

Scenario 230

TALIBAN RECAPTURED AFGHANISTAN - 2

BBC's TWO BASIC QUESTIONS:

After America's humiliating exit, *the BBC* discussed online the same very basic questions that: ***Why did the US made (wrong) choice of Afghanistan & why the war lasted so long?***

The same story in short; that after 9/11 of 2001, the US asked Afghanistan to hand over Osama Bin Laden to them – but the then rulers, the Taliban, refused so the US intervened militarily, quickly removing the Taliban from government and vowed to support democracy and eliminate the terrorist threat. The militants slipped away and later re-grouped – then raised their guns to fight back.

NATO allies had joined the US and a new Afghan government was installed in Kabul in place of the Taliban in December 2001. Deadly Taliban attacks continued at their pace. President Obama's '*troop surge*' in 2009 helped push back the Taliban but it was not for a long term. Year 2014 was the bloodiest year since 2001; NATO's international forces ended their combat mission, leaving responsibility for security to the Afghan army. That gave the Taliban momentum and they seized some territory also.

Five years later, the US started peace talks with the Taliban – but keeping the puppet Afghan government away; they were not called to the meeting table till the withdrawal agreement of 29th February 2020 was signed in Doha, Qatar. However, the US-Taliban deal could not stop the Taliban attacks - they switched their focus from the US & NATO bases to Afghan army, Afghan security forces and civilians, and resolved for targeted assassinations – which lasted till the doom-day of mid August 2021.

Other figures closely associated with the American-backed government floated their recorded videos congratulating the Taliban on their victory. High Council for National Reconciliation Chair Abdullah Abdullah announced the formation of a new '*coordination council*' with Karzai

and former warlord politician Gulbuddin Hekmatyar to deal directly with the Taliban in Kabul. Its purpose was to prevent chaos and to better manage the affairs related to peace and the peaceful governance. The Taliban didn't respond to the group. The US officials kept their focus on the evacuation and were seen '*not interested in the Afghan-to-Afghan talks*'.

The news of Taliban's quick advance to Kabul spread when helicopters were seen landing at the US Embassy early Sunday [15th August 2021] and armoured diplomatic vehicles were seen leaving the compound. Diplomats scrambled to destroy sensitive documents and smokes seen from some embassy's premises.

The Pentagon deployed another 1,000 troops to Afghanistan from a brigade combat team with the 82nd Airborne Division resulting in a total of 6,000 US troops on ground at Kabul International Airport which had already taken over air traffic control at the airport. Even then the US government was struggling to get real-time information. There was a big chaos at the Kabul airport and around – details are gives elsewhere on these pages.

Bagram and Sorobi districts in Kabul province also surrendered without shots being fired; the militants had made '*political deals*' with Afghan government officials and the local leaders – like in Mazar e Sharif and Jalalabad earlier. On the same day morning [15th Aug] Afghan forces handed over Bagram air base — once the US military's high-ranking important airfield in the country — to the Taliban; the air base was then holding 5,000 inmates in the prison – which were all released at once. Other prisons were also taken over by Taliban immediately and most inmates released.

Biden's statement 'washing hands of Afghanistan is one of the most shameful moment in US history': Left and right-wing media got united in condemnation of 'America's chaotic retreat' and 'betrayal' of Afghan people; some glimpses are detailed on other pages where appropriate.

As the Taliban entered Kabul – countries like Germany, Denmark and Norway said they would suspend operations. The British ambassador was scheduled to be airlifted the next day evening. Iranian officials said its embassy in Kabul would be evacuated by next day [Monday]. Other governments, including Russia and Turkey, said their missions would continue to operate; some neighbours like UAE & Pakistan helped evacuation process.

On the very next day of Taliban's take over, the world media started approaching friends and foes of Afghanistan for its future plans. Responses from 3 neighbouring countries were hereunder.

PAKISTAN: In Pakistan – long accused of aiding the Afghan Taliban – PM Imran Khan said:

"....the Taliban had broken the chains of mental slavery in Afghanistan.....the Taliban have freed their country from superpowers".

