

Scenario 235

COST OF THE AFGHAN WAR

SPENDING \$290m DAILY ON AFGHAN WAR:

America spent \$290 million every day for 7,300 days [more than 2.1 trillion] on its war efforts and nation-building projects in Afghanistan; Brown University's data report disclosed. For more details daily '**DAWN**' dated 14th November 2021 is referred.

That's how the United States ended up spending more than \$2 trillion in the last 20 years in Afghanistan, the University's report titled as **Costs of War Project** said. The report also pointed out that the money helped 'create a tiny class of young, ultra-rich Afghans,' many of whom started as interpreters for the US army and became millionaires. The contracts helped fuel a system of mass corruption that engulfed the country and, eventually, doomed its fragile democracy. **The CNBC** commented:

"The US made all these efforts to rebuild Afghanistan, yet it took just nine days for the Taliban to seize every provincial capital, dissolve the army and overthrow the US-backed government."

In an interview with the Pentagon watchdog SIGAR, **Ryan Crocker**, a two-time US ambassador to Afghanistan, ***blamed this post-E/11 corruption for America's failure.*** The Ambassador remarked:

"The ultimate point of failure for our efforts, you know, wasn't an INSURGENCY. It was the weight of ENDEMIC CORRUPTION."

Ambassador Crocker believes that the US bears responsibility for much of the corruption in Afghanistan because it flooded the country with billions of dollars more than its economy could absorb. Yet, in the early years of the Afghan-war, awarding government contracts to Afghan nationals was seen as a key part of the overall US counter-insurgency strategy. Several of these Afghan millionaires started their careers as interpreters for the US military and often their loyalty was the only criterion for getting the hefty defence contracts.

As has been mentioned earlier; as per Pentagon analysis, 40% of the \$108 billion that the US Defence Department paid to contractors in Afghanistan between 2010 and 2012 ended up in the hands of either the Taliban, the Haqqani network, organised crime rings, drug traffickers or corrupt Afghan officials – more speaking about President Obama's inherent deficiencies in command, ability, capacity & control.

COSTS OF AFGHAN WAR: DOD'S FIGURES:

Referring to **Robin Wright's** essay titled '**Does the Great Retreat from Afghanistan Mark the End of American Era**' appeared at **newyorker.com** on 15th August 2021:

*"For the US, the costs didn't end with its withdrawal from either Afghanistan or Iraq. It could cost another two trillion dollars just to **pay for the health care and disability of veterans** from those wars. And those costs may not peak until 2048.*

America's longest war will be a lot longer than anyone anticipated two decades ago—or even as it ends. In all, forty-seven thousand civilians have died, according to Brown University's Costs of War Project. More than twenty-four hundred were US military personnel, and almost four thousand were US contractors.

*The cost of the post-9/11 wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, and elsewhere totals **about \$8 trillion**."*

However, one can go into more details here. As per figures released, after the exit-date of 31st August 2021, by **the US Department of Veterans Affairs [DOD]**, the American journey of war remained the longest in Afghanistan as compared to other wars taken from the beginning till today. The details are:

Revolutionary: 8.4 years [1775 – 1783]; **Civil War:** 4 years [1861 – 1865]; **World War I:** 1.6 years [1917 – 1918]; **World War II:** 3.7 years [1941 – 1945]; **Korean War:** 3.1 years [1950 – 1953]; **Vietnam:** 10.75 years [1964 – 1975]; **Iraq War** 8.75 years [2003 – 2012]; **Afghanistan:** 19.8 years [2001 – 2021].

The US had mounted an invasion of Afghanistan following the alleged foreign attacks on Twin Tower and Pentagon - in New York, Washington DC and Pennsylvania on 11th September 2001 [popularly known as 9/11] in which nearly 3,000 people were allegedly killed.

The war in Afghanistan caused high costs for the US in terms of lives lost, troops deployed and dollars spent. During the height of the conflict, America had a deployment of nearly 100,000 people in Afghanistan – including US Armed Forces and Department of Defence [DOD] Funded Contracted Personnel. Referring to the **Congressional Research Service [DOD]**; after FY2017, the Department had started withholding US Armed Forces levels from public release.

Quoting the details collected by **Megan Duzor** of the **VOA News**:

*"In this longest US War since 2001, **2442 US troops have died** in the conflict in Afghanistan. American researchers at Brown University estimate that in total about 70 times number of people has been killed in Afghanistan during that period, including over **47,000 civilians**."*

The breakdown of the TOTAL DEATHS - 171,336 comes as under:

US Troops - 2,442; US Contractors - 3,845; Other allied troops - 1,144; Humanitarian aid workers - 444; Journalists and media workers - 72; Afghan National military and police - 75,314; Civilians - 47,245; AND Taliban fighters - 51,1E1.

*As per Pentagon's record, US military operations in Afghanistan have cost \$824.9 billion since 2001. Brown University's researchers put the **total cost of operations in both Afghanistan and Pakistan** at nearly \$2.3 trillion."*

BBC's research issued its own figures in this regard; see its concise report released on media during the first week of September 2021.

