

US Shift in Strategy from War to Peace?

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Introduction

Afghanistan is in the heart of Asia and a crossroad between geopolitical and geostrategic wise important countries of the region in the context of regional and Eurasian politics. However, the geopolitics and geography of Afghanistan itself is a riddle for countries that want to use this country to ensure their interests in the region and beyond. Afghanistan has a landmass of about 652,230 square kilometers, ranking 41 amongst the largest countries of the world. It has shared borders of around 5,529 kilometers with its neighbors. With approximately 31 million population, the country has about 180,000 active army that is poorly equipped. Afghanistan is surrounded by Islamic Lands, of which the governments have hostile approach towards it because of political issues and interests. Afghanistan has been occupied by powerful countries for specific objectives.

To its east lies Pakistan with which Afghanistan has its longest stretch of shared border, around 2,500 kilometers. Pakistan is spread over a vast area of 796,100 square kilometers, and has a population of 176.7 million¹. It has 617,000 active servicemen in the army and 515,000 reserve army personnel². The country also has atomic bomb.

America attacked and occupied Afghanistan 12 years ago in the name of combating so the called international terrorism by invoking Article Five of the Charter of NATO and Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations in the wake of 9/11 attacks on that country.

George W. Bush put the objective of fighting al-Qaeda and Taliban at the core of his strategy in Afghanistan. However, after two terms of Republicans' rule, Democrats altered the means and styles of the US strategy in Afghanistan and Iraq after coming to power. Following this, the American propaganda machine began shifting from war mongering rhetoric to talks of peace process in Afghanistan. This was despite the fact that at the beginning of his term in office, Barack Obama insisted on sending more troops to Afghanistan.

Recently, talks have been focused on change in US strategy from war to peace in Afghanistan. Peace that could materialize the US interests in Afghanistan, ensure continuation of US influence and propagation of secular culture and democratic values in this country. There is no doubt that strategic pact signed between the USA and Afghanistan by President Barack Obama and President Karzai in Kabul on 2-5-2012 and was endorsed by Afghan Parliament on 26-5-2013 is for these very objectives. Below are the key points in this pact.

- 1. Both sides pledged to strengthen long-term strategic cooperation in areas that are of importance for both sides. These include accelerating peace and reconciliation process, and strengthening of state institutions.*

2. Both parties pledged to support democratic values and uphold such values a fundamental aspect of their long-term partnership ...

3. Afghanistan reaffirms its strong commitment to inclusive and pluralistic democratic governance

4. Both sides reiterated that the presence and operations of US forces in Afghanistan since 2001 have been aimed at defeating al-Qa'idah and its affiliates.

5. It is important that after the signing of this strategic pact, negotiations should begin immediately to pave the way for signing of a security agreement to settle the issue of the status of American forces in Afghanistan...

6. The current military operations will continue until bilateral security agreement is concluded...

7. The United States shall designate Afghanistan a "major Non-NATO Ally."

8. America pledged to support Afghanistan in training and equipment of Afghan forces after 2014.

9. The United States shall seek funds to support the training, equipping, advising and sustaining of the Afghan national security forces.

10. Afghanistan pledged to give America access to and the right to use Afghan facilities until 2014. After this date, this issue will be governed by the bilateral security agreement that will be signed between the two countries.

11. Both sides agreed to enhance information and intelligence sharing...

The content of this strategic pact shows that the US strategy is designed with the objective of staying in Afghanistan long term. This is similar to the US occupation of Philippines in 1901 until 1946, although it came under the control of the Japanese for a short period from 1941 to 1945. The US then signed strategic and security agreements with Philippine and established bases there. These military bases still exist in Philippine.

The recent strategic agreement signed between Afghanistan and America is aimed at securing bases for USA in Afghanistan in return for making commitments to Afghanistan's security and stability. The agreement also requires judicial immunity for American soldiers against prosecution in Afghanistan. These two issues have not yet materialized, although America is trying to put them into action. America is looking for options and pretexts to achieve these two objectives. On 9-5-2013, Hamed Karzai announced, "America intends to establish nine bases in Afghanistan." He also said, "We agree to give the US these bases" and said, "serious negotiations are being conducted on these issues with Americans." (AFP, 9-5-2013). The issue of judicial immunity to US forces stationed in these bases is part of the negotiations.

