

**THE FUTILITY OF RUSSIAN AND AMERICAN OCCUPATION OF  
AFGHANISTAN AND THE FUTURE OF TALIBANS IN GOVERNANCE**

**BY**

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## **Abstract**

*This study tried to look at the reasons behind the failure of the U.S and Russian missions in Afghanistan and prospectively looked at what the future holds for Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. The study finds out that among other things, the major reason for the failure was the lack of proper understanding of the culture, history and politics of the Afghan people. The U.S government imposed a Western technocratic model onto Afghan economic institutions, trained their security forces in advanced weapon system they could not understand or maintain and failed to understand the cultural and social barriers to supporting women and girls. With the Taliban now in power, it is feared that the right and privileges enjoyed by Afghan women in the past twenty years stands at a risk. The study recommended that the U.S and indeed other world powers must be more careful in deciding if a conflict is worth fighting, escalating and continuing. To understand the rationale behind the invasions, the study adopted imperialism as a working model. We adopted the secondary methodological analogy, exploring materials from books, journals, news papers etc.*

**Keywords:** *Taliban, terrorism, imperialism, invasion, governance, insurgency*

## **Introduction**

Twenty years down the line, the U.S. government spent \$145 billion trying to build Afghanistan, its security forces, civilian government institutions, economy and civil society. The Department of Defense spent \$837 billion on warfighting, during which 2443 American troops and 1144 allied troops have been killed and 20,666 U.S. troops were injured. Meanwhile Afghans were even more affected with a greater toll where 66,000 Afghan troops have been killed, and at least 75,000 injured since 2001. Before we go into the details of this research study, let's take a look at a brief history of the occupation of Soviet communist and U.S. in Afghanistan.

Before the bloody communist coup and takeover in 1978, there were three Anglo – Afghan wars: one from 1839 to 1842, 1878 to 1880 (this period was the time Amir Abdurrahman Khan ruled, he sought for the unification of the country), and briefly in 1919 (this period brought about the reform process, ruled by King Amanullah). History has it that Afghan governance were spiced with numerous coup, some bloodless, some bloody. Legitimacy was conferred by the ability to take power, defeat rivals and provide peace and security, as well as by perceived independence from foreign control even when accepting financial assistance from other countries (Byrd, 2012).

After the Second World War, a new conflict appeared between the United States and the USSR. During the cold war, two models were in stiff competition namely; the American capitalism and USSR's communism. From the 1950s and 1970s, as

part of their cold war contentions, the Soviet Union and the United States provided aid to Afghanistan. This made Afghanistan the highest per-capita recipients of development assistance in the World. The Soviet occupation in Afghanistan started at the end of 1979 and led to more than two decades of debilitating conflicts. The Soviet Union invasion of Afghanistan was under the pretext of upholding the Soviet – Afghan Friendship Treaty of 1978. The Soviet Union were met with fierce resistance fighters called Mujahidun who saw the Christian or atheist Soviets as controlling which was a defilement of Islam as well as their traditional culture. The Mujahidun applied the guerrilla tactics against the Soviets proclaiming a jihad while the United States were providing them with weapons. The guerrilla tactics led to the Soviet force's departure in 1989. Seven days following the attack on U.S soil, the U.S. House of Representatives voted 420-1 and the senate 98-0 authorizing the United States to go to war, not just in Afghanistan, but in an open-ended commitment against the perpetrators of the 9/11 attack. Only one U.S. Rep. Barbara Lee of California cast the only vote opposing to the war. Therefore, the invasion of Afghanistan in the late 2001 to destroy Al-Qaeda, remove the Taliban from power and rebuild the country where the U.S. started bombing Afghanistan. The Taliban surrendered in Kandahar on Dec 9<sup>th</sup> 2001.

The U.S. invasion was in three phases where the first phase was collapsing the Taliban which lasted briefly just two months. The second phase, from 2002 to 2008, had the U.S. strategy of defeating the Taliban military and rebuilding core institutions of the Afghan state. And the last phase was that of a counterinsurgency doctrine. U.S. government hoped that by going into alliance with the Afghans they would be able to avoid the deploying of a large force to Afghanistan.

