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## **The Return of the Taliban in Afghanistan a critical assessment**

# **The Return of the Taliban in Afghanistan: a critical assessment**

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## Introduction

Time is certainly a factor when it comes to assessing the return of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Not in the sense of the duration, but rather the political composition in which the Taliban captured power then and now. Twenty years back, the Taliban had with them the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, and the United States. All three came to help the Afghan *mujahedeen* against the Soviets, who had invaded Afghanistan to support the communist regime in 1979. The communists were able to exploit the situation to their favour following the instability that had resulted from the overthrow of the monarchy in 1973 under the leadership of the former prime minister Mohammad Daud Khan, incidentally a cousin of King Zahir Shah with anti-Soviet credentials. The communists came to power in April 1978 through a violent coup d'état, or what came to be known as the Saur Revolution under Nur Muhammad Taraki of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan. Taraki, however, was assassinated in September 1979, and the leadership went to Hafizullah Amin. But the situation in Afghanistan deteriorated so fast that the Soviets thought of fixing it to their favour by invading the country in December 1979. Following the invasion, Hafizullah Amin was killed, and the Soviets installed Babrak Karmal. And this created the grounds for the violent campaign against the Soviet Union, with the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan collectively supporting the *mujahedeen*. After nearly 10 years of war and the communist government in Kabul increasingly failing to defeat the *mujahedeen*, the Soviets withdrew in February 1989.

In the wake of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, three outcomes reshaped the country. Firstly, the rise of the Taliban. The latter emerged from the ranks of the *mujahideen*, following the Soviet withdrawal and the lawlessness that engulfed the country. Secondly, the Saudization or Wahhabization of Afghanistan, including making Osama bin Laden, Al Qaeda, ISIS, and other fundamentalist outfits, a formidable force in Afghanistan. And thirdly, creating grounds for the politics of singularity with little or no consideration to the tolerant version of Islam, which had been the defining character of Afghanistan in earlier times. In fact, anyone familiar with Rabindranath Tagore's *Kabuliwallah* or Syed Mujtaba Ali's *Deshe Bideshe* (*In a Land Far from Home*) would know how proud, brave, and belligerent the Afghans were, indeed, with an equal amount of simplicity, generosity, and kindness. In many ways, had there been no Soviet invasion, there probably would have been no Taliban!

The paper assesses the milieu in which the Taliban came to power in Afghanistan twenty years back, their return now, and the possible impact in the region and beyond, including Bangladesh. The objective of the paper is not to reach certainties but to invite meaningful discussions without prejudices.

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## **The rise and return of the Taliban**

There is a precise incident when it comes to the rise of the Taliban. The leadership of the Taliban, most of them having suffered an injury while fighting the Soviets, came from the Pushto-speaking villages. The bulk of the recruits also came from the Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan. But it was the lawlessness in Kandahar that brought fame to the Taliban when the latter delivered instant justice to rape victims by hanging a rapist – a local commander who had raped a boy and two women.<sup>1</sup> The reputation of the Taliban soon spread throughout the country for mitigating justice which the corruption-ridden judicial system of Kabul could not do so. And in the wake of the vacuum created by the Soviet exit and backed by the Saudis and Pakistanis, it did not take long for the Taliban to defeat the other internal aspirants, including the Tajik-led pro-American Northern Alliance, and capture power in 1996.

The relationship between the Taliban and the United States deteriorated from 1996 onwards on account of the former harboring Osama bin Laden, Al Qaeda, ISIS, and other militant fundamentalist forces in Afghanistan, and coupled with the factor of the Taliban destroying the Buddhist archaeological sites at Bamiyan, banning music and movies in public, enforcing rigid dress code and other measures against women and girls. Afghan tribal conservatism got infused with Wahhabism to create a violent form of patriarchy. This incidentally was also the period when anti-communism of the United States got replaced with Islamophobia and the task of battling the Muslim militants in various parts of the world. The ‘good Taliban’ became the ‘bad Taliban’ overnight! The 9/11 attack on the United States created grounds for the US intervention in Afghanistan, although no Afghans were

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Nancy, “Afghanistan: The End of the Occupation,” 17 August 2021, <https://annebonnypirate.org/2021/08/17/afghanistan-the-end-of-the-occupation/>. Accessed on 3 September 2021.

involved in the terror attack. The Taliban also requested evidence from the United States about bin Laden's complicity in the attack, even suggested handing him over to a third (neutral) country, but that too was rejected by the United States.<sup>2</sup> Instead, the US decided to bomb Afghanistan in October 2001, just a month after 9/11. Interestingly, reports are now circulating that after 9/11, the United States wanted to bomb a Muslim country, in fact, any Muslim country, to pacify the shock and resentment at home. Although most of the terrorists were from Saudi Arabia, the latter being a friendly country could not be attacked. The wrath, unfortunately, fell on Afghanistan, with Osama bin Laden, a single person, becoming the target of the United States' response to the 9/11 attack.

I cannot help reminding the readers here that one could find a parallel in the Bangladesh Government asking Canada to hand over one of the fugitive killers of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family members. However, Canada is reluctant to hand the person over to Bangladesh on account of the prevailing rules of Canada, which forbids returning such offenders to countries that have the death penalty.<sup>3</sup> In light of Afghan tradition and civilizational practices, the Taliban too could not hand over a 'guest' (here, Osama bin Laden) without sufficient evidence, which the United States refused to provide. As indicated earlier, the United States even disagreed with the Taliban proposal of sending bin Laden to a neutral third country. In the Canadian case, should Bangladesh wage war against Canada, or should it try to convince the Canadian government and its people that harbouring a condemned killer makes its own justice system hollow if not dictated by power? But then, Bangladesh is not a superpower! It seems that 'power' and more so, 'absolute power,' not only corrupts and 'corrupts absolutely,' but also 'demoralizes' humans, as Sophocles had argued when referring to the power of money in his play, *Antigone*.

The aerial bombing certainly terrified the Taliban, but only after an "informal settlement negotiated between the Americans and the Taliban" did the former enter

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<sup>2</sup> "Bush rejects Taliban offer to hand Bin Laden over," *The Guardian*, 14 October 2001. See, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/oct/14/afghanistan.terrorism5>. Accessed on 3 September 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Editorial, "Bring Bangabandhu's killers back: They must not go unpunished," *Bangladesh Post*, 16 August 2021. See, <https://www.bangladeshpost.net/posts/bring-bangabandhu-s-killers-back-66450>. Accessed on 11 September 2021. See also, UNB report, "Bangladesh wants USA, Canada to send back Bangabandhu's 2 killers," *Dhaka Tribune*, 23 August 2019. Cited from <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/foreign-affairs/2019/08/23/bangladesh-wants-usa-canada-to-send-back-bangabandhu-s-2-killers>. Accessed on 11 September 2021.

