

An Analysis of Joe Biden Failed Policy in Afghanistan

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Abstract:

This research paper analyzes the Biden administration, its policies regarding the Afghan war and the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan after a two-decade war. In the Afghan war, which three administrations successfully ran since 2001, Biden's hectic withdrawal has left doubts regarding Biden presidency. This paper briefly examines the previous administrations of America in the light of political and international relations paradigms; thus, a comparative analysis is also built among the Bush, Obama, Trump, and Biden administrations. Biden strategy in Afghanistan is analyzed with the help of the Rational Choice theory. The rational strategy for the Afghan war is highlighted by providing answers to some critical questions, such as: What policies made Biden Administration differ from the previous administrations? What challenges had Biden faced while running a two-decade old war? The paper is precise enough to discuss the cost and benefits of the Afghan war post 9/11. Threats to U.S. security after this withdrawal is under discussion. A qualitative approach has been utilized to analyze the above questions based on secondary data, reports, books and journal articles.

Keywords: Afghanistan, U.S., Withdrawal, Biden, Administration.

Introduction:

In February 2019, a peace deal was signed between U.S. and the Taliban, according to which until May 2021, U.S. military troops will leave Afghanistan. However, when President Biden was elected, he updated the withdrawal time to September 2021 (Kiely & Farley, 2021). In his 14 April speech, Biden said, "not to conduct a hasty rush to exit." Taliban seems to be more active after the peace deal as they readily took over the region and reached Kabul until 15 August 2021. The land of Afghanistan became treacherous for the U.S. troops, Americans and Afghan security forces. U.S. evacuated Afghanistan ground till 30 August 2021, as the lives of thousands of American soldiers and U.S. loyalists were at stake.

About the speedy fall of Afghanistan, Biden defended his decision on 16 August 2021; "After 20 years, I have learned the hard way that there was never a good time to withdraw U.S. forces" (Kiely & Farley, 2021). However, the situation in Afghanistan became messy when an American airplane was

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flying from Kabul airport. People were forcefully rushing into the craft and hanging with the airplane wings. Besides, to prevent the people from fleeing, the Taliban have been firing warning shots to keep people away from the terminal of Kabul (Sikhala, 2021). The withdrawal decision by the Biden administration divided Washington. Experts criticized that the vacuum created by the U.S. in Afghanistan could lead to damaging consequences (Jenkins, 2021). However, some favored the strategic decision of Biden and conferred that President has recognized that the continued presence of the U.S. would not make the grounds of the U.S. or the world safer.

Public opinion through a research survey; 54% believed that Biden decision of U.S. withdraw from Afghanistan was right, while 42% called it a wrong decision. This is approximately a 50-50 endorsement. While 69% believed that the U.S. failed to achieve its goals in Afghanistan, only 27% called it a success. However, how did the Biden administration handle the situation in Afghanistan? 42% called it a poor job, 29% opted for only fair, 29% selected a good option and only 6% were particular about an excellent job (Igielnik, Keeter, & Hartig, 2021). Republicans view the Taliban takeover as more threat to U.S. security than democrats. Republicans oppose the U.S. withdrawal. However, both parties believed that the U.S. failed to achieve its Afghanistan goals. Among Democrats, fewer than half views Biden decision as a positive one.

Bush Administration; Liberal Democracy, Hard Power, and Neo-Conservatism:

After 9/11, President Bush invaded Afghanistan on 7 October 2001, and his utmost focus was eradicating Terrorism and terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda and the Taliban (Hassan & Hammond, 2011). Bush adopted a hard power policy in Afghanistan. Hard power is 'command power', the ability to change what others do through inducement (carrot) or threat (sticks). U.S. lures the hard power through resources like weapons, sanctions, payments and NATO forces.

Liberalist ideas of spreading democracy worldwide are the highlights of his regime. Bush administration believed that he was the President, and the state of America was the sole body that could go after the wicked Terrorism to destroy it in all five continents to spread freedom and democracy worldwide. Later Bush administration focused on nation-building and the advancement of democracy (as the U.S. portfolio).

