

Scenario 234

COLLAPSE OF A SUPER POWER

FIRST FACTOR – CORRUPTION:

The world media legitimately pondered and commented that why, despite spending \$1+ trillion and building an army and police force at the cost of \$88 billion, the US was forced to exit so unceremoniously. The ongoing popular discourse about the collapse of the Afghan state apparatus — the national unity government, provincial governors, the Afghan National Army, Afghan police etc — had rightly focused on the chaotic departure of the US forces and the peaceful takeover by the Taliban. How come the only superpower with its military might and economic prowess could not overcome allegedly a disorganised group of the Taliban?

Various explanations ranging from Afghanistan being the '*graveyard of superpowers*' to the ideological commitment of the Taliban to the poor strategic choices made by US presidents were discussed at various august debating forums. The alternative hypothesis remained that it was *an issue regarding the collapse of an elitist state* artificially nurtured and pumped up by external stimuli. Once those incentives were withdrawn the artificial superstructure went dismantled within days whatsoever.

Main question: Why the soldiers and police force *surrendered so easily* to the Taliban? A possible explanation was that in the case of Afghanistan, a new elite class was popped up by an artificial respiratory system and administered injections of huge doses of the US money. The country did not have the capacity to absorb roughly \$100bn annually — five times its 2020 GDP [the 2001 GDP was only \$4bn]. A new class of contractors, suppliers, transporters, importers, experts, bankers and military commanders was added to the traditional elites such as warlords, government officials, clergy leaders, drug traffickers etc. *The US companies and intermediaries, got lions shares of their contracted amounts for providing safe passage of dollars to all concerned including Americans.*

Ishrat Husain in his article published in **daily DAWN** dated 29th September 2021 provided a plausible explanation to the above important query:

"The said enlarged elite class was the main beneficiary of the continued occupation of Afghanistan by external forces; incomes, rent-seeking opportunities, businesses, jobs and corruption swelled the elite's wealth. Having transferred this wealth abroad they were the first ones to take flights out of Kabul helped by the US forces."

SIGAR Report, Afghanistan Papers and Carnegie Fund reports have amply documented the leakages, misappropriations and capital flight - [back to America and Dubai].

For almost two decades, billions of dollars in corruption proceeds were funnelled from Afghanistan, a country devastated by four decades of conflicts, to abroad. These outflows played a part in stunting Afghanistan's economic and political development, facilitating resurgence of the Taliban and worsening regional instability."

Compare this scenario with the plight of the common citizen of Afghanistan where 90% of the population was living below the poverty line; SIGAR found enough evidence of embezzlement and diversion of donor funds.

Another big question: ***why corruption is being equated with the Taliban's rise***; - because the ordinary Afghan villagers had lost trust in successive US and Afghan governments both. They welcomed the Taliban not only because they were fed up with continuing violence and insecurity for the last four decades but also because they felt the Taliban would not indulge in such like corruption at least – so rampant since 2001. **Trust was the glue that kept the population attached to the Taliban.**

Ishrat Hussain further divulged that successive Afghan governments were popularly seen as having been imposed by outsiders, taking orders from the US and NATO. The army and police were recruited, trained, equipped and paid by the same outsiders not to protect the citizens or Afghanistan's territorial integrity but as a counter-insurgency force. Almost all institutions of the state had become dysfunctional and the erosion of their capacity diverted the population's attention and support towards the Taliban who could fill the vacuum.

The Economist reported in its November 2020 issue that security actually improved in the areas the Taliban controlled. Local Taliban

1 leaders solved most disputes and decisions were taken immediately and
2 enforced effectively. The teachers actually turned up at work. *'Boys at*
3 *least can still get an education and the sick can receive healthcare in areas*
4 *occupied by the Taliban'; the Economist noted.* It was this expectation
5 of corruption-free good governance, expeditious and inexpensive
6 justice and access to basic services that led residents to pave the way for
7 the Taliban.