Kabul and install a government to their liking.<sup>4</sup> The Taliban quickly escaped and withdrew to the villages. In fact, among some Taliban, there were expectations that the arrival of the Americans would help the dismal economy of Afghanistan. In the beginning, things began to stabilize, and violence ceased considerably. But then, the United States, just like any other colonial force, started humiliating the Afghans not only by killing and injuring them wantonly but also by entering their houses in the name of capturing the Taliban terrorists. The aerial bombing, including drone attacks, made it even worse because when targeting a suspicious Taliban or terrorist hideout, the bombs also killed innocent people, including women and children. One cannot help recalling the poignant remark of Abdul Haq, an anti-Taliban Afghan leader, in the early days of US military action in Afghanistan, who sadly was later killed allegedly by the Kabul regime:

[The] US is trying to show its muscle, score a victory and scare everyone in the world. They don't care about the suffering of the Afghans or how many people we will lose. And we don't like that. Because Afghans are now being made to suffer for these Arab fanatics, but we all know who brought these Arabs to Afghanistan in the 1980s, armed them and gave them a base. It was the Americans and the CIA. And the Americans who did this all got medals and good careers, while all these years Afghans suffered from these Arabs and their allies. Now, when America is attacked, instead of punishing the Americans who did this, it punishes the Afghans.<sup>5</sup>

According to Brown University the number of people directly killed as a result of the US occupation of Afghanistan since 2001 is 174,516 (Appendix A: Table 1). The number of injuries also runs in thousands, and then there are those who have suffered 'invisible wounds.' One estimate compiled in 2009 suggests that "fully two-thirds of Afghans suffer from mental health problems."<sup>6</sup> The US-led offensives also destroyed homes and crops worth millions of dollars,<sup>7</sup> and displaced millions of people (Appendix A: Table 2). The loss of human lives and the destruction of

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<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Nancy, *op.cit.*

<sup>5</sup> Abdul Haq, "US bombs are boosting the Taliban," *The Guardian*, 2 November 2001. See, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/nov/02/afghanistan.terrorism9>. Accessed on 3 September 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Cited in Subash Jangala, "Taxes, taxmen and the Taliban," *My Voice*, 16 May 2021. See, <https://myvoice.opindia.com/2021/05/taxes-taxmen-and-the-taliban/>. Accessed on 11 September 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Jake Hussona, "The reverberating effects of explosive violence on agriculture in Afghanistan," *reliefweb*, 13 November 2019. See, <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/reverberating-effects-explosive-violence-agriculture-afghanistan>. Accessed on 3 September 2021.

the countryside created grounds for resistance, fusing the Taliban militancy with the anti-colonial insurgency.

But the question that one must raise here is, did the United States go to Afghanistan to defeat the Taliban and establish democracy there, or did it go there on a ‘feminist mission’ to save the women and girls there, or did it go there to reproduce the military-industrial complex? If it were for a ‘feminist mission’ it would certainly be worrying for the rest of the world, as Arundhati Roy so critically put it in her speech at the Lensic Performing Arts Center, Santa Fe, New Mexico, on 29 September 2002:

It’s being made out that the whole point of the war was to topple the Taliban regime and liberate Afghan women from their burqas, we are being asked to believe that the U.S. marines are actually on a feminist mission [laughter, applause]. (If so, will their next stop be America’s military ally Saudi Arabia?) [Laughter] Think of it this way: in India there are some pretty reprehensible social practices against “untouchables”, against Christians and Muslims, against women. Pakistan and Bangladesh have even worse ways of dealing with minority communities and women. Should they be bombed? Should Delhi, Islamabad and Dhaka be destroyed? Is it possible to bomb bigotry out of India? Can we bomb our way to a feminist paradise? [Laughter] Is that how women won the vote in the U.S? Or how slavery was abolished? Can we win redress for the genocide of the millions of Native Americans upon whose corpses the United States was founded by bombing Santa Fe? [Applause].<sup>8</sup>

But no less puzzling is the fact that the illicit production of opium has gone up during the US occupation of Afghanistan in the last twenty years (Appendix A: Table 3). Although the United States is on record of spending more than USD 8 billion over 15 years on efforts to deprive the Taliban of their profits from Afghanistan’s opium and heroin trade, it bore no results.<sup>9</sup> In fact, the Taliban had banned the farming of opium poppy in July 2000, which saw a serious drop in the production of opium poppy at the end of 2001 before the US-led invasion of Afghanistan. But interestingly, heroin made from opium grown in Afghanistan

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<sup>8</sup> Arundhati Roy, *Come September*. Cited from: <https://www.bisd303.org/cms/lib3/WA01001636/Centricity/Domain/616/comeSeptember.pdf>. Accessed on 10 September 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Landay, “Profits and poppy: Afghanistan’s illegal drug trade a boon for Taliban,” *Reuters*, 16 August 2021. See, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/profits-poppy-afghanistans-illegal-drug-trade-boon-taliban-2021-08-16/>. Accessed on 11 September 2021.

makes up 95% of the market in Europe!<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, the latter does not get flagged as much as it should. On the contrary, the incomes of the Taliban are accounted for in their relationship with Russia, Iran, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia. Still, hardly one mentions Afghanistan's illicit opium ending in Europe (Appendix A: Table 4). Are we to believe then that the production of opium poppy in Afghanistan has gone up during the US occupation so that the Taliban could profit from it, as it is alleged by the US military, by selling the illicit drug to Europe? Bizarre this may sound, but that is precisely what is being fed to the world by the governmental agencies of the United States. Or, did the latter profit from it simultaneously and meet a part of the cost of the war?<sup>11</sup> It is worth pointing out here that after returning to power, the Taliban government has already told farmers to stop cultivating opium poppies.<sup>12</sup>

However, more credible answer to the US invasion of Afghanistan lies elsewhere. Dwight D. Eisenhower, the 34<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, in his farewell speech at the end of his presidency in 1961, warned the Americans about the "grave implications" of the military-industrial complex.<sup>13</sup> The Afghan war itself was illegal under international law, yet the military-industrial complex profited from it immensely. According to a Brown University calculation, the United States spent USD 2.26 trillion in Afghanistan, or USD 300 million per day for twenty years, which could be translated as USD 50,000 for each of Afghan's 40 million people (Appendix A: Table 5 and Figure 1).<sup>14</sup> However, most of the profits went to Boeing, Raytheon, Lockheed Martin, General Dynamics, Northrop Grumman Corporation,

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<sup>10</sup> Reality Check Team, "Afghanistan: How much opium is produced and what's the Taliban's record?" *BBC News*, 25 August 2021. See, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-58308494>. Accessed on 11 September 2021.

<sup>11</sup> A report of the US Government in 2007 suggested of making opium production in Afghanistan licit. See, John A. Glaze, *Opium and Afghanistan: Reassessing U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy*, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, October 2007. See, [https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/46869/1007\\_OpiumAfghan.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/46869/1007_OpiumAfghan.pdf). Accessed on 11 September 2021.