US forces landed in Afghanistan on 7th October 2001. With the withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan and the takeover by the Taliban; look below - how much the US and its NATO allies spent in that country in 20 years of military occupation. US troop numbers grew as Washington poured in billions of dollars to fight a Taliban insurgency and fund reconstruction, peaking at about 110,000 in 2011; official data didn't **include special operations forces, and other temporary units**. In 2020, they were reduced to only 4,000.

NATO member countries were also part of the foreign troop presence in the country. However, they formally ended their combat mission in December 2014, but kept a 13,000-strong force there to help train Afghan forces and support counter-terrorism operations. There were

significant numbers of private security contractors in Afghanistan. This included [till ending 2020] more than about 8,000 US citizens on various assignments; the **US Congress** held all concerned records.

Following the final withdrawal of the US troops, Biden quoted two figures for the total cost of the war. He said:

"After more than \$2 trillion spent in Afghanistan... [or] you could take the number of \$1tn, as many say. However, the vast majority of spending in Afghanistan came from the US."

NOW see another analysis on the **COSTS OF AFGHAN WAR....**

The American military had achieved a quick victory over the Taliban and Al Qaeda in early 2002 but soon the focus was shifted towards Iraq; the Afghan conflict became a secondary effort and the mission went blurred. The Taliban also got consolidated, in the meantime gathered their scattered groups while remained hidden in border-tribal areas. Senior American officials almost always briefed about the on-paper progress and stories.

Thomas Gibbons-Neff wrote in '*Washington Post*' dated 29th August 2021 about the lies spoken by the American elite and asked that: '*What Did the US Get for \$2 Trillion in Afghanistan?*'

Thomas gave a little brief that the US spent as the details:

- \$1.5 trillion on WAR
- \$500 billion on INTEREST
- \$87+ billion on training of Afghan Forces
- \$24 billion on Economic Development
- \$9+ billion on Counter-Narcotics

SIGAR released reports which determined that an assessment of above spending on the said war found very little accounts to show for it.

A senior National Security Council official said that:

*"....the Obama's White House, along with the Pentagon, pushed for data that showed President Obama announced surge in 2009 was succeeding. [However,] It was impossible to create good metrics. We tried using troop numbers trained, violence levels, control of territory, and none of it painted an accurate picture. **The metrics were always manipulated for the duration of war.**"*

Since 2014, after the Pentagon officially and euphemistically ‘**ended 1 combat operations’** putting the Afghan military in the lead, more than 2 50,000 Afghan security forces died. Of the \$133 billion that the US spent 3 on reconstruction programs in Afghanistan, about \$88 billion went 4 toward training the Afghan Army and police forces. **Robert Finn**, the US 5 ambassador to Afghanistan in 2002-03, told investigators that: 6

“If you look at the overall amount of money spent in Afghanistan, you see a tiny %age of it went to help the people of the country. It almost all went to the military and even most of that money went for local militia and police training..... That tribal leaders and patronage networks engendered a new form of corruption.” 7 8 9 10 11 12

Quoting the **BBC** dated **3rd September 2021**: 13 14

“In 2010-12 when the US had more than 100,000 soldiers in Afghanistan, the cost of the war grew to more than \$100bn a year, according to US government figures. As the US military shifted its focus away from offensive operations and concentrated more on training up Afghan forces, costs fell sharply to about \$45bn in recent years.” 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22

The \$2 trillion figure referenced by President Biden was based on a **study by Brown University**, which included interest on debt used to finance the war and expenses such as veterans’ care. This study also included spending in Pakistan, which the US used as a base for Afghan-related operations. It found that costs of the war and future commitments, including the amounts America owed to Pakistan for tasked solo operations by the Pak-Army in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2020, amount to \$2.3tn. 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31

The UK and Germany - who had the largest numbers of troops in Afghanistan after the US - spent an estimated \$30bn and \$19bn respectively over the course of the war. 32 33 34 35

Despite pulling out nearly all their troops, the US and NATO promised a total of \$4bn a year until 2024 to fund Afghanistan’s own forces; but of course had to discontinue in the wake of Afghan Army’s zero performance. The fact remained that the bulk of the money spent in Afghanistan had gone to counter-insurgency operations, and on the needs of troops such as food, clothing, medical care, special pay and benefits; separate heads like lost to waste, fraud and abuse over the years are also to be considered. 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43

In a quarterly report to the US Congress in October 2020, the watchdog responsible for the oversight of reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan [SIGAR] estimated that: ‘**....about \$1Ebn were lost in ‘waste, fraud and abuse’ during May 200E - December 201E’.**

Nongovernmental Estimate of US costs for the 20-year war in Afghanistan is more than double the calculation made by the US Department of Defence (DOD); Anwar Iqbal’s essay in daily ‘**DAWN**’ dated 8th November 2021 is referred.

The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction [SIGAR], released its latest findings in the first week of November 2021, focusing on how the ever-soaring costs of war forced Washington to reconsider its Afghan strategy. The report noted that the Brown University’s Costs of War Project in its latest estimates put total costs of the war at \$2.26 trillion.

This **Watson Report** builds on Department of Defence [DOD]’s \$933 billion Overseas Contingency Operations [OCO] budgets and State’s \$59 billion OCO budgets for Afghanistan and Pakistan. Unlike the DOD Cost of War Report, the Watson report adds what it considers to be Afghanistan-related costs of \$433 billion above DOD baseline costs, \$296 billion in medical and disability costs for veterans, and \$530 billion in interest costs on related Treasury borrowing.