PM Khan was not alone in portraying the Taliban's victory as a triumph. Influential religious clerics and senior Pakistan military generals also celebrated publicly. Siraj ul Haq, the chief of Pakistan's *Jamaat-e-Islami* [JI], an Islamic political party, said in a speech:

'...it was a historic win over a superpower and would create an exemplary Islamic government in Afghanistan'.

Pakistan had pushed for peace during the Doha negotiations [2019-20], but many believed the main priority for Pakistan remained keeping the Taliban onside. However, it could be a two edge-sword; the strength of the Taliban's resurgence could further embolden already powerful radical Islamist groups in Pakistan and thus make it more vulnerable.

As the Taliban swept across Afghanistan, some Pakistanis saw it as a reason to celebrate. Islamist organizations in a number of Pakistani cities doled out sweets to locals. On social media, some people crowed over the failure of the US war effort and nation-building project next door. Raoof Hasan, Special Assistant to Pakistan's PM, mocking the assessments of Western experts on South Asia, tweeted:

"Afghanistan witnessed a virtually smooth shifting of power from the corrupt Ghani government to the Taliban. The contraption that the US had pieced together for Afghanistan has crumbled like the proverbial house of cards."

Pakistani PM Khan's government, however, refrained from recognizing the new Taliban's government in Kabul. PM Khan was a vocal opponent of the American '**WAR ON TERROR**' in the region and blamed it for stoking a parallel Pakistani Taliban insurgency, then stressed the importance of all sides working to secure an inclusive political solution. He had truly cited Pakistan as a victim of cycles of regional unrest and conflict - by the interventions of the US especially.

Pakistan's National Security Adviser Moeed Yusuf explained it more vividly in an interview [August 2021]:

"We under no circumstances are prepared to see protracted instability that in the past has caused spill-over into Pakistan. We suffered all of these 40 years."

Referring to ***Ishaan Tharoor's*** allegations dated 18th August 2021 at **"Today's World View"** newsletter:

"For years, the Western media and the US bemoaned the support afforded to the Afghan Taliban by Pakistan's military establishment and through its Inter-Services Intelligence [ISI]"

But if it was so, none of the media agency or the US State department ever bothered to go deep into the basic root-cause that US had continuously backed Afghan Presidents KARZAI & GHANI in association with Indian government and that:

- ***India's RAW & TTP had launched about 15,000 terrorist attacks on Pakistani soils after 2005.***
- ***Especially hit Pakistan's Tribal areas and Balochistan killing more than 80,000 soldiers and civilians.***
- ***.....Caused over \$150 billion loss in Pakistan's economy.***
- ***.....Also drove 3.5 million of Pakistani citizens away from their homes.***

The Western media claimed that the Taliban's long-running insurgency and its rapid takeover of Afghanistan were linked to Pakistan – **but who created Al-Qaeda and Taliban – it was the US who created them**, backed them with cash finance and military equipment during 1970-80s to oppose the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan; see the details in preceding chapters of this book.

For its allies in the Pakistani establishment, the Taliban's appeal was both political and strategic, thus Pakistan served as a major US ally during and after the 2001's invasion of Afghanistan – but the US betrayed.

The situation turned around at 180 angles when ***the US started preferring India, sending them huge funding*** in the name of training of Afghan

Security Forces there; total bill paid: nearly \$88bn. As a result, India planted those trained Afghani groups at the Pak-Afghan border to attack Pakistani territories labelling them as Pakistani Taliban [TTP] killing about[see the above lines again for details].

With so enhanced loss of military and civilian lives, especially with the notorious pinching instructions of **DO MORE; DO MORE**, Pakistan had to react in its own way – so the world has seen the end of the LONGEST US WAR with so humiliating defeat.