<sup>12</sup> Sune Engel Rasmussen, Zamir Saar, and James Marson, "Taliban Move to Ban Opium Production in Afghanistan," *The Wall Street Journal*, 28 August 2021. See, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/taliban-afghanistan-heroin-ban-opium-production-11630181316>. Accessed on 11 September 2021.

<sup>13</sup> See, Transcript of President Dwight D. Eisenhower's Farewell Address (1961), <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=90&page=transcript>. Accessed on 3 September 2021.

<sup>14</sup> FP Staff, "So who won Afghanistan war? America's boots on ground didn't but it's the suits who made a killing," *Firstpost*, 20 August 2021. See, <https://www.firstpost.com/world/so-who-won-the-afghanistan-war-americas-boots-on-the-ground-didnt-but-its-the-suits-who-made-a-killing-9900441.html>. Accessed on 3 September 2021.

and big corporations such as DynCorp International, KBR, and Fluor Corporation,<sup>15</sup> all supplying weapons or logistical materials needed to fight a war (Appendix A: Tables 6 and 7). Brown University further calculates and “projects that the cost of interest on the United States’ Afghan war debt will go up to USD 6.5 trillion by 2050. And that will pinch the average American since that translates to USD 20,000 for each and every US citizen.”<sup>16</sup> If anything, this is what had led Donald Trump to conclude that the Afghan war was not only futile but also a drain to the US economy, particularly when so much work has to be done at home if the United States wants to keep its global economic position intact.

This is where the rise of the Taliban twenty years back differs from its return now. In fact, twenty years back, as indicated earlier, the Taliban emerged from the ranks of the *mujahedeen* under the direct sponsorship of the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan, all collectively finding pan-Islamism and support of the ‘Islamic forces’ from all around the world to the cause of the Taliban useful in their campaign against Soviet communism. But once the Soviets were out, the Taliban, even pan-Islamism, became a spent force, soon to be used as an excuse for waging war and occupying Afghanistan for not delivering, as indicated earlier, a single person in the name of Osama bin Laden. However, this time the matter is different. Whereas the Taliban rose to power twenty years back following the exit of the Soviet Union and with the aid of the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan, but this time their return came in the wake of the defeat of the United States and its allies, which the Taliban did almost single-handedly. No big powers were there to support them. Even the support of Pakistan, if it were, could not have gone beyond certain localities at the border as it would have invited the wrath of the United States, whose friendship the Pakistani elite, including its military, has always vied for.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

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## The Doha peace process: United States and the Taliban

The Doha peace process was a turning point; it started in July 2018 and concluded with an agreement between the United States and the Taliban on 29 February 2020 (Appendix B). The agreement was exceptional in many ways. Firstly, it was an agreement between the United States and, as indicated in the document, “the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban.”<sup>17</sup> This is unique, a state signing an agreement with a non-state and an erstwhile ‘terrorist’ entity. Secondly, Russia, China, and Pakistan were also part of the peace process. They all agreed to the agreement, which, as per the agreement, was unanimously endorsed by the UN Security Council on 10 March 2020.<sup>18</sup> Pakistan also regained its position in Afghan affairs, particularly for freeing Abdul Ghani Baradar, the co-founder of the Taliban and the key negotiator at Doha, from the prison at the United States' request. This proved vital in bringing the peace talks at Doha to a credible conclusion. Thirdly, the incumbent Afghan government of Ashraf Ghani was not included in the peace process, with the Taliban refusing to sit with them as they were referred to as ‘puppets’ of the US government. The Taliban’s position had some merit, particularly in the wake of the presidential election in Afghanistan in 2018. In fact, in a country with 31.6 million people, only 9.7 million were registered voters. But more importantly, only 1.8 million voted in the September 2018 presidential election,<sup>19</sup> and that again, in the midst of violence and irregularities, including “ballot stuffing.”<sup>20</sup> In many ways, Ghani did not have the

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<sup>17</sup> *Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban and the United States of America*, 29 February 2020. See, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Agreement-For-Bringing-Peace-to-Afghanistan-02.29.20.pdf>. Accessed on 3 September 2021.

<sup>18</sup> United Nations, “Security Council resolution endorses moves towards long-sought Afghanistan peace,” *UN News*, 10 March 2020. See, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/03/1059161>. Accessed on 3 September 2021.

<sup>19</sup> Hamid Shalizi and Abdul Qadir Sediqi, “Afghanistan’s Ghani claims narrow win in preliminary presidential vote results,” *Reuters*, 22 December 2019. See, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-election-idUSKBN1YQ054>. Accessed on 3 September 2021.

<sup>20</sup> Alexander Tuerk, “Afghan Polls Close As Voters Face Taliban Threats,” *NPR*, 28 September 2019. See, <https://www.npr.org/2019/09/28/765380352/afghan-polls-close-as-voters-face-taliban-threats>. Accessed on 3 September 2021. See also, Mujib Mashal, Fahim Abed and Fatima Faizi, “Afghanistan Election Draws Low Turnout Amid Taliban Threats,” *The New York Times*, 28

moral authority to govern Afghanistan, and the Taliban were confident that the bulk of the Afghans, if not all, were already with them.

This proved correct when the United States started withdrawing from Afghanistan, abandoning a huge quantity of military hardware (Figure 2), including its prize Bagram Air Base late at night on 15 August 2021, literally without informing the incumbent Afghan government of Ashraf Ghani. The Taliban then captured one city after another without any resistance. The 300,000 strong Afghan armies, raised by the United States, surrendered to the Taliban without fighting. So desperate were the members of the Afghan Army to remove their military attires and vanish into the crowd that the Taliban had to take control of the capital city of Kabul unprepared almost two weeks before the agreed deadline. Ashraf Ghani secretly fled the country and took refuge in the United Arab Emirates after crisscrossing a country or two. The United States, on its part, indeed, with the consent of the Taliban, took control of the Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul and made a mess of it when trying to control thousands of Afghans who wanted to flee the country for security or economic reasons. A part of the mess could have been deliberate, mainly to capture global media attention and draw sympathy for the US military trying to help the ‘fearful’ Afghans desperate to flee and live a life in the West. In the end, the messy situation at the airport saw a suicide bomb attack, claimed by the Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP), which killed at least 175 people, including 13 US soldiers.<sup>21</sup> However, the US reaction to the suicide attack was equally horrendous and painful when a drone attack launched against the ISKP suicide bombers killed 10 Afghans from the same family with 4 members between the age of 2 and 4.<sup>22</sup> There is no doubt that when reminiscing the

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September 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/28/world/asia/afghanistan-president-election-taliban.html>. Accessed on 3 September 2021.

<sup>21</sup> Mersiha Gadzo and Farah Najar, “US says drone strike foiled another Kabul airport attack,” *Aljazeera News*, 29 August 2021. See, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/8/29/kabul-airlift-enters-final-phase-us-warns-of-more-attacks-live>. Accessed on 3 September 2021.