The bilateral security agreement - suggested in the strategic pact - has not been signed thus far. This bilateral security agreement when signed may restrict or guarantee the actions of US forces in Afghanistan. American forces will obtain judicial and diplomatic immunity in Afghanistan. In Iraq, about 16 thousand personnel related to the US embassy enjoy diplomatic immunity. American officials and America's agent Noori al-Maliki failed to make a legitimate excuse for giving judicial immunity to the rest of American military personnel, by unavailingly trying to market these forces as trainers for the Iraqi army.

1. However, the question remains as to whether peace – as expected by people of Afghanistan- is in the US agenda at all?

2. Does the West (Europe and USA) want complete and lasting peace in Afghanistan?

3. And, what does “change in strategy from war to peace” means?

This article would seek answers to these questions.

War and Peace, American Perspective, Public Perception

When the US policy-making establishment uses the terms “war” and “peace”, the concept is different from the way ordinary people understand them. When the United States speaks about war, this does not mean the USA intends to go to war against major powers, because, this may lead to changing of the current World Order in which USA is already the dominant power. The US does not engage in a war that may lead to declining of its global supremacy. George W. Bush, because of his over-confidence on the US military strength, waged war on Afghanistan and Iraq ignoring its allies and the United Nations. This unilateral military campaign of the Bush administration led to failures in achieving stated US military goals, thereby undermining US credibility as a global military power.

The concept of peace as upheld by the US policymaking establishments is different from that understood by ordinary people. When diplomats and US politicians talk “peace” this means preventing war in areas where some sort of compromise is necessary to ensure US interests. Therefore, US strategy of peace does not mean putting an end to the war in Afghanistan and Iraq. America will continue these wars by other means and styles. America will let Afghan and Iraqi armies to conduct and carry this war, leading them from behind the scenes. It is for this reason that USA has been giving training to these forces, and is controlling them by their advisors. An indication for this is the fact that the US is insisting to sign strategic and security pacts with the two countries. It seems that USA wants to end the direct military engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan - but in essence, it will continue the war against people of these two countries (by employing the armies of these two countries as proxies) - so that people cannot free themselves from US colonialism.

Insistence on diplomacy does not mean that the USA will not resort to war. In US foreign policy and diplomacy, war and peace are two very interrelated, intertwined concepts. Earnest J. Wilson III, Dean of Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California who also served on the senior staff of the US National Security Council, says in an article: “The influence of DoD (Department of Defense) on US foreign policy-making is way greater than the foreign policy establishment itself”. He says that while the DoD has a budget of upward of 260bn, the State Department had requested a budget of about 10bn for 2008.³ In the same year, US military spending was 607 billion

dollars⁴. In 2012, US defense budget increased to around 695.7 billion dollars. This means USA is the biggest military spender in the world.

War is the basis of American foreign policy. It conducts its foreign policy in the guise of preventive attacks, war on terror, and securing of US interests. It also conducts its military based foreign policy under the pretext of supporting its allies, supporting a member of United Nations, ensuring the implementation of international laws, or implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions and sometimes, in the name of protection of human rights. America knows that if it were to remain the only dominant power in world politics and if the world were to submit to its supremacy, it must instill fear in other great powers so that they do not dare compete with it and challenge its leadership. This requires heavy investment in military power. Had it not been for this US military power, its interests, economic progress, and financial gains would not have been secured; its unity and integrity would not have been ensured. If USA does not wage wars outside, civil war would start within and destroy its unity, making it hard for the state to impose its authority. Thus, diplomacy is employed to serve these objectives. Hence, heavy investments and big budgets allocated for the US military spending and war efforts are aimed at implementing the US foreign policy. Less budget for the State Department for diplomatic affairs could be traced back to these backgrounds. Therefore, US foreign policy is offensive and war-oriented. Expressed differently, the military machinery spends ten times more than the diplomatic activities, exactly for the reason that the foreign affairs of the US are based on war. The US believes that its diplomatic achievements are the result of its military might and war-oriented efforts, which compel others to accepting its diplomatic and political and non-political programs.