## **Conceptual Clarification**

**Terrorism:** Terrorism is often referred to the acts of violence that targets civilians in the pursuit of political or ideological aims. The United States Department of Defense defines terrorism as the calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological (Imhonopi et al, 2016).

UN Security Council Resolution 1566 (2004) gives a definition of terrorism to mean criminal acts, including against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or taking of hostages, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or in a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population or compel a government or an international organization to do or abstain from doing any act. Terrorism targets at the very violation of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law; rules governing armed conflict and protection of civilians. In the context of our study, Global terrorism index 2016 findings has it that the Taliban in Afghanistan had a 29% increase in the number of people it killed in 2015, responsible for 4,502 deaths from terrorism during the year. Individual terrorist activities are usually unpredictable rather it follows a common statistical pattern.

**Taliban:** The Taliban were founded in 1994 with their founding leader Mullah Omar, to impose a morally rigorous Islamic order on Afghanistan. The word Taliban means *students*. In the 1990s, they slowly took over more lands in Afghanistan but not the North, conquered Kabul in 1996 and established the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. They were quite successful in the 90s with the aim of offering security, ending the drug trade, human trafficking and corruption until they started to institute repressing measures such as restrictions on women and the

banning of music. A strategy they used to cement their position was recruiting locals either through force or bribery. Mullah Omar relied on local commanders who had connections into other factions aligned with their ideology.

The Taliban taking over Afghanistan today has the same history in the 90s where they project to end corruptions, violence, drone attack from the U.S. planes and offer to the Afghans what they call an alternative, based on stability and security. They also offer to allow women the access to education and rights. These are the exact promises in the 90s but were replaced by brutal oppression. Again, they are leveraging localism as strategy. To understand the Taliban, one needs to study their patterns of operation. History isn't just a set of dates or facts. It's a lens of analysis that can help us understand the present and what will happen next (Olomi, 2021).

**Governance:** Fukuyama defines governance as a government's ability to make and enforce rules and to deliver services, regardless of whether that government is democratic or not. Governance is the sound exercise of political, economic, and administrative authority to manage a country's resources for development. It involves the institutionalization of a system through which citizens, institutions organizations and groups in a society articulate their interests, exercise their rights, and mediate their differences in pursuit of the collective good (Country Governance Assessment, 2005).

In governance, citizens are rightly concerned with a government's responsiveness to their needs and protection of their rights. In general, governance issues pertain to the ability of government to develop an efficient, effective, and accountable public management process that is open to citizen participation and that strengthens rather than weakens a democratic system of government.

## **Research Methodology**

This research work uses secondary method of data collection and adopts imperialism as a theory for the theoretical framework.

## **Literature Review**

Robert (2021) observed that the Afghan war showed limits of the U.S military power. It demonstrated the seeming paradox that it is possible to win the battles and still lose the war. The fact that a technologically superior force can kill more effectively than its enemy yet fail to achieve a final result resembling victory. It showed that in the 21st century, it takes more than a conquering army to convert the overthrow of a government into a lasting success. That there must be an understanding of local politics, history and culture. Robert (2021) pointed out that the U.S underestimated how much its presence as an occupier fueled Taliban motivation to fight, and limited the Afghan government's ability to unite.

Carter (2021) posits that one reason for the futility of the American effort was the influence of Islam and resistance to foreign occupations- factors which he noted were not well understood by the Americans. "The very presence of Americans in Afghanistan trod on what it meant to be Afghan." Its prodded men and women to defend their honor, their religion and their homes. It dared young men to fight. It animated at the Taliban, it shaped the will of Afghan soldiers and police.