The Bush administration was truly called 'neo-con' or Bush doctrine when they invaded Afghanistan. Neo-Conservatism "was an approach to foreign policy making which empowered the U.S.

due to its unparalleled position in the world to take over a state which is a terrorist state or assist terrorism through other means" (Webber, 2009). Neo-Conservatism sought to pressure and reinforce what was seen as the U.S.' benevolent global' hegemony. The theory of Neo- Conservatism proved to be effective during the Afghanistan invasion. In Jan 2002, Iraq, Iran and North Korea were identified as 'axis of evil'; thus, the war on terror started in the regions of Central Asia. The U.S. attack on Iraq in 2003 not only diverted its military resources from Afghanistan to Iraq but also made suspicious the ultimate stated goal of President Bush that was to eradicate Terrorism and to emancipate Afghan people, particularly women from the Taliban's aggression. It provided breathing space to the Taliban who regrouped in the tribal belt of Pakistan and started a tactful guerilla war against the US-led NATO forces in Afghanistan (Gul, 2009). But despite that Bush's aggressive doctrine was supported worldwide, by congress, the media and the public. The term "Terrorism' was extensively defined internationally, blamed on the Muslim world in general and Pashtun tribesmen in particular, living inside and outside Afghanistan (Taj, 2009). In collaboration with its local allies, the mainstream western media turned against the tribe members, dubbing them terrorists with pristine culture. The bipolarity of the Muslim and non-Muslim world was ideologically supported under the "clash of civilizations" rubric. The alignment of Muslims and non-Muslim world with the U.S. in its project against the war on terror made Bush a daring and bold President worldwide (Dorani, 2019).

Obama Administration; Realist Ideas, Smart Power, and Game Theory:

Obama came into office in 2008 and focused on improving his image worldwide over the war on terror. He took out the troops from Iraq and deployed additional troops in Afghanistan. During Obama's era, the highest number of military troops were positioned in Afghanistan i.e., 100,000. Obama changed the U.S. foreign policy contrary to Bush's liberalist thought of spreading democracy worldwide (Hoffman, 2015). Obama saw the Taliban as a real threat to America. Obama used a smart power policy, a combination of hard and soft power. Smart power is the use of soft power backed up by hard power (Indurthy, 2011). NATO was reorganized as part of a strategic mission. Some kind of sophistication and limitation was evident in the U.S. foreign policy. Some political pundits believe it was the end of U.S. hegemony.

U.S., Taliban, and Afghan governments constituted three corners of a firm triangle. Three players showed more interdependency; thus, game theory could be applied. Game theory analyzes how

decision-makers interact in decision-making to consider the reactions and choices of the other decision-makers. Due to the high interdependency of the Afghan government on the U.S., more stay in Afghanistan will make the Taliban capable of covering the ground. There are precisely no incentives for the U.S. to stay in Afghanistan. Obama is certain that engagement with other countries, especially with Muslim states, could effectively combat Terrorism internationally. He believed in diplomacy rather than military means (Dorani, 2019). At his best level, he did a lot to avoid conflicts on U.S. ground. Obama administration was more consistent with bureaucratic politics.

The Obama administration first introduced the Afghanistan-Pakistan strategy. The main aim was to eradicate the evil of Terrorism from both states as both are culturally, ethnically and bordered interlinked countries. The exclusion of Al-Qaeda, reconciliation with the Taliban and U.S. peaceful exit were preferences (Shad & Iqbal, 2021). Tribal regions of Pakistan were considered to be the safe haven of terrorists; thus, Pakistan was heavily funded to start operations against Terrorism in the North-Western part. Pakistan was playing a dual role of problem and solution.

The U.S. passed the Kerry-Lugar bill for Pakistan, which consists of \$1.5 billion per year for consecutive years during 2010-2014. The Pakistan border was used for drone attacks. Trilateral dialogue between Pakistan, Afghanistan and U.S. started. Later the Raymond Davis case, the killing of Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad and U.S. troops attacking Pakistani check posts tragically faded the strategic relations between U.S. and Pakistan. The reconciliation process between the U.S. and the Taliban started when the latter opened their political office in Qatar in Jan 2012 with the former consent (Dobbins, 2014). In the Doha meeting, an agreement was locked over returning American soldiers and war prisoners from the Taliban side, but the lack of trust ended soon. Obama, a rational thinker, thought about transferring responsibilities to the Afghan government and deployed additional troops in Afghanistan to train Afghan security forces against the Taliban. To make a safe exit from Afghanistan and end a long-term war.

Trump Administration; America First, Nationalist and Populist Policy:

Trump administration's foreign policy was consistent though a little confusing from earlier policies. Trump's doctrine can be explained in a few blunt words; "Put up, pay up or shut up" (Miller, 2019). Trump compelled European countries to donate for the strategic goal, specifically to NATO. His strategy towards Afghanistan was slightly different; he directed the additional troops in Afghanistan

more for searching and destroying terrorists and less focused on guarding and developing the Afghan government.

