Multiple Realities, Internal Contradictions and the Fall of Ghani and Afghanistan

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Abstract. Contrary to the generally held belief and submission that the US presence in Afghanistan was a guarantee for the sustainable peace, stability, human rights and democratic governance in Afghanistan, there were indeed many factors extraneous of the US that led to the final (albeit sudden) fall of the Afghan government despite the presence of the US forces. These factors included multiple realities happening in very quick successions, internal contradictions, external influences and compelled capitulation of the President which eventually led to the fall of the state to the opposition Taliban autocracy. The final collapse of the 20-year western mission to Afghanistan took only a single day as Taliban gunmen entered the capital, Kabul, on Sunday August 15, 2021 while the President Ashraf Ghani fled the country and America abandoned its embassy in panic. Even the militants themselves were surprised by the speed of the takeover, co-founder Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar admitted in a video statement in that same evening. Therefore, the multiple realities, internal contradictions and external influences were overwhelming enough to decimate the optimism of the international community in the ability of the mere presence of the US in Afghanistan to repel the doggedness of the Taliban. After nearly two decades of war, more than 6,000 American lives lost, over 100,000 Afghans killed and more than $2 trillion spent by the U.S., the speed of the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan has shocked the world. The U.S. defence officials reportedly expected Afghanistan's capital, Kabul, to fall in 90 days. It took less than 10 days. Among the key causes, analysts say, are intelligence failures, a more powerful Taliban, corruption, money, cultural differences and willpower. This paper is essentially a field research with reliance on primary and secondary sources of data in published outlets, newspaper interviews, and books.

Key Words: Multiple Realities, Internal Contradictions, External Influences, State Collapse, Afghanistan Taliban, Corruption, Cultural Differences and Willpower

Introduction

The fall of Afghanistan on Sunday August 15, 2021 to the waiting "desperate" hands of the Taliban took the world by storm. This is not only because the international community has assumed that the US presence in the country which had lasted for twenty years was a seeming "guarantee" of the sustainability of the Afghan state, coupled with the fairly favourable Afghan-Pakistan bilateral relations which was crucial to the peace, security, serenity and prosperity of the Afghan state and by extension, the regional geopolitical stability and cooperation, furthermore, the educational attainment, professional exposure of the President, Ashraf Ghani, his impressive diplomatic and strategic dispositions, sound economic policies, robust bilateral diplomatic relations with Pakistan, India, Iraq, Uzbekistan and many of the Asian Tigers were all expected to galvanize the peace, stability, prosperity, sustainability of the state, unfortunately, however, the multiple realities, internal contradictions, external conspiracies and American policy change could not save the Afghan state from falling to the hands of the Taliban that had consistently sustained its focus on overthrowing the government for twenty years.

Although the United Nations did not remove the name of President Ashraf Ghani from its list of heads of states until 15 February 2022 (Taieb, 2022), which was a clear signal that the global community was surprised at the turn of events and the international system may have

been optimistic on the possible resolution of the Taliban putsch in reversal and a possible restoration of the President and democracy, unfortunately it has been over one year with a clear sense of the reality of Taliban take-over on the sensibilities of the Afghans and the international community.

The major preoccupation of the west and by extension the global community has been that "nobody wants Afghanistan once again to be a breeding ground for terror"[1] clearly amplified by the UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, thus the west for years also laid out an explicit mission to support democracy and human rights, and they were indeed afraid that most of those gains are expected to be swept away with the Taliban in power. The Taliban have always been clear that they are fighting for an austere interpretation of Islam, which includes particularly severe restrictions on women and girls. Freedom of speech would also be curtailed to minimize critical views on the government policies. Over the many years of peace talks brokered by the US, Taliban negotiators have promised to respect women's rights under Islam, but refused to be drawn on details. The promise was wrapped in mystery and ambiguity. This ambiguity represents and underlines the resentment of the international community and the west in particular to the prospect of Taliban in power. It is instructive to note that in one year of the Taliban in power and in areas under their control, women already have limited education, restrictive work and employment opportunities and partial withdrawal of their freedom of movement. The fear of the international system has been justified, unfortunately.

Who is President Ashraf Ghani?

