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United States-Afghanistan Policy Perspective: An Imperialist Lens on the Politics of Asia Pacific from 1933 to 2013

Farhan Khalid

Lecturer, Department of Political Science,
Government Murray Graduate College Sialkot,
Punjab-Pakistan

Correspondence Author: farhankhalid5669@gmail.com

Roshan Ara

Ph.D Scholar, Department of Political Science, Government
College Women University, Sialkot, Punjab- Pakistan

Email: roshanara63@yahoo.com

Ambreen Aman

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science,
Government Shahbaz Sharif Associate College (w) Jamkey
Cheema Teh Daska, District Sialkot, Punjab- Pakistan

Email: ambreenaman2012@yahoo.com

Saim Dar

Senior Analyst, Research Scholar Based in Islamabad
Specialist in Counter Terrorism-Pakistan

Email: saim.dar@outlook.com

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Abstract

The qualitative research work indicates perspectives of American policy towards Afghanistan during 1933-2013. How the United States as a super power has played its effective and domineering role in the regional and geo-strategic environment? What were the major American concerns and repercussion on the eve of the Russian invasion in Afghanistan in Dec 1979? What were the major options for the United States to bring its rival superpower Soviet Union former on back foot through the application of soft and coercive diplomacy? How much the United States has invested and gained from Afghan wars 1979 and 2001 as the dominant power in the Indian Ocean? The study includes certain contemporary developments i.e. the US strategic and regional response towards Taliban in Afghanistan, the US AF-PAK Strategy, the Dialogue and coercive diplomacy in the context of US role and policy paradigm shift during the pre and post 9/11 environment as the leading contents of the study.

Keywords: Af-Pak Strategy, Imperialist, Indian Ocean, Policy Perspective, Punitive Response.



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Introduction

For many years The United States has had a major impact on global affairs and has been a prominent player in international relations. It has been largely influenced by the ever-changing geo-strategic and geo-political developments. Afghanistan, in particular, has been a major focus of the United States' foreign policy due to its impact on regional and global political order. Afghanistan's strategic location has played a crucial role throughout its history. It has been a target for invasions, from Alexander the Great to Genghis Khan. In the 19th century, it was a source of conflict between Britain and Russia, with both nations vying for economic and political dominance. Britain sought to expand its markets in India, while Russia aimed to gain access to the Indian Ocean through Afghanistan. This ongoing battle for control over Afghanistan has had a significant impact on the country and its people. Throughout the 19th century, the history of Afghanistan was heavily influenced by the rivalry between Britain and Russia. Afghanistan served as a buffer zone between these two powerful nations and its strategic importance was recognized by the United States as well. While the US did have relations with Afghanistan before World War II, they were not as significant as the long-standing and central role played by the United Kingdom in Afghan affairs. Informal relations between Afghanistan and the United States have a long history, dating back to 1933 when the American State Department initially showed hesitation in establishing official diplomatic ties. This was due to concerns about the country's underdeveloped conditions and inability to ensure the safety of foreigners, as well as the lack of significant American interests at the time. Despite these reservations, the two nations eventually agreed to establish formal diplomatic relations, culminating in the signing of an official agreement in 1937. In 1942, the US-Afghan agreement aimed to promote economic cooperation between both countries. This led to the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between Washington and Kabul. Despite pressure from Moscow and London, the Afghan government sought to develop ties with the United States. Economic benefits were a major factor, as the US offered concessions for American companies to explore oil resources in Afghanistan. As part of this agreement, an American inland exploration company was granted a 75-year lease to explore oil wealth in Afghanistan.

Zahir Shah Regime (1933-1973): The US-Afghan Relations

In the year 1933, Zahir Shah rose to power in Afghanistan and introduced a fresh approach to their foreign relations that focused on building a strong relationship with the United States. He utilized diplomatic tactics to establish friendly ties with the US from 1933-1945. This resulted in an official relationship forming between Zahir Shah and US President Franklin D Roosevelt resulting in political and economic cooperation between the two countries. A significant event in this relationship was the signing of a loan agreement between Zahir shah and President Truman on February 7, 1951, where the US provided \$50,000 in financial aid to the Kabul administration. During the early stages of the Cold War, America and Russia engaged in a rivalry for global dominance. While the US had established economic and diplomatic ties with Afghanistan, Russia was geographically closer to the country. The US pushed to increase its influence and further its own interests in Afghanistan, while the Afghan government began exporting goods to the American market. The US also initiated various economic projects in Afghanistan and promoted itself as a global advocate for peace and democracy in the region. (Ma'arroof, 1990).