<sup>22</sup> Sandi Sidhu, Nick Paton Walsh, Tim Lister, Oren Liebermann, Laura Smith-Spark and Saskya Vandoorne, “Ten family members, including children, dead after US strike in Kabul,” *CNN*, 31 August 2021. See, <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/08/29/asia/afghanistan-kabul-evacuation-intl/index.html>. Accessed on 3 September 2021. See also, Alex Horton, Dalton Bennet, Joyce Sohyun Lee, Meg Kelly and Elyse Samuels, “Examining a ‘righteous’ strike: Analysis of the deadly U.S. drone strike’s aftermath in Kabul suggests no evidence of explosives in targeted vehicle,” *The Washington Post*, 10 September 2021. Cited in <https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#inbox/FMfcgzGjlnSgPTsSmKBhHfqmsdjRvKq>. Accessed on 11 September 2021.

closing days of the United States' exit from Afghanistan, many would remember the ISKP and the United States for committing crimes against humanity!<sup>23</sup>

But the drone attack signified something else. One is the form of warfare in the making and the power of the military-industrial complex. Two, making the Taliban attentive to the fact that the exit of the United States from Afghanistan can create grounds for its reentry in another form if and whenever required. Three, and more importantly, it is not easy for anyone, less so for a superpower, to digest humiliation. A display of unrestrained power is therefore required to tame the ego of the American people, particularly those who are reluctant to give up or see a change in the current status of the United States in the world. This would imply that the quick stability of Afghanistan is out of the question. In fact, any such stability in Afghanistan under the Taliban would create more criticisms in the United States and would doom the prospect of the ruling party, unfortunately, the democrats, returning to power in the legislative and executive branches of the government. Put differently, the challenge for the Taliban would be to reproduce stability in the midst of US hostility, which could extend from the latter freezing the bank assets of Afghanistan to putting sanctions of all kinds and creating space for the anti-Taliban forces to operate in the name of saving the country.<sup>24</sup>

However, a different turn of events could transform the post-withdrawal US-Afghan relations into something softer and accommodative, and this would include, one, the people of the United States rising to the occasion and forcing the military-industrial complex to stop profiting from wars and conflicts; and two, the United States shifting to another conflict zone and wiping away from its memory the Afghan debacle as it has done with the Vietnam War. The former borders on idealism, while the latter goes by the name of realism. But in the end, to keep both sides happy, it could be a combination of both!

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<sup>23</sup> See, Shereena Qazi, "Afghans demand justice amid attempt to probe war crimes at ICC," *Aljazeera*, 4 December 2019. See, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/12/4/afghans-demand-justice-amid-attempt-to-probe-war-crimes-at-icc>. Accessed on 11 September 2021.

<sup>24</sup> "US freezes nearly \$9.5 billion Afghanistan central bank assets: Report," *Business Standard*, 19 August 2021. See, [https://www.business-standard.com/article/international/us-freezes-nearly-9-5-billion-afghanistan-central-bank-assets-report-121081900034\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/international/us-freezes-nearly-9-5-billion-afghanistan-central-bank-assets-report-121081900034_1.html). Accessed on 3 September 2021.

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## Pakistan

Can the immediate neighbours make a difference to the return of the Taliban? Pakistan comes immediately to the mind not because of its 2,640 km border with Afghanistan but rather because of the blame it had to share in the birth of the Taliban. There is certainly an element of truth in this. The visible factors were the *maktab* (Muslim elementary school) in the refugee camps in Pakistan, whose teachings were heavily infected with the Salafi or Wahhabi understanding of Islam, often at the behest of the ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence of the Pakistan military) interlocutors. But the latter were equally infected with directives from Saudi Arabia and the United States in their collective effort to eradicate Soviet communism in Afghanistan. In fact, the United States, to obtain cheap oil and contain communism, supported Saudi Arabia and soon became complicit in the latter's advocacy of Wahhabism around the world. Pakistan readily joined the 'believers' against the anti-God Soviets without realising that what you reap is what you sow! In the last twenty years and even earlier, Pakistan suffered from the conflict and war in Afghanistan. One estimate indicates that the semi-covert campaign of drone strikes of the United States, which began in 2004, against Al Qaeda and Taliban forces based in northern Pakistan killed as many as 56,661 Pakistanis, including 23,300 civilians.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, more than 2.7 million Afghans fled the country and started living worldwide, including 1.4 million in refugee camps in Pakistan (Appendix A: Table 8).<sup>26</sup> Given the costs of war that Pakistan had to bear, it is likely, although not certain, that it would refrain from activities that could destabilize the area and create further problems for her. Instead, Pakistan would seek stability in Afghanistan, which is probably why it was so forthcoming in making the Doha peace process successful. There is, of course, the issue of the military in Pakistan, which equally profits from national and regional conflicts and animosities. How much the people and politicians of Pakistan would be able to keep the military confined to its barracks remains a scenario to be seen.

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<sup>25</sup> See, <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/costs/human/civilians/pakistani>. Accessed on 3 September 2021.

<sup>26</sup> "Where do Afghanistan's Refugees Go?" *The Conversation*, 23 August 2021. See, <https://theconversation.com/where-do-afghanistans-refugees-go-166316>. Accessed on 3 September 2021.

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## India

India's Afghan policy has largely been Pakistan-centric, and there lies its weakness. Building a relationship, even an association, with people or a country on a negative premise is always a bad idea. This is a truism in diplomacy which the policymakers, largely for being ideological and holding *apriori* notions of things, often end up forgetting. In fact, in the last twenty years, India, by keeping its faith in the power of the United States and the puppet regime in Kabul, had put all its eggs in one basket. This again runs contrary to the teaching of diplomacy found in all classical manuals, from Sun Tzu to Chanakya Kautilya. The consequence could not be anything better. The return of the Taliban saw the Indian officials hurriedly closing down their mission in Kabul and the consulate offices in Kandahar, Mazar-i-Sharif, Jalalabad, and Herat.

Two things remain puzzling, though. Firstly, the Indian missions in Afghanistan were targeted several times by the suicide bombers – 2008, 2009, and again in 2014. Yet, it never abandoned its offices, nor did the Indian Ambassador in Kabul flee the country with his staff. But this time, it did, possibly thinking beforehand that the Taliban could never be trusted, particularly with Pakistan to its side. What led India to such a fearful position, despite the assurance of the Taliban to the diplomatic community that no harm would come to them and that the Taliban would provide security to them? Obviously, India did not have any credible communication channels with the Taliban. This brings me to the second puzzle.

