
American role in Afghanistan: Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era

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Introduction

The response to the 9/11 terrorist attack by waging war against Afghanistan points to America's larger interests in the region. According to Gerard Toal "One can find evidence of a counter-modern tendency in certain geopolitical crises where global threats are territorialised as threats from 'rogue states'. The problem of weapons of mass destruction, for example, becomes the problem of Saddam Hussein and what to do about Iraq....Terrorism becomes the problems of 'rogue states' like Sudan and Afghanistan."¹ The War on Terror aimed at toppling the Afghan regime led by the Taliban which refused to hand over Osama bin Laden, the culprit of 9/11 terrorist attack to the US. However, the UN Charter prohibits change of regime in a country by external actors as that

defies sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. The article 2 of the UN Charter prohibits the use of or threatened use of force against another state.² It is argued that the Taliban refused to turn over bin Laden because there was no extradition treaty existing between the US and Afghanistan. Secondly, there is a long tradition in Muslim countries to treat foreign visitors as guests. Nevertheless, the Taliban expressed its willingness to deliver bin Laden over to the US or to a third country if US officials provided convincing evidence that bin Laden had, in fact, been complicit in the 9/11 attacks. The US President George Bush's response was that the US officials would not furnish any such evidence to the Taliban government.³ After 9/11 attack, the US received sympathy from almost all countries of the world. However, instead of capitalising on those positive feelings to isolate bin Laden

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and his aides, the US reacted to the occasion in a knee-jerk military fashion. According to Arturo Munoz, the US was opposed to reconcile with the Taliban in early December 2001. "A peace process among the Afghans was discussed at the time, only to be repudiated by the Americans."⁴ The US quickly divided the world into two categories of nations, American allies who supported the War on Terror and enemies who opposed or even maintained neutrality. Soon, Iran was included as part of the latter category in Bush's "Axis of Evil" speech.⁵ The American President Barack Obama replicated his predecessor's military and security centric strategies. According to M. J. Williams, "the US has and remains overly inclined to use military power to fix a problem, even when that problem ultimately defies the ability of the military to provide a solution. While the new Obama Administration has a more evolved view of the Afghan issue, the continued US over-investment in defence illustrates the preference of tools in the American psyche."⁶

The US was more interested in waging a war to eliminate the enemy and spread its influence in the region than building a peaceful and democratic Afghanistan. To conduct the war in Afghanistan, the US resorted predominantly to air power

and limited its ground-troops presence. And for ground operations, it depended on Afghan warlords. While, on the one hand, the US wanted to limit the casualties on its army, the increasing use of air power led to the increase in the casualties of Afghan civilians. Moreover, the US dependence on Afghan warlords militated against the idea of peaceful and democratic Afghanistan. The warlords practiced no less violence than the Taliban. They used the American military and economic assistance for consolidating their role in different pockets of Afghanistan. The intelligence provided by the warlords to the US was based more on their desire to sort out personal feuds with other warlords than to give authentic information about al Qaeda and Taliban hideouts. Instead of creating an independent Afghan National Army, it was suggested at the Bonn conference that the ANA (Afghan National Army) be recruited from these militias.⁷

Williams argues that Afghanistan poses virtually no threat to the US and its NATO allies in the way the Nazi Germany threatened Europe or Soviet Russia threatened the NATO. It is the absence of power in Afghanistan - the ability of the government to hold a monopoly on the use of force, to curb narcotics production, to root out warlordism

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and to defeat an insurgency – that causes problems for NATO allies.⁸ Nation-building, which requires continued engagement in social, economic and political restructuring of a society after a war was not part of the American Afghan War plan. The various peacekeeping operations in the 1990s of which the US had been a part - in the former Yugoslavia and Haiti, for example - were held up by key administration figures like Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld as proof of strategic capacity of the Clinton administration. They, instead, believed that the military was to be fundamentally transformed and should not to be used for 'policing' or for open-ended peacekeeping missions linked to the notions of nation-building. The transformation of the military was to be essentially based on high-technology, rapidly deployed, short-duration combat missions, in which victory could be achieved quickly and forces speedily withdrawn. To conduct the Afghan War, the American forces confined their activity to a high-technologically driven military role while the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission was portrayed as post-conflict stabilisation and reconstruction mission. Between 2001 and 2005, the US spent eleven times more on military operations in Afghanistan than it did on