Trump followed nationalist ideas by putting up America in preference. He ended the military presence in Syria and lessened the military troops in Afghanistan. He thought the downing economy of the U.S. could impair its hegemonic position (Dadabaev, 2020). The rising position of China as an economic power and the Russian covert support to the Taliban was also an inescapable danger. Thus, he ordered the withdrawal of half of the troops from Afghanistan. This made Republicans query the Trumps administration. Besides, the public views about the rapid withdrawal were not reassuring due to the rise of ISIL, so the party permitted the Trump administration to remain in Afghanistan.

Trump administration officially started the Afghan peace process with a vibrant objective of withdrawal from Afghanistan. Zalmay Khalilzad was appointed (an American Afghan diplomat) as a U.S. representative in peace talks (Shad & Iqbal, 2021). U.S. and Taliban seemed to be on the same page during this agreement, but the Afghan government got an extreme position about power sharing in Afghanistan. The American public condemned the Trump administration for agreeing to Taliban demands willingly. Numerous people in America and even outside the U.S. protested to show their anger.

Biden Administration; Rationalist Ideas and Pragmatic Realism:

In strategic policies, Biden Administration followed a realistic approach rather than the liberal internationalism of Bush era. He truly believes that getting rid of Terrorism is not the responsibility of the U.S. as it has been losing a lot in terms of casualties and economic growth (Jenkins). Instead, he would concentrate on U.S. economy in comparison to China's influential economic image. As Anders Person, an expert on Middle Eastern affairs claimed that the U.S withdrawal from Afghanistan was strategically the most correct choice to enable it to compete with China as the superpower. The U.S engagement in Afghanistan during the past 20 years, inadvertently provided China with a conducive environment to make rapid financial growth. If left unchecked, this economic strength will eventually convert to military strength (Shad & Iqbal, 2021).

U.S. fast pullout of military troops from Afghanistan highly implies to the U.S. regime-war change strategy. As Biden said in his speeches, "America did not go to Afghanistan to nation- build", (House, 2021), clarifying that Afghanistan did not serve the national interest of U.S. Biden had a

contrary view over the Afghan war and little ambiguous strategy. However, it could be summed up in a few points.

1. Reducing U.S. military footprints on the ground of Afghanistan.
2. Only deploying forces in the regions where the Taliban had not taken over.
3. Primarily focus on destroying the leadership of terrorists.

Biden Administration came up with the withdrawal deal but updated the withdrawal time from 1 May 2021 to 11 September 2021, for a harmless and tidy exit (House, 2021). On 25 March 2021, Biden said in a press conference at the White House, "it is going to be hard to meet the 1 May deadline. In terms of tactical reasons, it is hard to get those troops out." (Schulze, Ruttig, & Protection). He updated the withdrawal date to 11 September and said on 14 April, "time to end the forever war." Besides he also explained the decision. Biden said the U.S. has achieved its initial and primary objective, "To ensure Afghanistan would not be used as a base from which to attack our homeland again" (Simkhada, 2021).

In his speech on 14 April, Biden said, "we will not conduct a hasty rush to the exit; we will do it responsibly, deliberately and safely." The Afghan government president Ashraf Ghani asked for immediate presidential and parliamentary elections, refusing the proposals of power-sharing and the interim government. With the delayed date by Biden, the Taliban increased the attacks against the Afghan government. According to a Defense Department report, "The Taliban initiated 37 percent more attacks this quarter than the same period in 2020 (Biden, 2021)." Defense Department added that the Taliban has adjacent connections with Al-Qaida and is doing a large-scale offensive against the local population and the Afghan government.

On 8 July 2021, Biden shortened the date to 31 August and ordered a speedy withdrawal. However, it made sure that the Taliban was not inevitable. On 15 August, the Taliban took control of Kabul, President Ghani fled to India and the U.S. embassy was evacuated. On 16 August, Biden addressed the nation; "I do not regret my decision to end America's warfighting in Afghanistan (Kiely & Farley, 2021)."

Just like Trump, Biden also blamed the Afghan government for the fall of Afghanistan. Biden said in his speech on 31 August 2021, in the White House, "we were ready when they and the people of Afghanistan watched their government collapse and their President flee amid the corruption and malfeasance, handing over the country to their enemy, the Taliban, this the Taliban was in its strongest

military position since 2001, controlling or contesting nearly half of the country. That was the choice- the real choice- between leaving and escalating (House, 2021)."

Theoretical framework:

Rational Choice Theory in Political Decisions:

The choice is generally completed by first considering the costs, risks and benefits of making that decision. A choice that seems irrational to one person may make perfect sense to another based on individual desires. In lateral meaning, rationality means sane (good judgment) thoughtful act or decision in a clear-handed manner and doing what is worthy in the long term. An Economist, Adam Smith, wrote Rational Choice Theory in the 1700s to explain how people make choices based on self-interest in terms of economics. He maintained in his famous book, "The Wealth of Nations," that people ultimately act in their interest, but sometimes society and the environment are also taken into consideration (Bapat, 2010).