The United States and the Taliban signed the Doha peace agreement in February 2020, and then the UN Security Council, as indicated earlier, unanimously endorsed it in March 2020. What was India doing all this time? Was it waiting for the US election, and the possibility of having the Doha agreement cancelled after the election is over either by Donald Trump if he returns to power or by the new administration of Joe Biden, who had a track record of fighting the "war on terror"? After all, Biden was one of 77 senators who gave President George W. Bush the authority to use force in Iraq!<sup>27</sup> Nothing less than having too much faith in the United States' "war on terror" and the ideological proclivity of the party-in-power could explain the current setback of India's policy in Afghanistan. But India's

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<sup>27</sup> Katie Glueck and Thomas Kaplan, "Joe Biden's Vote for War," *The New York Times*, 12 January 2020. See, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/12/us/politics/joe-biden-iraq-war.html>. Accessed on 4 September 2021.

efficient diplomats will certainly try to correct the setback sooner than later, indeed, to keep its investment of USD 3 billion in Afghanistan intact.<sup>28</sup> There are already signs of this, with the Indian diplomat holding his first formal meeting with the Taliban in Doha on 31 August 2021.<sup>29</sup> Probably this is the best time to quote Bill Clinton's 1992 catchphrase: "It's the economy, stupid!" The onus also lies with the Taliban as to how best to use India's investment in Afghanistan. But with some of the Taliban members graduating from the Indian Military Academy in Dehradun,<sup>30</sup> the political acumen of India, if recovered and put into use, could make a difference to its relationship with Afghanistan in the not-so-distant future.

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## Russia

The exit of the United States and the return of the Taliban recreated geopolitics in the region in favour of Russia and China. However, much would depend on how stable Afghanistan will be under the Taliban. Russia has much to rejoice, mainly because it failed to keep Afghanistan within its sphere of influence earlier and the humiliation it suffered at the hands of the Taliban, and now the United States is equally humiliated, so Russia does not have to carry the burden and the blame of the erstwhile Soviet Union forever. But the rejoicing is more because the exit of the United States has created an opportunity for Russia to redesign its relationship with Afghanistan for the benefit of both. And having had the experience of dealing with other 'post-modernist' Islamic countries, particularly Iran,<sup>31</sup> in recent times, Russia feels better equipped to deal with the Taliban this time than it had done twenty years back.

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<sup>28</sup> Anjani Trivedi, "Will India's investments in Afghanistan amount to anything?" *Mint*, 30 August 2021. See, <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/will-india-s-investments-in-afghanistan-amount-to-anything-11630281437354.html>. Accessed on 4 September 2021.

<sup>29</sup> Elizabeth Roche, "Indian diplomat holds meeting with Taliban's No 2 negotiator in Doha," *Mint*, 1 September 2021. See, <https://www.livemint.com/news/world/indian-ambassador-to-qatar-meets-senior-taliban-leader-in-doha-11630411906474.html>. Accessed on 4 September 2021.

<sup>30</sup> Lt Gen Zameer Uddin Shah, "India trained Afghan forces who joined Taliban govt. They can now be our ambassadors," *The Print*, 19 August 2021. See, <https://theprint.in/opinion/india-trained-afghan-forces-who-joined-taliban-govt-they-can-now-be-our-ambassadors/718182/>. Accessed on 4 September 2021.

<sup>31</sup> As Michel Foucault had claimed about the Islamic revolution in Iran. See, Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi, *Foucault in Iran: Islamic Revolution after the Enlightenment* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016). See also, Janet Afary and Kevin B Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005).

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## China

In the last twenty years, China has also transformed economically and in dealing with the world. In fact, the exit of the United States from Afghanistan comes when the United States is engaged in restricting the re-rise of China as an economic power. I say “re-rise” because, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, China was the largest economy in the world. It lost out two centuries, but the ingenuity of Deng Xiaoping during his leadership (1978-1989) allowed China to make good use of Chinese dialectics and reproduce a unique system of the political economy called *capicomunism*.<sup>32</sup> China otherwise can live with contradictions and finds it unnecessary, even hegemonic, to reproduce societies in the image of an outside power. China certainly is no longer in the business of exporting communism. This would please the Taliban as it requires China’s support for its infrastructural development, which China would be ready to provide once it is assured that its 91-km long border with Afghanistan, the Wakhan Corridor, would not be a cause of concern, particularly in the wake of West’s criticism of China’s alleged treatment of its ethnic Muslim Uygur population across the border. Again, the onus lies with the Taliban if they want to make good use of the Wakhan Corridor and revive the age-old Silk Road to its benefit. But then, given the current US-China contestations, how the United States and its allies would look upon this geopolitical configuration in favour of China remains a point of concern.

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## Iran and Saudi Arabia

The return of the Taliban is likely to favour Iran geopolitically, more so if the latter could forge a profitable relationship of trade and investment with its immediate neighbour to the east. This would be a headache for the United States and its allies, particularly Israel since they already feel threatened by the Shia Crescent.<sup>33</sup> At the same time, Iran could be a model for the Taliban when it comes to nurturing a socio-political system, including confronting the much-abused gender relationship, something that got derailed twenty years back when the militant Wahhabis under

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<sup>32</sup> Loretta Napoleoni, *Maonomics* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2011).

<sup>33</sup> Steven Bucci, “The Shia crescent is still America’s biggest Middle East challenge,” *Alarabiya News*, 13 March 2020. See, <https://english.alarabiya.net/views/news/middle-east/2020/03/13/The-Shia-Crescent-is-still-America-s-biggest-Middle-East-challenge>. Accessed on 4 September 2021.

the leadership of Osama bin Laden befriended the Taliban to promote their own version of *jihad* globally. Led by Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, Saudi Arabia is also now different from twenty years back. With its education curriculum changing, women driving and joining the workforce in greater numbers, and the entertainment sector ready for the public for fun and jobs,<sup>34</sup> Saudi Arabia is now relatively more tolerant than ever. This is bound to influence the Taliban in a manner qualitatively different from the influence the Saudis had twenty years back.

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## Bangladesh

What about Bangladesh? Distance and government policies have made a difference to Bangladesh's relationship with Afghanistan for decades. However, one must quickly add that the Afghans had an extraordinary relationship with the people of Bengal and Bangladesh for centuries. The reverse is less the case, although some Bangladeshis fondly remember the hospitality of the Afghans when they took refuge in Afghanistan after crossing the border from Pakistan in 1971. But with no major business transactions, in fact, the volume of bilateral trade between the two countries figured only USD 15.4 million in FY 2020. With Bangladesh importing more than exporting, there are fewer incentives in deepening the relationship.<sup>35</sup> Again, Bangladesh's exports to Afghanistan remain limited mainly to pharmaceutical and vegetable products, which figured only USD 8.64 million in FY 2021, while Bangladesh imported USD 9.27 million worth of goods from Afghanistan, mainly minerals and chemical products in FY 2020.<sup>36</sup>

But with the Soviet invasion, Afghanistan did become a major issue in Bangladesh, interestingly not so much for the governmental response to the invasion. In fact, there was hardly any,<sup>37</sup> but more for the response of a handful of pro-

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<sup>34</sup> BBC News, "Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, power behind the throne," 6 October 2020. See, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-40354415>. Accessed on 4 September 2021.