Competing or Reinforcing? Comparing Bush, Obama Strategies

The decade since September 11 has seen two competing US foreign policy visions, different in its style but same in essence. George W. Bush's response to the attack shaped his foreign policy, which he declared his so-called *War on Terror*. Barack Obama tapped into the American public's disillusionment over Iraq and Afghanistan and US foreign policy more generally by rejecting the core principles of Bush's world-view. Opposing Bush's foreign policy, Obama said that the US needed partners to achieve its goals and protect its interests. Moreover, those partners, he believed, could be won over only through diplomatic engagement, not intimidation. Optimistic about the capacity of American power, Bush declared his global war, in order to reshape the world order. He, therefore, declared his offensive foreign policy attacking Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. However, Iraq war produced something Bush never had anticipated: a protracted and bloody occupation that demonstrated the limits of American power. Criticism of US foreign policy soared, both at home and abroad.

Barak Obama in a way owed his political success to George W. Bush, as Bush's strategy led to revealing the limits of the American power in Iraq and Afghanistan and it also failed to produce the supplementary benefits that Bush had anticipated. During his presidential debate, Obama argued that he had opposed Bush's strategy from the start. His criticisms flowed from a rejection of Bush's view of how the world worked. Where Bush implicitly denied the claim that globalization was remaking world politics, Obama accepted it as a given. A globalized world had created a multitude of threads that crossed national

borders. Democrats first raised the concept of globalization during the Clinton administration. The Obama administration will not give up on this concept because of the gains it has brought to the United States. America carved up the issue of international terrorism to justify its war against Islam, Muslims and occupation of their lands. Under the pretext of nonproliferation, the monopoly of atomic weapons has been limited to those countries that possessed them before George Bush, the son. Climate change and the issue of environmental protection is another pretext, the USA is using to secure its economic and political interests. This has become evident in conferences that have been held in the context of climate change and environmental protection. However, American power, though vast, was insufficient to meet these challenges. In Obama's words "America cannot meet the threats of this century alone".⁵

Obama argued that the United States could secure the partners it needed only if other countries agreed with the direction USA was heading to, and the way it was pursuing its goals.

Barack Obama argued that "with the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, Bush is giving terrorists what they really want...extended US occupation at heavy costs with undetermined consequences."⁶ Barack Obama summed up his foreign policy in a few points; US troops' withdrawal from Iraq in 16 months of occupying his office, engaging world powers in US missions abroad, replacing war with diplomacy in US foreign policy.

Although Obama emphasized the importance of working with friend and foes alike, he insisted that he would act militarily where it made sense. Besides vowing to send more troops to Afghanistan, he insisted during his presidential campaign in August 2007 that he would use drone strikes and Special Forces operations to attack inside Pakistan. He said: "*if we have credible intelligence about high-value terrorist targets, and President Musharraf does not act, we will.*"⁷

Obama administration made no reduction in military budget and military preparation, rather his administration made double fold increase. It also did not stop the war on terror, but changed the tactics to achieve desired goals with minimum cost and less trouble. It increased drone attacks, extending operations to other countries. Obama employed forces of other countries under its influence such as the army of Pakistan to fight the Taliban and African armies to fight Muslims in Somali. This made it easy for the Obama administration to focus on other strategic priorities such as the Pacific Ocean region. America suffered heavy losses in Iraq, and it seemed that it was losing the battle to the resistance. This harmed the US international standing greatly. Nevertheless, no country in the world could take its leading position. The US managed to maintain its leadership and gain strategic objectives in Iraq and in the region. USA imposed its desired constitution and strategic and security agreements on Iraq. It controls the affairs in Iraq and the region, and wishes to apply the same strategies and agenda in Afghanistan to ensure its presence in this country.