LESSON: *in wars, powerful partners should deal with the allies sincerely and whole-heartedly. The basic Islamic philosophy is ‘Friend of your friend is friend AND the friend of your enemy is Enemy’ – one can analyse these words in recent past of the troika of the US – Pakistan – India.*

ISI’s GEN HAMID GUL PREDICTION:

Now recall famous words of late Pakistani Gen Hamid Gul, known as the Godfather of Pakistani geo-strategic policies, televised in 2014 – so why crying that **the ISI defeated the Soviet Union in Afghanistan with the help of America – and then the ISI, with the help of America, defeated America.**

It’s no secret that under President Trump’s pressure, Pakistan had released Abdul Ghani Baradar — the political key-figure of the Taliban - from prison in 2018 so he could participate in peace negotiations held in Doha, the Qatari capital. In June [2018]’s **Washington Post**: PM Khan had argued that he and his government did the ‘*real diplomatic heavy lifting*’ to bring the Afghan Taliban to the negotiating table and urged the US and Afghan governments to ‘*show more flexibility*’ in the talks.

In Pakistan, new influx of Afghan refugees was [and still is] endangered on top of the more than 3 million it has hosted since the waning days of the Cold War. The Taliban takeover does not dim the threat of anti-Islamabad militancy, and it could also encourage Islamist extremist movements and ethnic *Pashtun* separatists operating within Pakistan. Meanwhile, Western frustrations with the Pakistani connection to the Afghan Taliban could only intensify in future.

These developments would probably take Pakistan further away in all developmental fields, perpetuating dysfunction at home and locking it into a foreign policy defined by more dependence on China – but the

people were happy to keep the US away calling it treacherous and deceitful.

RUSSIA: Russia reacted to the Taliban's return to power with cool real politik. Zamir Kabulov, Russia's presidential envoy to Afghanistan, said on state television on 16th August 2021 that:

"If we compare the negotiability of the colleagues and the partners, I have long since decided that the Taliban is much more able to reach agreements than the puppet government in Kabul."

Russia has long criticised the US intervention in Afghanistan. In February 1989, the Soviet Union evacuated its troops while crossing over the Friendship Bridge into Uzbekistan. This August [2021], US-allied warlords and their fighters were forced to flee over the same bridge.

In Afghanistan, the Russia's policy went different than in Syria and Iraq; Russia was seen ready to engage if the Taliban could ensure security for the diplomatis community and prevent militants from launching assaults against its neighbours such as Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

The Russian envoy to Afghanistan, even hinted the possibility that Russia would recognise the Taliban government – but depending upon the behaviour of the new rulers. However, the Taliban promptly took the Russian embassy under protection, and its ambassador, Dmitry Zhirnov, told about the Taliban's promise that *'not a single hair will fall of Russian diplomats'*.

CHINA: Since long China, no doubt, was feeling uneasy about the US military engagement in Afghanistan. Then astonishingly, it also blamed the US for its *'irresponsible withdrawal'* from Afghanistan. In recent times, the continued presence of the US in Afghanistan was seen as a lesser of two evils but Beijing adopted a careful line in its policy towards the new Taliban regime. Chinese media called Afghanistan a **'graveyard of empires'** and Beijing never opted to be mired in this Great Game. China's foreign ministry spokeswoman said:

'... [we're] ready to develop good-neighbourly, friendly and cooperative relations with Afghanistan but Afghanistan would not serve as a staging ground for acts detrimental to China'.

China would, however, plan to participate in the post-war reconstruction and provide investments etc. On 16th August 2021; China's spokesperson, Hua Chunying, reiterated that:

1 *"Beijing welcome the Taliban's promise that they will allow no force to*
2 *use the Afghan territory to engage in acts detrimental to China and its*
3 *expression of hope that China will be more involved in Afghanistan's*
4 *peace and reconciliation process and play a bigger role in future*
5 *reconstruction and economic development".*

6
7 For many years, China remained concerned about its far-west Xinjiang
8 Uyghur region while demanding the Taliban refrain from hosting any
9 Uyghur groups on their territory.

10
11 Referring to **Simon Jenkins** in **the Guardian** dated 16th August 2021:

12
13 ***"The fall of Kabul** was inevitable. It marks the end of a post-imperial*
14 *western fantasy. Yet the west's reaction beggars belief. Call it a*
15 *catastrophe, a humiliation, a calamitous mistake, if it sounds good.*
16 *All retreats from empire are messy. This one took 20 years, but the end*
17 *was at least swift.*

18
19 *The US had no need to invade Afghanistan. **The country was never a***
20 ***'terrorist state'**.... It was not at war with the US; indeed the US had*
21 *aided its rise to power..... The Taliban had hosted Osama bin Laden*
22 *in his mountain lair through his friendship with the Taliban leader,*
23 *Mullah Omar... (but not as terrorist entity)"*

24
25 After the 2001 invasion, the US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld
26 demanded that George Bush should **'punish and get out'** but neither
27 President Bush nor UK's PM Tony Blair listened. For reasons never fully
28 explained, Blair declared a **'doctrine of international community'** and
29 pleaded for Britain to be in the first bombing run over Kabul.

