



Muhammad Usman Ullah*

Saif Ur Rehman †

Azka Gul ‡

U.S Foreign Policies and Strategies of Bush, Obama and Trump Administration in Afghanistan

Abstract: President Bush focused on military action and regime change, with the goal of disrupting Al Qaeda's ability to launch terrorist attacks. Obama increased the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan and focused on building up the capacity of Afghan security forces and increasing diplomatic efforts. Conversely, Trump continued the drawdown of U.S. troops, increased airstrikes and attempted to revive peace talks with the Taliban. In February 2020, the U.S. signed a peace agreement with the Taliban, including a timetable for the withdrawal of all troops by May 2021. However, the peace process stalled, leading the Biden administration to extend the withdrawal deadline to August 31, 2021, and eventually withdraw all U.S. troops from the country.

Key Words: Foreign Policy, Strategy, Afghanistan, Al Qaeda

Introduction

The foreign policy of any country is basically the set of its objectives, goals and interest which governs or guide its relations with other countries. So on the whole, it is the strategy or tactic used by the government while dealing with the other states. The country imply different strategies to achieve its objectives which are basically based on its interest from other countries. Foreign Policy is imperative because it regulates the state of affairs between the nations. It also provide a set of rules to diplomats during dialogues with each other. So, the good foreign policy is basically the backbone of any country for its success and in the international world. Powerful diplomacy is the guarantor of a country worth in the international arena.

There are basically some tools used by the state to achieve its foreign policy objectives like "Diplomacy, Foreign Aid and Military Strength". So we can say that, foreign policy is the set of objectives which are developed by the country according to its interest and then the country's different strategies (Diplomacy) to achieve its goals or results.

United States Foreign Policy

The United States is an all-powerful, dominating country in the world. The Foreign Policy of the United States matters for the whole world. Every step of this super power is the concern of the world. The Department of States is the only valid base for the determination of the kind of United States Foreign Policy. The department of

* MS Scholar, Department of Politics and International Relation, International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan. Email: usmanktk013@gmail.com (Corresponding Author)

† MS Scholar, Department of Politics and IR, IIUI, Islamabad, Pakistan.

‡ Research Fellow Global Policy and Research Institute Islamabad, Pakistan.

States outline, describe, and directs the goals of Foreign Policy. The following are different goals:

1. Preserving the national security of the United States.
2. Promoting world peace and a secure global environment.
3. Maintaining a balance of power among nations.
4. Working with allies to solve international problems.
5. Promoting democratic values and human rights.

The United States is using different strategies (like through its hegemony, Supremacy and Invasion on a humanitarian basis) and some coercive or hard means (Military power and war) to achieve these ends or goals.

Now, will discuss these strategies in the light of its Foreign policy goals.

Hegemony

Hegemony is like the dominance or influence of one nation on other nations. Like the way United States is hegemon on other nations of the world. To achieve the goals of its foreign Policy, the United States use its hegemonic posture. Like "to safeguard the national security of its own country and to endorse global peace and security", the United States took the decision of war on terror against Al-Qaeda and Taliban. These agents of Chaos tried to terror the U.S nation. The United States shouted that they attacked on our freedom, liberty, civilization and way of life. So then the United states with all its power and authority and attacked on another country – Afghanistan. Even no single country in the world stood against this decision because Bush said clearly "You are either with you are with the terrorist". That's how the hegemon deals with other nations to secure its interests.

Invasion

Invasion is also another strategy used by the United States to secure its interest and to promote a secure and peaceful global environment. The weapons of mass destruction (WMD) of Iraq were threat to global peace and they can harm the sovereignty and security of anyone nation. That's why the United States on the behalf of all other nations for the endorsement of global peace did Invasion in Iraq. In Afghanistan, the United States also invade to stop human rights abuses by fundamentalist. Basically, that was also to protect and promote Democracy, Freedom of speech, basic human rights and standard of living.