8
9 Coming back to the same - Why soldiers and policemen surrendered so
10 easily to the Taliban? Simply because –

11
12 *'a soldier won't risk his life when he hasn't been paid his salary for*
13 *months, his family is on the brink of starvation and he knows that his*
14 *commanders have amassed huge wealth by diverting his dues and that*
15 *they don't care about forces' welfare'.*

16
17 A sense of uncertainty and de-motivation prevailed because they knew
18 their paymasters [the US] would no longer fund them. ***It was the survival***
19 ***instinct that overwhelmed them and resulted in their surrender,***
20 ***incompetence and ineptness.***

21
22 The lesson from Afghanistan's story was that miss-governance and
23 corruption by elites at the expense of the majority's welfare caused
24 popular estrangement, alienation, disregard and allowed non-state but
25 nationalist actors to run the state. And the US high command Generals
26 had also accepted this reality; see the speech of the US military chiefs
27 before the American Lawmakers about the Afghanistan debacle -
28 ***cumulative effect of 20 years of mistakes:***

29
30 WASHINGTON: [The latest testimony before the House Armed Services
31 Committee]

32
33 *".....major strategic issue that we are going to have to really unpack*
34 *today - we need to fully examine the role of Pakistan but the focus*
35 ***should be on finding the root cause of the US loss - a whole series of***
36 ***decisions that took place over 20 years, not on a single-source.***

37
38 *My assessment is, this is a 20-year war, and it wasn't lost in the last*
39 *20 days or even 20 months. There's a cumulative effect to a series of*
40 *decisions that go way back.*

41
42 *Whenever you get some phenomenon like a war that is lost — and it*
43 *has been ... (because) certainly the end state is a whole lot different*

than what we wanted. So, whenever a phenomenon like that happens, there's an awful lot of causal factors. And we have to figure that out. A lot of lessons learned here."

Gen Miley also cited some major decisions, by successive US administrations, which he believed contributed to the loss. Those included 'letting Osama bin Laden escape from **Tora Bora**'.

Another mistake, according to him, was shifting focus from Afghanistan to Iraq in the early stage of the war.

".....Pulling all the troops out of Afghanistan with the exception of a few others, was a major strategic decision. Pulling off intelligence advisers ... we blinded ourselves to our ability to see how the war was going."

On 29th September 2021; throughout that day's hearing, Republicans and Democrats sparred over who to blame for America's failures in Afghanistan. **Gen Frank McKenzie**, the head of Central Command, linked Kabul's collapse in August to former President Trump's deal with the Taliban, which promised a complete withdrawal of US troops.

Gen McKenzie argued that once the US troop presence was pushed below 2,500 to meet the deal's deadline, the disentanglement of the US-backed Afghan government accelerated. He added that:

"The signing of the Doha agreement had a really pernicious effect on the government of Afghanistan and on its military — psychological more than anything else, but we set a date — certain for when we were going to leave and when they could expect all assistance to end."

In the US-Taliban accord, signed in Doha, Qatar on 29th Feb 2020, the Trump administration had pledged to fully withdraw its troops from Afghanistan by May 2021 and the Taliban committed to stop attacking US and coalition forces. Some lawmakers, however, defended the withdrawal. Committee's Chairman Adam Smith said:

"The decision the president TRUMP made was to stop fighting a war that after 20 years it was proven we could not win. There was no easy way to do that."

US-PAK REMAINED APART TILL END:

See the diplomatic activity between two countries during the last days of Afghan-War in 2021:

“President Joe Biden couldn’t find time to call PM Khan — somewhat without explanation — but US-Pakistan engagement on Afghanistan continued. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Pakistani FM Mr Qureshi spoke multiple times. US Special Rep for Afghan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad continued his visits to Islamabad and Rawalpindi, last one in July [2021].

CIA Director Bill Burns visited Pakistan in a secret trip though was made public later. COAS Gen Bajwa received multiple calls from officials in Washington, including from Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin. The National Security Advisors of the two countries met twice in person, and the ISI chief visited Washington just in last week of July [2021]. A new quadrilateral relationship was announced between America, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Uzbekistan.”

Yet despite all this, there was seen no movement on intra-Afghan peace talks beyond a set of inconclusive meetings in Doha in July [2021] — because the Taliban had gained extra-ordinary momentum and advances in Afghanistan those days and the Afghan government’s position was worsening rapidly; the Taliban leadership was not ready to listen any advice or even comment from outside including Pakistan. The US took it that Pakistan was not helping them being in good relations – so the distance enhanced bit by bit; till the total US defeat.