The Perspective of Cold War Policies

The United States has had a significant involvement and stake in Afghanistan, largely driven by a desire to protect its oil interests and support the private sector in the country. The US government

has consistently pursued its political, economic, and strategic goals in Afghanistan, often influenced by the competition between superpowers. (Hartman, 2002). Furthermore, Russia supported National Liberation Movements (NLM) and socialist ideologies in developing countries. The growing influence of Russia in countries like Afghanistan caused concern for American policymakers, who were striving to maintain their global dominance and promote capitalist ideals. The Soviet Union's interests in Afghanistan were seen as a potential threat to the United States' strategic interests. (Garthoff, 1994,). In the initial stages of the Cold War, the US was against providing military assistance to Afghanistan. However, after the Soviet invasion, the US had to reassess its position and began providing money and weapons to the resistance warriors in Afghanistan. Prior to intervention US-Afghan relations centered around promoting economic development and modernization in Afghanistan. There were also efforts to strengthen socio-political ties and maintain a positive relationship among United States mission and the Afghan's officials order to prevent appose US sentiments in Afghanistan. It is due to the Russian support to the Pashtunistan issue and the large amount of military assistance they have provided to Afghan forces, as a result of their close demographic ties. (Poullada, 1981). The US government provided significant financial support to Afghanistan in order to align the Kabul administration with its strategic goals of containing the spread of Soviet communism and Chinese communist troops. (Mehar, 2004).

The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan and its Impact on US

The dynamic between the United States and Afghanistan has been heavily impacted by global politics. In reaction to the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan, American intelligence agencies closely monitored the situation. This invasion had major consequences in South Asia, giving the Soviet Union the opportunity to assert its influence in the region and safeguard its national security. It also prevented the United States from deploying their Rapid Deployment Force in the Indian Ocean and countering the 1978 deal between the US and China. Additionally, Afghanistan's strategic location, its warm waters for sea trade, and its abundance of natural resources were also attractive to the Soviet Union. This led to their invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, causing concern for the US and other western countries. (Woodward, 1987). The US government responded by emphasizing the need for military strength in the Indian Ocean and protecting the oil reserves in the Persian Gulf. The US formulated its Afghan policy as a response to the Cold War and the need to contain communism. ((Mateen u din, 2002). It decision by the US to contain the Soviet Union in Southwest Asia and the Persian Gulf ultimately led to the beginning of a new era of the Cold War, as their previous policy of "Détente" was abandoned. (Mehar, 2004).

The Expenses of US Diplomacy and Military Operations

US government devoted all the efforts efforts towards creating various plans to contain and remove Russian soldiers from Afghanistan, (Goraya, 2013). In 1979, President Jimmy Carter declared the Persian Gulf region as the "Third Strategic Zone" for the United States and other western countries, in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The Pentagon also recognized this invasion as a major threat to global peace, comparable to World War II. President Carter warned the Soviet Union that any attempt to control the Persian Gulf region would be perceived as an attack on the fundamental interests of the United States, and would be met with appropriate actions, potentially including military force. After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Pakistan became the first line of defense and received significant aid from the United States. This aid included \$625 million for Pakistan and an extra \$430 million for the rehabilitation of Afghan refugees in the country. The US closely monitored the situation and acknowledged the potential consequences of the Soviet intervention. The US government viewed the Soviet invasion as a serious threat to the region and

a ploy to gain control of the Indian Ocean, as well as a means of spreading communism in the Persian Gulf.

The Harsh and Unforgiving Reaction

The American ambassador in Moscow was recalled, new consulates in New York and Kiev were suspended, and the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) process was postponed. Additionally, the United States decided to boycott the 1980 Moscow Olympics. (Los Angeles Times, 1980, Jan 23). It included the establishment of military bases in countries like Kenya, Oman, and Somalia, with a focus on the Diego Garcia base in Asia Pacific. As a result, the region experienced increased tensions and even civil war, with the US promoting hostile activities. The Afghan freedom fighters advocated for the removal of Russian troops from their land and declared it a national war against Non-Muslim invaders. This changed the traditional social divisions into an ideological conflict, with the support of the United States. (Roy, 1991). American government provided nearly \$30 million in military aid to various Afghan resistance groups during the Soviet-Afghan War. The US President covertly supported different factions within Afghan society that were engaged in armed conflict against the Russian forces in Kabul. (Michel, 2010).