<sup>35</sup> Reyad Hossain and Mohsin Bhuiyan, "Trade with Afghanistan might grow further if situation normalises," *The Business Standard*, 17 August 2021. See, <https://www.tbsnews.net/economy/trade-afghanistan-might-grow-further-if-situation-normalises-289759>. Accessed on 4 September 2021.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Even as late as 2010 when the United States requested Bangladesh to send combat troops to Afghanistan to fight the Taliban, the Government of Bangladesh politely declined. See, "Bangladesh

*mujahideen* supporters who joined the anti-Soviet war following calls from Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and the United States to resist communism in Afghanistan. After the Soviet withdrawal and the Taliban taking over Afghanistan, the so-called ‘war veterans’ returned home from Afghanistan and started a violent campaign under the banner of HUKU (Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami of Bangladesh) with its slogan “*Amra Sobai Hobo Taliban. Bangla Hobe Afghanistan*” (We all will become Taliban and Bangla will become Afghanistan).<sup>38</sup> But then, when it comes to terrorism, one must note that without the state's complicity, no major terrorist operation is possible. Such complicity often includes groups and personalities within the government championing the cause of terrorism either by remaining quiet and tolerating the outfit or by encouraging the members with words and activities. In fact, twenty years back, one can hardly deny the state's complicity in some of the terrorist incidents.

This scenario of state complicity has changed completely, particularly after the Holey Artisan terror attack on 1 July 2016. There is now zero tolerance for terrorism, with several institutions dedicated to countering and preventing terrorism and violent extremism in Bangladesh. Indeed, because of this, any suggestion that the return of the Taliban in Afghanistan would harm Bangladesh can be discarded because it has no basis. In fact, no evidence was provided when the Dhaka Police Commissioner (DPC) told the media that some Bangladeshis have left for Kabul to offer services to the Taliban regime for ‘nation building’ and were detained in India.<sup>39</sup> This is an interesting case because the DPC, as part of the local civil policing, does not have the mandate to divulge confidential reports, if any, on Bangladesh’s terrorism beyond borders, yet his statement created media sensationalism both at home and abroad. But more importantly, no Bangladeshis left for Afghanistan in the last twenty years when the Taliban were in a dire situation and needed them the most. Why would they go now when the Taliban gave no invitation to them? One can only hope that the state officials and the media would be more responsible and evidence-driven. Anything less would create a

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would not send troops to Afghanistan: Hasina,” *The Indian Express*, 3 October 2010. Cited from, <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/bangladesh-would-not-send-troops-to-afghanistan-hasina/691866/>. Accessed on 5 September 2021.

<sup>38</sup> B. Raman, “We All Will Become Taliban...,” *Outlook*, 9 December 2002. See, <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/we-all-will-become-taliban/218257>. Accessed on 5 September 2021.

<sup>39</sup> Faisal Mahmud, “Bangladesh on high alert for its citizens illegally ‘entering’ Afghanistan,” *TRTWORLD*, 1 September 2021. See, <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/bangladesh-on-high-alert-for-its-citizens-illegally-entering-afghanistan-49597>. Accessed on 5 September 2021.

negative image of Bangladesh and discourage entrepreneurs, both local and international, from investing in Bangladesh. However, this does not imply that Bangladesh can lower its guard on terrorism. In fact, given the nature of contemporary terrorism, no country can do that. But there is no point in raising false alarms, particularly when such alarms create a negative image of Bangladesh and hurt the economy.

Bangladesh now has to wait and see what kind of government is formed in Afghanistan, how the immediate neighbours respond to it, also how the rest of the world responds to it. Then it can decide the nature of its relationship with a Taliban-led government in Afghanistan. In fact, Bangladesh is relatively in an advantageous position because, unlike some countries in the region, there is no compulsion for it to take a hurried decision. But at the same time, if the Taliban can deliver on its promise and create a stable government, Bangladesh, in light of its record of non-interference and mutual respect, can gain the most by developing a strong relationship of trade and investment and human development.

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## Concluding thoughts

Finally, one cannot escape from raising very pertinent questions: Has the Taliban really changed? Can they be trusted? Will they refrain from committing terrorism and violence against women? The easiest answer would be: yes and no! The leadership will certainly be more cautious, but there is no guarantee that the rank and file would follow the guidelines coming from the top. There are signs, though, particularly the way the Taliban conducted the negotiations with different countries and the briefings made in public, that things have changed for the Taliban. But then, economic hardship and international politicking could make the leadership more insular and fearful, and out of fear, as Ibn Rushd, the 12th-century Andalusian scholar, would say, intolerance and violence could erupt. There is no denying the fact that the reality in the last twenty years has changed. However, the problem lies not so much with the changing reality but with the mindset, which is difficult to nurture and change overnight. And that is where the fear lies, but it is also the reason why greater attention ought to be given to the Taliban schooling of tolerance and respect. The opportunity is there, but the question remains will the people of Afghanistan have the space to practice it? One can only hope and recollect Michel Foucault's insightful observation during the early days of the Iranian Revolution, which in many ways remains equally valid for the defeat of the United States and its western allies and the return of the Taliban in Afghanistan:

There are more ideas on earth than intellectuals imagine. And these ideas are more active, stronger, more resistant, more passionate than "politicians" think. We have to be there at the birth of ideas, the bursting outward of their force: not in books expressing them, but in events manifesting this force, in struggles carried on around ideas, for or against them. Ideas do not rule the world. But it is because the world has ideas (and because it constantly produces them) that it is not passively ruled by those who are its leaders or those who would like to teach it, once and for all, what it must think.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Foucault wrote this in *Corriere della sera* in November 1978. Cited from, Janet Afary and Kevin B Anderson, *op.cit.*, p. 3.

## Appendix A

**Table 1**  
**Human Cost (estimated direct war deaths) of Afghanistan War 2001-2021**

U.S. military	2,324
U.S. DOD Civilian	6
Other allied troops	1,144
National military and police	69,095
Opposition fighters	51,191
U.S. contractors	3,917
Civilians	46,319
Journalists and media workers	74
Humanitarian/NGO workers	446
Total	174,516

Source: Costs of War, Brown University, 2021

**Table 2**  
**Displacement caused by the Afghanistan War (as of 2020)**

Type	Numbers in million
Refugees and Asylum Seekers	2.6
Internally Displaced Persons	3.5
Total	6.1

Source: UNHCR

**Table 3**  
**Potential opium production in Afghanistan, 1994-2020**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Opium Production (In tons)</b>
1994	3,450
1995	2,306
1996	2,248
1997	2,804
1998	2,683
1999	4,505
2000	3,176
2001	200
2002	3,400
2003	3,600
2004	4,200
2005	4,150
2006	5,300
2007	7,400
2008	5,800
2009	4,000
2010	3,500
2011	5,800
2012	3,700
2013	5,500
2014	6,400
2015	3,300