reconstruction, humanitarian aid, economic assistance and the training of Afghan security, all forces combined.⁹ According to Dobbins, the inadequate resources especially in Afghanistan, "represented both an exaggerated confidence in the efficacy of high-tech warfare" and "an aversion to the whole concept of nation-building".¹⁰ Munoz argues that the paltry investment of the US resources in Afghanistan was only one reason for the inadequacy of the mission. Another reason was the way those resources were applied. "Instead of honouring Afghan terms of peace, utilising village institutions to maintain security, and training Afghans to do most of their own fighting and rebuilding..., the US and NATO tried to impose Western ways of doing things."¹¹ The US applied a top down approach to ensure security and socio-economic development in Afghanistan. On the security front, this has meant building the Afghan National Security Forces – consisting of the Afghan National Army, Afghan National Army Air Corps, Afghan National Police, and Afghan Border Police – as the bulwarks against the Taliban and the other insurgent groups. On the economic and development fronts, this has meant improving the central government's ability to deliver services to the population. But "there were few efforts to engage

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Afghanistan's tribes, sub-tribes, clans, and other local institutions," laments Seth Jones, who worked closely with US Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan.¹²

To add to the examples of American military-driven foreign policy, there were reports of Afghan detainees being tortured in Bagram and other US detention centres. An article in the Guardian (UK) stated that in Bagram and eighteen other US detention centres and firebases around Afghanistan, Afghan detainees were regularly tortured.¹³ Patience, which is required for successful nation-building process is found to be lacking among US troops. Copies of Koran have been found to be burned by US troops and a US soldier opened fire and killed 16 people in a village near Kandahar.¹⁴

While to get a foothold in Central Asia, the US strengthened the hands of the authoritarian rulers in the name of creating a common front against terrorism, however, the same US followed the ideology of "liberal democracy" to keep the war-ravaged Afghanistan weak by not allowing the state to consolidate power. According to Tim Bird and Alex Marshall "Warlordism and the absence of an effective bureaucracy were the absolute natural by-

products of an externally dictated and implicitly decentralising economic agenda in Afghanistan".¹⁵ The agenda was based on the principle that the state should be the enabler rather than the provider of economic growth. International aid was tied to the global private sector which was entrusted with the task of reconstruction and as a result Afghanistan remained to a weak and rentier state. Furthermore, these two scholars also point to the problem of tying aid to the purchase of America-sourced products and services. According to them, a full 70 per cent of US aid was made conditional upon US goods and services being purchased or employed.¹⁶

American plan for long-term presence in Afghanistan

The US interest to stay in Afghanistan and Central Asia for long time became clear after the Lisbon Summit between NATO and Afghanistan. Both signed a declaration, the thrust of which was on affirming "their long-term partnership" and building "a robust, enduring partnership which complements the ISAF security mission and continues beyond it".¹⁷ The Lisbon summit confirmed that the NATO military presence in Afghanistan would continue beyond

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2014, the timeline suggested by President Hamid Karzai for Kabul to be completely in charge of the security of the country. Going by the spirit of the declaration, NATO will maintain its counter-terrorism capability in Afghanistan even after 2014. The declaration said that NATO would be present in Afghanistan so long as it did not have confidence that the Al-Qaeda was no longer operative and was no longer a threat. NATO may even undertake combat operations beyond 2014 if and when need arises.¹⁸ The US President Barack Obama said, "by 2014 the NATO footprint in Afghanistan will have been significantly reduced. But beyond that, it is hard to anticipate exactly what is going to be necessary...I will make that determination when I get there".¹⁹ Recently, discovery of huge potential of mineral deposits in Afghanistan has further enhanced the geopolitical importance of the entire region.²⁰ However, it is argued that tapping into these resources is a long-drawn and expensive process as Afghanistan lacks materials and technical expertise to benefit from such discoveries and exploration of these resources also requires extensive field work to determine whether the minerals are commercially viable.