30
31 In 2006, British army of 3,400 volunteered to suppress resurgent Taliban
32 rebels in *Helmand*, a southern province of Afghanistan. Secretary
33 John Reid held that only remnants of the Taliban remained there and
34 that *'not a shot needed firing'*. Gen David Richards said it would be
35 *'just another Malaya'* – but seven years later, **British troops had to leave**
36 **defeated and wounded**; the local *Pashtuns* are masters at humiliating
37 outside powers.

38
39 *[The then PM Tony Blair and his cabinet could have known their*
40 *history that the same Pashtuns had slaughtered nearly 17,000 British*
41 *men, women, and children when they were evacuating Kabul ending*
42 *the First Afghan War 183E-42 and the British Empire was defeated;*
43 *had to leave the whole Afghanistan.]*

Twenty years of dependency on lavish western taxpayers means that 1
 soldiers, interpreters, journalists, academics and aid workers were seeing 2
 friends threatened and killed. Years of assistance and training went in 3 vain.
 The US wasted its trillions dollars [see details in separate chapter] 4 and the
 Britain alone washed out its £37bn just to feel a fresh taste of 5 imperialism.
'How many times must it be drummed into British heads 6 that the British
Empire is over?' **Simon Jenkins** is referred again. 7

'To make the world better....' is an old slogan now; soldiers need not to 8
 die for it, 454 British soldiers and civilians lost their lives in Afghanistan. 9
'The world is not threatening Britain. Terrorism does not need state 10
sponsors, nor will it be ended by state conquest', held **Simon Jenkins**, 11
 referred above, in very sincere tone. 12

WAR OF BOMBS & BULLETS IS OVER: 13

On 18th August 2021; a lengthy text message became viral in the whole 14
 world from an unknown destination – interesting it was; let us share: 15

"War of Bombs & Bullets is OVER; A War of Brains is Starting - 16

- America has miscalculated the biggest step it took 19 years ago; the 17
 step of thinking that Afghanistan is a walk in the park to take over 18
 – pity on their knowledge. 19
- And it again miscalculated its withdrawal. If anyone thinks that 20
 America mistakenly has withdrawn from Afghanistan is mistaken 21
 as well – pity on their wisdom. 22
- America has three SELF CREATED enemies at this time: China, 23
 Iran and China's ally - Pakistan. 24
- America wanted a civil war to ensue in Afghanistan that will spill 25
 over into Pakistan, destabilise Chinese western border and put Iran 26
 at alert with *Sunni Taliban* taking over its western borders. 27
- Civil war did not start; and that made the American plans upside 28
 down – pity on their rogue planning. 29
- The *Shia* dominated Northern Areas [of Afghanistan] and its leaders 30
 supported Taliban and made peace with them. That created havoc 31
 for the Americans and victory for Iran. No threat at its eastern 32
 borders. 33

- China pre-emptively invited and started a dialogue with the Taliban and peacefully chalked out the future; NO rifts there either.
- Pakistan fenced off its border months earlier with Afghanistan and absolutely stayed away from its internal matters thus there was no conflict between the Taliban and Pakistan – thus NO Civil War.
- The Indian investment [in Afghanistan] of billions of dollars fizzled out; and the Indians fooled the US that they had a stronghold in Afghanistan. India even lost its bet in post American withdrawal from Afghanistan; they couldn't handle the situation – all their narratives went to the dogs as well.
- Americans are angry and annoyed with the Indians for misleading them - more than they are with the Afghans.
- Afghan government was a puppet to begin with and the Americans knew it because they are the ones who IMPOSED them on the Afghan people.

NOW AFTER...?