A well educated, internationally exposed personality, President Ashraf Ghani, was born as Mohammad Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai on 19th May 1949 in the Logar Province of Afghanistan. He travelled to the United States of America in the 1960s to study. He completed his Bachelor's degree programme at the American University in Beirut eventually graduating with a Doctorate degree in Anthropology from the Colombia University. Ghani rose through the academic ranks to become a Professor of Anthropology at numerous institutions, especially John Hopkins University, from where he transferred his professional services to the World Bank. He returned to Afghanistan in 2002 after the collapse of the Taliban regime serving first as the Minister of Finance in the course of which he introduced impactful reforms and policies which were not only approved but applauded by Hamid Karzai and his cabinet. He was credited for creating a new Afghan currency and robust tax system until his resignation in December 2004 to become the Dean of Kabul University.[2] A return to his first love in career.

In 2005 Ghani became a member of The Commission on Legal Empowerment of The Poor, an independent initiative hosted by the United Nations Development Programme that same year, Ghani gave a TED Talk in which he discussed how to rebuild a broken state such as Afghanistan (Ghantous, 2021). In 2013 he was ranked 50th in an online poll to name the world's top 100 intellectuals conducted by Foreign Policy Magazine and second in a similar poll run by the Prospect Magazine[3] He is also the co-founder of The Institute for State Effectiveness, an American Organization set up in 2005 to improve the ability of states to serve their citizens.

[1] UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, asked about the situation in Afghanistan, said in a TV interview: "It's very important that the west collectively should work together to get over to that new government, be it by the Taliban or anybody else: nobody wants Afghanistan once again to be a breeding ground for terror." *BBC Reports*, September 1, 2021.

[2] "AFGHANISTAN: new president in difficult time." *The Week.* 29 September 2014. Retrieved 16 July 2022.

[3] "World Thinkers 2013 – Prospect Magazine." Retrieved 2 December, 2015, from prospectmagazine.co.uk; Baker, S. (19 August 2021). The Taliban have declared the 'Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan,' the same name it used when it brutally ruled the country in the 1990s. *Business Insider*. Retrieved 20 August 2021.

Ghani has been favourably described as an Afghan Politician, Academic and Economist who served as the fifth President of Afghanistan and the second and final President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan from September 2014 until August 2021, when his government and by extension the Afghan state was overthrown by the Taliban.

Ghani is an independent Politician and ideologically liberal personality, he came fourth in the 2009 Presidential election, ran again in 2014 Presidential election securing fewer votes than his main rival Abdullah Abdullah in the first round, but winning a majority in the second round of votes to emerge as the President. Following political chaos, the United States intervened to form a unity government with Ghani as President and Abdullah as Chief Executive of Afghanistan (Akhgar & Gannon, 2019) Ghani was re-elected when the final results of the 2019 Presidential election were announced after a long delay on 18 February 2020 (Mashal, 2020)[4]. He was sworn in as President for a second five-year term on 9 March 2020 (Turak & Macias, 2021). His tenure ended abruptly on 15 August 2021 as the Taliban took over the capital and the country leading to Ghani fleeing Afghanistan and eventually taking refuge in the United Arab Emirate. He said he was forced by his security team to leave the country because there was a chance that the Taliban would assassinate him, adding that he had no other choice in order to avoid widespread violence in Kabul[5].

As president, Ghani was a visionary known for his intensity and energetic speeches[6]. He aimed to transform Afghanistan into a technocratic state winning him support among young and mostly urban men and women, leading to a young generation of educated figures taking up leading positions in cabinets. Ghani made extensive efforts to make peace with Taliban insurgents[7] and improving bilateral relations with Afghan neighbour, Pakistan. However many of his promises, such as fighting corruption and turning the country into a trade hub between central and south Asia, were left unfulfilled (Constable, 2021) in his administration, this may be due largely to the socio-economic pressure mounted perpetually by the opposition Taliban forces in the face of uncertainties surrounding the US support. His position was also weakened by political rivalries, his attempt to lessen the power of ex-warlords and an uneasy relationship with the United States regarding the war. He was also criticized for being aloof and short-tempered, including being in denial during the Taliban's offensive in 2021[8]. In any case Ghani was a consequential president at a very critical period in the history of Afghanistan.