[DOD’s latest Cost of War Report, dated 30th June 2021, said its cumulative obligations for Afghanistan, including US war fighting and reconstruction, had reached \$839.8 billion. Cumulative reconstruction and related obligations reported by State, USAID, and other civilian agencies reached \$49.7 billion.]

The SIGAR report notes that since 2002, Congress appropriated more than \$145.96 billion for reconstruction and related activities in Afghanistan, of which nearly \$110.26 billion was for six of the seven largest active reconstruction accounts.

The **International Narcotics Control & Law Enforcement [INCLE]** reported cumulative appropriations of \$5.50 billion and \$0.57 billion in funds remaining for possible disbursement on 30th June 2021. The fall of Kabul in August 2021, delayed all the disbursements. The Congress created the **Afghanistan Security Forces Fund [ASFF]** to provide the **Afghan National Defence Forces [ANDSF]** with equipment, supplies, services, training, and funding for salaries, as well as facility and infrastructure repair, renovation, and construction.

President Trump signed the **Consolidated Appropriations Act 2021**, into law on 27th December 2020, which provided an appropriation of \$3.05 billion for ASFF for fiscal year 2021 and a revocation of \$1.10 billion for ASFF for fiscal year 2020, reducing the original appropriation from \$4.20 billion to an adjusted appropriation of \$3.10 billion.

As of 30th September 2021, cumulative appropriations for ASFF stood at more than \$81.44 billion, with nearly \$76.39 billion having been obligated, and nearly \$75.72 billion disbursed.

The SIGAR report also included a joint statement issued after 8th Sept 2021's virtual meeting of the foreign ministers of Pakistan, China, Iran, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The statement affirmed *'the importance of sustained international engagement on Afghanistan, especially in supporting its humanitarian and development needs.'*

The SIGAR report noted that in 2019, Afghanistan imported goods totalling \$7.33 billion while exporting only \$975 million worth according to World Trade Organization data. This produced a negative merchandise trade balance of \$6.36 billion, equivalent to 30.1% of Afghanistan's GDP.

Since the war against the Taliban began in 2001, **about 456 UK troops died**. President Ghani said in 2019 that more than 45,000 members of the Afghan security forces had been killed since he became president five years earlier. Brown University's research in 2019 estimated the loss of life amongst the national military and police in Afghanistan to be more than 64,100 since October 2001. **According to the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan [UNAMA]**, nearly 111,000 civilians were killed or injured since it started recording civilian casualties in 2009.

Not only the Afghan War caused losses to the US, INDIA's \$3b investment in Afghanistan went in vain too. Referring to the **APP's Article no:2822** dated 11th September 2021 on media pages:

"India had been using Afghan soil against Pakistan since 2001 by investing about \$3 billion on infrastructure, training of Afghan forces and other projects to establish a network for its permanent foothold and to achieve its overt and covert designs - by sponsoring terrorism against Pakistan from Afghan territory."

India invested \$3b in Afghanistan to destabilise Pakistan; it violated various Articles of the UN Charter including Article 2(4), Article 41(3)

of the Vienna Convention, and Paras 2 & 5 of UN Security Council Resolution 1373 of 2001. However, when the Taliban re-captured Afghanistan in August 2021, Indian designs turned into total loss and chaos; the Modi's government had acted as top spoiler of regional peace. It's already on record that India had supported and trained *Dai'sh* & *TTP* elements to use as proxy tools for its nefarious designs against Pakistan, Afghanistan and the region.

US MONEY – LOOTED: YOU TOO BRUTUS....

In January 2010, Afghan anti-corruption agents trained by the US, raided **New Ansari Money Exchange** HQ in Kabul, one of the country's largest financial outlets, and carted away tens of thousands of documents. US officials suspected the politically connected firm was laundering money for narcotics traffickers and insurgents by moving billions of dollars to Dubai and other foreign destinations.

Michael Flynn, the then military intelligence chief in Afghanistan and later President Trump's national security adviser, told that the US forces played a pivotal role in the operation and examined the seized documents and data. He also added:

"It was a huge success. We conducted that raid and in three days, we did a lot of exploitation. We brought in (rope) about 45 people from around the country very quietly. New Ansari was just incredibly corrupt. It had double books and people were just stealing us blind - Was anyone held accountable? No, no one was held accountable."

Why not held accountable - they turned out to be men from Afghanistan's presidential palace. Months after the raid, investigators wire-tapped a conversation in which a senior aide to Karzai, named **Zia Salehi** allegedly agreed to block the New Ansari probe in exchange for a bribe. He was arrested in July 2010. Within hours, however, Karzai personally intervened and ordered Salehi's release from jail, declaring that investigators had over-stepped their authority. The Afghan government later dropped all charges against all.

- ***The fact prevailed that Karzai's aide, Zia Salehi, had been on the CIA's payroll for years, too.***

Obama admin bogged down again, and the US-inspired anti-corruption drive lost even more steam. The Salehi case was a spinning point as his

arrest had provoked a '**hornet reaction**' by the presidential palace, which ordered Afghan law enforcement agents to stop cooperating with the US officials. In real terms, the interest and enthusiasm lost after Salehi Case.