The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) report examined the two decades of the U.S reconstruction effort in Afghanistan, detailing how the U.S government struggled to developed a coherent strategy. The

report noted that while there have been some bright sides, such as lower child and maternal mortality rates, increase in per capita GDP, and increase in literature rates, progress has often been elusive and the prospect for sustaining this progress are dubious. The U.S government has been often overwhelmed by the magnitude of rebuilding a country that at the beginning of the U.S invasion had already seen two decades of Soviet occupation, civil war and Taliban brutality.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This research work has chosen imperialism as the baseline for analysis. Imperialism is a process of expanding control by one state over another. The word is derived from the Latin word 'imperium' which means command and domination. It can be defined as the ultimate rule over foreign lands and people. It has to do with exercising authority or power, or having influence or control by one state over another state. Imperialism is defined as a concept by V.I. Lenin as the highest stage of capitalism characterized by the dominance of big monopolies in all spheres of life, the struggle between the capitalism countries for source of raw materials and markets for foreign territories.

The relation of this theory to our study is the pointers that the U.S. claims to project democracy and freedom whereas in reality it boosts exploitation, domination and control making Afghan state a mere puppet of imperialism. Another pointer is to highlight how U.S. imperialism has impacted and furthered the rule of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Imperialism is not a policy but an essential characteristic of capitalism for the past hundred years. The United States were of the notion to protect American interests and protection of Afghan civilians from the Taliban, along with other foreign policy goals such as the spread of democracy. This is imperialism realigned because when the chips were down and they saw that

they actually failed, they hurriedly chickened out leaving the country in a state of chaos and uncertainty. After 20 years of presupposed indoctrination, it is expected that Afghan state should have accepted the type of government presented to them by U.S. but the reverse was the case as U.S. hurriedly withdrew just like the Soviet Union did.

The ideology of American imperialism condensed itself into the slogan of “containment.” Afghanistan was yet another instance of American containment through the support of anti-statist terrorism (Krishna 2002). The United States has always implemented and administered various campaigns designed to dominate, contain and establish economic and political hegemonic status over any perceived threat through systematic methods. Some of these campaigns have been carried out through the alleged war on Communism, drugs and terror. This can be seen in the Bush administration that launched the war on terror in 2001 in response to the 9/11 attack on U.S. soil. The first phase of the war which targeted Afghanistan, the second, in 2003, targeted Iraq and then expanded involving 76 countries in a variety of ways.

## **Findings and Discussion**

**The futility of Russian and American occupation of Afghanistan:** The withdrawal of the Soviet Union and the United States from Afghanistan is an occasion for reflection. U.S. invasion of Afghanistan have been critically likened to the Vietnam War. In 1979, when the Soviet forces invaded Afghanistan, no one would have foretold the outcome. Soviet forces simply weighed the costs of their invasion exceeding the benefits. The crucial factor for the explanation of Soviet forces withdrawal from Afghanistan was that of a declining Soviet economy and the strong resistance they faced who applied guerrilla strategy to fight them off.

Peace agreement between the Taliban and the United States was reached on February 29, 2020 in Doha to end the war in Afghanistan. Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the deputy to the Taliban leader Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada signed the agreement in the presence of the U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and a large group of Taliban representatives. For two decades in Afghanistan, the U.S. seems to have made progress in many areas in rebuilding the country and establishing a modelled government for the Afghans. There also seems to the international community that the invasion was futile with several factors behind it. Factors like being unfamiliar with culture and regional dynamics, lack of regional strategy, changing of U.S. policy over time, and lack of transparency. There were a lot of conflicting interests in Afghanistan that allowed the Taliban to continue to fight, and the biggest impediment to success on the battlefield against the Taliban was the cost of an insurgency is less. It's impossible to win a counter insurgency in a country bordered by another country which you have a dysfunctional relationship with. You need to maintain a strong alliance with the borders of the country in which you are at war with. There were times the Taliban would want to negotiate but the Pakistani military establishment would want them to fight on and get more concessions before they negotiate.