The rational choice approach to politics assumes that individual behaviour is motivated by self-interest, utility maximization or goal fulfillment (Keane, 2016). The Rational Choice Theory has arisen as one of the most persuasive, dominant, and aspiring theories applied in politics ever. It supports political life and plays a central part due to its natural value in the human psyche and behaviour.

James McGill Buchanan was an American economist who worked on Public Choice Theory and extended the use of The Rational Choice theory; [We can] extend economic theory in a way that not only explains the "stagflation" and declining growth rates [of recent years] ... but also provides a partial explanation of a variety of problems usually reserved for other fields- the "ungovernability" of some modern societies, the British class structure and the Indian class system, the exceptionally unequal distribution of power and income in many developing countries, and even the rise of Western Europe from relative backwardness in the early Middle ages to the dominance of the whole world by the late nineteenth century (Samples Jr, 2011).

Buchanan clinched from the above argument that the "rapidly accumulating developments in the theory of public choices...have influenced the way modern man views government and political process. This shift in attitudes toward bureaucracies and politicians and governments". That with the world's modernity and different experiences in politics have bent the structure of the theory to be truly applied in noneconomic fields.

Biden being a rationalist thinker, ended the longest war. In April 2021, he ignored the entreaties of his top generals and announced the withdrawal date. It is easy for presidents to start wars, as the previous administration invaded more than 85 countries to combat Terrorism. Few like Syria and Iraq invasions, could not be justified, but it is much harder to end wars. Biden's decision about withdrawal was possibly the boldest foreign policy move in U.S. history. On 22 August 2021, Biden called the withdrawal a "logical, rational and right decision." Associate Professor of government at Dartmouth College said, "for someone who made his name as an empathetic leader, he has appeared... as quite rational, even cold-hearted, in his pursuit of this goal (Jenkins)." As the war was getting more costly day by day, China as an economic competitor and communist force was rising. The war on terror consequences gradually stretched to the grounds of the U.S., and Americans' issues were being ignored due to the high defense budget.

Cost- Benefit analysis post 9/11 war:

The cost-benefit analysis could be helpful in making sense of Biden's rational decision about the withdrawal.

Summary:

Total deaths post 9/11 as a result of war	Over 929,000
Civilian death as a result of fighting	387,000
No of refugees displaced past 2 decades	38 million
Budgetary cost post 9/11	\$8 trillion
U.S. government involved in counter terrorism activities in countries	85 countries

Brown University, USA have issued data (Jenkins).

Total direct war deaths:

Direct war deaths	Total
U.S. military	2,442
U.S. contractors	3,936
National Military and Police	75,314-78,314

Other Allied troops	1,144
Journalist and Media workers	136
Humanitarian Aid workers	549

Data by Watson Institute of International and Public affairs, Brown University, USA (Cordesman, 2017).

A study conducted in 2016 shows that U.S. efforts have a negative impact on Terrorism over the past years. Increased U.S. efforts are correlated with a worsening of the overall terror situation. Statistical modeling indicates for every additional billion dollars spent and 1,000 American troops sent to fight the war on terror, the number of terror attacks worldwide increased by 19. Furthermore, the model finds up to 80 percent of the variation in the number of worldwide terror attacks since 9/11 can be explained by just those two variables—U.S. money spent, and military members sent to fight the war on terror (Jenkins, 2021).

In terms of protecting Americans and the homeland, data from the Global Terrorism Database pointed out an average of 65 Americans were killed each year by terrorists for the 12 years following 9/11, compared to 57 annually before 9/11. In the past 30 years, 2001 notwithstanding, more Americans were killed in 2012 than in any other year. Moreover, while the number of terror attacks in the United States declined during the post-9/11 period, the division of Islamist- inspired attacks increased. From 1987 to 2000, five Islamist-inspired attacks took place within the homeland, but since 2001, the number of Islamist-inspired attacks rose to seven.

The only benefit the U.S. has got is the rise of democracy. Democracy indicators across the 51 Muslim-majority countries have marginally improved since 2001. Data from Freedom House indicates the average political rights and civil liberties scores for Muslim-majority states have improved by 5.7 percent during the war on terror. In the dozen years prior to 9/11, the average score was 5.25, which improved to 4.96 for the 12 years following the attacks (lower scores are better, with 1 representing "most free" and 7 reflecting "least free").