"The American money was empowering a lot of bad people. There was massive resentment among the common people. Americans were considered the most corrupt here so had no credibility on the corruption issue".
[SIGAR's Interviews referred]

Less than two months after Salehi's catch and release, an even bigger scandal arose to test the White House's credibility. **KABUL BANK**, the country's biggest, nearly collapsed under the weight of \$1 billion in fraudulent loans — an amount equal to one-twelfth of the country's entire economic output the year before. The Afghan government engineered an emergency bailout to stem a run on the bank as angry crowds lined up to withdraw their savings.

Investigators soon determined that Kabul Bank had falsified its books to hide hundreds of millions of dollars in unsecured loans to politically connected business executives, including the president's brother Mahmoud Karzai and the family of Fahim Khan, the warlord then serving as the country's first vice president. An American officer of the US Treasury Department posted in Kabul as Afghan Government Adviser told the interviewers:

"On a scale of one to 10, it was a 20 here. It had elements that you could put into a spy novel, and the connections between people who owned Kabul Bank and those who run the country."

Much of the looted money had originated from the US treasury, which subsidized the salaries of Afghan soldiers, police and civil servants who had made up the bulk of Kabul Bank's deposits. At first, the Obama admin loudly announced to fully investigate the Kabul Bank scandal — not only to recover the stolen money but also to demonstrate to the Afghan people that no one was above the law.

The US officials were upset because there were a million things to do, and all of it depended on the Karzai regime as an effective partner but if this [**Kabul Bank Scandal**] was allowed to continue, every move would become debateable. There was a lot of personal anger and disgust. Especially embarrassing as the US had deployed tens of financial advisers and watchdogs to Kabul yet had somehow missed a giant FRAUD scheme under their so-called direct supervision.

Another American, former consultant to Afghanistan's Central Bank for three years, asked the said US Advisor about Kabul Bank's fall; see reply:

"We had an hour-long conversation. I asked him, do you think this is a financially sound bank? He said, 'Yes.' And literally 30 days afterward, the whole house of cards came down. This was one of the biggest misses in my career. A \$1 billion bank collapsed, and the US adviser swore to me it was financially sound."

However, the insider US military officers and spy agencies had known about troubles inside Kabul Bank a year before its meltdown. The US intelligence officials were tracking ***illicit money flows from the bank to the Taliban*** and other insurgents and had shared the information with their counterparts in Afghan intelligence. But none of the intelligence agencies bothered more *'because it wasn't in their mandate'*.

A year after the scandal became public, the US Ambassador in Kabul, **Karl Eikenberry**, made the case a top priority and pressed Karzai to take action. But once more, the embassy backed off after Eikenberry was replaced by Ryan Crocker in July 2011. ***Aah; how fragile and precarious US policy was*** then; literally overnight the entire policy changed. Crocker was instructed to make the issue go away; bury it as deep as possible, and to make silent all voices within the embassy.

The **US Ambassador Crocker**, as well as US military commanders and others in Washington, didn't want to risk alienating Karzai, because they needed his support as thousands of additional American soldiers had arrived in the war zone. Crocker and his colleagues didn't want Congress or international donors to use that bank scandal as an excuse to cut off aid to Kabul. The US got eased after changing its Ambassador.

Later, for his part, Crocker told SIGAR that he agreed corruption was an enormous problem that had sabotaged the war effort but by the time the Kabul Bank scandal struck, it was too late. The Ambassador maintained:

"I was struck by something Karzai said and repeated a number of times during my tenure, which is that the West, led by the US, in his clear view, had a significant responsibility to bear for the whole corruption issue."

*I always thought Karzai had a point, that you just cannot put those amounts of money into a very fragile state and society, and not have it fuel corruption – **NO you just can't.**"*

America spent \$290 million every day for 7,300 days; but when Taliban fighters seized Kabul without firing a single shot, President Biden blamed Afghans for failing to defend their country; the Afghan political leaders fled the country and the Afghan military gave up without fighting – what an awesome defeat of a super power.

Referring to **Christina Wilkie's** essay Dated 10th September 2021 at **CNBC.Com**:

"America's fault began when they invaded Afghanistan seeking revenge against al-Qaeda for the twin-towers terrorist attacks that allegedly killed 2,977 people on 11th Sept 2001 [9/11]."

The US Embassy in Kabul was closed on the first day of the Taliban's entry in Kabul and the American soldiers left the soils two weeks later. Abandoned air bases, half-finished construction projects and tens of thousands of untraceable guns litter the countryside, all purchased with American money."

Christina, like many others, wrote correctly that the US dollars also created the '**E/11 millionaires and caused mass corruption** in Afghanistan' - a new class of ultra-wealthy Afghans who made their fortunes working as contractors for the US and NATO. A few of these millionaires became role models for a new generation of Afghan entrepreneurs and philanthropists. Many more exploited their family ties to government officials or provincial warlords in order to secure lucrative contracts. Over the time, the US government contracts became the fuel for a system of mass corruption that engulfed the country and, eventually, doomed its fragile democracy.