2016	4,800
2017	9,000
2018	6,400
2019	N/A
2020	6,300

Source: UNODC

**Table 4**  
**Major income sources of the Taliban's**

<b>Source</b>	<b>\$ In Millions</b>
Drugs	416
Mining	400-464
Extortion and taxes	160
Charitable donations	240
Exports	240
Real estate	80
Specific countries	Russia, Iran, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia

Source: The Conversation, 2020

**Table 5**  
**US Expenditure in Afghanistan; Department of Defense and State  
Department Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) Appropriations for  
Afghanistan, Fiscal Year (2001-2021) and Fiscal Year 2022 Request**

<b>Year</b>	<b>\$ In Billions</b>
2001	9
2002	14
2003	17.6
2004	15.2
2005	20.9

2006	18.8
2007	31.4
2008	38.8
2009	57.2
2010	107
2011	119
2012	110
2013	83.7
2014	88.1
2015	57.8
2016	52.1
2017	58.6
2018	57.5
2019	47.8
2020	49
2021	37.1
2022	22.9

Source: Costs of War, Brown University, 2021

**Table 6**  
**Top 5 US companies profited the most from the Afghanistan war**

Company Name	Total Return in Percent	Annualized Return in Percent	\$10,000 2001 stock purchase in 2021	Notable Board Members
Boeing	974.97	12.67	\$107,588.47	Edmund P. Giambastiani Jr. (former vice chair, Joint Chiefs of Staff), Stayce D. Harris (former inspector general, Air Force), John M. Richardson (former navy chief of Naval Operations).
Raytheon	331.49	7.62	\$43,166.92	Ellen Pawlikowski (retired Air Force general), James Winnefeld Jr. (retired Navy admiral), Robert Work (former deputy secretary of defense).
Lockheed Martin	1,235.60	13.90	\$133,559.21	Bruce Carlson (retired Air Force general), Joseph Dunford Jr. (retired Marine Corps general).
General Dynamics	625.37	10.46	\$72,515.58	Rudy DeLeon (former deputy secretary of defense), Cecil Haney (retired Navy admiral), James Mattis (former secretary of defense and former Marine Corps general), Peter Wall (retired British general).
Northrop Grumman	1,196.14	13.73	\$129,644.84	Gary Roughead (retired Navy admiral), Mark Welsh III (retired Air Force general).

Source: The Intercept, 2021

**Table 7**  
**List of 20 companies profiting the most from the Afghan War**

Rank	Name of the Company	Country	Arms Sales in Billion	Total Sales in Billion	Profit in Billion	Number of Employees
1	Lockheed Martin Corp	United States	\$44.9	\$51.0	\$2.0	105,000
2	Boeing	United States	\$26.9	\$93.4	\$8.2	153,000
3	Raytheon	United States	\$23.9	\$25.3	\$2.0	67,000
4	BAE Systems	United Kingdom	\$22.9	\$23.5	\$1.1	83,200
5	Northrop Grumman Corp	United States	\$22.4	\$25.8	\$2.0	85,000
6	General Dynamics Corp	United States	\$19.5	\$31.0	\$2.9	105,600
7	Airbus Group	Trans-European	\$11.3	\$75.2	\$3.3	133,671
8	Thales	France	\$9.0	\$17.8	\$931.1	65,000
9	Leonardo	Italy	\$8.9	\$13.0	\$310.3	45,134
10	Almaz-Antey	Russia	\$8.6	\$9.1	\$422.6	129,000
11	United Technologies Corp	United States	\$7.8	\$59.8	\$4.9	240,000
12	L-3 Technologies	United States	\$7.8	\$9.8	\$693.0	31,000
13	Huntington Ingalls Industries	United States	\$6.5	\$7.4	\$479.0	38,000
14	United Aircraft Corp	Russia	\$6.4	\$7.7	\$325.3	98,000
15	United Shipbuilding Corp	Russia	\$5.0	\$5.6	\$101.0	80,000
16	Honeywell International	United States	\$4.5	\$40.5	\$1.7	114,000
17	Rolls-Royce	United Kingdom	\$4.4	\$19.3	\$5.3	50,000

18	Leidos	United States	\$4.4	\$10.2	\$242.0	31,000
19	Naval Group	France	\$4.1	\$4.2	\$36.5	13,429
20	Textron	United States	\$4.1	\$14.2	\$1.2	35,000

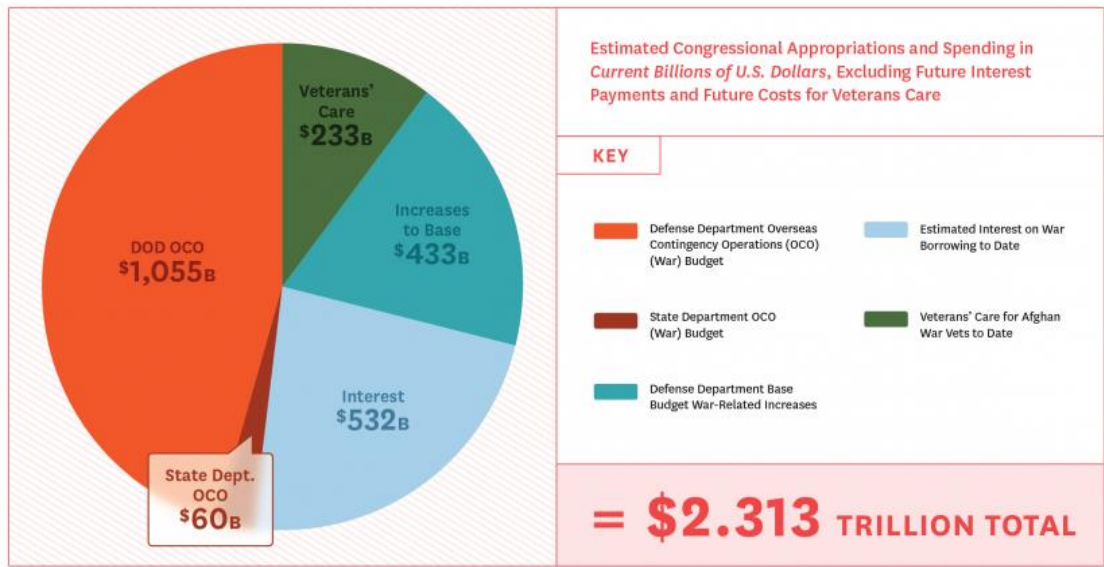
Source: USA Today, 2019

**Table 8**  
**Major destination countries for the Afghan refugees and asylum seekers**

Country	Number of Person
Pakistan	1,450,000
Iran	7,80,000
Germany	181,100
Turkey	129,300
Austria	46,600
France	45,100
Greece	41,200
Sweden	31,300
Switzerland	15,400
India	15,100
Italy	13,400
UK	12,600
Australia	12,400
Belgium	8,900
Indonesia	7,600