However, Pakistan repeatedly indicated earlier, covertly and openly, that it wanted the mutual relationship to be defined more broadly than with regard to Afghanistan — especially based on ‘geo-economics,’ its favoured current catch-all for trade, investment, and connectivity. Pakistan could never approve that the US failures in Afghanistan be blamed on Pakistan. During the recent past, the US mostly expected Pakistan to ‘DO MORE’ on Afghanistan issues. Referring to **‘The Future of Pakistan’** by Stephen P. Cohen in *Brookings.edu* [2011]:

“The sticking points from the US side, however, remain: wariness about trusting Pakistan, and a desire for Islamabad to put pressure on the Taliban. Pakistan argues the requests to ‘do more’ from the US side are never-ending.”

This mantra of **DO MORE** was repeatedly read over in terms of pushing the Taliban toward a peace agreement with the corrupt Afghan governments of Karzai and Ghani which the Taliban always and openly refused. Pakistan told the US about its inability because both the Afghan presidents were in hi-profile association with India, Pakistan’s rival state

who had launched about 16000 terrorist attacks in Pakistan with the aid of these two stooge rulers – and that the US had been ignoring all that activity knowingly – rather tolerated Afghan-Indian strategy with smiles.

The result was obvious – a humiliating defeat for the US and India both.

Madiha Afzal wrote in her article published in the '**Foreign Policy**' dated 6th August 2021; much earlier than the Taliban's taking over Kabul:

"Pakistan's official stance is that it would prefer a peaceful outcome in Afghanistan, some sort of a power-sharing arrangement reached after an intra-Afghan peace deal.

Many are sceptical of this given Pakistan's support of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in the 1990s [basically it was the US support delivered to them via Pakistan]. But Pakistan argues that a protracted civil war in Afghanistan would be disastrous for it, on three dimensions:

- *First, insecurity from Afghanistan would spill over into Pakistan.*
- *Second, Pakistan fears that this would set up space for the resurgence of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan [TTP], a group responsible for killing tens of thousands of Pakistani civilians and attacking the country's army, security forces, and politicians.*
- *Third, this would increase the amount of refugee flows to Pakistan [which has hosted millions of Afghan refugees since the 1990s, including 3 million at present], which it can't afford."*

Of course, these were well-founded and documented fears.

The Western media and the US power corridors were aware about what a Taliban victory would mean for Pakistan. Also the implication, that the road to a comprehensive Taliban military win would be violent or at least un-predictable. What Pakistan didn't discuss openly was: Pakistan had long preferred the Afghan Taliban to local *Pashtun* nationalists, which it viewed as threatening, and to the successive two Afghan governments of Karzai & Ghani; also which it viewed friendly with India. And the Afghan Taliban's ideological twin, the TTP, had posed an existential threat to Pakistan which had killed c80,000 Pakistanis during two decades of the recent war.

This tension was clearly making Pakistan nervous. Pakistan encountered the TTP in military operations since 2008 onwards, but many of them

sought refuge across the border in Afghanistan, and regrouped themselves as a continuous process since then. The Afghan Taliban's rule over Afghanistan would almost certainly embolden the TTP, engulfing Pakistan in violence it experienced between 2007 and 2016. PM Khan's government had to negotiate a deal with the Afghan Taliban to constrain the TTP, but there was a real question of deal's effectiveness in the coming times.

The above explained tension was not perceptible to Pakistan's public; thus Pakistanis being supportive of the Afghan Taliban were against the TTP. However, the top civilian and army officials admitted to these facts then; was also alleged that the army chief and the DG ISI called the Afghan Taliban and the TTP *'two faces of the same coin.'*

During mid-year [2021], when the Taliban marched ahead in rural Afghanistan, with fingers being pointed at Pakistan's relationship with Taliban, Pakistan distanced itself from the group. PM Khan openly said that:

"Pakistan doesn't speak for the Taliban, nor is it responsible for it;that a 'rushed' US withdrawal before peace talks has set the stage for the current situation.....the Taliban's battlefield victories render moot any leverage Pakistan could have over it.....that the TTP faction could be hiding among Afghan refugees in Pakistan."

[Daily **DAWN** dated **29th** July 2021 is referred.]