The Diplomatic Strategies of the Reagan Administration in Afghanistan

The United States took a closer look at its foreign policy towards the Soviet Union during the Reagan administration. Their focus was on negotiating the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan and recognizing the regime of Babrak Karmal in Kabul. During the Reagan regime, there was a strong effort to rally the United Nations in condemning the repeated acts of aggression and violence by Russia in Afghanistan. The US also implemented a financial and military support to the resistance forces fighting against the Russian invasion in Afghanistan. (Mehar, 2004). The Washington administration supported modern groups in Afghanistan, rather than fundamentalists who were considered anti-American. During the Reagan administration, the United States provided financial assistance of over \$200 million to Afghanistan during fiscal years 1981-1984, and this support increased to \$470 million in 1986, \$639 million in 1987, and \$600 million in 1988, following the Reagan doctrine. (Lorentz, 1987).

The withdrawal of Russian troops and Geneva accord

Pakistan was a key partner in these efforts and helped to finalize the Geneva agreement. It took four nations a total of 9 years and 49 days to successfully remove the Russian troops from Afghanistan, as outlined in the Geneva accord. The United Nations played a crucial role in resolving the issue of Afghanistan by facilitating diplomatic discussions among all involved parties. This ultimately led to the signing of the Geneva agreement on April 14, 1988, which aimed to bring peace to Afghanistan and oversee the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the country by February 15, 1989. High-ranking diplomats from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Russia, and the United States were present during the signing of the accord. (Malik, 2008). This was evident as the US embassy in Kabul was closed down due to the chaotic law and order situation in the country. As a result, a civil war broke out between seven different militant groups, each led by a different warlord, competing for ethnic and political power.

US Policy Perspective on Post-Soviet Withdrawal

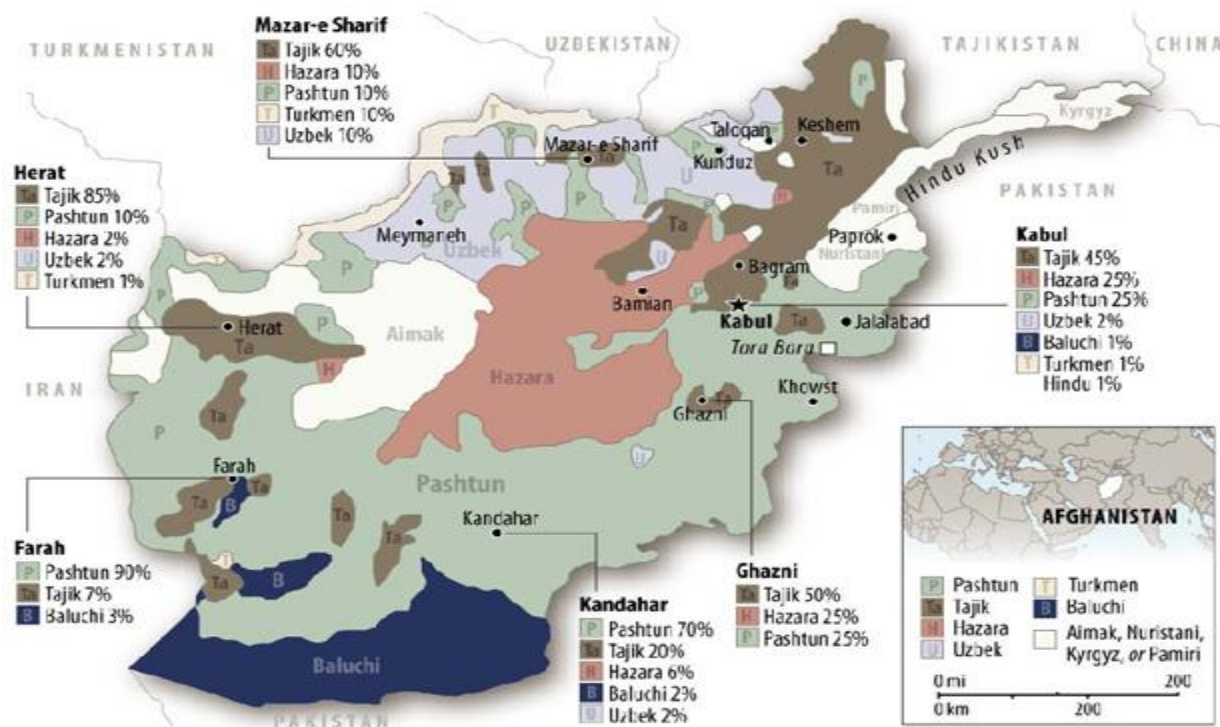
After the Soviet Union's withdrawal from Afghanistan, the United States limited its involvement in the country. However, the US was still interested in maintaining control over the strategic gas and oil routes that passed through Pakistan and Afghanistan to the Central Asian Republics. This led to a struggle for power among various ethnic groups within Afghanistan. While some American