- Now after America losing India falling on its face,...the entire war is going to be fought in the news and with narratives.
- **No bombs, No bullets, No bunkers. A war of brains.....**
- India will try to delude the world with wrong narratives. They are a wounded Jackal - And a wounded jackal is more DESPERATE.
- Pakistan has won. Pakistan is Stronger than before. Pakistan is on a more solid diplomatic ground than it has been in the past 19 years of this war.
- The world should be ready for a peaceful region where China, Pakistan, Iran and access to Central Asia through Afghanistan will define a new Chapter in the future of CPEC. CPEC only had one obstacle and that was unhindered access to Central Asian countries, it is here now. And it being here is the death of INDIA. A stronger region with Pakistan leading in it is a nightmare for India.

But get ready to hear the screams of BLA, PTM and all other Afghan based Indian supported rogue elements. They will be dying along with Afghan puppet regime.

GOOD DAYS ARE HERE – and AHEAD

Historians of Afghan-US relations held that the Taliban and al-Qaeda 1
 were inseparable; their joint training sessions were known to all. 2 Moreover;
 the Taliban were not a centralised and unified force; some 3 leaders wanted
 to lead a peaceful life then but hardliners were reluctant 4 to break links with
 al-Qaeda and other affiliated factions. There was a 5 regional branch of the
Islamic State group - ISKP [*Khorasan*] – used to 6 oppose the Taliban regime
 but how would they behave in changed 7 scenario – was not clear. 8

Like al-Qaeda, ISKP was also degraded by the US and NATO; they were 10
 able to re-group again during the post-withdrawal period. Its fighter 11
 numbers were estimated as less than 2000 but it would try to gain 12
 footholds in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and parts of Tajikistan, which 13
 could be a serious regional concern in the near future. 14

Let us re-visit the issue once more. 15

Many factors were responsible for this catastrophe, an unexpected event 18
 called fall of Kabul. Firstly; the melting of the Afghan National Security 19
 Forces [ANSF], which were well-armed as well as well-trained by the 20
 Americans themselves and having five times numerical superiority over 21
 the Taliban militia, allowed the latter a free passage across the various 22
 cities and district HQs. 23

Secondly; the *performance of the US intelligence remained zero* since six 25
 months at least; they fell flat, showing how detached, lazy and casual the 26
 US administration remained about the ground situation in Afghanistan. 27
 The US lost interest in Afghan affairs after the Biden Administration 28
 announced the withdrawal plan in April 2021. 29

The world intelligentsia failed to comprehend the rapidity of how a 31
 20-year old multinational Afghan project led by the world's sole 32
 superpower could be wound up in few weeks – and that too forced by a 33
 militia of little more than 60,000. It would take time the world feel about 34
 the deeper implications and envisage the whole spectrum of consequences 35
 of this episode. 36

Among all the stakeholders, no one got affected by the disaster as 38
 profoundly as the Afghan people. The images and video clips of the then 39
 prevailing chaos and anarchy in the streets, roads, bus stops, and Kabul 40
 Airport were heartbreaking. These scenes of human helplessness and 41
 pessimism will continue to shame the world for failing the people of 42
 Afghanistan. 43

Referring to Amanat Chaudhry's essay titled ***'The fall of Kabul and beyond'*** in daily ***'theNews.com.pk'*** dated 19th August 2021:

"When the history books get written, the myopic and lopsided policies pursued by the Biden Administration will characterize the legacy of the 'experienced' president for all the wrong reasons. He will not be able to shrug off the questions about the Americans leaving the people of Afghanistan to fend off for themselves.

Worthy of equal blame is the now-deposed Ghani administration that kowtowed to its foreign masters and built up an empire of corruption, incompetence, and unpleasantness, practically alienating the Afghan people....."

The Taliban takeover was celebrated by some people in Pakistan at full bloom – forgetting that the Taliban philosophy and democracy lie at two opposite polls – one have to make one choice.

With Kabul overtaken by the Taliban, all the previous peace deals including the Doha Agreement and regional efforts as well as the expectation from the Taliban to keep them dissociated from so-called terror outfits like Al-Qaeda had practically gone dead. That was why the Taliban-run Afghanistan needed international legitimacy and financial assistance to be viable; as noted by Mullah Baradar: ***'...the Taliban's test has just begun'***.