In the eyes of **Ryan Crocker**, a two-time **US ambassador** to Afghanistan, the US bears responsibility for much of the corruption in Afghanistan because it flooded the country with billions of dollars more than its economy could absorb; but no one bothered then.

In the early years of the war in Afghanistan, when American soldiers were still hunting al-Qaeda terrorists and battling Taliban fighters, the idea of using local **Afghan contractors** to supply US military bases seemed like a good one. By contrast, in Iraq most of the supply and logistics work for US troops was performed by non-Iraqis, typically through contracts with huge multinational firms. But in Afghanistan, awarding government contracts to Afghan nationals was a key part of the US counter-insurgency approach and thus the whole scheme. Later it

became an **official Pentagon procurement policy** – duly approved by Congress in 2008. A 2011 congressional report on military contracting held:

“Employing local nationals injects money into the local economy, provides job training, builds support among local nationals, and can give the US a more sophisticated understanding of the local landscape.”

But what happened at last - several Afghans who though became millionaires working as US contractors had become interpreters for American soldiers, accompanying service members on dangerous missions during some of the deadliest years of the war. The loyalty they earned as interpreters later served them well in the defence contracting business.

One Hekmatullah Shadman’s story is known in Pentagon. As troop levels were increased in Afghanistan after President Obama’s announcement, so did Shadman’s revenue that was already on role of a US military base in Kandahar since 2005. He had started contracting with one truck but then grew up so sharply that in 2009, Shadman’s company billed the Department of Defence for \$45 million. During 2007-12, Shadman’s trucking company collected \$167 million from US government contracts; all proved by his bank statements. But who were his unofficial American partners – Pentagon never got moved purposefully!

That’s why, Shadman’s success was tainted. In 2012, the Department of Justice accused Shadman of fraud. The US government admitted that he had paid kickbacks to American soldiers and Afghan government officials in exchange for his contracts and that he grossly inflated his costs and billed the Defence Department for work that was never done.

There were also allegations that he transferred funds to a known Taliban **money-person**. When Shadman was asked, he denied all the allegations against him, and **several of the US officers who worked with Shadman in Kandahar publicly came to his defence**. A protracted legal battle ensued, and when the case was finally settled in 2019 the US could recover only \$25 million in shape of his assets.

Attempts to locate Shadman were unsuccessful. But it wasn’t just Afghans who abused the American lucrative contracting business in Afghanistan. One of the top suppliers of fresh food to US forces in Afghanistan was Netherlands based Supreme Group BV, founded by an American Stephen Orenstein. The company’s revenue increased

50-fold in a decade; **Bloomberg** placed Orenstein on Billionaire's Index in 2013.

In 2009, Supreme Group hired the outgoing director of the federal agency that awarded its contracts, the Defence Logistics Agency, to be the company's CEO. A year later, Supreme Group was handed a multibillion-dollar, no-bid contract extension by the Defence Logistics Agency. In 2014, Supreme Group pleaded guilty to fraud charges that included creating a fake subcontractor and billing the government for the subcontractor's fees.

'The company agreed to pay \$389 million in fines and damages, one of the largest penalties ever imposed on a defence contractor at the time.'

In the overall context of the US war in Afghanistan, however, the federal cases brought against Orenstein and Shadman were not the exception. The vast majority of the contracting fraud and corruption in Afghanistan went unreported and unpunished; as normally happen in such situations. According to a Pentagon analysis:

"40% of the \$108 billion that the Defence Department paid to contractors in Afghanistan between 2010 and 2012 ended up in the hands of either the Taliban, the violent Islamist Haqqani terror network, organized crime rings, trans-national drug traffickers or corrupt Afghan officials."

Veterans of the conflict say statistics like above can obscure what was in reality a more complicated and ethically murky situation. In a country where roads are often controlled by tribal warlords, transporting necessary and lifesaving supplies overland to American soldiers often required paying fees for safe passage to whichever group controlled the roads. In areas controlled by the Taliban, these amounts, of course, went in the Taliban's kitty. Refusing to pay the warlords who controlled the roads could have harmed the soldiers and contractors gravely.

"You could be hardcore about stuff and say, We're not going to pay anybody, but, I'm telling you, you were going to get hit on the road,"
Rodney Castleman, an American employee of an Afghan trucking company told; **The New Yorker** dated 3rd July 2016 is referred.

Security trumped everything else, and the contractors who delivered goods intact and on time needed safety. To some American officials, paying off a local strongman to guarantee safe passage seemed more

reasonable than paying an American defence contractor to bomb their way across the country. **Richard Boucher**, who served as Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia during President Bush's administration, described two different levels of corruption in an interview in 2015 with SIGAR:

"There is corruption that spreads the wealth and takes care of everybody, that gets to the widows and orphans. And there is the corruption that goes to my house in the Riviera."

Col [R] Chris Kolenda, in a 2016 SIGAR interview, said:

*"By 2006, just five years into the US war, the elected government in Kabul had self-organized into a **kleptocracy**. The kleptocracy got stronger over the time, to the point that it became priority of the Afghan government - not good governance....."*

It wasn't just Americans who saw this happening. High-ranking Afghan government officials did, too."