Yet the world remained sceptical, amid reports of purported Taliban fighters being treated across the border in Pakistan.

In her article *Madiha Afzal*, cited above, pointed out that from America's perspective, the main task was for Pakistan to exercise its leverage in pushing the Taliban to reduce violence and toward an intra-Afghan peace deal. The second was the potential for counter-terrorism cooperation in the post-withdrawal landscape; but a chequered past marred the relationship. For Washington, part of the reason it lost the war against the Taliban was because the Taliban found support in Pakistan, including sanctuary for the Haqqani network and the *Quetta Shura*.

That Osama bin Laden [OBL] was found in Abbott Abad in 2011 eroded any remaining trust from the US side. Yet America needed Pakistan's help in the region, especially amidst withdrawals from Afghanistan.

And Pakistan largely delivered on the Trump administration's main ¹ request, to bring the Taliban to the table for talks with the US – that's ² why the Doha Declaration and this ending of 20 years long war.

The US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's statement after their exit from Afghan soils that *the US will re-assess its ties with Pakistan after the Taliban takeover* confirmed the US would continue to see Pakistan through the Indian prism of doubts and distrust, and would always expect Pakistan to **do more** despite its loss of human lives more than any war partner state.

During the last week of September 2021, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Mr Qureshi emphasised the need for cooperation between the two countries beyond counter-terrorism and Afghanistan. He reiterated:

"Our engagement has often been narrowly framed, dictated either by short-term security interests or the imperative to deal with a common challenge, and we want to break out of this pattern."

"This approach may not be viable for the US and would be a strategic mistake in the current international environment which is moving fast towards a multi-polar world. Asia is most reflective of this change as China advances in continents across the world via geo-economics through its Belt and Road Initiative [BRI]."

Pakistan was a most favoured US-ally in and after 2001 and was instrumental in fighting the War on Terror that claimed the lives of c80,000 Pakistani civilian and forces; nevertheless, the relationship between the two remained multifaceted. The situation gone changed after the Afghan war ended; the rising multipolar world started posing challenges to the US and its status as the sole superpower. President Joe Biden admitted that:

"We're engaged in a serious competition with China. We are dealing with the challenges on the multiple fronts with Russia."

Competing with Russia and China was certainly a challenge; the US-India strategic partnership faced a serious setback in the wake of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. India's relations with China were of adversarial nature. Pakistan on the other hand had played a pivotal role in the US-China relations in the past. Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's first secret visit to China in the 70s was an event to note in the same context. Pakistan could help connect the US and China again

in areas of converging interests and cooperation – but the US never aspired to move this way.

Pakistan emphasized that in the world of increased connectivity and interdependency, the US needed to work in this direction, particularly after its withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership [TPP] in 2017. Had the US wanted to maintain presence in this Asian region, Pakistan's involvement could be vital. Pakistan, having a unique strategic location, deserve more economic participation from Washington through developing trade, transit links, and business-to-business ties; and should consider '**peace and stability in Afghanistan**' critical.

The fact remains that America was not happy with CPEC, although Pakistan's security establishment had stressed multiple times that '**seeing Pakistan through CPEC prism only was misleading.**' Moreover, any inter-camp politics was not in the interest of any country. However, the US didn't see eye to eye with this and didn't buy the argument of geo-economics due to its hostile relations with China. The US was not ready to develop a policy towards Pakistan on a broader context; it continued to see Pakistan through specific prism of **DO MORE**.

Pakistan successfully conveyed its views and asserted that it would not compromise its national interest anymore. PM Imran Khan's stance of **ABSOLUTELY NOT** provided basis to the US to be a '**partner in peace and not in war**'; these were pillars of the policy Pakistan intended to pursue; and the approach Pakistan sought for relationship with its counterpart — a relationship based on understanding, mutual respect and diplomatic reciprocity. In a rapidly changing international environment, it was a mistake to abandon Afghanistan like in the 90s. Pakistan's FM Mr Qureshi re-asserted:

"It would not be in the interest of the US to repeat such a mistake of distancing itself from Pakistan and not have a continued working relationship with a country which has been an ally for over seven decades."

Nasim Rizvi's analysis appeared in daily **THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE** dated 30th September 2021 is referred.