Source: UNHCR data, 2020

**Figure 1**  
**U.S. Costs to Date for the War in Afghanistan, in \$ Billions FY2001-FY2022**



Source: Costs of War, Brown University, 2021

**Figure 2**  
**Military hardware left in Afghanistan**

<p><b>Humvee (x 3,012)</b></p> 	<p><b>Mi-17 (x 32)</b>            Transport and gunship helicopter</p> 
<p><b>C-130 Hercules (x 3)</b>            Transport plane</p> 	<p><b>MD-530 (x 43)</b>            Light helicopter</p> 
<p><b>UH-60 Blackhawk (x 33)</b></p> 	<p><b>A-29 (x 23)</b>            Light attack plane</p> 
<p><b>Grenades (x 20,040)</b></p> 	<p><b>AC-208 (x 10)</b>            Light counter-insurgency plane</p> 
<p><b>Machine guns (x 7,035)</b></p> 	<p><b>Grenade Launchers (x 1,394)</b></p> 

Source: Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR)

## **Appendix B**

### **The Doha Agreement**

Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan  
between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the  
United States  
as a state and is known as the Taliban and the United States of America

February 29, 2020  
which corresponds to Rajab 5, 1441 on the Hijri Lunar calendar  
and Hoot 10, 1398 on the Hijri Solar calendar

A comprehensive peace agreement is made of four parts:

1. Guarantees and enforcement mechanisms that will prevent the use of the soil of Afghanistan by any group or individual against the security of the United States and its allies.
2. Guarantees, enforcement mechanisms, and announcement of a timeline for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Afghanistan.
3. After the announcement of guarantees for a complete withdrawal of foreign forces and timeline in the presence of international witnesses, and guarantees and the announcement in the presence of international witnesses that Afghan soil will not be used against the security of the United States and its allies, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban will start intra-Afghan negotiations with Afghan sides on March 10, 2020, which corresponds to Rajab 15, 1441 on the Hijri Lunar calendar and Hoot 20, 1398 on the Hijri Solar calendar.
4. A permanent and comprehensive ceasefire will be an item on the agenda of the intra-Afghan dialogue and negotiations. The participants of intra-Afghan negotiations will discuss the date and modalities of a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire, including joint implementation mechanisms, which will be announced

along with the completion and agreement over the future political roadmap of Afghanistan.

The four parts above are interrelated and each will be implemented in accordance with its own agreed timeline and agreed terms. Agreement on the first two parts paves the way for the last two parts.

Following is the text of the agreement for the implementation of parts one and two of the above. Both sides agree that these two parts are interconnected. The obligations of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban in this agreement apply in areas under their control until the formation of the new post-settlement Afghan Islamic government as determined by the intra-Afghan dialogue and negotiations.

## PART ONE

The United States is committed to withdraw from Afghanistan all military forces of the United States, its allies, and Coalition partners, including all non-diplomatic civilian personnel, private security contractors, trainers, advisors, and supporting services personnel within fourteen (14) months following announcement of this agreement, and will take the following measures in this regard:

A. The United States, its allies, and the Coalition will take the following measures in the first one hundred thirty-five (135) days:

1) They will reduce the number of U.S. forces in Afghanistan to eight thousand six hundred (8,600) and proportionally bring reduction in the number of its allies and Coalition forces.

2) The United States, its allies, and the Coalition will withdraw all their forces from five (5) military bases.

B. With the commitment and action on the obligations of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban in Part Two of this agreement, the United States, its allies, and the Coalition will execute the following:

1) The United States, its allies, and the Coalition will complete withdrawal of all remaining forces from Afghanistan within the remaining nine and a half (9.5) months.

2) The United States, its allies, and the Coalition will withdraw all their forces from remaining bases.

C. The United States is committed to start immediately to work with all relevant sides on a plan to expeditiously release combat and political prisoners as a confidence building measure with the coordination and approval of all relevant sides. Up to five thousand (5,000) prisoners of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban and up to one thousand (1,000) prisoners of the other side will be released by March 10, 2020, the first day of intra-Afghan negotiations, which corresponds to Rajab 15, 1441 on the Hijri Lunar calendar and Hoot 20, 1398 on the Hijri Solar calendar. The relevant sides have the goal of releasing all the remaining prisoners over the course of the subsequent three months. The United States commits to completing this goal. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban commits that its released prisoners will be committed to the responsibilities mentioned in this agreement so that they will not pose a threat to the security of the United States and its allies.

D. With the start of intra-Afghan negotiations, the United States will initiate an administrative review of current U.S. sanctions and the rewards list against members of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban with the goal of removing these sanctions by August 27, 2020, which corresponds to Muharram 8, 1442 on the Hijri Lunar calendar and Saunbola 6, 1399 on the Hijri Solar calendar.

E. With the start of intra-Afghan negotiations, the United States will start diplomatic engagement with other members of the United Nations Security Council and Afghanistan to remove members of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban from the sanctions list with the aim of achieving this objective by May 29, 2020, which corresponds to Shawwal 6, 1441 on the Hijri Lunar calendar and Jawza 9, 1399 on the Hijri Solar calendar.

F. The United States and its allies will refrain from the threat or the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Afghanistan or intervening in its domestic affairs.

## PART TWO

In conjunction with the announcement of this agreement, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban will take the following steps to prevent any group or individual, including al-Qa'ida, from using the soil of Afghanistan to threaten the security of the United States and its allies:

1. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban will not allow any of its members, other individuals or groups, including al-Qa'ida, to use the soil of Afghanistan to threaten the security of the United States and its allies.

2. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban will send a clear message that those who pose a threat to the security of the United States and its allies have no place in Afghanistan, and will instruct members of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban not to cooperate with groups or individuals threatening the security of the United States and its allies.

3. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban will prevent any group or individual in Afghanistan from threatening the security of the United States and its allies, and will prevent them from recruiting, training, and fundraising and will not host them in accordance with the commitments in this agreement.

4. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban is committed to deal with those seeking asylum or residence in Afghanistan according to international migration law and the commitments of this agreement, so that such persons do not pose a threat to the security of the United States and its allies.

5. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban will not provide visas, passports, travel

permits, or other legal documents to those who pose a threat to the security of the United States and its allies to enter Afghanistan.

### PART THREE

1. The United States will request the recognition and endorsement of the United Nations Security Council for this agreement.
2. The United States and the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban seek positive relations with each other and expect that the relations between the United States and the new post-settlement Afghan Islamic government as determined by the intra-Afghan dialogue and negotiations will be positive.
3. The United States will seek economic cooperation for reconstruction with the new post- settlement Afghan Islamic government as determined by the intra-Afghan dialogue and negotiations, and will not intervene in its internal affairs.

Signed in Doha, Qatar on February 29, 2020, which corresponds to Rajab 5, 1441 on the Hijri Lunar calendar and Hoot 10, 1398 on the Hijri Solar calendar, in duplicate, in Pashto, Dari, and English languages, each text being equally authentic.



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