BLAST AT KABUL AIRPORT – 13 KILLED:

On 27th August 2021; thirteen [13] US service members and at least 60 Afghans were killed and 140 wounded in two bombing attacks outside Kabul's airport. The deadly blasts came as the US and other countries raced to complete a massive evacuation of their citizens following the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan. Eighteen US service members were also injured.

ISIS in Khorasan, known as ISIS-K, claimed that an ISIS militant carried out the suicide attack and President Biden immediately ordered US military commanders *"to develop operational plans to strike ISIS-K assets, leadership and facilities."*

US officials had warned over the past week that a threat of a terror attack at the airport was becoming more acute; the US diplomats in Kabul warned American citizens to immediately leave several gates of the

airport, citing security threats. The risk of potential suicide attacks by 1 ISIS-K had already led the US to establish alternative routes to Kabul 2 airport before the evacuation operation started. 3

Thousands of Afghans gathered, in hopes of being evacuated, at the 4 airport's gates after Taliban's take over of Kabul on 15th August 2021. 5 The social media, after the explosions, showed chaotic scenes of crowds 6 of people trying to help the wounded amid bodies on the ground. 7 Pentagon held that one of the explosions happened at the airport's Abbey 8 Gate and the other at or near the Baron Hotel, a short distance from 9 Abbey Gate. 10

Abbey Gate is the main entry point to the airport and primary security 11 there was being provided by US Marines. The area around that gate had 12 been used for holding refugees after they passed through the Taliban 13 check points outside the airport, and before they were allowed to go 14 to airport. 15

Baron Hotel was used by British soldiers and other allies as an evacuation 16 handling centre to process evacuees, before moving them up to the 17 Abbey Gate. Over 95,700 people were evacuated since 15th August and 18 over 101,300 since the end of July. Even after the attack, scores of people 19 continued to gather at the airport - ahead of US' 31st August 2021 20 deadline for the final exit from a 20-year war ridden Afghanistan. 21

Several European countries, including Belgium, Denmark, Netherlands, 22 Poland, New Zealand and Canada completed their evacuation missions 23 till then. The UK continued its evacuation operation despite attack; 24 13,146 people -- including embassy staff, British nationals, those eligible 25 under the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy program and a 26 number of nationals from partner nations -- were evacuated by the UK. 27

Abdullah Abdullah, the Chairman of Afghanistan's Reconciliation 28 Committee under the previous government condemned the said attacks; 29 the Taliban had taken away security from the former Afghan President 30 Hamid Karzai and Abdullah Abdullah. 31

On 31st August 2021; the Taliban practically took over the whole 32 country except a negligible resistance in Panjsher valley but the resistance 33 could not last more than 4 days. All of the Afghanistan was under 34 Taliban control. It marked the end of an era: America's longest but 35 humiliating war was over; America suffered multiple losses. It happened 36 fast, stunning the world and leaving many in the country racing to find 37

an exit. But even among those surprised by the way the end played out, many knew the war was destined to end in bad tone. See further:

".....the seeds of disaster were planted back at the war's very beginning. Soon after the US landed in Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks, the successive US governments struggled to answer exactly why the military was there. In the very beginning, the goal was relatively clear: to capture the perpetrator of the attacks, OBL, but almost immediately, the goals went blurred rather got scratched."

[**Rajaa Elidrissi's** essay of 1st September 2021 at **vox.com** is referred]

On the same day of **31st August 2021**; EU countries vowed to dole out an unspecified amount of funds to significantly beef up financial support for Afghanistan's neighbors to manage the refugee crisis at their borders. But they also pushed back discussions on the bloc's own role in accepting Afghani asylum seekers, citing various reasons.

In 5-hours long meeting in Brussels, EU interior ministers adopted a text that pledged financial support to relevant international organizations and neighboring countries of Afghanistan to reinforce their capacities to provide protection and sustainable livelihood for Afghan refugees. Exactly how much money they offered to Pakistan and Iran; no one divulged.