Democrats had adopted diplomatic engagement as a foreign policy style during Bill Clinton administration. The objective has been for the Democrats to strengthen their hold on US affairs internally, improve US image internationally, minimize opposition of other great powers to US policies abroad, and remove the fatigue caused on the US military and economy by direct wars and financial (economic) crisis. This policy was not implemented because other powers challenged the first power US. Rather, rival countries to the United

Stated are happy with this US strategy of engagement. However, this engagement is aimed at implementing US plans and achieving US objectives with help of these powers. This engagement of other countries does not translate into participation in planning and policy-making on international issues. Rather the USA makes plans, issues directives and establishes relations with other countries to ask them to implement these policies. This is the goal of US engagement of other countries. In fact, it is a way of deceiving those countries that walk the path of America in implementing US strategies. USA calls on major powers and small countries alike to engage with it in managing the world affairs, asking them to implement the policies and strategies it devices. These countries are under the delusion of being US partners while the reality is that they are only executors of US strategies.

Shift in US Strategy from War to Peace, Regional Implications

After coming to presidency of Barak Obama, US foreign policy has been set in maintaining of regional and international realities to achieve goals. However, this does not mean that Obama has been soft in implementing US policies, particularly in the Muslim world. For instance, Bush launched drone attacks on four Muslims countries (Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan and Yemen) while Obama extended these operations to six countries including Somalia and Libya.

At the beginning, the USA did not trust countries of the region to assign them important tasks. There had been over-confidence on American capabilities, thereby giving countries of the region an impression that it was their duty to serve US interests, or at least not stand on US's way by favoring its opponents. Opposition to US occupation increased in Iraq. In 2007 and 2008, the resistance reached its peak. In case of Afghanistan, Taliban were defeated at the beginning, but it was not long enough when resistance in Afghanistan resumed and gained momentum. It was in these circumstances when Obama came to presidency and declared that USA was going to engage countries of the region in Afghan affairs. Interests of these countries in Afghanistan and in the region have direct effects on US strategy in Afghanistan. Paradoxically, engaging these countries in Afghan affairs leads to conflict of interests of these countries, creating new challenges for the USA. The attack on Indian workers in Afghanistan on 26 February 2010 is a manifestation of this conflict of interests between India and Pakistan. It was in this context that USA increased pressure on India and Pakistan to start dialogue, because India-Pakistan rivalry directly affects the war USA has started on the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Although, American policy on India and Pakistan is independent of its policy on Afghanistan, it pressures Pakistan to give in to India in case of Afghanistan so that India increases its influence in Afghanistan and makes greater gains. USA helped India to enter into the Afghan theatre with the aim of bringing India closer to itself.

America sees the Afghan theater in the context of its rivalry with China and Russia. America encouraged both countries to participate in the Afghan cake. The contracts of Ainak Copper Mine and extraction of oil in the north of Afghanistan are small examples of this policy. Similarly, Russian companies participate in reconstruction projects particularly in Energy and Water sector officially (through diplomatic channels) and unofficially (directly). This soft stand on China and Russia and encouraging them to sign such contracts to

secure some interests has earned their cooperation with USA. It has led them to believe that American occupation of Afghanistan is not directed against them. Thus, they make no attempt to oppose US interests. Obtaining cooperation of regional countries in Afghanistan will help achieve US goals and objectives without huge human or financial commitments. This strategy also gives the impression that America is not despotic in running the world affairs, an impression which helps minimize opposition to US strategy in Afghanistan.

Connecting South and Central Asia program is gradually gaining momentum, and Turkmenistan on the Caspian Sea region is becoming an active player in the recent days.

1. Extension of Trans-Afghan gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Pakistan and India (funded by ADB),
2. extending a 1300MW power line from Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan to Pakistan via Afghanistan (the project is called CASA-1000) partially funded by the World Bank,
3. the program to extend a railway line between Turkmenistan and Afghanistan, Central Asia Regional Cooperation program (CAREC)
4. and several other programs

are underway to reshape the region into cooperation by interrelating and diffusing their interests under the US auspices.

In the guise of these programs, America wants to extend its control over natural resources in Central Asia. In this strategy, Afghanistan stands as strategically the most important region from where America will implement its plans. The objective is not mere cooperation and progress in the region. This whole program is aimed at securing US interests in this region, particularly extending its control over Turkmenistan, and this is what matters for America the most. Turkmenistan is one of the biggest exporters of natural gas to Russia. Not only Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, but USA wants to take the entire Central Asian region out of the influence of Russia and bring it under the US control. This is would be a determining factor in US-Russia rivalry, because if Russia loses control over this region, it would be a fatal blow for it as Central Asia, Caucasus and Eastern Europe are spheres of Russian influence outside its territory proper.