Multiple Realities

The multiple realities of the Afghan state began with the very noticeable remarkable lack of cohesion in the government underscored by three different executive members' views of the Taliban: The first group of the Executive team see the Taliban as "Enemies", another group saw them as "Mere agitators" while another group consider them as necessary evil to be tolerated, placated and possibly converted to friends and allies. These contradictory views on the profile of the Taliban was not only properly exploited by the Taliban in advancing their

[4] Mashal, M. (18 February 2020). After 5-Month Delay, Ashraf Ghani Is Named Winner of Afghan Election. *The New York Times*. ISSN 0362-4331. Retrieved 18 February 2020; Ghani named winner of disputed Afghan poll, rival also claims victory. Reuters. 19 February 2020. Retrieved 19 February 2020.

[5] "UAE says Afghanistan's Ghani is in Gulf Arab state." *Reuters*. 18 August 2021; "Ashraf Ghani: 'I apologise that I could not make it end differently'". *BBC News*. 9 September 2021. Retrieved 16 May 2022; "The rise and fall of Afghan President Ashraf Ghani." *France 24*. 15 August 2021. Retrieved 16 July 2022.

[6] "The rise and fall of Afghan President Ashraf Ghani." *France 24.* 15 August 2021. Retrieved 16 July 2022.

[7] Constable, P. (15 August 2021). Afghan president sought modern reforms, forced out by insurgents. *Washington Post*. Retrieved 16 July 2022; "Afghan president Ashraf Ghani: intellectual who had no answer to the Taliban". *The Guardian*. *Reuters*. 16 August 2021. Retrieved 16 July 2022.

[8] DesMarais, S. (9 March 2018). Afghanistan's Powerbrokers Prepare for 2019 Presidential Elections. *Institute for the Study of War*. Retrieved 16 July 2022; Bezhan, F. (16 August 2021); "Ashraf Ghani: The Deeply Polarizing President Who Oversaw The Fall Of Afghanistan". *RFE/RL*. Retrieved 16 July 2022.

ideology and take-over plans, it indeed hampered the ability of government to decisively deal with the onslaught of the Taliban elements. A section of the government officials accorded the Taliban extensive and excessive courtesy which was not only a morale booster but energiser and strategic sustenance of their hope of overrunning the government.

Another factor closely related to and consequent on the above is the transparent doggedness, focus, determination of the Taliban who have kept faith with their ideology and deeply fanatical religious inclination to sustain their hope of taking over Afghan state and instituting their Islamic Agenda. Their optimism paid off in the face of a confused Afghan government officials with uncoordinated vision, strategy to decimate the Taliban elements.

Further still, the position of President Ghani was also weakened by political rivalries, his attempt to lessen the power of ex-warlords and an uneasy relationship with the United States regarding the war. He was also criticized for being aloof and short-tempered, including being in denial during the Taliban's offensive in 2021 After nearly two decades of war, more than 6,000 American lives lost, over 100,000 Afghans killed and more than $2 trillion spent by the U.S., the speed of the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan has shocked the world. U.S. defence officials reportedly expected Afghanistan's capital, Kabul, to fall in 90 days. It took less than 10 days. Among the key causes, analysts say, are intelligence failures, a more powerful Taliban, corruption, cultural differences and willpower[9]. Obviously, the willpower of the Taliban was by far superior to the Afghan constituted democratic government which could not harmonize their strategy for the defence of the state and the defeat of the Taliban forces.

It is instructive to note, that only few state and non state actors expected a takeover that swift, with so little resistance from the Afghan government and Afghan National Army, the latter of which was funded and trained with $89 billion from the U.S. taxpayer's funds and was expected to put up very strong resistance to the Taliban incursion. Unfortunately, the multiple realities took their toll on the collapse of the state. The American officials had expressed overwhelming fear of the end result and bloodletting once they left, the speed of the collapse of the Afghan state was unreal to the US officials. one former intelligence official and U.S. Marine who served in Afghanistan told CNBC, requesting anonymity due to professional restrictions[10]. "Why were the Taliban able to so quickly take over? This is a masterpiece, frankly, operationally," Michael Zacchea, a retired U.S. Marine who led an American-trained Iraqi Army battalion during the Iraq War, told CNBC. "Why were they able to take the country faster than we did in 2001"[11] This provides the answer to the surprise of the US, in a rhetorical question which has been asked by Americans, Afghans, military veterans and international observers alike and the answer, much like the Afghanistan conflict itself, is complex, multilayered and tragic. However, among the main causes, analysts say, are intelligence failures, a more powerful Taliban, corruption, cultural differences, and simple willpower, some of which have been explained earlier.