ROLE OF INDIA IN AFGHAN WAR:

India was the only South Asian country to recognize the Soviet-backed Democratic Republic of Afghanistan in the 1980s after the Soviet's entry and occupation.

India aided America for the overthrow of the Taliban and became the 1 largest regional provider of humanitarian and reconstruction aid to 2 Afghanistan during Karzai & Ghani's governments. Indians were working 3 in various rebuilding projects in Afghanistan – but in fact India's foreign 4 intelligence agency R&AW was working in cover to malign Pakistan and 5 train and support TTP insurgents. During 2006 there were 600 Balochi 6 separatists who were receiving military training in Indian camps which 7 later launched thousands terrorist attacks in Pakistan; **Mariana Baabar's** 8 essay in **OUTLOOK INDIA** dated 24th April 2006, titled as "RAW is 9 Training S00 Balochis in Afghanistan" is referred.

Relations between Afghanistan and India received a major boost in 2011 with the signing of a **Strategic Partnership Agreement**, Afghanistan's first accord with the US since the Soviet invasion of 1979.

A major shift in India's position on Afghan Taliban was reported by a top Qatar official in June 2021, revealing that an Indian delegation quietly visited Doha to meet Taliban's leadership. The agenda had taken several weeks in the making in the first half of 2021, and likely involved Qatari mediation between India and the Taliban, too; **Geeta Mohan's** essay in **INDIA TODAY** dated 22nd June 2021 is referred

After 9/11 event and the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, India offered intelligence and other forms of support for the Coalition forces. After the overthrow of the Taliban, India established diplomatic relations with the newly established Afghan national government of Karzai. India also provided \$650 million to Afghanistan in humanitarian and economic aid. India's more emphasis on training of Afghan civil servants, diplomats and police gave it a strategic insight.

In 2005, India sponsored Afghanistan's membership in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation [SAARC]; which matured in 2007 and Afghanistan finally became the eighth member of SAARC. It was basically to develop strategic and military cooperation against the Taliban because an Indian national [a spy of RAW] was killed by the Taliban in November 2005. India filtered its own benefits out of this killing and deployed 200 Indian soldiers in the garb of providing security for Indian nationals. In fact those were the so-called soldiers who targeted Pakistan's Balochistan province and the Pak-Afghan border tribal villages inside Pakistan.

India also pursued a policy of close collaboration with Afghanistan and Iran in order to bolster its standing as a REGIONAL POWER to launch

attacks inside Pakistan. It signed three memorandums of understanding [MOUs] with Afghanistan on various disciplines to keep and increase Indian security personnel on Afghan soils. During Hamid Karzai's visit to India in April 2006, an agreement providing \$50 million to promote bilateral businesses was also signed; that initial amount was then revised to \$150 million, then to \$750 million.

The Indian Army's Border Roads Organisation constructed a road in 2009 in the remote Afghan province of Nimroz, connecting Delaram to Zaranj providing a viable alternative route for the duty-free movement of goods through the Chabahar port in Iran to Afghanistan. It was a key strategy to build up transportation links bypassing land routes through Pakistan, helping reduce the Afghan economy's dependence on Pakistan.

On 7th July 2008; the Indian embassy in Kabul was attacked by a suicide car bomber – killing 58 people and leaving 141 wounded. Senior Indian Army officer Brig Ravi Mehta was entering the embassy gates in a car when the attack took place; he and another hi official were killed at the spot. India alleged that the blast was sponsored by the Pakistan's ISI which was immediately refuted. Next month, Afghan President Karzai visited New Delhi for official condolence to that human loss.

On 18th October 2009; the Indian embassy in Kabul was attacked again by a car bomb killing about 17 people and leaving tens wounded.

On 26th February 2010; another attack took place at the Arya Guest House [state hotel] resulting in the death of 17 Indian doctors and a civilian. It was a combined suicide car bombing and shooting attack by two militants allegedly belonging to the Taliban.

According to 2010 Gallup poll, which interviewed 1,000 adults, 50% Afghans approved of the job performance of India's leadership and 44% disapproved with 6% refusing to answer. According to the survey, Afghan adults approved of India's leadership more than of US leadership.

