**Goodbye Afghanistan**

[**Najm us Saqib**](https://nation.com.pk/Columnist/najm-us-saqib)

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Perhaps a quick look at the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan might reveal and prove that except for its strategic value, proud history and Osama Bin Laden, it had nothing else to offer to its distinguished but uninvited guests that remained on its soil for two decades. Its terrain consists of mostly rugged mountains with only 11.8 per cent of arable land. It is situated in the foothills and periphery of the rugged Hindu Kush range with a history of earthquakes, flooding and droughts. With a population of around 40 million, this country has 0.4 hospital beds for every one thousand persons. Over 13 million people are suffering from severe acute food security and more than 55 per cent of the population lives under the poverty line. Known for illicit cultivation of cannabis and a regional source of hashish, Afghanistan is the world’s largest producer of opium. Dependent heavily on financing through grants and aid, its trade deficit is approximately 31 per cent of the GDP. It spends a little over one per cent of the GDP on defence. Only 13 per cent of its citizens use the internet.

[Russian, Tajik presidents discuss situation in Afghanistan](https://nation.com.pk/06-Jul-2021/russian-tajik-presidents-discuss-situation-in-afghanistan)

Afghanistan’s geography somehow provides it an attractive strategic significance. Completely landlocked, it is surrounded by a nuclear Pakistan, energy rich Iran, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan and of course America’s ‘strategic competitor’, China. Al Qaeda and the Taliban protected Bin Laden and necessitated the US, NATO and the rest of the civilised world to launch an organised attack on the roots of terrorism found in Afghanistan. During the prolonged War on Terror and even after the demise of both Bin Laden and Al Qaeda, its strategic value remained intact. The latest objective was to stabilise Afghanistan by providing it an Afghan-owned, Afghan-led broad-based political set up. Neither the undesirable ‘military solution’ nor the desirable ‘political solution’ of the Afghan conflict could be achieved even after assiduously following the entire course of military history and strategy for twenty years.

Leaving Afghanistan to its own devices in the prevalent muddled predicament and expecting the fourteen diverse ethnic groups, weak government and the menacing Taliban to find a peaceful solution to their political, economic and social problems created in the past few decades is asking for the moon, to say the least. The only redeeming feature seems to be the history, culture and Afghan resilience to continue finding solutions within their own system while keeping outside forces at bay. One wonders if the powers that be had understood the Afghan culture, their system of justice and thought process, the intricacies of the Loya Jirga and Meshrano Jirga or even the difference between the two before deciding on the present and future of this country. War and peace are two words which seem to be synonymous in the Afghan dictionary. It is a fact that during the 20th century, this country made more than eighteen changes to its national flag thereby manifestly announcing to the world its difficult-to-understand character and demeanour.

[US forces shoot down armed drone over US embassy in Baghdad](https://nation.com.pk/06-Jul-2021/us-forces-shoot-down-armed-drone-over-us-embassy-in-baghdad)

Political turmoil is the name of the game when it comes to Afghanistan. From the time Ahmad Shah Durrani unified the Pashtun tribes and founded Afghanistan in 1747 to its winning independence from British control in 1919, the Soviet Union’s invasion in 1979, the fall of Kabul to the Taliban in 1996, 9/11 and America launching air strikes in 2001 and Washington’s announcement of the withdrawal of troops by September 2021, Afghanistan has remained stubbornly steadfast against any external aggression or outside control, justifying its title of being the ‘Graveyard of Empires’. Hence, for Afghans, life will actually come to its usual chaos as opposed to the forced bedlam once foreign troops leave their homeland for good. In this way, the country would be run or not run by its own people in a way that they wanted to and not through some carefully crafted foreign plan of action.

Ideally speaking, the repair of Afghanistan’s soul and infrastructure, providing food, basic health and education facilities, internet access to the remaining 87 per cent of the population and facilitating 40 million people to live a life as per their own culture and religion, should have been the world’s concern. Conversely, the country’s imminent takeover by the Taliban seems to be the shared concern of all related stakeholders. The just started civil war and its spillover effects within and more importantly outside the country along with the expected rise in violence seem to be the other worrisome areas. Include in this scenario the likely influx of thousands of refugees into adjacent areas and its effects on the socio-political and economic spheres of host countries and you have a real imminent multidimensional crisis needing serious and timely action. Hence, the reconstruction of Afghanistan and the Marshall Plan needed to be put on the backburner.

[Israel releases Jordanian citizen accused of 'spying for resistance'](https://nation.com.pk/06-Jul-2021/israel-releases-jordanian-citizen-accused-of-spying-for-resistance)

The withdrawal of foreign troops and certain recent events indicate a strategic shift from Afghanistan and Al Qaeda to the threat of Islamic State (IS) that has reportedly taken root in and around Iraq, Syria, Sahel, Mozambique and the Horn of Africa. President Biden’s telling the Kabul executives that ‘Afghans are going to have to decide their future’ and practically announced the final good bye to Afghanistan with lukewarm promises of future engagement. Secondly, during the 83-member Global Coalition meeting held on June 28, Secretary Antony Blinken while announcing Washington’s new contribution of US$ 436 million to assist displaced people in Syria and the surrounding areas, cautioned the world of an ‘alarming surge in IS activity’ and that ‘this situation is simply untenable’ and ‘it cannot persist indefinitely’.

Clearly, Washington and its allies have left for President Ashraf Ghani, the Taliban and the internal and regional stakeholders to sort out the ongoing Afghan conflict themselves. As for the strategic significance of Afghanistan, well, it remains intact; may not be overlooked and may certainly be utilised from nearby areas as and when required. Verily, in the boisterous state of affairs in Pakistan’s neighbourhood, history has silently repeated itself.