

***Asymmetrical Warfare and Peace Building in Afghanistan:
An Appraisal***

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.8384949



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Abstract

The concept of asymmetrical warfare has a chequered history. In primitive ages, the tools of warfare were simple and less devastative. In modern warfare especially in post-World War 2, nuclear weapons, biological weapons and chemical weapons replaced general armoured which can wipe out human beings from earth in no time. In such circumstances, the weaker nations like Afghanistan prompt to choose guerrilla techniques against United States of America and its allies under the ambit of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). America and world community mishandled the Afghan crisis and ignored the decades inherited guerrilla training of Afghan people and its forces and warfare history against the invaders in different times; they only used naked weapons rather than to open diplomatic channels to bring peace in war-torn Afghanistan.

Key words: Asymmetrical, Warfare, Peace, Afghanistan

Introduction

War is the symbolic confrontation between two or more than two opposite parties for political and military gains.¹ The weaker party chooses tactical weapons to use against its stronger rival that is known as asymmetrical warfare.² Asymmetric warfare remained a prominent strategy in early years of the 20th century. The circumstances classify an asymmetry into ‘Strategic Asymmetrical Warfare (SAW) and Tactical Asymmetrical Warfare (TAW).³ In the former case, warriors opt to deploy their available limited resources against stronger enemies in terms of number and technologically advanced weaponry. Unlike this, in the latter case the weaker state chooses various tactics based on their training to counter technologically strong country.⁴ Afghanistan is famous for its land lock geostrategic status, 19th century Great Game, Cole war, and New Great Game in the comity of world.⁵ Amir Ullah Khan, Zafar Nawaz Jaspal & Samina Yasmin stated:

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“The Major Powers, by end of 20th century initiated ‘New Great Game’ to establish their control on main trade routes, to capture natural resources and to install their respective puppet government in Afghanistan. Their rivalry engulfed the whole region with terrorism, extremism, and instability.”⁶

America and its allies opened a new war against Taliban regime established in 1996 under the new nomenclature ‘Global War on Terror’ with aims at to target Al-Qaeda, to establish a democratic regime and to extend humanitarian aids to people of Afghanistan. Contrary to this, the US and its allies badly failed to meet out their strategic goals and to help Afghan government and its people out of crisis.⁷

United States of America tried to legitimize ‘WoT’ under the garb of self-defence through UNSC Resolution 1368 to counter any threat posed by the terrorists.⁸ However, this Resolution did not grant any blank cheque to USA for taking a unilateral action against terrorists. For this reason, USA superseded this Resolution by passing a bill ‘Authorization for The use of Military Force (AUMF)’ by 107th Congress that empowered the US President to use force against any nation, organization, person, or group of persons abetting terrorists or terrorist organizations involved in planning, authorization, or abetting terrorists in 9/11 attacks.⁹

The US military junta advised the former US President Barak Obama to avoid reducing US troops in Afghanistan on the ground that such step would help Afghan Taliban and ISIS and Al-Qaeda to re-emerge and to establish stronghold in Afghanistan. The Obama’s administration, therefore, announced that under ‘Resolute Support Mission’ the troops would be reduced to 5500 from 9800 by 2017.¹⁰ It is worth to mention that under ‘Operation Enduring Freedom’ 140,000 US and NATO combatants participated in Afghanistan in 2010-11 to December 31, 2014. The US faced economic loss of \$ 685 billion from 2001 in Afghanistan. In addition, it funded \$ 4 billion to 350,000 troops stationed in the ANSF per annum.¹¹ The US lost 2271 and NATO 3407 troops in addition to psychological sufferings and low morale.¹² Previously by end of cold war, America showed its back to Pakistan and withdrew its troops from Afghanistan and left trained militant groups in Afghanistan without ant strategic planning. In this regard, Amir Ullah Khan, Zafar Nawaz Jaspal, and Samina Yasmin quoted Hillary Clinton:

“United States created combatants and also supplied high advanced arms to them to counter Soviet Union army in Afghanistan. At the end of Cold War and collapse of former Soviet Union, the United States of America left Afghanistan and left well-trained fighters in Afghanistan and Pakistan.”¹³

In addition to this, William Blum also raised questions of launching of war in Afghanistan against Soviet Union and supporting trained combatants. He stated: "United States ignored the ramifications of spending billions of dollars on to its created trained non-state actors and dragging world community’s opinion to wage holy war against former Soviet Union."¹⁴

America spent huge amount worth \$141 billion in Afghanistan in post 9/11 period. However, this could not reduce uncertainties in Afghanistan.¹⁵

Factors Fomented Asymmetrical Warfare:

Asymmetrical war in Afghanistan has a chequered history. Afghan land witnessed several empires and their downfall in history. However, the post 9/11 wave of terrorism and US invasion of Afghanistan changed strategic dimensions. The geo-strategic, topographic, demographic, psychological, internal, regional and international factors facilitated the Afghan fighters to engage USA and its allies in asymmetrical warfare.