This financial support was in fact a broader strategy for keeping Afghan migrants away from EU countries amid fears of another surge. The Interior Ministers of the EU countries signed a statement saying:

"Based on lessons learned, the EU and its member states stand determined to act jointly to prevent the recurrence of uncontrolled large-scale illegal migration movements faced in the past, by preparing a coordinated and orderly response - incentives to illegal migration should be avoided."

LAST AMERICAN SOLDIER LEAVES KABUL:

On **31st August 2021**; the US Army shared an image, taken with night-vision optics, of the last US soldier to step aboard the final evacuation flight out of Kabul — Maj Gen Chris Donahue, Commander of the 82nd Airborne Division was the person in focus.

America's longest war took the lives of 2,400 plus US troops and an estimated 240,000 Afghans, and costing them more than \$2 trillion: www.dawn.com/news/1643653 dated 31st August 2021 is referred.

Celebratory gunfire echoed across Kabul as Taliban fighters took control of the airport before dawn on 1st September 2021 following the withdrawal of the last US troops, ending 20 years of war that left the group stronger than it was in 2001. Shaky video footage distributed by the Taliban showed fighters entering the airport after the last US troops took off a minute before midnight, marking the end of a hasty and humiliating exit for Washington and its NATO allies. Taliban Qari Yusuf said at Al-Jazeera TV:

"The last US soldier has left Kabul airport and our country gained complete independence."

Although the US succeeded [in 2001] in driving out the Taliban from power and stopped Afghanistan being used as a base by Al Qaeda, it ended with the Taliban group controlling more of the country than they ever did during their previous rule from 1996 to 2001. Those years are still known for the Taliban's strict interpretation of *Shariah*, and the world was aspiring to see whether the Taliban could form a more moderate and inclusive government in the months ahead.

In 2021; thousands of Afghans fled fearing Taliban reprisals. A massive but chaotic airlift by the US and its allies over the two weeks succeeded in evacuating more than 123,000 people from Kabul, but tens of thousands who helped Western states during the war were left behind. About 100 to 200 Americans wanted to leave but were unable to get on flights.

Gen Frank McKenzie, commander of the US Central Command, told a Pentagon briefing that the Chief US diplomat in Afghanistan, Ross Wilson, was out on the last C-17 flight. Gen McKenzie told reporters:

"There's a lot of heartbreak associated with this departure. We did not get everybody out that we wanted to get them out. But I think if we'd stayed another 10 days, we wouldn't have gotten everybody out of that country."

As the US troops departed, they destroyed more than 70 aircrafts, dozens of armoured vehicles and disabled air defenses that had thwarted an attempted Islamic State rocket attack on the eve of the last US departure.

President Joe Biden, in a statement, defended his decision to stick to the given deadline for withdrawing US forces. He said:

"The world would hold the Taliban to their commitment to allow safe passage for those who want to leave Afghanistan.

Now, our 20-year military presence in Afghanistan has ended."

Biden thanked the US military for carrying out the dangerous evacuation. He added that the US long ago achieved the objectives it set in ousting the Taliban in 2001 for harbouring Al Qaeda militants who masterminded the 11th Sept 2001 attacks on America – however, he had to entertain heavy criticism from Republicans and some of his fellow Democrats for his handling of Afghanistan since collapse of the US-backed government.

Senator Ben Sasse, a Republican member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, called the **US withdrawal a national disgrace** that was the direct result of Biden's misadventure, cowardice and incompetence. However, one Democratic Senator Sheldon Whitehouse tweeted:

"Bravo to our diplomats, military, and intelligence agencies. An airlift of 120,000 people in that dangerous and tumultuous situation is something no one else could do."

Blinken said the US was prepared to work with the new Taliban govt if reprisals against opponents in the country would not be the Taliban's policy. He said:

"The Taliban seek international legitimacy and support. Our position is any legitimacy and support will have to be earned. The Taliban must revive a war-shattered economy without being able to count on the billions of dollars in foreign aid that flowed to the previous ruling elite and fed systemic corruption."

The population outside the cities was facing what the UN officials called an acute **catastrophic humanitarian situation** worsened by a severe drought. One local opinion appeared:

"Our culture has become toxic; we see Russian and American influence everywhere, even in the food we eat. That is something people should realize and make necessary changes. This will take time but will happen."