Supremacy

The state of being superior to the rest of the world in all matters. One perspective of the United States attack on Afghanistan is also for to maintain its supremacy in the South Asian region. The United States wants to keep its position in South Asia for its interest and certain goals. The Central Asian States are blessed with precious minerals and natural resources like oil and gas. To get access to the resources of CAR'S and the warm water of the Indian Ocean, Afghanistan was only the opportunity. After 18 years of war on terror, the U.S is still here basically for the "Containment of rising China and the resurgence of Russia and to prevent Iran's expansionist policies". Because only in this way, U.S can maintain its supremacy on its arch-rivals and competing nations. The other important thing is that the U.S also want an honorable and enduring end of the war on terror to maintain its international credibility. So, they can say proudly that they filled their commitment and brought peace for the whole world (Reimer, 2008).

Trade Routes

Since ages, the United States is always in struggle to control every state at his own terms and conditions. The United States is using sugar coated words like national security, sovereignty, international peace, freedom, human rights, and a global peaceful environment to achieve other ends. Due to presence in Afghanistan, they are trying their best to damage China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is an economic project and game changer for Pakistan. Secondly, also promoting U.S backed gas pipeline Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) against the Russian backed gas project Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) to tackle interests of Iran and Russia. So to keep its hegemony and supremacy the United States is using different tactics.

So in the end, it is realized that by using civilized and polite explanations the United States is busy in capturing rare precious natural resources and controlling important trade routes to maintain its supremacy and hegemony in the region.

The approach of Bush in Afghanistan

During George W. Bush presidency, the incident of 9\11 happened. The four hijacked planes by Al-Qaeda operatives attacked on the World trade center in New York and Pentagon in the Washington DC on 9 September, 2001. The Bush administration passed a "Joint Resolution" in congress for endorsement of use of force against the attackers. The Bush administration initiated the global war against terrorism. On 20 September 2001, they officially declared the war on terror. The incident of 9/11 radically changed U.S foreign policy. The war on terror started with aims – to overthrow the Taliban rule, abolish their safe havens, to combat against international terror and create peace and stability. In this way, the ruling goal of the U.S Foreign strategy after the 9/11 assaults,

is counterterrorism and to guarantee that Afghanistan won't end up places of refuge for the specialists of the Chaos, savagery and fear. The Foreign Policy of the Bush Administration based on these three values: "Defending the peace – preserving the peace – extending the peace" (Reimer, 2008).

The Approach of the Bush administration during the war on terror in Afghanistan was mainly based on three different strategies. The first strategy was "Counter-terrorism strategy" which means to counter terrorist by using conventional methods which eventually direct the war in Afghanistan. Then, "Pre-emption and pre-eminence" it characterized the change in Washington's perception about the terrorist menace and the ways to confront it. Next, was the "Forward Strategy for the democratization of the Middle East", it helped to recognize the main drivers of the war on terrorism and find the long term way out of it. President Bush elaborated that the threat of terrorism was worldwide, so all small or failing countries are important in the war on terror. The Bush administration used the "Realpolitik approach" and made clear to all nations that, "You are either with us or you are with the terrorists" in the war against terrorism (Dunn, [2005](#)). The U.S military with the help of the British, initiated war by air strikes and then after 17 days ground troops reached the. In December 2001, the Taliban almost left Kabul and U.S. military to achieve its desired result. In 2003, the Bush administration shifted their attention from Afghanistan to Iraq. Bush announced that a major battle end here and vowed for reconstruct. During that time, NATO enter into Afghanistan and assumes security, 65,000 troops from 42 countries came (Amadeo, [2018](#)).