According to a former diplomat of

India, by the end of 2008, the US began developing an altogether new land route through the southern Caucasus to Afghanistan which steers clear of Iran, Russia and China. He believes the project, if materialised, would be a geopolitical coup – the biggest ever that Washington would have swung in post-Soviet Central Asia and the Caucasus.²¹ At one stroke, the US would be tying up military cooperation at the bilateral level with Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan and the US will be able to consolidate its military position in the southern Caucasus. Washington looked for new supply routes and military bases in Central Asia even though its close partnership with Pakistani military continued. He says, "the US has done exceedingly well in geopolitical terms, even if the war as such may have gone rather badly both for the Afghans and the Pakistanis and the European soldiers serving in Afghanistan".²²

The US, so far, has tried to shape the Afghan war unilaterally according to its own geopolitical interests. It has tried not to give Iran and Russia any major role in developing Afghan war strategy. It has tried to secure most of the military bases and supply routes for western troops in Pakistan and Central Asia.

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The US has tried to temper its overtly unilateral policy by divide and rule tactics. It has tried to engage Central Asian states bilaterally. It is argued that once Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the two key players in Central Asia, step out of the CSTO and SCO and directly deal with the US and NATO then these two organisations would be effectively kept out of Afghan cauldron. The US allowed NATO at the same time to negotiate with Russia for transit route facilities. Therefore, the US has engaged the regional powers bilaterally robbing their collective strength that could have been expressed through the organisations like CSTO and SCO.²³

The unilateral role of the US has also been facilitated by the political problems that characterise the bilateral relationship between India and Pakistan, India and China, Iran and Pakistan and Russia and China. To gain Pakistan's cooperation, the US has used India card. It has, at times, asked India to play a larger role in Afghanistan. Similarly, to contain India, it has tried to raise Chinese specter.²⁴

However, Pakistan has been considered the key for the realisation of the American plan in Afghanistan and Central Asia. After bin Laden was found and killed in Pakistan, the

US-Pak strategic relationship began to show the signs of strain. It lay bare the divergences of interests that both the states have been pursuing in Afghanistan. However, it is believed that both the states would try to balance their relationship as they are interdependent in the formulation of strategies to realise their respective objectives in Afghanistan. The US has rarely any chance of making its plan of reconciliation with the Taliban successful without Pakistan's assistance. Pakistan's military and intelligence wing, ISI, reserve strong connections with the top Taliban leaders and Haqqani network. Similarly, Pakistan's objectives in Afghanistan would remain a distant dream without the American military aid and economic assistance.

Challenges to the American interests in Afghanistan

The question of legitimacy is involved in such kind of wars like the War on Terror in Afghanistan in which civilians die in large numbers. The War is not against the state but against a group of people. If the enemy is no longer the opposing state and its people but a regime or leadership, then bombs that missed did not hit the 'enemy' but innocent civilians. In the Second World War there were few qualms about causing

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collateral damage because ultimately it was still the enemy that suffered. But when bombs missed their targets in Belgrade or Baghdad or in Afghanistan, it was the innocent and the vulnerable that suffered.²⁵ Afghan case points out that the civilians even go to the extent of supporting the forces waging war against alien powers. Furthermore, 'War on terror' has widened the gap between international law and legitimacy. Legitimacy provides the necessary flexibility to law when the latter is relatively fixed and rigid. In this context, legitimacy can be understood not as deviation from existing law rather making law more relevant to the changing conditions. But preemptive use of force against groups of people (terrorists) put international legitimacy in jeopardy.²⁶ First, international law is based on the logic of self-defence and secondly, states are the sole units of action. Preemptive attacks can be self-serving and actions against groups undermine territorial integrity of states within which such groups operate. Military operation against such groups forecloses the policing and extradition options on which the international law is based. There is even no one to decide that there is sufficient evidence of state complicity in harbouring terrorists.

The US has resorted to the

provisions of 'self defence' in order to defend its action against states like Iraq and Afghanistan. And UN resolution 1373 supports such action and can be interpreted to have given an unlimited mandate to the use of force. The UN Charter article 51 requirement that self-defence measures be reported to the Security Council is not a sufficient protection against erratic or opportunistic behaviour of states especially in the context of the five permanent members who are generally able to engage in such measures have the capacity to veto any resolution directed against them.²⁷ These issues become complicated in the context of an extension of the right of self-defence to include preemptive actions.