Intelligence failure was another of the multiple realities that led to the sudden collapse of the Afghan state and President Ghani. The Taliban's rapid takeover of Afghanistan, which included the capital city and the Presidential palace, suggests that the U.S. military intelligence failed in its assessment of the situation, according to Bill Roggio, a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defence of Democracies. "This is an intelligence failure of the highest order," he told CNBC's Squarwk Box Asia on Monday, barely 24 hours after the takeover on Sunday August 15, 2021 adding that it's the "biggest intelligence failure" since the offensive during

[9] US Defence officials one former intelligence official and U.S. Marine who served in Afghanistan told CNBC, August 12, 2021 requesting anonymity due to professional restrictions.
[10] Ibid
[11] Michael Zacchea, a retired U.S. Marine who led an American-trained Iraqi Army battalion during the Iraq War, told CNBC on September 3, 2021. "Why were they able to take the country faster than we did in 2001.

the Vietnam War, a campaign of devastating surprise attacks on the U.S. and its allies in 1968[12]. Roggio said the Taliban pre-positioned equipment and materials, organized, planned and executed a "massive offensive" since early May before beginning its "final assault," while U.S. officials said the local government and military forces should be able to hold out for six months to a year. A week after the Taliban takeover, Reuters reported that a US defence official saw Afghan's capital Kabul falling in Ninety days, unfortunately, that happened on Sunday, August 15, 2021 less than 10 days after the first provincial capital of Zaranj was taken by the Taliban.

Interestingly, but curiously the Taliban did not have to fight their way into Afghanistan's provincial capitals but rather brokered a series of surrenders, says Jack Watling, a research fellow for land warfare and military sciences at the Royal United Services Institute in London. Over the last few years of fighting, the group managed to gain control of some 50% of the country by seizing rural areas. This strategic gradual but persistent incursion and take-overs culminated in the eventual overrun of the state, the fall of Afghanistan and the end of President Ghani's regime. When they began making headway in cities, many Afghan forces gave in to them, convinced that the government in Kabul would not back them up. "The Taliban would infiltrate urban areas, assassinating key people like pilots, threatening the families of commanders, saying if you capitulate, you'll save your family"[13] A lot of people, because they lacked confidence that Kabul would be able to save them, capitulated as demanded by the Taliban elements. More and more people chose this route, "so there was very little fighting, which is why it suddenly happened so fast," he added[14]. The speed of take-over of the state is not necessarily a reflection of military capability, but a reflection of a collapse in the will to fight.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani himself fled the country on Sunday evening as the Taliban entered the presidential palace and declared the war "over." Ghani indeed confessed that he fled to prevent "a flood of bloodshed." "The Taliban have won with the judgment of their swords and guns, and are now responsible for the honour, property and self-preservation of their countrymen," Ghani said. Despite being vastly outnumbered by the Afghan military, which has long been assisted by US and NATO coalition forces, the Taliban carried out a succession of shocking battlefield gains in the weeks preceding the final defeat of Ghani and collapse of Afghanistan.

Another noticeably instructive factor of the multiple realities was that as soon as the U.S. pullout began, the Afghan troops and officials immediately began jumping ship, either to appease the Taliban or to retreat into old ethnic militias. An interview with a researcher who chose to remain anonymous revealed a stern confidence that the Taliban takeover will not bring peace to the Afghan state. Source submitted that as the dust settles, many U.S trained, equipped fighters will likely regroup along ethnic lines to fight again. This portends danger.