think tank believed that the US had no reason to be in Afghanistan, others argued for the importance of American presence in the region. The aftermath of the Soviet aggression was not fully resolved until the political effects of that aggression were eliminated. (Rodman, 1994). The US recently announced a reduction in economic aid to Afghanistan, a country that lost its strategic importance after the withdrawal of Soviet forces. American involvement in supporting Afghan Mujahedeen during 1980s was largely influenced by their anti-communist stance. This support continued into 1990s with the implementation of a policy that aimed to find a diplomatic settlement and provide armed aid to the Kabul. The US also backed the formation of an interim government in Afghanistan in order to ensure an inclusive government. (Kux, 2001).

The Rise of the Taliban and its Impact on US

In 1994, the Taliban movement, led by Afghan Islamic students, began to gain power in Afghanistan. They overthrew the pro-communist Najeeb government and sparked a civil war in the country. Their goal was to purify the country of warlords and establish an Islamic Sharia system. By the end of 1996, the Taliban had successfully established their government, but their use of the slogan of Jihad caused them to become isolated from the international community. (Dobbs, 1996). In May 1997, the Taliban capture the power of Mazaar Sharif Afghanistan. It led to their declaration of full command and control over the country. Additionally, Washington expressed their willingness to reception envoy from Kabul hire from the Taliban in United States.

The Taliban in Afghanistan



Source: <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/taliban-afghanistan>

US saw the ideology of the Taliban as important and supported it due to its opposition to Russia and Iran, as well as its alliance with Pakistan. It led to the belief in Afghanistan that the US was backing, supporting, or funding to afghan government. (Makenzie, 1998). In 1998, the United States made the decision to reinstate the peace process in Afghanistan, with the goals of protecting American interests, eliminating terrorist training camps, and securing Pakistan as a key ally for

access to Central Asian routes. However, this plan was disrupted when the United States embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Tanzania were targeted by terrorists, bringing attention to the now-infamous figure of Usama Bin Laden. The United States expressed their anger and concern regarding Osama Bin Laden's presence in Afghanistan and attempted to negotiate his extradition through secret mediation efforts. They also warned the Taliban that if they did not cooperate, they would face consequences such as military strikes and being labeled a terrorist state. The possibility of targeting Bin Laden and Taliban leaders was also mentioned. (Judah, 2002). In December 2000, the United States imposed economic sanctions on the Taliban government in an effort to pressure them into closing terrorist camps in Afghanistan and handing over Osama Bin Laden, who was suspected of involvement in the bombing of US embassies in Africa. An air embargo was also put in place and the assets of the Taliban were frozen. (Rashid, 1999).