On 20th September 2011; former Afghan president Burhanuddin Rabbani was assassinated with several other people in a bomb attack in Kabul. After the Taliban government was toppled in NOVEMBER 2001, Rabbani had returned to Kabul and served briefly as President from 13TH November to 22ND December 2001, till Hamid Karzai was chosen as his successor at the **Bonn International Conference**. Mr Rabbani was killed at his home by a suicide bomber who, officials believed, had concealed a bomb in his

turban. He was meeting members of the Taliban at that time. The council leaders were there in negotiations with the Taliban.

On 4th October 2011; Afghanistan signed a strategic pact with India; calling it a Strategic Partnership Agreement during a visit of President Karzai to Delhi. Indian PM Man Mohan Singh said violence in Afghanistan was undermining security in South Asia so **India would ‘stand by Afghanistan’** when foreign troops withdraw from the country in 2014.

Mr Karzai’s visit followed a series of attacks which had damaged ties between Kabul and Pakistan as the increasingly close relationship between Kabul and Delhi was viewed with suspicion. The pact was believed to include an Indian commitment to increase its training of Afghan security forces and police. Both sides were to launch Partnership Council, topmost body to implement the **Strategic Partnership Pact** in May 2012.

This strategic partnership agreement between India and Afghanistan could have evoked howls of protest from Pakistan as it had long been regarded its western neighbour as part of its sphere of influence – but Pakistan remained cool. Pakistan, however, noted New Delhi’s way to expand influence and to become Regional Leader in Southern Asia.

Instead, Pakistan’s PM Mr Gilani said:

“India and Afghanistan are both sovereign countries and they have the right to do whatever they want to but regional stability should be preserved.”

Soon after, PM Gilani met his Indian counterpart Man Mohan Singh on the margins of a regional summit in the Maldives; both PMs promised a new chapter in ties. It was resolved that the next round of talks between officials as part of an engagement on various issues would produce definite results. Afghanistan or the pact was scarcely mentioned in public or media.

In those days, Pakistan was battling multiple calamities, including soar ties with the US; even looking worse than those with India. It was also struggling to tackle the militant groups like TTP and *Sapah e Sahaba* that had posed mortal dangers for Pakistan itself and additionally a deep economic downturn generally. While Pakistan continued to invest time

and energy in Afghanistan, a large part of the war had come home too and it was struggling to enforce its writ on the northern border areas adjoining Afghanistan. A lessening tension with India could help at this point but it didn't happen.

Disappointed with the US behaviour; hostile Pakistan balked at trade and transit through Pakistan though unnecessarily. Sajjad Ashraf, a professor at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, said:

"If the three countries can reach an understanding and let India develop Afghan capacity leading to regional economic integration, Pakistan too becomes a winner. In the age of globalisation, following any other course will result in Pakistan lagging behind."

For India, peace in Afghanistan was important to be able to exploit the vast economic potential of the Central Asian states. It shared Afghanistan's concerns about the security of the nation after the western withdrawal from a combat role in 2014. In the meantime, Afghanistan, India and Iran signed the **Chabahar Agreement** as against the Gwadar project of the CPEC.

On 22nd May 2014; the Indian consulate in Herat was attacked by 3 militants equipped with AK-47s, RPGs, hand grenades and suicide vests.

On 24th December 2015; India donated three Mi-25 attack helicopters to Afghanistan as part of the bilateral strategic partnership to counter the Taliban groups. The next day, on **25th December**, Indian PM Narendra Modi visited Kabul to open the newly constructed Afghan parliament opposite the ruins of the Darul Aman Palace, which had been built by India for \$90 million. PM Modi and President Ghani held that:

"Though, India and Afghanistan need no introduction, we are bound by a thousand ties... We have stood by each other in the best and worst of times"

On 4th June 2016; PM Modi and Afghan President Ghani formally inaugurated the \$290-million Salma Dam with a capacity of 42 MW power generation. The dam was expected to help Afghanistan capitalize on opportunities that would open up once the India backed Chabahar project completed; hoping to link the port in Iran to Central Asia's road and railway networks.

In August 2021; After Taliban's take over, Dozens of refugees from Afghanistan arrived in India following the new government established; India hosted hundreds but no details yet.