To gain quick victory in the war against Al Qaeda, the US, apart from violating international law, took the support of warlords who had no less violent objectives than the Al Qaeda or the Taliban. It is reported that the US still maintains relationship with different warlords to make its counter-insurgency strategy effective. The strengthening of warlords would lead to a more conflict-prone Afghanistan than a peaceful one. Even the problems of poppy cultivation and Drug Trafficking have been overlooked by the US to achieve its geopolitical

objectives.²⁸

The US's increasing emphasis on military perspective on security is reflected in its highly technocratic view on war, scorn for nation-building and prioritisation of ends over means. All these factors will erode the soft-power resources of the US in the long-term.

Interdependent World and Growing Independence of Regional Powers

The states have entered into deep economic and cultural relationship which is mutually beneficial and any conflict on military and strategic front would cost them more as the states involved in the conflict may have to bear the accumulated cost of disrupting the chain.²⁹ As economic security has begun to play more important or as important role as military security perspective, some scholars define the world as militarily unipolar but economically multipolar. The global financial crisis points to the extent to which financial market has been integrated. And to tone down the crisis requires the joint efforts on the part of major economic players and members of G 20 and on which both developed and developing countries debate to evolve common strategy to deal with

the crisis. Containment of Iran, which has been one of the primary objective of the American role in Afghanistan may find difficulty in an ever-increasing inter-dependent world. Even after Bush included Iran as an evil country in his famous phrase "Axis of evil" in his State of the Union address of 29 January 2002, the European Union foreign ministers reached an agreement to open talks with Iran on a trade and cooperation pact in the month of June of the same year. When the Sheer Energy Company of Canada agreed to an US \$80 million development project with the National Iranian Oil Company, the US objected to it categorically. Similarly, Moscow has a major investment in Iran's nuclear programme. The Russian Ministry of Atomic Energy was closely involved in building Iran's \$1 billion Bushehr nuclear power plant, and the Russian nuclear industry seeks more such projects.³⁰

Neither has the world emerged completely unipolar, nor has any world society become firmly established. In between the two perspectives on the post-Cold War era, there remains a large grey area where states move from the pro-US foreign policy or clear anti-US or restricted foreign policy to a more independent foreign policy. For example, Iran pursued a cautious

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foreign policy in the Cold War period due to the presence of the Soviet Union near its border and America's policy of sanctions after the hostage crisis. After the disintegration of the USSR, Iran has on several occasions expressed its wish to play the role of a regional power. It is developing nuclear plants with Russian assistance despite American sanctions. The coercive diplomacy of the US against Iran is ineffective so long as Russia does not agree to it. Growing interdependence and availability of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction to large number of state actors have granted such independence to them. In the aftermath of 9/11, though the Iranian President Syed Mohammad Khatami condemned the attacks and sympathised with American people, he favoured a UN led 'anti-terror coalition' to take on the terrorists in which Iran was willing to participate. But the unilateral attacks on Afghanistan has led to Iran's accusation that they were part of a long-term US plan to dominate different regions of the world. Similarly, while India and the US have developed strategic partnership in the form of civil nuclear deal in the post-Cold War period, Pakistan and Russia have moved closer as the Summit in Sochi points to this fact. In the quadripartite summit of Russia, Pakistan and Tajikistan hosted by

President Dmitry Medvedev at the Black Sea resort, Sochi, Moscow decisively moved to de-hyphenate its relationship with Islamabad and New Delhi. Sochi was a turning point in that direction as Mr. Medvedev's bilateral meeting with Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari on the sidelines of the summit was marked by uncharacteristic warmth and both the leaders decided to have "very regular and frequent contacts" and engage in "good political dialogue" unlike in the past.³¹ In case of Afghanistan, regional powers like Iran, Pakistan, India and many Central Asian states are trying to pursue their strategic interests more independently. Central Asia, which till the disintegration of the Soviet Union established relations with other countries through Soviet Union's foreign policy making with clear anti-US thrust, tried to move away from Russian orbit but never liked to replace Russian hegemony with any other power's hegemony. They preferred independence to any other kind of regional security arrangements centering around a hegemon. Therefore, they played one power against the other to secure independence.

Though there is no militarily powerful state or a combination of such states existing to challenge the US's power position globally, various

regional powers can pool their strength to effectively challenge the extra-regional ambitions of the US. The formation of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in which both Russia and China cooperate and provide all the Central Asian states including themselves the required leverages against the US points to this. Though both the countries welcomed the US to operate against the terrorists and cooperated with it, they were insistent that the US should exit from the region as soon as the War on Terror gets over.