Furthermore, the use of social media as lethally as they do sniper rifles was exploited by the Taliban elements. They deployed coercive diplomacy to pressure local tribal leaders, used pretty simple but effective text message campaigns to threaten local Afghans working with the U.S. and with other foreign efforts, to achieve their ultimate desire to capture power. The Taliban elements also strategically allowed ground commanders make decisions and bring people into captured territories to provide small-scale social services to the residents. That allowed the group to "outmaneuver" Afghan and foreign forces in terms of effectively appealing, co-opting or coercing the local population into supporting or not opposing them.

[12] Bill Roggio, a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defence of Democracies. "This is an intelligence failure of the highest order," he told CNBC's Squarwk Box Asia on Monday, barely 24 hours after the takeover on Sunday August 15, 2021.

[13] Jack Watling, a research fellow for land warfare and military sciences at the Royal United Services Institute in London.

[14] Ibid

Very strategic to the multiple realities in the build up to the defeat of Ghani and the collapse of Afghanistan, was that the Taliban was not engaged in a full military onslaught and organized resistance, the blitz of the country would have taken longer even if it would still have happened, in view of the other multiple realities. Watling believes that the Taliban would have still won. He said. "And this is because the Afghan National Army is comprised of lots of units that are systemically corrupt, have no effective command and control, they don't know how many people are in their own units, most of their equipment has been taken apart, stolen and sold off, and so they were a completely dysfunctional force."[15] Such a force could not have survived such a devastating, calculated, well-planned Taliban attack.

Unfortunately, the Afghan military is woefully underpaid, underfed and undercompensated by the Ghani leadership in Kabul. The "soldiers in many cases have not been fed very well, very rarely been paid and been on duty for a long time away from home ... and were not well led,"[16] A tactical failure that resulted in heavy casualties to the tune of about 40 soldiers a day for the several years. Many army units would sell their equipment to the Taliban for cash and there were frequent desertions that went unaccounted for, leaving inflated troop numbers on the books but not in the field. It was such an uncoordinated military action.

External Influences

Aside from the internal contradictions and multiple realities leading to the abdication of President Ghani and the fall of the Afghan government leading to the emergence of the Taliban regime, external influences and conspiracies were also instrumental to the episodic fall of the state. Of particular interest in this paper is the role of Pakistan. Following the collapse of the central government, a handful of Afghan politicians, including the parliamentary speaker, fled the country and travelled to Pakistan. This is suggestive of the role of Pakistan in the geopolitical stability of the region and interference in the internal politics of Afghanistan.

Many of Afghanistan's challenges, often thought of as domestic, are also regional in character, necessarily addressed with regional strategies and cooperation. Policies that have sometimes been used to insulate the Afghan state against interfering neighbours have denied Afghanistan the advantages of joining with neighbours to face common threats and realize new opportunities. The economic interdependencies that emerge in a regional open market system are thought likely to give its neighbours a greater stake in Afghanistan's stability and prosperity.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson blamed the United States for the Taliban's rapid takeover of Afghanistan Mikhail Gorbachev, the leader of the Soviet Union who had presided over the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1988, argued that "NATO and the United States should have admitted failure earlier" and that the NATO campaign in Afghanistan was "a failed enterprise from the start" which was founded on "the exaggeration of a threat and poorly defined geopolitical ideas".

On the evening of 18 August, 2021, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International cooperation of the United Arab Emirate announced that it had welcomed former president Ghani into the UAE on humanitarian grounds. On 19 August, 2022 Ghani released a video denying reports he had carried a large sum of money with him as he fled and that he was negotiating a return to Afghanistan.[174] Other government, military or anti-Taliban officials also fled to India, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

Over the last seven decades, a tenuous and often grudging coexistence has emerged between Pakistan and Afghanistan, propelled by both internal and external developments. These include Pakistan's formation during the partition of British India, which Afghanistan

[15] Ibid

[16] Ibid; Nawaz, S. (2008). *Crossed Swords: Pakistan, Its Army, and the Wars Within*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, p. 439.

refused to recognize; a dispute over their shared border; alignments with competing sides during the Cold War; United States and Saudi-Arabia backed proxy warfare; the emergence and Pakistan's sponsorship of the Taliban; and the post-9/11 era, during which both countries were aligned with the United States, even though Pakistan maintained its ties to the group. Together, these episodes reveal enduring themes in the bilateral relationship that will impact future Afghan, geopolitics and regional stability. They include sovereignty concerns, security interests, geopolitical dynamics, cross-border ties and connectivity and trade. As foreign (US) troops withdraw, the Taliban in control and prospects for a peaceful settlement concluded, these themes will become all the more important to building future stability in Afghanistan and limiting the re-emergence of proxy conflict in the region. Indeed, the current war emerged from these dynamics and has further shaped the bilateral relationship over the past twenty years.