NEW COLD WAR – NOW US vs CHINA:

On 21st September 2021; the US President Joe Biden, while addressing the UN General Assembly, said:

“We’ve ended 20 years of conflict in Afghanistan, and as we close this period of relentless war, we’re opening a new era of relentless diplomacy of using the power of our development aid to invest in new ways of lifting people up around the world.”

After the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, Biden’s administration shifted their attention and energy towards persistent peace-keeping policy. However, the growing Sino-US wedge was alarming because of the impact it could have on the world-order and the possibility of a rift in US-Russian relations. Today’s emerging realities require re-adjustments, which negate what President Biden narrated in his speech. The main issue for the whole Western block and the US was, in fact, the China’s economic expansion.

A new grouping of Australia, UK and US [AUKUS] remained under discussion and finally agreed upon and signed as a new initiative to deal with growing Chinese engagements in the Indo-Pacific region. Already a four-member group of Australia, India, Japan and the US known as QUAD was there for the same purposes – a manifestation of what Beijing termed **COLD WAR MENTALITY**. The first summit of QUAD held in Washington on 24th September 2021 was a mature effort to further consolidate the security alliance aimed at containing China. Both QUAD and AUKUS could be termed as an eastern NATO that focused on the Indo-Pacific region.

After spending 2-3 trillion dollars during its 20 years of futile war in Afghanistan, the US shifted its focus on two major threats to its influence in Europe and the Asia-Pacific — Russia and China. In military power, China was far behind the US but then came on par with the US in the economic arena. It has also tried to bridge the gap in military and technological power. Even Russia recovered itself from the 1990’s fall syndrome of the USSR and its rise challenged America’s so-called unbeatable power-myth.

America’s new policy was based on new main objective in Asia. Priority was given to isolate and contain China in the Asia-Pacific region by utilising AUKUS and QUAD relationships along with South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines and Vietnam. Exploiting grey areas like unrest in

1 Xinjiang, Tibet, Hong Kong mounted its strategic priority. Over the
2 years, China got consolidated its soft power by diplomacy, aid, trade and
3 investments under its Belt and Road Initiative [BRI]. Yet to see how
4 President Biden would transform his claims and plans into reality - given
5 shaken US confidence amidst its humiliation in Afghanistan.

6
7 Since the Taliban's takeover of Kabul on 15th August 2021, the US and
8 India missed no opportunity to hurt and damage Pakistan. Despite
9 serious human rights violations by the Indian security forces in Occupied
10 Jammu & Kashmir and violence against minorities particularly Muslims
11 in Assam, **President Biden warmly welcomed PM Modi to the White**
12 **House**. Biden's message to Pakistan was loud and clear that India would
13 remain a priority despite BJP's communal persecution and grave violation
14 of human rights. Biden-Modi duo would shape things to contain China
15 and Pakistan.

16
17 After withdrawing from Afghanistan, the US was in no need of any
18 assistance and support from Pakistan. It started using its advantageous
19 position to reformulate a new strategy aiming at Beijing and Islamabad.
20 The US opted to tame Pakistan by using its clout in IMF, World Bank,
21 Asian Development Bank and other multilateral financial institutions to
22 exert maximum pressure on Islamabad. It was difficult to determine how
23 Pakistan would cope with the Indo-US nexus in future.

24
25 Lastly, the US and India started playing diplomatic tactics to create a
26 wedge in Sino-Russian relations. In the last 30 years, Russia and China
27 have strengthened relations through their fundamental role in the
28 **Shanghai Cooperation Organization**, which led to a deepening of
29 strategic, security, economic and political ties between the two; but yet
30 to see how India and the US would cause a rift in Sino-Russian relations.
31 So far, both Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi
32 Jinping remained firm on maintaining their deep-rooted ties. However,
33 one can expect rupture in their relations when China would announce
34 and show an aggressive and offensive stance against AUKUS and QUAD.

35
36 Russia would also like to maintain its age-old friendship with India;
37 meaning thereby that a loose agreement over tolerance and cooperation
38 was likely. The famous dictum that **'in global politics, there are no**
39 **permanent enemies and no permanent allies but only interests'** would
40 matter in Sino-Russian relations and Pak-US ties both. Following its
41 humiliating withdrawal from Afghanistan, the US was confronted with
42 several foreign policy challenges.