1. Geographical location

The role of geography and topography cannot be ignored in guerrilla warfare. Mountains, deserts, jungles and oceans are considered as natural defence resources. Afghanistan has also such advantage by having high mountains, deserts and jungles which provide an easy shelter to Afghan combatants. These natural factors helped the Afghan combatants during Afghan-Soviet war and recent Afghan-US war to strike and attack on troops of US and its allies and to seek shelter in hideouts in peripheral villages and mountains.¹⁶

2. Taliban's training

Training is one of the most important elements to combat the enemy. The Afghan people fought for several decades against invaders. Their history is full of warfare with invaders; and also their mutual fighting.¹⁷

3. Taliban's conventional weapons

Taliban had inherited Soviet Union weapons. They were also supported by American with money, training, and weapons during US-Soviet war. However, in the post 9/11, the Taliban used conventional weapons to target troops of US and its allies in Afghanistan by following the 'Strategy of Hit and Hide'. This strategic tactic of Taliban played significant role to demoralise the allied forces and American-installed governments in Afghanistan. It also exhausted the energy of allied forces which ultimately weakened their determination. Being aboriginals, the Taliban were familiar with the nook and corner of their country and safe heavens.¹⁸

4. China's apprehensions on US Hegemonic designs

Historically China had apprehensions about Taliban's support to East Turkmenistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) – an anti-China terrorist organization – having a strong footing at Afghanistan. However, in the post 9/11, China changed its strategic approach towards Taliban and tried to normalise its relationship with them through diplomatic channels and tried to bring peace and stability in Afghanistan and to make efforts for the rehabilitation of Afghan people.¹⁹ America did not want to allow the infiltration of China in Afghanistan. However, the cancellation of talks of Trump's administration with Taliban in September 2019 paved the way to China to take advantage of that deadlock and asked Taliban to visit Beijing for Intra-Afghan dialogue in October 2019.²⁰

In the post 9/11, China had also apprehensions of the presence of troops of North Atlantic Treaty organisation (NATO) and America; and also of India. All these were the hostile forces against China and Russia. China and Russia established Shangai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) to counter the hegemonic designs of NATO in Central Asia and Afghanistan.²¹

5. Pakistan's threat perception

America time and again requested Pakistan to cooperate and assist it to make US-Taliban dialogues successful. Pakistan facilitated US and world community to bring peace in Afghanistan by demonstrating through release of Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar. Zalmay Khalidzad, former US advisor to Afghanistan stated: "Pakistan has a crucial role to bring US, Afghan government and Taliban in negotiation table and to exchange their respective points of view to resolve decades' war in Afghanistan."²² United States on the other hand, always blamed Pakistan for supporting Taliban and Haqqani's Network.²³

America always played a dubious role in Afghanistan; and its double-standard role created great uncertainty and mistrust among political and security circles in Pakistan. It installed India as its protégé or watch-dog to counter Pakistan and China's influence in Afghanistan. This created security threats for Pakistan. Pakistan naturally was in favour of Pakistan's friendly governmental set-up in Afghanistan that avoided using its soil against Pakistan and its people.²⁴ India, Pakistan's competition, has been present in Afghanistan for tactical reasons. The majority of India's efforts are focused on larger political involvement. Special Forces and sufficient resources have been offered to Security forces in order to combat terrorism and extremism. India would also support Afghan security personnel with increased military training and invest in long-term capacity-building projects.²⁵

India's military goal in Afghanistan is to keep Pakistan, China, and Russia at bay. Indian assistance to Afghanistan was considered significant politically to show and demonstrate support to Afghan administration and people. The basis of the Indian resistance differed significantly from that of Afghanistan, and owing to the hilly terrain, air power might be utilized to defeat the resistance. India extended implied but not clear support to Afghanistan because it could not overlook Pakistan, and Afghanistan is demanding weaponry that could be used for both internal conflict and foreign threats.²⁶ S. Shah stated:

"The India's political, intelligence and military engagements in Afghanistan constituted dual threats to Pakistan – one on east side and the second on the western side. India's support to Afghanistan in either case would leave Pakistan with no option except to balance the scales by assisting the Liberation of Tamil Tigers Elam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka to ensure a regional balance of power."²⁷

6. Russia & Iran Apprehensions

Russia and Iran are neighbours of Afghanistan and both countries have strategic interests in Afghanistan. America is inimical to both these countries. America also accused these countries to have collaboration with Taliban. However, America and the world community were convinced that Russia, China and Iran had vital role to restore peace and stability in Afghanistan.²⁸ Despite that, Russia and Iran like China and Pakistan had also threat perception on presence of troops under the umbrella of NATO and America.