In 2010, **Dr Rangin Spanta**, then President Hamid Karzai's National Security Advisor, told the US officials that Corruption was not just a problem for the governance in Afghanistan; but a new system of governance in itself. Despite all the pathways along which American money travelled through Afghanistan, there was ***one place it never reached: the pockets of the country's poorest citizens***. After two decades of so-called nation-building with \$2.1 trillion, the economic status of ordinary Afghans had barely changed at all. According to the World Bank, Afghanistan was the sixth-poorest nation on Earth in 2020 — a ranking essentially unchanged since 2002; Income per capita was just \$500.

Crocker had correctly told SIGAR in 2016 that: *"Our biggest single project, sadly and inadvertently of course, may have been the **development of mass corruption**."*

AMERICA ROBBED BY THE AMERICANS:

The famous SIGAR report and the other studies openly pointed out that the US funds for Afghanistan were most probably robbed by the American security officials posted there during different times in various capacities – but the whole **corruption-game was played in the name of Afghan Contractors**. Of course the later class of Afghans also made huge fortunes out of the US-AFGHAN WAR but it was not possible without

the connivance and share-holdings of the officers and men who used to dole out the contracts and tenders to them for a choice of services.

Daily **Independent** dated 13th September 2021, however, jolted the whole world by quoting a figure of \$14 trillion as America's spending on Afghan War, whereas President Biden cited figures of 1 trillion and the Brown University Study mentioned 2 trillion; see the said newspaper-essay's opening paragraph:

"Up to half of the \$14 trillion spent by the Pentagon since E/11 went to for-profit defence contractors, a study released Monday found. While much of this money went to weapons suppliers, the research is the latest to point to the dependence on contractors for war-zone duties as contributing to mission failures in Afghanistan in particular."

In the post-9/11 wars, the US corporations contracted by the Defence Department not only handled war-zone logistics like running fuel & food convoys but performed other 'missions' like training and equipping Afghan security forces — the forces that collapsed without firing a single bullet in August 2021 as the Taliban swept the country. President Biden placed blame squarely on the Afghans themselves. **"We gave them every chance - what we could not provide them was the will to fight."**

In Afghanistan, Afghan contractors allegedly were paying protection money to warlords and the Taliban themselves, and the Defence Department insisting on equipping the **Afghan air force with complex Black-hawk** helicopters and other aircrafts that only the US contractors knew how to maintain. **Hartung**, the Director of the Arms and Security Program at the Centre for International Policy, said:

"If it were only the money - that would be outrageous enough. Instances are there where the Pentagon's reliance on contractors backfired. But the fact - it undermined the mission and put troops at risk is even more outrageous."

The truth remains that before President Biden began the final American withdrawal from Afghanistan in earlier months of the year [2021], **there were far more contractors in Afghanistan than the US troops**. The US saw about 2300 military members die in all post-9/11 conflicts, but nearly 3800+ contractors had succumbed to their lives; it's estimated.

The contracting practices started with the then-Vice President **Dick Cheney, the former CEO of Halliburton**; the company which had

received more than \$30 billion to help set up and run bases, feed troops and carry out other work in Iraq and Afghanistan. Cheney and defence contractors argued that relying on private contractors for work that service members did in previous wars would allow for less military troops, and be more efficient and cost effective. By 2010, Pentagon spending had surged by more than one-third, as the US fought dual wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Harry Stonecipher, then the **vice president of Boeing**, told **The Wall Street Journal**, a month after the surging attacks:

“Any member of Congress who doesn’t vote for the funds we need to defend this country will be looking for a new job after next November.”

And it remains a reality that a third of the Pentagon contracts went to just five weapons suppliers. In one fiscal year, the money **Lockheed Martin** alone got from Pentagon contracts was one and a half times the entire budgets of the State Department and the US Agency for International Development [USAID]. **Jodi Vittori**, a former Air Force colonel, pointed to the US insistence that the Afghan air force should have used US-made helicopters while the Afghans preferred Russian helicopters, which were easier to fly, could be maintained by Afghans, and were suited to rugged Afghanistan. When US contractors pulled out with US troops taking their knowledge of how to maintain US-provided aircraft with them, top Afghan leaders bitterly complained.

Hillary Clinton, Secretary of State under President Obama, had also accused defence contractors at risk in war zones of resorting to payoffs to armed groups, making protection money to the Taliban groups. The US relied, in part, on defence contractors to carry out one of the tasks most central to its hopes of success in Afghanistan — helping to set up and train an Afghan military and other security forces – but ultimately fell like feathers when the Taliban started moving. Some American intelligentsia held the opinion that:

“...relying less on private contractors, and more on the US military, might have given the US better chances of victory in Afghanistan. Using contractors allowed America to fight a war that a lot of Americans forgot we were fighting.”

INDIA’S COLOSSAL LOSS:

Referring to an essay appeared in ‘**AL-JAZEERA**’ dated 29th August 2021; it remained a hard fact that the Taliban takeover was a ‘body blow to Indian interests in Afghanistan.