**The future of Taliban in governance:** The Taliban have taken over power in Afghanistan after U.S. announcement of its withdrawal so now what next? Will the Taliban be able to sustain itself in power? The answer to any of such questions lies on how Taliban handles and prevents armed opposition to its rule and managing the country's economy and relations with the outside. With the history of coups/conflict of this country, one of the most opposition the Taliban will face could come from the inside.

Afghan women fear for their future in Afghanistan, fear for their rights, freedom and freewill. In comparison, Afghanistan today is not the same for women like in the 90s. Women's education as well as their economic and political participation is far greater than before. There is an outcry by gender equality activists, women journalists and judges for an evacuation, emergency visas and relocation support. There will be need for the new government to put the rights of these women in consideration even as they uphold the Islamic culture. On taking over Afghanistan, the Taliban government poses significant promises about the future of the country. These include the establishment of inclusive government, upholding the rights of women but limiting it within the framework of Sharia, freedom of press albeit with caveats. They intend to run an Islamic Emirate.

The Talibans propose to seek friendly diplomatic ties with the United States and the World at large. The Taliban government is making lots of promises which put them under international scrutiny to uphold a good governance system that will represent all Afghan ethnic groups and respect human rights, with particular reference to women. The U.S. government has promised to maintain little or less influence over the Afghan forces or Taliban government in the future with no attempt to coerce it to change its nature through the use of force. The future of Afghanistan now rests on the contention of the military between Afghan and the Taliban, with the militias of former Northern Alliance actors waiting, ready to protect their interests.

Most recently, the new government, the Taliban have enacted an interim all male government with most of the members of this government tagged or labelled as terrorist by the United States. A pregnant woman was killed by the Taliban which provoked a protest by women. Afghanistan government are in dire need for aid

supply by W.H.O. All these and more is what the Taliban are and will be facing. The World is watching and expects the Taliban to run a government in favour of all and to also have friendly relations with the outside.

## **Conclusion**

The study while aimed at projecting the future of Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, also looked at some of the reasons why Russia and American so-called reconstruction missions in Afghanistan failed. We find that the U.S and Russia while going on the guises of protection of lives and prevention of terrorism, were merely serving their own states selfish interest. Their failure came on the ground that they failed to first understand the background politics, culture and history of the land they occupied. While America wanted to entrench democracy, there was no time it stopped to think if that was what the people really wanted. The U.S government forced Western democratic and technocratic models onto Afghan economic institutions. They trained security forces in advanced weapon system they could not understand or maintain, imposed formal rule of law on a country that address 80-90% of its dispute through informal means (SIGAR report, 2021).

The study also finds that historically speaking, once a rebel takes over power, it works hard to consolidate it. This has sparked the fear that the Taliban are likely to welcome back al-Qaeda back to Afghanistan- the very group the U.S was fighting to prevent the Taliban from providing a breeding ground for. There has also been growing concern if the Taliban will keep to their promise of running an inclusive government as the question of women inclusion and rights has once again been brought to bear. Only recently, women peacefully protesting in Kabul were beaten by the Taliban and the announcement of an interim government by the Taliban has not put a single female in power.

The recent happenings in Afghanistan put the Afghans in desperate need of aids. While aid workers and providers may be willing to help, the uncertainty that has followed the Taliban take over may mean that aid workers are even at more risk. This could lead to a humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.

## **Recommendations**

The following are the recommendations made by this research work:

1. That U.S and indeed other world powers must be more careful in deciding if a conflict is worth fighting, escalating and continuing.
2. That the U.S occupation of Afghanistan for the last 20 years has put the lives of many Afghans including women and children and also that of over 120,000 interpreters and their families who supported the allies at the risk of persecution by the Talibans. The U.S government must therefore provide asylum to them and help in their resettlement.
3. That countries of the world should be prudent when dealing with agitations and insurgencies in their territories and beyond to avoid another Taliban crisis.
4. That if at all it becomes necessary for an external intervention in another country, the intervening country must first fully understand the dynamic cultural, religious and political differences in the local nation and not try to impose a foreign model.

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