrous policies.

When the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, Pakistan was forced to train the Mujahideen with CIA funding and bore the brunt of millions of Afghan refugees coming into the country, bringing what became known as the ‘drug and Kalashnikov culture’. Many of the Taliban emerged from the border refugee camps and, with a powerful mix of Pashtun nationalism and Jihad slogans, Pakistan saw its then tribal region destabilized with Pakistanis being viewed as collaborators of the US. The Geneva Accords may have allowed the Soviets an exit out of Afghanistan but the refugee issue was ignored in this Agreement.

Post-9/11, despite the fact that no Pakistani was involved in the Twin Towers attack, Pakistan was forced into becoming a frontline participant in the US/Nato war in Afghanistan with disastrous consequences. Not only was there a new stream of refugees, Pakistan also got dragged into another war that was not ours to fight. We suffered 80,000 casualties, polarization within our society and more than $150 billion loss to the economy. Worse still, our tribal belt saw further destabilization, especially with 430 (June 2004 – Jan 2018) US illegal drone attacks with civilians directly targeted including wedding parties and funerals. These drone attacks were a hostile military act carried out against an ‘ally’. Apart from Imran Khan, no Pakistani political leader raised a voice against these attacks (except paying overt lip service and informing the Americans covertly of support) or against the war that also created widespread extremist terrorism in Pakistan. US commitments that this time Pakistan would not be abandoned ended in sanctions against Pakistan.

Despite the sacrifices made by Pakistan for the US war on terror, including providing crucial logistical support to the US/Nato occupation forces in Afghanistan, Pakistan became an unrelenting punching bag for the failing Afghan government, its RAW-funded NDS and its collapsing ANA. Now we are seeing the scapegoating of Pakistan for US/Nato failures in Afghanistan – with India fuelling these attacks since it has lost its Western staging ground for proxy terrorism in Pakistan.

When Prime Minister Imran Khan’s government was elected to office, it pushed for dialogue and peace in Afghanistan and made clear that it could no longer be a partner in war. Pakistan did all it could to facilitate Taliban negotiations with the US, including releasing the imprisoned Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Baradar as sought by the US. Through the Doha agreement the US gave legitimacy to the TTA, even welcoming Baradar in Washington. The Taliban’s rapid advance to reach Kabul and the capitulation of the ANA and the Ghani regime cannot be blamed on Pakistan.

Pakistan has made its policy clear: it is seeking to ensure an inclusive government in Afghanistan that will protect the rights of women, girls and minorities; it will work to develop a consensus for international recognition of an inclusive Taliban-led Afghan government; and, critically, it will seek action from the TTA on its commitment not to allow Afghan territory to be used against Pakistan. Pakistan will no longer accept being scapegoated for the failures of others. Enough is enough.

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The views expressed by the writer are her own.