In the light of this, the US strategy of “peace” in Afghanistan has obvious regional dimension that are aimed at minimizing negative interference of countries to American strategy and optimizing its chances of success.

Conclusion

1. The prospect of peace in Afghanistan is achievable within US parameters and objectives.
2. These objectives include securing military bases without entering into war with the Taliban. In order for USA to achieve its goals without war, it is important to reach an agreement with the Taliban and accommodate them in Afghan government. Otherwise, it is not possible to stabilize the situation.

3. The USA can maintain the status-quo only by bringing all factions of the Afghan conflict in a coalition government without isolating anyone.

There is no doubt that America limited its vision of peace in Afghanistan after signing strategic agreement with Afghanistan on the issue of its presences in this country. The US demands include permanent bases in Afghanistan, judicial immunity for US troops stationed in Afghanistan, reaching an agreement of reconciliation with the Taliban giving them share in the government and accepting them as an opposition force. The US goal with regard to the Taliban is to deceive them into entering the political process. The strategic agreement dictates a pluralist, democratic government in Afghanistan. It is for this reason that Taliban political office was opened in Qatar on 17 June 2013. A Taliban representative explained objective of their political office in Qatar in five points:

1. improving relations with countries of the world through negotiations and discussions,
2. supporting the political process with the aim of establishing an Islamic state in Afghanistan,
3. meeting with other Afghan sides with consideration of circumstances,
4. improving relations with government and non-government international institutions such as the United Nations, and issuing of political statements
5. and releasing those statements through international media.” (al-Jazeera 17 June 2013).

Thus, it seems that Taliban are getting close to agreement with the system in Afghanistan while the process is supported by the United States. Taliban hope to participate in the political process with the current system. If this materializes and Taliban join the political process, it will be the biggest achievement for the US strategy of securing its interests and influence in Afghanistan.

Reuters reported on 17/6/2013, quoting US officials, “USA will start peace talks with the Taliban as of next week in Doha”, but implied that the desired outcome would require lengthy process. The agency also quoted these officials that, “the United States also insists that Taliban should sever relations with al-Qa’idah, renounce and put an end to armed activities, accept the Afghan constitution which guarantees women’s right and rights of minorities.”

Common perception of lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan would remain a dream as it has been over the last 300 years history of this country, unless there is a radical geopolitical/geostrategic change in the region that can link different parts of this country comfortably to commercially and economically important regions beyond its current borders. In addition, the requirements for such a radical change is to:

1. Continue the resistance against occupation.
2. Reject participation in the government and political process.
3. Insist on uprooting of the current system.
4. Reject US presence.
5. Making public opinion against US presence in Afghanistan, and against its puppet government.

6. Continue Islamic dawah based on the ideology of Islam to shape public opinion.
7. Continue efforts to get the leadership of the nation.
8. Give people a correct picture of the political situation.
9. Connect the issues of Afghanistan with the issues of Pakistan for a radical change.

This will bring about radical changes and will put US program, and its strategic and security plans on the path to failure.

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24 Shawwal 1434 AH

01 September 2013 CE

1 globalfirepower.com

2 Ibid

3 "Hard power, soft power, smart power", Earnest J. Wilson, III, Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Vol.616 (Mar. 2008), pp.110-124. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25097997>

4 Pavan Nair, "An Evaluation of India's Defence Expenditure". Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 44, No. 51 (December 2009), pp. 40-46

5 James M. Lindsay, George W. Bush, Barack Obama and the future of US global leadership

6 Barack Obama, 'The war we need to win', Woodrow Wilson Center, 1 Aug. 2007.

7 Barack Obama, 'The war we need to win'.

8 "The Geopolitics of the United States, Part II: American Identity and the Threats of Tomorrow", Stratfor.com, Aug 25, 2011.

9 Refer to the annexed table at the end of the article which for details on donors commitment to different areas.