In 2004, a new constitution was formed, democratic elections held and Hamid Karzai became President. At the same time, bin laden was terrorized for more attacks. The bush administration stuck in Iraq after

Saddam Husain's killing, because sectarian violence surfaced. That was the time, when the Taliban and Al-Qaeda re-emerged. The security conditions deteriorated and violence in Afghanistan heightened again. Especially in 2008, when during an operation the U.S military forces killed some above 100 civilians by mistakes, the conditions became worse. Washington complained NATO for violence and asked for more troops. The Bush administration used a realpolitik approach and achieved their targets immediately and started training of Afghan security forces in 2005. At the end, the Bush part of the war on terror is simply conclude as the regular cycle of intrusion – an eight-year revolution in which the Idealistic vision of "transforming them to their benefit" transforms into the fatigued authenticity of "they are not so much fit for change and we have to spend our cash and blood inside our own fringes." (War in Afghanistan, 2009).

Strategies of Obama in Afghanistan

Barack Obama holds President's office from 2009 till 2017. He inherited the complexities of the American eight years long war on terror and re-assesses the Bush approach towards Afghanistan. Though he was not the one who initiated it but had to handle it smartly.

On 1 December 2009, President Obama explored his strategy towards Afghanistan in such words: "We must deny al Qaeda a safe haven. We must reverse the Taliban's momentum and deny it the ability to overthrow the government. And we must strengthen the capacity of Afghanistan's security forces and government so that they can take lead responsibility for Afghanistan's future" (CNN Politics, 2009).

So, the three core elements of Obama's strategy were: a military effort to create the conditions for a transition; a civilian surge that reinforces positive action; and an

effective partnership with Pakistan (Dunn, 2005). President Obama after taking office gave approval for a dramatic increase in a number of troops till 2010 for combat operations to halt Taliban energy. The next step was capacity building of Afghan forces and society after 18 months. As the final step in July 2011, they started troop's withdrawal and shifted responsibilities to the Afghan government and security forces. Till 2014, they trained Afghan forces and equipped them with the best skills. Secondly, with the help of their NATO allies they focused on Nation-building – trained security forces, strengthened the government, eradicated corruption, tried to capture the drug trade and focused on the wellbeing of the Afghan people. Obama also focused on good relations of mutual respect, cooperation and trust with Pakistan against a common enemy. The main goal was "to disrupt, disassemble and defeat Al-Qaeda". In May 2011, Osama bin laden was found and killed during an operation by U.S forces in Pakistan. But the Taliban and Al-Qaeda hands have regained strong footholds by capturing almost 50% of the area (Amadeo, 2018).

Obama's policy in Afghanistan was a fine-tuning of the Bush's approach but it also included the time-based framework for the withdrawal of troops. Obama reexamined the policy of Bush and focused more towards right war that means war in Afghanistan, because they were real threat to security. He amplified the number of troops, funds and other resources for war in Afghanistan. Obama's strategy seemed to be in "middle path", he did not just focus on combat but also included non-military options by offering health, education, food and investments facilities. The President Obama also focused on non-military options like peace dialogues with the Afghan Taliban. In July 2011, the withdrawal of troops begun and at the same time U.S

initiated peace talks with the Taliban leaders. The peace dialogues held two times during Obama's presidency in 2013 and 2015.

In 2013, "Qatar peace process" were initiated. For the very first time, process of peace talks between U.S, Afghan government and the Taliban leadership were planned. Meeting was supposed to be held on 23 June 2013 after all negotiations between authorities. Taliban opened their political office in Qatar with the help or permission of U.S. On 20th June, the talks cancelled between U.S and the Taliban in Qatar, because Afghan government did not welcome the political development of Taliban's office in Qatar and U.S hegemonic way. Hamid Karzai government became conscious about their own authority in Afghanistan. After 2 years, in May 2015, the Qatar peace process was reorganized between the envoys of Afghan Unity government and the Taliban. Then Pakistan's establishment took a serious step for peace dialogues. In response, "Murree Peace Talks" were held between Afghan government delegates and the Taliban in very comprehensive way. The United States and China in this regard played a very vital role. But before second round, the news of Mullah Omer death stalled the process (Ahlawat, [2017](#)).