7. Problem of Distinction between Insurgents and civilians

Another major problem in asymmetric warfare in Afghanistan was to distinguish insurgents from civilians. Tracking insurgents becomes more difficult and the armies constantly run the risk of killing innocent people, which further created hatred in minds and hearts of general public and inadvertently fuelling the insurgency.

Analysis

The above discussion reflects the fact that several factors helped the seasoned and decades trained fighters to leave Afghanistan. America and its allies got frustrated to continue that war on terror in Afghanistan; and their people were not ready to spend their taxes on that war. The American allies decided to reduce their troops in Afghanistan gradually which also created apprehensions in Pentagon that such war would be Americanised in nature. United States also ignored the role of the neighbours of Afghanistan especially Russia, Iran, and Pakistan. Keeping in view its failure in Afghanistan, United States started to throw responsibility on Pakistan for supporting Taliban which seemed ridiculous and illogical. It blamed Pakistan's spy agency Inter-Services Agency (ISI) and Pakistan's military establishment. Here [C. Christine Fair](#), the hardliner and extremist anti-Pakistan writer is quoted:

“President Joe Biden, like his predecessor Barak Obama also help the opinion that Pakistan supported the Taliban. The Pakistan's intelligence agency and military establishment extended unstinting backing to Taliban. Without its support, Taliban would be nothing except a nuisance rather than an effective fighting force. The United States needed to impose targeted sanctions against those in Pakistan's deep state who sponsored Islamist militants.²⁹

The blame-shift game of America and anti-Pakistan writers raised the following questions:

1. What was the role the Major Veto Powers (USA, UK and France) actively engaged in Afghanistan?
2. What was the role of presence and stationing of troops of these major powers in Afghanistan?
3. What was the role of NATO to counter Taliban and to restore peace and stability in Afghanistan?
4. NATO has thirty-one countries.³⁰ All are technologically developed countries. Is not failure of these countries to counter Taliban and to restore peace and stability in Afghanistan?

5. Was the role of Mosad to counter Taliban and to restore peace and stability in Afghanistan?

6. Was the role of India and its spy agency Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) to counter Taliban and to restore peace and stability in Afghanistan?

The approach of scholars and writers like C. Christine Fair is emotion-ridden, biased and subjective which is a clear deviation from facts. It is astonishing that such writers ignored the NATO’s 3.5 Million soldiers on which the member states spend £975bn in 2023.³¹

Pakistan conducted various military and intelligence-based operations in former Federally Administered Tribal Areas to target terrorists and militants. Thousands of both military and civilian *Jawans* and officers sacrificed their lives for restoration of peace not only for the people of Pakistan but also for the global community. The civilians in Pakistan were equally suffered psychologically, physically, financially, and socially. Even in various corners, people of Pakistan were displaced and migrated to safe places. The global community recognised the services, sacrifices of Pakistan’s army personnel and its people against war on terrorism except America, India and their allies. America always stuck to its demand of “Do More” which had and have serious repercussions on Pakistani society and ultimately state. It would be sagacious for United States of America and to its political and military leadership to accept their strategic blunder in Afghanistan rather than to throw filth on Pakistan, its military and intelligence agencies as it confessed its crimes in invading Iraq; as it confessed the intelligence failure of its Spy Agency CIA in Iraq.³² Likewise, former Prime Minister Tony Blair also confessed the intelligence failure in Iraq.³³ Pakistan was also targeted for scorching criticism for the presence of Osama Bin Laden (OBL) in the country. It is hilarious that if the two super powers of the world and their intelligence agencies failed to find out fact in case of Iraq’s possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction then a developing country with weak economic base like Pakistan and its intelligence could succeed to trace out the hide out of OBL; when Pakistan was engaged on different fronts to counter terrorist threats especially on Western and Eastern border.

In the nut shell, the strategic miscalculation of America and its allies germinated the seeds of radicalism and terrorism in Afghanistan instead of wiping out terrorism; and they have lost moral grounds to raise fingers on Pakistan’s military and its intelligence agencies for their failure in Afghanistan.

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