**Pause and reflect**

[**Saleem Qamar Butt**](https://nation.com.pk/Columnist/saleem-qamar-butt)

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One hears and watches with utter incredulity the demands being heaped on the Afghan Taliban government soon after the complete and forced exit from Afghanistan by the US and allied forces. The revengeful invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 by the US and NATO/ISAF allies, rubber stamped by the UN and followed up by 20 years of pulverisation of Afghan culture, society and the country as a whole with complete disregard to human rights, international laws and any morals is no secret.

The killing of thousands of civilians including women and children by botched air and drone strikes besides ground military and covert operations is also well documented. Even on the last day of the American exit in August 2021, a drone strike killed an aid worker and his entire family including a wife and seven children. The whole world saw Afghan civilians dropping from the tailboards and wheels of US military cargo planes after takeoff; which was indicative of the insensitivity and disregard for non-American human life by the withdrawing forces. US support to non-democratic governments in the ME and elsewhere and a strategic partnership with even much touted democratic governments like India practicing state terrorism and atrocities against minorities all over India (particularly in IIOJ&K, Punjab, Gujarat, Hyderabad, Junagarh, Assam and in the North Eastern Seven Sister States) for economic and security interests is well established too. That begs the question as to how long the USA can stay as a global leader sans high morals of democracy it preached, which stand badly exposed. Does the US realise the pitfalls of indulging in yet another Cold War and arms race and failing the UN like the erstwhile League of Nations?

[FBISE to announce SSC Part 1 result on Nov 2](https://nation.com.pk/30-Oct-2021/fbise-to-announce-ssc-part-1-result-on-nov-2)

I had briefly analysed the down side of excessive use of hard power in my piece ‘The Limits of Hard Power’, and the reasons for following such a counterproductive policy in ‘Pentagon’s Foolish Friends’. It was an effort to remind thinking people in the US that “I read old books because I would rather learn from those who built civilisation than those who tore it down”.

Throughout the two decades of war there, US policymakers used short-term operations such as drone strikes to put off thinking about and confronting the weaknesses of the Afghan National Army, the shortcomings of President Ashraf Ghani’s government and the absence of a workable endgame. Drones also killed hundreds of innocent civilians; delinquent strikes, especially those that hit women and children, inflamed local populations and helped extremists recruit new members in Afghanistan, Pakistan and other parts of the world targeted by the US.

There is no reason to think drones will be more strategically successful in Afghanistan going forward than they have been for the past 20 years. If anything, it will now be even more difficult for US forces to accurately identify and hit targets. Reportedly, a plan for Turkish troops to stay behind and provide intelligence fizzled when the Taliban forced them to withdraw. Washington now has no straightforward way to collect the intelligence it needs to inform targeting decisions—or to figure out whom, exactly, it has killed in the wake of a drone strike.

[Doctor killed over resisting dacoits in Karachi](https://nation.com.pk/30-Oct-2021/doctor-killed-over-resisting-dacoits-in-karachi)

As per reports, CIA Director William Burns has been deliberating with Pakistan and even the Taliban about gaining permission to strike common enemies such as IS-K, and discussions are also underway about basing drones in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The administration seems to be moving toward a hybrid approach that may curb the worst excesses of the Trump years, but it will hardly fix the underlying problems. If the Biden administration really wants to break with the failed policies of the “war on terror,” it should dramatically curtail the use of drones and the United States must stop killing people it does not know; instead, the US may assist CASA regional countries with drones, munitions, technology and sharing of technical intelligence to take on the common foes. The United States should play by the same rules governing the use of force as it expects other countries to play by.

At a time when Pak-US relations once again seem at its nadir, it is considered appropriate for both countries to pause and reflect to discuss the friction points and identify common interests in the broader context, keeping respective national interests intact; regional and global realignments notwithstanding. Or else the mutual regret ought to be greater than the mending efforts. As for Pakistan, overcoming political polarisation, economic decline and effective control on unbridled corruption and inflation should remain a top priority for a strong internal front that manifests in better foreign policy decisions.