The United States' Role

The Efforts to bring an end to the Afghan war have focused largely on the interests of three parties: the Afghan government, the Taliban and the United States. All three are directly involved in the conflict and have an immediate stake in its prosecution and ultimate resolution. Ahead of the August 31, 2021, withdrawal of US and international troops, uncertainty surrounds the question of Afghanistan's future stability and prospects for the stalled peace process. Central to both is a fourth actor, Pakistan, which has played a key, if less overt, role in the conflict from its position on Afghanistan's eastern border.

Former US President Donald Trump reportedly requested Pakistan's assistance in bringing the Taliban to the table in 2018, and lauded Pakistan's role in "advancing the Afghanistan peace process" when intra-Afghan negotiations began nearly two years later[17]. This outreach highlights Pakistan's deep ties to the Taliban, to which it has given safe haven and support for much of the past two decades. Many senior Taliban remain based in Pakistan, where their families live, they own property and businesses, and injured fighters receive medical care (Ilyas Khan, 2016). This reality is not lost on Afghanistan's leaders or its people, who have suffered tremendously at the hands of the Taliban and who hold Pakistan responsible for enabling the ongoing violence. Many Afghans question why Pakistan maintains its ties to the group and has the United States of America which had played very leading defining roles in the stability and sustainability of the Afghan state for over twenty-years have intervened in the resolution of the political emergence of the government of unity led by Ghani, After nearly two decades of war, more than 6,000 American lives lost, over 100,000 Afghans killed and more than $2 trillion spent by the United States, the speed of the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan has shocked the world. United States defence officials reportedly expected Afghanistan's capital, Kabul, to fall in 90 days. It took less than 10 days among the key causes, analysts say, are intelligence failures, a more powerful Taliban, corruption, cultural differences and willpower. "American troops cannot and should not be fighting in a war and dying in a war that Afghan forces are not willing to fight for themselves," Biden said. "We gave them every chance to determine their own future. We could not provide them with the will to fight for that future," he added[18].

Central to understanding America's seeming failure in Afghanistan comes down to understanding the country's history and its culture and how drastically it differs from any Western nation. For example, there has never been a central government in Afghanistan. Therefore, for the US to imagine, they could establish one was a fool's errand, the 'surprise' at

[17] Ahmed, M. (2018). Pakistan Says Trump Seeks Help on Taliban Talks. *AP News*, December 3, 2018. Retrieved from www.apnews.com/article/6cbd791ee70045c88890f3b2f5f60d48; Pakistan Embassy, United States. (2020). *Statement on the Visit to Pakistan by Ambassador Khalilzad*. September 14, 2020.

[18] President Joe Biden in a Press Release on Monday August 16, 2021 defending the American troops withdrawal from Afghanistan.

the Taliban regaining power shows just how little Americans, from top to bottom, understand Afghanistan: Afghanistan is a country of numerous tribes, languages, ethnicities and religious sects, and Washington and its NATO allies were attempting to turn it into a unified democracy premised on largely Western values. "There was a fundamental failure to understand what the Afghans wanted" Zacchea, who trained an Iraqi battalion in 2004, said. "We assumed they wanted what we had liberal democracy, Judeo-Christian values ... And think they'd just automatically convert. And that is not the case"[19] This fact was critical to the US actions, strategies, calculations and miscalculations in Afghanistan.