On 2nd September 2021; after the Taliban got firm footing in Kabul, there was a sudden surge at the Spin Boldak - Chaman land border crossing, which lead to the deadly stampede killing one person after the

unprecedented number of people started fleeing from war-torn 1 Afghanistan to Pakistan. Pakistan had closed its border due to excessive 2 influx of unwanted Afghan refugees from Taliban terror. A 64-year-old 3 man from Afghanistan named Safi Ullah died in the incident as confirmed 4 by his son Shahid Ullah to the CNN reporter - *"Me and my father were 5 trying to cross the border with the rest of our family, I lost my father in 6 the stampede, later we found him dead."* 7

On 29th September 2021; a top US General conceded openly that the US 9 *'lost the 20-year war in Afghanistan'*. **Gen Mark Milley**, Chairman of the 10 US Joint Chiefs of Staff, told the House Armed Services Committee that: 11

"It is clear; it is obvious to all of us, that the war in Afghanistan did 13 not end on the terms we wanted, with the Taliban in power in Kabul. 14 The war was a strategic failure; it wasn't lost in the last 20 days or even 15 20 months. There's a cumulative effect to a series of strategic decisions 16 that go way back; We accomplished our strategic task of protecting 17 America against Al-Qaeda, but certainly the end state is a whole lot 18 different than what we wanted." 19

Gen Milley was correct to mention that a lot of lessons were learned 21 here. He listed a number of factors responsible for the US defeat going 22 back to a missed opportunity to capture or kill Al-Qaeda leader Osama 23 bin Laden [OBL] at *Tora Bora* soon after the October 2001 US invasion. 24 In 2003, the US troops should not have been shifted to Iraq from 25 Afghanistan. President Biden, in April [2021], ordered a complete 26 pullout of US forces from Afghanistan by 31st August because an accord 27 had already been reached with the Taliban by former president Donald 28 Trump – called the Doha Agreement of 29th February 2020. 29

Gen Milley & Gen Kenneth McKenzie, Commander of US Central 31 Command, had personally recommended that some 2,500 troops 32 should remain on ground in Afghanistan but Biden had received '*split 33 advice*' about what to do then. Ultimately, it was up to the commander- 34 in-chief to make a decision so he announced *that it was time to end a 35 20-year war*. 36

TALIBAN'S ARMED PARADE IN KABUL: 37

The new Taliban ruling team held a military parade in Kabul on Sunday, 40 the 14th November 2021, using captured American armoured vehicles 41 and Russian helicopters in a display that showed their ongoing 42 transformation from an insurgent force to a regular standing army. 43

Referring to daily '**DAWN**' dated 18th November 2021:

"The Taliban operated as insurgent fighters for two decades but have used the large stock of weapons and equipment left behind when the former Western-backed government collapsed in August to overhaul their forces.

The parade was linked to the graduation of 250 freshly trained soldiers of Afghan army."

The Taliban's Defence Ministry spokesman Enayatullah Khwarazmi told that the exercise involved dozens of US-made armoured security vehicles driving slowly up and down a major Kabul road with MI-17 helicopters patrolling overhead. Many soldiers carried US made-M4 assault rifles. Most of the weapons and equipment the Taliban forces were carrying and using were those supplied by Washington to the American-backed Ghani's government in Kabul in a bid to construct an Afghan National Force capable of fighting the Taliban – but that day never appeared.

Those forces melted away with the fleeing of Afghan President Ghani from Afghanistan — leaving the Taliban to take over major military assets. Taliban officials also told that pilots, mechanics and other specialists from the former Afghan National Army would be integrated into a new force, which had already started wearing conventional military uniforms in place of the traditional Afghan dress normally worn by their fighters.

[According to a report of late 2020 by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction [SIGAR], the US government transferred to the Afghan government more than \$28 billion worth of defence articles and services, including weapons, ammunition, vehicles, night-vision devices, aircraft, and surveillance systems, from 2002 to 2017.]

Some of the aircraft were flown into neighbouring Central Asian Countries by fleeing Afghan forces; the Taliban were on the way to get them back.