**Who Lost the War in Afghanistan?**

[Nawazish Ali](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/nawazish-ali/)

August 3, 2021

USA, by no means, is the first superpower to get bogged down in chaos and violence in Afghanistan, dubbed as “the graveyard of empires” for good reason. A serious political debate that who has lost the war in Afghanistan will go on for a long time. There ought to be a far more serious effort to examine the political history of the war and lessons learnt. All participant nations and warring factions should analyse the campaign in entirety as well as from respective country’s perspective for academic use. It should consider the war’s budgets and its strategic cost at any given point versus its worth prolonging for two decades before withdrawal from the war-zone.

The USA did not launch Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in the aftermath of 9/11 terrorist attack on home land to impose democracy or for economic prosperity in Afghanistan and Iraq. The stratagem for invading Afghanistan was a subsidiary or auxiliary offense in response to the fundamental effort launched against Iraq, aimed at elimination and destruction of Al-Qaida and the breeding house of terrorism in Afghanistan. The intrinsic objective was to eliminate all potential threats to Israel, known as 53rd state of USA, by destruction of Iraq and weakening of military and economic potentials of the Arab World.

The overriding perception prevails; the USA has failed to achieve its political objectives after fighting one of the longest wars of military history as it did not bring peace and stability in Afghanistan. But the question stays on! Did USA aim at bringing stability and tranquility in Afghanistan as a result of this war? This will certainly remain unanswered in the books of military history. However, USA had minimum war causalities, 2400 military personnel killed and over 20,000 wounded since 2001, as compared to any other belligerent countries on both sides. Pakistan alone suffered over 8000 uniformed personnel killed, approximately 25000 civilians were dead as a result of terrorists’ attacks inside Pakistan territory and the similar number killed while fighting as associates of various factions of Taliban. The worst suffered country and nation is Afghanistan. American leaders were proved foolish to believe that they could remake, rebuild, modernise and civilise Afghan society after a prolonged war

The key issue is, whether letting it escalate or prolong was worth the cost? If one examines price tag of the war and lack of any clear or consistent strategic rationale for continuing it so long, then it is far from clarity that USA ever had the grand strategic design justifying two decades of engagement and should have committed the assets and resources to the conflict that it did.

USA has failed to achieve its political objectives after fighting one of the longest wars of military history as it did not bring peace and stability in Afghanistan.

One did not have to invoke the inaccurate cliché of Afghanistan as the graveyard of empires to understand that the Taliban were a resilient and mercurial force, as capable of persuading opponents to switch sides as of disappearing from the battlefield. Why should USA have succeeded where even the communists had failed? Another dilemma continues, how will future strategic interests of America shape in the Af-Pak region? The war is continuing for bringing a change to the regional environment aimed at giving rise and power to the identical and associated extremists, who export terrorism all over the world.

One should never forget that Afghanistan today is strikingly different than that of 1990s. The Taliban may control Kabul but the peace agreement expecting them to exercise comprehensive control over Afghanistan is nearly impossible, given the extent of fragmentation, the spheres of influence and strongholds the anti-Taliban and its associates are gradually regaining. Not to mention the different factions like of ISIS-Khorsan, which after being largely eliminated in the Middle East has focused its attention for fighting proxies as mercenaries?

Did Pakistan Win the Afghan War? The question looks to be totally out of place considering financial losses, communal and sectarian disintegration and ethical degeneration during the last two decades. However, Islamabad is almost as involved in Afghanistan Peace Process as Washington and the USA. The recent Afghanistan negotiation has put Islamabad back in the “good books” of Washington. This in turn means economic benefits via the International Monetary Fund besides certain financial aid by USA. Pakistan joined the US lead coalition for certain political and strategic compulsions in the aftermath of 9/11 terrorist attack. Understanding why and how this happened is imperative for those who deal with international affairs.

Pakistan is a country whose strategic position in the region is the most delicate and must never put all its eggs in the Taliban’s basket. Otherwise, in the long run, it will have a negative impact in case of a prolonged civil war in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, one lesson is clear from the long-expected US withdrawal from Afghanistan: Intellectual diversity, lately presented as a moral imperative and a mode of racial justice, is a practical necessity to avoid more destructive international entanglements in the future.

“We fight wars with men – and with ghosts. When it comes to haunted battlefields, Afghanistan is second to none”. – Alexander the Great

*The writer is a retired Pakistan Army officer and can be reached at nawasish30@hotmail.com*