In December 2015, during the 5th summit of Hearts of Asia in Islamabad, another political effort initiated under the "Quadrilateral Coordination Group", which included Pakistan, China, U.S and Afghanistan. In Muscat, the first envoy of these countries, Afghan government, Taliban met in 2016 in for the betterment of security conditions. But again the death Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Mansor shelved the talks without any meaningful outcome. Consequently, during the Obama's presidency none of the peace talks were successful despite the sincere efforts

made by all the parties. The Taliban leadership in start soften their stance but after the death of Mullah Omer and Mullah Akhtar Mansor, the violence escalated and security conditions again got worsen in Afghanistan (Amadeo, [2018](#)).

Priorities of Trump in Afghanistan

The Donald trump is the third president of United States, who is welcomed in office with the longest and costliest war of its history. The principle objective of the U.S foreign policy after 9/11 attacks is counterterrorism and to ensure that Afghanistan will not become safe havens for the agents of the chaos, violence and terror. But after 18 years of war against agents of chaos and terror, still they have strong footholds in 50% of the country.

The President Donald trump campaigned on complete withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan during his elections. But complete withdrawal can leave space for Taliban to gain more territory and the security conditions will become worse, which is why after many meetings with generals, officials and by keeping in mind the consequence of each step, almost after one year of presidency, trump very carefully announced his priorities. He unveiled his Strategy on 21 August, 2017. The President Trump defined strategy of victory in such words: "By attacking our enemies, obliterating ISIS, crushing al Qaeda, preventing the Taliban from taking over Afghanistan, and stopping mass terror acts against America" (Tourangbam, [2018](#)).

The main focus of his strategy at that time was on - to remain in the country with relatively increase number of troops, no interference in governance matters of Afghanistan and will not dictate them on political issues means not exporting democracy abroad and not taking part in nation building. The President Donald

Trump also proposed a “high on military and low on diplomacy strategy” by commenting that the political agreement or bargain could be calculated but “after an effective military effort”. The trump changed strategy by prioritizing withdrawal of troops according to conditions of grounds instead of time-based approach. He did not disclose any information like troop number and major operations. They took the limitations on military troops and expands their power in battle grounds for successful outcomes. But at the same time, he also signaled about the political end or settlement of war by including Taliban. He said we will not do nation building, we will just assist and train Afghan Police and Afghan security forces until they are fighting against Taliban. Trump administration announced to took hard step Pakistan by pressuring them and cutting their aid. Trump appreciate the Indian role in rehabilitation process and put ball in Indian court for more economic help. But Indian card can threaten the stakes of Pakistan in Afghanistan and will lead to more chaos, conflict and anarchy instead of cooperation. Because other regional countries may have some concerns in Afghanistan, but Pakistan has major and legitimate stakes there (Ahlawat, [2017](#)). So U.S should keep in mind the ground realities and its consequences while making policy for Afghanistan. The trump strategy of pressing Pakistan and asking India for more help is seen as strategically incoherent. The Trump administration adopts very realistic approach – by focusing more on eliminating agents of chaos instead for importing democracy and other ways of life in complex Afghan society. According to the Long War Journal, “still after 18 years of war 41 districts of Afghanistan are remain under the control of Taliban, while 201 districts remain are disputed, which is placing total Taliban controlled and contested territory at about 60 percent” (Tourangbam, [2018](#)). They are mostly active in rural areas

especially in east, north and Kunduz in the south. It is depressing that even after 18 years, the Taliban are still not only active but dominant also, the corruption remain abundant and still their consensus on politics seems vague and elusive.

The new strategy in Afghanistan is also known with the abbreviation of ‘R4+S’, which means “Regionalize, Realign, Reinforce, Reconcile and Sustain”. “It stands for the regionalizing the approach to consider the involvement by India, Pakistan, Iran, Russia and China, realigning military efforts to put more U.S advisors at the brigade and battalion levels of Afghan Units, reinforcing the efforts with the additional U.S troops, Looking for the ways to reconcile with fence sitters in Afghanistan who might work with the government, and ensuring that 320,000 Afghan forces are sustained as they faced a tough fight.” (Ahlawat, [2017](#)).

