

The US Paved the Ground for Regional Powers to Seek a Stake in Afghanistan

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Whether the US is really willing to pull troops out of Afghanistan and Syria or not, it has triggered a huge wave of diplomatic and military provocations across the immediate region, the mess which the US might possibly want to happen as a consequence. It has to be admitted that the US gain nothing by withdrawal, so the announcement of troops' pullout is pointless. The attack on US troops in Syria's Manbij last week can be used as an excuse to reverse the US's pullout decision.

The US saw China, Russia and Iran advancing to Afghanistan that prompted Washington to shake up its Afghanistan policy and renew its predominant role in the region to counter the trio rivals. The US allowed Pakistan, India, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE and other allies to take up a stronger stance and role in Afghanistan. These countries seek to settle their disputes and feud within the boundaries of Afghanistan. Although, Russia, China and Iran seems unable to get themselves fully involved in Afghanistan in the face of US presence, they have renewed their efforts to cut the impact of US influence in Afghanistan and the region.

India invited Afghan national security advisor **Hamdullah Mohib**, the former president **Hamid Karzai** and US special envoy **Zalmay Khalilzad** to resume a major role in Afghanistan amid the brouhaha of US forces' withdrawal. India's move is aimed at delivering a message of caution to Pakistan which is believed to carry a huge influence over Taliban's talks with the US.

According to Indian Express, India blasted at Pakistan that it has no right to speak on behalf of Afghanistan. Indian foreign ministry spokesperson has said that Pakistan has no right to tell Afghanistan as an independent country on how to regulate its foreign policy or how regional states should play role in regional affairs. India also declined Pakistan's allegations that it cannot play a role in Afghanistan.

It was the first instance of provocation of ties between arch enemies – India and Pakistan – as a result of US calculations. The US can retain its status and place in the international system only under the umbrella of diplomatic and military chaos in the world. Now, the situation in Afghanistan has been designed so carefully where Pakistan and India both spontaneously leans towards the US's support and its presence for their own stake.

Amidst the US-led so called peace efforts with Taliban, Saudi Arabia came forward to host the "US-Taliban" talks, but on certain condition which has not been accepted by the US special envoy and Afghan government. Saudi Arabia's intelligence chief had urged Afghan government to dissolve four major parties in Afghanistan to prevent them from taking part in the upcoming presidential election. These parties are on Saudi Arabia's blacklist over ties

with Iran, Turkey, Kazakhstan and other rivals of sorts. In diplomatic terms, Saudi Arabia stands hostile to Iran, Russia and Turkey and has adopted impulsive measures so far to counter its rivals in Afghanistan.

Saudi Arabia which takes pride in its revenues from Hajj pilgrimage, oil and gold think that every rash decision it take would be accepted by the world, especially the Muslim states. Afghanistan is different to other states where the reins of power are at the hand of the US and it never ever take up a stance regardless of the US gesture.

Saudi Arabia has pumped billions of dollars into Afghanistan's war since the 1970s to Mujahideens during the Soviet invasion or the Taliban via Pakistan, and has used its "holy status" to indoctrinate Jihadists, Taliban and other militant groups, but it is still lagging far behind in diplomatic area and gets its demands refused by the US and Afghanistan.

Saudi Arabia has remained as one of the largest financiers of then-Taliban regime and the current Taliban rebellion.

Some sources in Qatar told BBC that all states involved in "efforts to end protracted Afghan war" are in pursuit of their own interests rather than the proclaimed agenda.

The European Union edges backward from the physical and political scene in Afghanistan and this is not out of any weakness, but owing to lack of EU's confidence on Afghanistan's government that only toe the US line and carry no steady and sustainable foreign policy.

If the EU find a flaw or loophole in the US policies in Afghanistan and discover a powerful leader or group distaste to the US's trajectory, it would, of course, step forward with new countering agenda and ambitions in mind. The EU sounds unaligned with US in many world issues like sanctioning of Iran that it challenges by proceeding some deals with the Islamic Regime despite heavy sanctions.

Not just the EU, there is Iran, China and Russia whose inactions or failed attempts to make inroads in Afghanistan have contributed to the expansion of US influence in Afghanistan. Some powerful EU states, Russia, China, Turkey and Iran and partly India which, in a sense, stands opposite to the US's imperial agenda, have no ability o push for taking up some steering role in Afghanistan. If they come together, some if not all of them, it could truly pose a challenge to the US's foothold.

Now is the high-time for rival states to grab the opportunity to form a concrete opposition to US in Afghanistan as the presidential election is scheduled for July this year and blocs are taking shape against each other. All the presidential candidates have either paid service to the US in the past or they sound stubbornly loyal to the US, so the election result is absolutely in favor of the US.

The Taliban always refuse to prepare for talks with the government of Afghanistan, professedly under the pretext that the Afghan government is a puppet regime installed by the US, bears zero legitimacy as well as for inking Bilateral Security Agreement with the US in 2014. But, what remains the fact which media won't tell is that the US fears that if rivals like Russia, Iran or China infiltrate into the power base or in other terms the presidential system of Afghanistan, any new government could imperil the long-term US strategic agenda for Afghanistan with a view to promoting Russian or Chinese agenda. Therefore, the US doesn't authorize the government in Kabul to speak with Taliban, and there is no cover

for this circumstance unless Taliban itself reject negotiation with Kabul.

Afghanistan's government under Ashraf Ghani insists on chance to speak directly with the Taliban which is all but symbolic. The government heavily depends upon foreign aids including the US and EU also referred to as "the International Community".

Several conferences have been held so far on Afghanistan in Brussels, Geneva, Bonn, Tokyo, Istanbul, Vienna and other venues only to beg to world countries for funds. In such platforms, each Afghan government has to rattle off a litany of successes it has achieved over a period of time to convince the donors for continued aid. To this end, Afghan government makes dramatic pleas from "Taliban leadership" to sit in one table with Afghan govt. to show the international community it seeks "peace".

On the heyday of talks with Taliban, Iran grabbed the opportunity to show up as an influential power in the region and announced in late December that Tehran has engaged in negotiations with members of the Taliban. Iran is third in line to regional countries - Russia and China - that speak of negotiations with the Taliban.

It is no secret that the Taliban have no independent leadership and they will never poise to talk with Iran, Russia or China in the presence of US. It means that the regional powers have formed their own brand of Taliban only to challenge the US's expansionist policies. Iran, in particular, sees the Afghan-US Bilateral Security Agreement as a menace and, for now, Talibanization is deemed as the sole weighty option that can protect or at least fend off any enemy encroachment through its border.

Iran, Russia, China, Turkey, Qatar, UAE and Saudi Arabia have joined hands with Pakistan to negotiate with the Taliban and brush the Afghan government off the table, because none believe that it genuinely represents Afghanistan.

The Taliban militants have repeatedly acknowledged that they receive funds from Saudi Arabia, UAE and Pakistan - the only states which recognized the savage regime of the Taliban in 1996.

By drawing Saudi Arabia, UAE and Qatar into the war, the US has unburdened itself of the brunt of huge cash and costs of arms that have been poured into the hotspots of battlegrounds.

In Raisina Dialogue this year in India, former Afghan president Hamid Karzai said that it is not possible that the US will withdraw from Afghanistan. He asserted:

"The US troops will not leave Afghanistan and the US negotiation with Taliban is only about the US stations in Afghanistan and its delivery to the Taliban. They haven't come to leave".

He went on to say:

"Read Robert Killen's book that say 'Afghanistan has vital strategic importance because all of its neighbors are superpowers'".

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