Analysts said the Taliban's return to power was a major diplomatic and financial setback for India, which had cultivated close relations with the puppet Ghani's government. Afghanistan was vital to India's strategic interests in the region and a close partner for almost two decades. At the end this South Asian giant became the region's **'most disadvantaged'** player.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, with whom New Delhi had cultivated a close relationship, fled the country in mid-August as the Taliban surrounded the capital, Kabul. The sudden collapse of the Western-backed government in Kabul on August 15 precipitated an unprecedented exodus of diplomats, foreign aid workers and Afghans who worked for Western countries and feared reprisals from the Taliban. India was perhaps the first nation that closed their missions in Afghanistan after the Taliban's take-over.

India, under **Operation Devi Shakti**, had already evacuated more than 800 people from Afghanistan before the formal take-over of Kabul by the Taliban. On 26th August 2021, India could evacuate only 24 of its citizens along with 11 Nepalese nationals in a military aircraft. More than 180 it had planned – but others could not reach the airport to board the aircraft.

New Delhi invested \$3bn in development projects, offered scholarships to Afghan students, and helped construct the Afghan Parliament building at a cost of \$90m, earning huge goodwill in the country of 38 million. During the 2020 Afghanistan Conference, India's External Affairs Minister S Jai Shankar said no part of Afghanistan was **'untouched by the 400-plus projects'** that India had undertaken in all 34 provinces of the country. Bilateral trade between the two countries had also increased significantly over the years and reached \$1.5bn in 2019-20.

India, which considered the Taliban as a proxy of its archrival Pakistan, had maintained close ties with the Northern Alliance instead, which had defeated the Afghan armed group in 2001 with the help of US-led NATO forces. India had gone from being Kabul's closest regional partner to one of the region's most destitute player in Afghanistan context, said **Michael Kugelman**, Deputy Director of the Asia Programme at the US-based Wilson Centre. India was out of the game in Afghanistan, in fact.

Foreign policy gurus held that India was too late in reaching out to the Taliban to secure its interests, as reports emerged that Indian officials

met the Taliban in the Qatari capital, Doha, in June 2021. One expert opined:

“Two factors went against New Delhi; India’s reluctance to reach out to the Taliban until it was too late, and an Afghan reconciliation process with a deep Pakistani footprint, owing to its ties to the Taliban.

One deprived India of potential leverage, and the other put New Delhi at a geopolitical disadvantage.”

The Afghan reconciliation process was an outcome of Doha Agreement between the Taliban and the US signed on 29th February 2020 [*the details are given in an earlier chapter*]. India remained wary of the Taliban, given its proximity to Pakistan’s military spy agency the Inter-Services Intelligence [ISI], while Islamabad had lodged formal complaints against New Delhi for using Afghan soil to **‘*carrying out terror activities in Balochistan and around Pak-Afghan borders*’**.

Afghanistan at last availed a pro-Pakistan government, and this would give Pakistan and India’s other key rival, China – Pakistan’s close friend – an opportunity to play more of a role in Afghanistan. There could also be security risks, because already there were numerous dissident roaring and separatist voices in many Indian provinces.

During its first stint in power, from 1996-2001, the Taliban faced international isolation as it was recognised by only three countries – Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates [UAE]. But things were different this time as regional powers such as China, Russia, and Iran indicated they might work with the Taliban to secure their interests.

India’s former External Affairs Minister Kunwar Natwar Singh, in an interview of mid 2021 suggested *‘New Delhi should establish diplomatic ties with the Taliban* if it functioned as a responsible government. However, India’s former ambassador to Afghanistan, Gautam Mukhopadhaya, said:

“The situation has not crystallised yet. We don’t even have a transitional administration yet [in Afghanistan]. I think for the time being we have to wait and watch.”

At a minimum, establishing informal links with the Taliban government could put New Delhi in a stronger position to ensure that its assets and

investments in Afghanistan shouldn't be imperilled – it was a sane advice from the Indian think-tanks.

GHANI's CORRUPTION & COSTS:

Also worth consideration the ***Pak-media's assessment about real costs of the Afghan-War***; once more referring to Anwar Iqbal's assessment about Afghan War Published in daily **DAWN** dated 8th November 2021:

"A non-governmental estimate of US costs for the 20-year war in Afghanistan is more than double the calculation made by the US Department of Defence [DOD]."

The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction [SIGAR], an official agency that reports directly to Congress, released its latest findings this week, focusing on how the ever-soaring costs of war forced Washington to reconsider its Afghan strategy."

A US government agency started probing into claims that former Afghan president Ashraf Ghani took with him \$169 million while fleeing Kabul, a senior member of his security staff had video proof of the alleged theft; **daily DAWN** of dated 11th October 2021 is referred.

Brig Gen Piraz Ata Sharifi, who headed Mr Ghani's bodyguard squad, said in an interview that he not only saw huge bags of cash being transferred but also acquired a video clip from a CCTV camera. Mr Sharifi told the **Daily Mail Online** from a hideout in Afghanistan:

"One of my jobs was to disarm the soldiers on guard at the ministry before the president arrived, for his security."

Mr Sharifi, wanted by the Taliban for interrogation, was hiding at an undisclosed location in Afghanistan. The Taliban announced a reward of one million Afghanis for his arrest. From hiding he however, told that:

"We were waiting for the president there. But then I got a call to say that instead of coming to the defence ministry, the president went to the airport. The defence minister had also fled; so had my boss - so had all of Mr Ghani's close family and entourage."