According to Bhadrakumar, growing consultations between Russian-Indian and Iranian-Indian consultations testify that the regional powers may be slowly waking up and becoming wiser about the US's geo-strategy in Afghanistan. The time may not be far off before they begin to sense that the "war on terror" is providing a convenient rubric under which the US is gradually securing for itself a permanent abode in Hindu Kush and the Pamirs, Central Asian steppes and the Caucasus that form the strategic hub overlooking Russia, China, India and Iran.³² Recently, Russia has proposed to Afghanistan a key role for SCO in the peace process. The President of Russia and Iran had telephonic conversations regarding the issues of common concern like the Afghan issue.³³

Wars cannot be won militarily alone

The Cold War politics warranted a restraint from the direct use of force and coercion due to parity of power of the two super powers. With the end of the Cold War and after the dismantlement of the Warsaw pact, American foreign policy makers assumed that coercion and use of force if necessary could serve the US foreign policy objectives. However, the post-war situations in Iraq and Afghanistan are difficult to be managed by America alone. And more importantly, they require long-term and socio-economic engagement rather than military operations alone.

The US officials, contrary to their beliefs and actions, admit that wars cannot be won militarily alone. For example, the US former secretary of defence Robert Gates observed, "one of the important lessons of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is that military success is not sufficient to win: economic development, institution-building and the rule of law, promoting internal reconciliation, good governance, providing basic services...along with security, are essential ingredients for success."³⁴ In absence of these basic requirements, non-state actors like terrorists, warlords and civil war

groups move from strength to strength. Realising that there is no military endgame to Afghan problem, the US has been looking for political solutions like talking to the Taliban to stop attacks on the US and NATO forces in return for their reconciliation into Afghan political mainstream. However, many analysts believe that it is a hasty decision on the part of the US. The American plan for withdrawal of its forces by the end of 2014 is considered premature as the Afghan security forces are still not strong enough to protect the Afghan nation from the future security threats. The Taliban has not completely abjured violence and accepted the Afghan constitution in principle. It is still a strong force and has put the release of the Taliban prisoners in Guantanamo Bay as the first condition to open talks with the US.

Growth of non-state actors with asymmetric warfare tactics

There are likely to be less conventional warfares among the integrated members of the Europe and the less capability of the US to engage militarily without co-operation of the other powers and economic engagements among the states raising the cost of military engagement to mitigate the chances

of symmetrical warfare among the nation-states. On the other hand, the rise of international terrorism and civil war situations in the post-Cold War era has increased the cases of asymmetric conflicts. In the era of globalisation, “democratisation of technology”, the “privatisation of war” and the “miniaturization of weaponry” emboldens the radical groups vis-a-vis state actors. The asymmetric wars cannot be won. Nuclear missile defence technology developed by the US cannot be able to detect such operations if planes and buses are used for terrorist operations and people sneak in through fake passports and visas. Like conventional regular army of the opponent, there is no identifiable enemy in such kind of asymmetric warfare. They mingle with civilians and they can even enter into the territory of some other states from where they can wage a war. The difficulties in the counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan reveal that the US Army embraces a big-war paradigm. Difficult terrains, porous boundaries, difficulty in understanding native peoples’ language and cultural dissimilarity impedes American fight against the Taliban and Al Qaeda.

It is an issue of recurring debate in Washington as to how to combine counterinsurgency operations

effectively with nation-building efforts. It is because of America's military thrust in its foreign policy, the counterinsurgency operations have gone more militariastic impeding the nation-building process. According to Michael J. Mazarr "the tremendously insightful Hammes and policymakers such as the thoughtful and dedicated Gates have fully recognized the importance of nonmilitary instruments of power in dealing with these new threats and have called for improvements in those instruments. In practice, however, actual U.S. operations in these contingencies have retained an overwhelmingly military flavor."³⁵