Tribal alliances in Afghanistan very often supersede national considerations or loyalties are determined by money and power. And part of the Taliban's strength lay in the fact that as Pashtuns, they belonged to the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan. "Meanwhile," the former U.S. intelligence official said, "we basically supported a hodgepodge of ethnic minorities, who never had the capability of unifying the country." "We did not understand the tribal dynamics, we never did," Zacchea said. "We think everybody wants what we have. It's cultural obtuseness, obliviousness to their reality and their lived experience"[20]

The nature of the US brokered cease-fire with the Taliban in early 2020 further weakened the Afghan government's image: Negotiations led by the Trump administration left out the elected leadership in Kabul, this damaged the Afghan government's legitimacy at a time when it already had little respect from local communities[21], Afghans across the 39 million population have expressed acute fear for their nation's future especially women, who following the US invasion in 2001 were able to go to school for the first time since the Taliban took control of Afghanistan in 1996. For many Afghan War veterans, bringing some of these basic freedoms to Afghans made their sacrifices worth it. However, the fear of a possible reversal of the sanity and sanctity of women liberation is now a reality with Taliban.

Conclusion

The fall of the Afghan government and the abdication of the President Ashfat Ghani as a consequence of the Taliban overthrow are clearly traceable to multiple realities, complex economic, socio-political contradictions, external influences and the US policy change. Not everyone believes the U.S. troop withdrawal is to blame for the chaos in Afghanistan. Kirsten Fontenrose, director of the Scowcroft Middle East Security Initiative at the Atlantic Council, submitted that the Taliban has become more effective since the 1990s. "They have become much more adept militarily and non-militarily in terms of pursuing the same objective they have which is establishing an Islamic emirate in Afghanistan, the U.S. withdrawal is not the reason the Afghan government was out-manoeuvred,"[22] she added. Fontenrose said the Taliban surrounded the capital of Kabul, cut off supply lines that government forces needed, and have also grown in numbers while developing new strategies. The fall of Afghanistan was just a matter of time given the multiple realities, internal contraptions and contradictions and external influences. As early as 2015, a survey conducted by the Afghan news channel TOLO News showed that the popularity of Ashraf Ghani in Afghanistan had fallen dramatically with

[19] Michael Zacchea, a retired U.S. Marine who led an American-trained Iraqi Army battalion during the Iraq War, told CNBC on September 3, 2021. "Why were they able to take the country faster than we did in 2001 Gen. A. Zacchea, who trained an Iraqi battalion in 2004.

[20] Ibid

[21] Jack Watling, a research fellow for land warfare and military sciences at the Royal United Services Institute in London.

[22] Kirsten Fontenrose, Director of the Scowcroft Middle East Security Initiative at the Atlantic Council, told CNBC's "Squawk Box Europe" on Monday. "The U.S. withdrawal is not the reason the Afghan government was outmaneuvered," she added.

only 27.5% of the respondents claiming that they were satisfied with his leadership[23]. This was a signal sufficiently ignored by the Ghani government and officials.

External influences or third party interventions thus played a major role in the socio-economic and political dynamics of Afghanistan in the last twenty years, but the most critical of those were those of Pakistan and the United States. Bilateral relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan are very critical and the two states should build the scaffolding for improved regional connectivity, economic development, and governance.

The United States and other third parties can support this process, but external involvement is necessarily limited in impact and could ultimately prove counterproductive if not well calibrated. Helpful steps Washington could take include encouraging bilateral relations without interfering, pressing for dialogue between India and Pakistan on Afghanistan, taking on a limited verification role for bilateral commitments and addressing potential spoilers in the process. In the end, bilateral relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan are just one piece of a larger web of interrelated regional security and political dynamics. Stronger Afghanistan-Pakistan ties alone can only go so far in building stability across the region and improving the lives of those whose ties span the shared border.

External challenges could again scuttle hopes for a strengthened bilateral relationship and instead give way to continued, destabilizing acrimony. Such an outcome is, unfortunately, more likely than not given the immense challenges of attaining peace in Afghanistan and overcoming decades of bilateral tensions. In the event that conflict abates in Afghanistan, however, the Afghanistan-Pakistan bilateral relationship will play a key role in either building on the new stability or threatening to compromise it. The study concludes with an examination of the broader international community's contributions to the shaping of regional security.

[23] "Ashraf Ghani and the Pashtun Dilemma". *The Diplomat*. 18 January 2015.

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