Sharifi claimed ex-Afghan president stole hundreds of millions, perhaps billions of dollars before fleeing. He added:

1 *"I have a [CCTV] recording [from the palace] which shows that an*
2 *individual at the Afghan Bank brought a lot of money to Mr Ghani*
3 *before he left - Hundreds of millions, perhaps billions of dollars. There*
4 *were many big bags, and they were heavy."*

5
6 Sharifi said he was disappointed as he liked Mr Ghani - this money was
7 for the currency exchange market. Each Thursday, the dollars were
8 brought for that purpose. This time it was taken by the president.
9 Mr Ghani knew in the end what would happen. So, he took all the
10 money and escaped. Mr Ghani, however, denied the allegation that he
11 left Kabul with four cars and a chopper full of \$169 million, adding that
12 he left Afghanistan un-ceremoniously to avoid bloodshed. His abrupt
13 departure allowed the Taliban to take Kabul two weeks before the US
14 troop pullout.

15
16 Earlier that week, the US government's Inspector General in-charge of
17 investigating misuse of aid money, John Sopko, told Congress he's
18 looking into claims that Mr Ghani and his subordinates stole millions of
19 dollars before fleeing. Sopko told the Congress that:

20
21 *"There are allegations, but not only with President Ghani. There are*
22 *allegations with senior officials in their finance ministry, their central*
23 *bank and a number of other ministries walking off with millions of*
24 *dollars. But again, those are just allegations. We have not confirmed*
25 *any of those yet."*

26
27 **In September 2021**, White House Press Secretary **Jen Psaki** told
28 reporters that so far, they had no evidence of Mr Ghani's involvement
29 in this theft, but the Biden administration would let the UN probe the
30 allegations.

31
32 **On 31st October 2021**; the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said
33 that former Afghan President Ashraf Ghani had pledged to fight till
34 death but fled Kabul when the Taliban appeared around.

35
36 Also, a conservative US think-tank, **Hudson Institute**, rated the reported
37 US-Pakistan talks on a formal agreement for using Pakistani airspace for
38 operations in Afghanistan as a major development. However, **Pakistan's**
39 **Foreign Office had declared the news as FALSE** a week earlier. The
40 Foreign Office [FO] on 23rd October 2021 issued a formal statement on
41 a CNN report claiming that a formal agreement for the use of Pakistan's
42 airspace by the US to conduct strikes in Afghanistan was close; clarifying
43 that there was **'no such understanding between the two countries'**.

In an interview to ‘**CBS - Face the Nation**’ talk-show, former US special 1 envoy for Afghanistan *Zalmay Khalilzad* said that the Biden administration 2 could have done more to prevent the collapse of the government in 3 Kabul. At Sunday’s show, the interviewer asked Secretary Blinken 4 if he had personally tried to persuade Mr Ghani to stay in Kabul. 5 Mr Blinken said he was on the phone with Mr Ghani on Saturday, 6 the 14th August night, pressing him to accept a plan for transferring 7 power to a new government in Kabul, This government would have been 8 ***led by the Taliban but would have included all aspects of the Afghan*** 9 ***society***’ - he said. 10

Mr Ghani told him that ***‘he was prepared to do that, but if the Taliban wouldn’t go along, he was ready to fight to the death.’*** - And the very 12 next day, he fled Afghanistan. The Taliban captured Kabul the same day 13 then. In fact, Blinken was engaged with President Ghani over many 14 weeks, many months – but of no avail. 15

Asked if he did everything he could, the top US diplomat said the State 16 Department was reviewing everything that the US did, starting from 2020 17 when the Trump administration made an agreement with the Taliban. 18

The review included ***‘the actions we took during our administration, because we had to learn every possible lesson from the last couple of years’*** - and also from the last 20 years, he said. 19

Pointing out that this was America’s longest war, Secretary Blinken 20 said President Biden ended the longest war to ensure that another 21 generation of Americans would not have to fight and die in Afghanistan 22 he also added: 23

“And I think when all of this settles, that’s profoundly what the American people want and is in our interest. Meanwhile, we are doing everything to make good on our ongoing commitments.” 24

Another Hudson report, distributed with the review, noted that several 25 US commentators had voiced their desire to disengage with Pakistan – 26 however ended with: 27

“That would be a mistake... Pakistan remains important for the US policy.” 28

Earlier this week, US Under-Secretary of Defence for Policy **Colin Kahl** 29 told Congress that Pakistan has continued to give the US access to its 30

History of a Disgraceful Surrender [2021]

1 airspace and the two sides were also talking about keeping that access
2 open. The intelligentsia of the world and media were unable to
3 understand that there was no accord at all between the two nations nor
4 it was possible in the given situation. Dr Kahl told the Senate Armed
5 Services Committee that:

6
7 *"Pakistan is a challenging actor, but they don't want Afghanistan to*
8 *be a safe haven for terrorist attacks, external attacks, not just against*
9 *Pakistan but against others as well.*

10
11 *They [Pakistan authorities] continue to give us access to Pakistani*
12 *airspace and we are in conversation about keeping that access open."*

13
14 However, those American efforts went futile – Pakistan straightaway
15 refused to allow its bases or airspace by any foreign state; friend or foe.
16