Conclusion

The trump administration also chose the option of peace dialogues, which are in process currently. But one thing they have to keep in mind is that sooner or later they have to leave Afghanistan so they should settle dispute with dialogues for long lasting peace and stability. The President of Afghanistan Ashraf Ghani’s offered “unconditional peace proposal” in February of 2017 to the Taliban. It included “a ceasefire, legitimate recognition of the Taliban as a political group, scope for new elections and a constitutional review – was supposed to be receiving some concerns from the Taliban, despite the weird silence from their side”. Trump multiple times repeat that military power or fight is not the only solution of this 18 years longest war, the peace be bring by considering the Taliban in establishment or giving them political right. . The ending of Afghan war will involve a political settlement supported by regional powers and there is no purely

military solution possible against the Taliban. Recently, the Peace talk with Taliban which are in process, are without preconditions and offered recognition of the Taliban as a legitimate political group, aimed at ending more than 16 years of war, it means that history will not repeat itself but it rhymes. One of the main hurdle in the peace process is the lack of political consensus among Afghans themselves. They are not on one page for the peaceful solution because of diverse ethnic factions. The trump priorities are guides by the principled realism for moving forward. The dialogues are a root of civilization and peace, so without any dialogue with Taliban there is no peace. Nevertheless, without direct dialogue between the Afghan Taliban and the Afghan government, the peace would remain a mere optimistic fantasy in Afghanistan. Each president had a different approach towards Afghanistan, and it is difficult to say which foreign policy was more friendly, active, and optimistic. George W. Bush's policy was focused on

military action and regime change, while Barack Obama's approach was more focused on building up the capacity of Afghan security forces and increasing diplomatic efforts, while also attempting to negotiate a peace agreement with the Taliban. Donald Trump's policy was similar to Obama's, but with a continued drawdown of U.S. troops and increased airstrikes. In terms of which foreign policy was more active and optimistic towards a peaceful resolution in Afghanistan, Obama's approach appears to have been more focused on diplomatic solutions and building up the capacity of Afghan security forces. The Obama administration sought to negotiate a peace agreement with the Taliban, and while those talks ultimately stalled, the approach showed an emphasis on finding a political solution to the conflict rather than solely relying on military action. Therefore, Obama's policy could be considered more active and optimistic towards a peaceful resolution in Afghanistan compared to Bush and Trump.

References

- Ahlawat, R. (2017, November 28). *The R4+S Approach For Afghanistan – Analysis*. Eurasia Review. <https://www.eurasiareview.com/28112017-the-r4s-approach-for-afghanistan-analysis/>.
- Amadeo, K. (2010, April 8). *War on Terror Facts, Costs, and Timeline*. The Balance; The Balance. <https://www.thebalance.com/war-on-terror-facts-costs-timeline-3306300>.
- Anonymous. (2009, December). *War in Afghanistan repeats America's past mistakes*. The Ithacan. http://theithacan.org/am/publish/opinioncommentary/200912_War_in_Afghanistan_repeats_America_s_past_mistakes_printer.shtml.
- Dunn, D. H. (2005). Bush, 11 September and the Conflicting Strategies of the “War on Terrorism.” *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, 16, 11–33. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/30001932>.
- Obama, B. (2009). *Transcript of Obama speech on Afghanistan* - CNN.com. Edition.cnn.com. <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/12/01/obama.afghanistan.speech.transcript/index.html>.
- Rierner, A. K. (2008). U.S. foreign policy from Bush to Bush: Enduring parameters and policy options. *Institute for Strategy and Security Policy*, 7(1), 117–141.
- Tourangbam, M., & Palrecha, N. (2018). *Trump's Strategy in Afghanistan: The Beginning of an Indefinite End*. Thediplomat.com. <https://thediplomat.com/2018/06/trumps-strategy-in-afghanistan-the-beginning-of-an-indefinite-end/>.