Changing Face of US-Afghanistan Policies after 9/11

After the tragic events of 9/11, US shifted its approach political settlement to harsh & coercive in name of stability. US officials, along with experts deemed Kabul to be a safe haven for terrorists, militants, and extremists who posed a threat to American citizens, offices, and embassies worldwide. The focus shifted towards protecting national security and the American people. The US government was highly concerned about preventing future attacks and asserted its dominance in the region. (Butt, 2012). The administration shifted its focus from acquiring oil interests to rooting out terrorism in Afghanistan. The term "rogue states" was also used by the Bush administration to refer to countries that posed a threat to American and global security. Nations such as Afghanistan, Syria, North Korea, and Iran were categorized by the US as Rogue and Terrorist States. India openly embraced the US's shift in policy and their increased focus on India's role in handling Afghan affairs. (Gul, 2005). This decision was made due to the ongoing importance of the War on Terror to the United States. In order to combat terrorist threats, US administration declared changes a new registration policy, a more effective surveillance system, increased use of Arial drone warfare technology, and a larger amount of US-Aid to support counter-terrorism strategies. These measures are aimed at crushing Al-Qaeda and Taliban forces, as well as their bases of operation. In December 2001, the Bonn Agreement was established to provide diplomatic support from the United States in creating a stable political infrastructure in Afghanistan. The US has played a key role in the rebuilding process of Afghanistan, focusing on creating a functional state and building institutions. They have also engaged with foreign agencies to aid in reconstruction efforts and have encouraged the involvement of public in the recent diplomatic settlement of Afghanistan. (Rais, 2011). As a result, Afghanistan held its first direct democratic election in 2004, marking a significant moment in the country's political history. This was made possible by Bonn accord and the successful US poll. following year, legislative poll was held in September 2005, but the results did not produce a clear majority, leaving the parliament in a divided state. (Johnson, 2006).

2009 US AF-PAK Strategy: A Comprehensive Approach for Afghanistan and Pakistan

Upon taking office, the Obama administration quickly demonstrated its dedication to upholding the strategic priorities and interests of the United States through a consistent policy approach. Bruce Riedell served as an advisor to former US President Barack Obama on matters concerning Kabul and Islamabad. During the first address, President Obama announced a new strategy towards these two countries, the "AF-PAK Strategy". He stressed The US along with its allies and friends such as Pakistan and Afghanistan, is facing a common threat from a mutual enemy. However, our intentions are clear and direct - to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat this enemy in both Pakistan and Afghanistan. Our goal is to prevent them from returning, as this is not just a problem for America,

but an international security challenge that must be addressed. (Devine, 2015). On October 28, 2009, President Obama signed and ratified the US defense act, which included provisions for compensating Taliban who renounced their surrendered without weapons. (Markey, 2009).

Navigating the Changing Landscape: Strategic Partnerships 2010-2012

On March 25, 2010, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the United States came together for strategic dialogues to address American interests in the region. (BBC News, 2010, April 2). On May 2nd, 2012, President Obama traveled to Afghanistan and met with President Hamid Karzai to sign a Strategic Partnership Agreement. This agreement outlined the United States' commitment to continue supporting Kabul for some. The future of US policy towards Afghanistan will focus on nation building, restoring democracy, defeating and eliminating AL-Qaeda and achieving peace with the involvement of American forces till all goals met. Former President Obama announced a gradual exit policy to withdraw American troops from Afghanistan, while still maintaining a face-saving exit strategy and aiming for successful nation building and peace-making efforts.

Conclusion

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the United States revised its policy towards Afghanistan, taking into account its strategic interests in the region. It included the implementation of the AF-PAK Strategy, engaging in strategic dialogues, and forming a power sharing partnership in order to maintain peace and stability within the country. The United States focused on building institutions, promoting political socialization among the Afghan people, encouraging political participation, boosting media presence, protecting human rights, and promoting democratic values such as holding parliamentary and presidential elections. From the years 1933 to 1973, the United States and Afghanistan had a primarily economic-focused relationship. However, after the Russian invasion in 1979, the United States became heavily involved in Afghanistan's political and financial affairs. The US played a crucial role in supporting Afghanistan to drive out Russian troops and reach a settlement in Geneva in 1988. For the next two decades, the United States continued to provide economic and military aid to Afghanistan for reconstruction and infrastructure development. In 1996, the Taliban gained control of Kabul and the US responded with stricter policies towards Afghanistan. The Taliban's establishment of an extremist government and involvement in drugs trafficking and opium production were major factors in this decision. Additionally, the US demanded that Usama Bin Laden be handed over, as he was suspected of being responsible for the bombing of US embassies in Africa. As a result, the Taliban became isolated from the international community. The United States took on Afghanistan as the primary battleground in the global war on terror, declaring it a crucial area in the fight against terror. From 2001 to 2013, the US led NATO forces in this fight, implementing various measures to monitor and control dissidents. These measures included the use of Arial drones, strict surveillance, new registration policies, and strong intelligence systems. In the wake of the war, the US also made significant efforts towards rebuilding Afghanistan, focusing on establishing institutions, promoting democracy, and involving Afghan civilians in the political process. This involved conducting elections for parliament and the president, as well as engaging with warring factions through strategic dialogue. These efforts spanned from 2001 to 2013.

Conflict of Interest

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