Challenges to Biden Administration to End the War:

1: Deteriorated Relations with the world powers:

The U.S. faces rivalry in certain regions where it used to be the sole superpower. In South Asia, the U.S. has faded bonds with China. China has upturned into a South Asian power and leading in the world power ranks. In Europe, the U.S. has hostile relations with Russia, weakening regional stability

and U.S. hegemony. In the Middle East, the U.S. faces aggressiveness with Iran; in East Asia, the U.S. has belligerent ties with North Korea. This antagonistic behaviour could be risky if avoided (Jenkins, 2021).

2: Great Defense Budget for Wars:

The military operations against Terrorism in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria were costly to the U.S. These were the longest wars. It damaged the U.S. economy too much as a greater part of the economy was allocated for defense. Certain domestic issues were overlooked because of the great defense budget. During the Biden administration, the U.S. defense budget recorded was \$813 billion, in which \$773 billion for the pentagon and \$40 billion for other national security- related programs (Gerges, 2013).

3: Effects of Domestic Politics:

Domestic's political condition principally affects war strategy. Being an extreme opponent of the Trump administration, Biden had to follow the withdrawal strategy of the Trump administration, as Trump called it a "ridiculous, endless war." As there were no incentives for U.S. in Afghanistan. So 'ending war' strategy could give weightage to its political image of Biden. Besides, the Biden own party members want him to end the war to get political stability.

4: U.S. as A target of Terrorism:

No president after Bush prevents U.S. ground from Terrorism. In 2016, former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani alleged the Jihadi attacks in the U.S. "All started when Clinton and Obama got into office." Though during the Biden administration, domestic Terrorism was not the primary objective. In the U.S., Terrorism was initiated in April 2020; A scheme was caught targeting the U.S. and NATO air bases, getting instructions from militants' hub in Syria and Afghanistan. In 2020, Sep-Nov, terrorist attacks on the streets of Vienna, in Europe. U.S. Department of Justice unscrewed a dangerous existence carrying out an event like 9/11.

Discussion:

With the American withdrawal from Afghanistan, questions have been raised about the domestic politics of the U.S.: Will America pay the price for this withdrawal? If the Taliban successfully stabilizes the Afghanistan government, there is a possibility that Terrorism will lead in the world since their strong links with Al-Qaeda. In this case, the U.S. could face an attack like 9/11 but to address this question, Biden already cleared that after 9/11, America has advanced in military intelligence, tactics and capabilities means that American forces will be able to pre-empt any danger like 9/11. However, this could prove as a myth if international terrorists fall for any retaliation against the U.S. for the two-decade war.

Antony Blinken, the secretary of state, alleged that the Taliban put off attacks on American troops because of U.S. withdrawal assurance; otherwise, it could not be possible. Here a query about the military power of the U.S. arises as being the most experienced army involved in the longest war. Were they unable to fire back against the Taliban?

On 12 August 2022, an American general called the U.S. withdrawal decision by Biden the greatest blunder. So, the decision is still not accepted wholeheartedly by the officials. Even after the withdrawal, airstrikes and drone attacks continued inside Afghanistan, killing senior leaders and officials of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. So, this withdrawal could be called an official U.S. withdrawal but not an eternal one, as the U.S. seems to be doubtful about the future of Afghanistan. Most importantly, they are uncertain about their President's decision as it does not seem to be taken collectively. So, there is a possibility of another invasion of Afghanistan by the U.S. as they have kept a strict eye on the activities of the Taliban.

Conclusion:

The out of the blue withdrawal of the U.S. from Afghanistan has shaken the world, especially the Americans' pride. For years it will be a hot debating topic: why the U.S. undertook so a prolonged and costly war in Afghanistan without any tangible result? Besides the failure of the Biden administration, the execution of the war strategy and a safe withdrawal will also be under discussion. However, the national interest is here to stay, though called by a huge number of critics a 'Pronounced political Blunder', but here we cannot deny the fact that it was highly concerned with the future of the U.S. either it will take the U.S. towards a new uprising or will be proved to be a security threat to the U.S. The withdrawal decision has proved a rational choice of Biden over a two-decade war. Unlike his

predecessors, he did not follow the path-dependent approach. The deteriorating economic conditions of the U.S and the growing economic strength of China were the real factors behind this decision. The inclusive cost of war seems far greater in terms of humanitarian and budget than the overall benefit. Besides the disappointments that the U.S. has made in this war, people of Afghanistan have undergone a drastic change. Those locals whose lives were improving because of the U.S. involvement in Afghan land are incredibly dissatisfied.

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