Secret alliance and Shifting system

In the context of post-Cold War era when alliances and partnerships are always shifting, effective policy of coercion cannot be applied. With the growth of non-state actors like the radical religious groups, states do not form alliances on a formal basis and can operate in a surreptitious way as the other group is not a state. Pakistan provides a cogent example to illustrate this. On the one hand it fights the 'war on terror' and on the other side provides sanctuary and logistical help to different terrorist groups. While the US has strong reservations regarding Pakistan

being a strong ally to fight terrorism as the secret defence documents disclosed by Wikileaks³⁶ point out, it gives more and more aid to Pakistan to reduce anti-Americanism and support-base for terrorists in Pakistan. In the beginning of 2011, at the time when the US was contemplating the ways and means to withdraw from Afghanistan, the Washington Post reported that the Obama administration would give Pakistan more military, intelligence and economic support, after assessing that the US could not afford to alienate Pakistan.³⁷ The White House rejected proposals made by military commanders who, after losing patience with Pakistan's refusal to go after the Afghan Taliban, recommended that the US deploy ground forces to raid the insurgents' safe havens inside Pakistan.³⁸ After Osama bin Laden was found and killed in Pakistan and Headly's interrogation, the US relationship with Pakistan touched a new low. However, analysts argue that still the US and Pakistan have tacit understanding as Pakistan has not put down a single US drone so far though it complained about frequent American drone attacks. Iran, on the other hand has put down the single US drone that crossed into its territory. Iran and China being deeply suspicious of American motives in the Central Asian region are reported to

have provided military support to the Afghan Taliban. For example, there have been reports of Iran providing military hardware to the extremist Sunni Afghan Taliban and Chinese-made military equipment has reportedly also been found on Taliban fighters.³⁹ Thus, shifting of alliances, the increasing capability of states to pursue independent foreign policy objectives and secret and informal alliances jeopardize coercive diplomacy and use of force ineffective. The International politics relating to Afghanistan can be situated in the grey area defined by no clear alliances and asymmetric warfare.

The zero-sum game

Military and strategic perspective on security is based on zero-sum game. Gain is ensured by defeating the enemy. The states which fight the enemy have different military-strategic objectives. Where the end objective is military-strategic in nature, the immediate objective of member-states is bound to be military-strategic with the same logic of zero-sum game. For example, the US call for 'war on terror' has been joined by many states but their military strategic objectives substantially differ as they belong to different geopolitical realities. While

Pakistan is more inclined to defend its interests against India, Russia wants to maintain its interests in Central Asia by not allowing Islamic forces into it and 'War on terror' would help Russia to fight in Chechnya but it is worried about NATO's presence in Central Asia and Afghanistan, Iran wants to defend its geopolitical interests in Central Asia and maintain its traditional sphere of influence in western Afghanistan, and Central Asian states apprehend the spread of Islamic fundamentalism to their territory and also want to get rid of Russian monopoly over the energy politics in the region thus inviting the US presence in the region. According to Farkhod Tolipov, the operation in Afghanistan is essentially leading to the juxtaposition of the two realities: the international and unifying fight against terrorism, on the one hand, and the conflict prone, disuniting geopolitical rivalry in the Central-South Asian macro-region, on the other.⁴⁰ Even to defend their interests, states maintain secret alliances with the terror groups. Cooperation can be total if both objectives and the end result are contextualized in a win-win situation. Situation in Afghanistan can only improve if states see their benefits in the reconstruction and continuous engagement with it after the reconstruction.

Conclusion

Afghanistan had fought three wars with British imperial force and spawned Basmachi movement to preempt Russia's aggressive and strategic movement towards its south to maintain its independence. It showed its interest to maintain neutrality in the world wars and joined Non-Aligned movement. However, the US long-term geopolitical interests in Afghanistan militates against these two principles. While the Afghan president Hamid Karzai is interested in an intra-Afghan dialogue to build the Afghan nation, the US opposes it. The reason for this is while US expects Karzai to work as a US

surrogate, he prefers to act as an Afghan nationalist.⁴¹ The US sought a new status of forces agreement to maintain permanent bases in Afghanistan but Karzai opposed this and put up strong conditions to be fulfilled before any strategic engagement with the US. Karzai, in order to minimise his dependence on the US increased consultations and ties with Russia and Iran, including military cooperation. Karzai also increased consultations with Pakistan to reach with some understanding on Afghan peace settlement.⁴² Afghanistan's fierce sense of independence and neutrality has the possibility to add complexity to an already complex new great game. ■

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