

Original Article

USA withdrawal from Afghanistan: Challenges and Political-Economic Options for Pakistan in Changing Regional Dynamics

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Abstract

This research explored USA withdrawal from Afghanistan. The incident of 9/11 shocked the whole world, when two hijacked aeroplanes by Al-Qaeda hit twin towers of USA. Subsequently, 10 years of fighting in Afghanistan, on May 2, 2011, Osama, bin Laden was killed by American forces at Abbottabad in Pakistan. On January 20, 2014, President Barak Obama announced the policy of ending war in Afghanistan and withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan. His successor Donald J. Trump continued the same policy. Finally, on August 21, 2021, the last troop of USA withdrew from Afghanistan. The research also examined how Pakistan can play a role to improve the political economy of Afghanistan? The study elaborated how USA-Afghanistan conflict created challenges and political-economic options for Pakistan in changing regional dynamics. The researcher has used primary data using the method of semi-structured interview via purposive sampling, content analysis and documentary analysis to triangulate the data and to avoid the biasness in the research. The researcher has incorporated Rational Choice Theory (RCT) in his research to explore that how states make decisions based on cost and benefits analysis among their relations with each other? States opt the best among the available options, in term of their relations with other.

Keywords: Afghanistan, USA withdrawal, Political-Economic Options, Pakistan

1. INTRODUCTION

This study has focused on USA withdrawal from Afghanistan: challenges and political-economic options for Pakistan in changing regional dynamics. Furthermore, it has also explored the new phase of relations among USA, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. As it has been noticed that the incident of 9/11 traumatized the entire world. The twin towers of the great power of the day, the United States has hit by two hijacked aeroplanes by Al-Qaeda. This event did not bring a change only in American politics but also affected the international politics. After the said incident, the United States of America decided to target Al Qaeda's harbors. According to American's information the Taliban government had granted asylum to Osama bin Laden, who was the head of Al-Qaeda. As a result of negotiation failure, USA launched a full-scale military operation called "Operation Enduring Freedom" against Afghanistan.

Subsequently 10 years of fighting in Afghanistan, On May 2, 2011, Osama, bin Laden was killed by American forces at Abbottabad in Pakistan. On January 20, 2014, President Barak Obama announced the policy of ending war in Afghanistan and withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan. His successor Donald J. Trump continued the policy of withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan. Finally, on August 21, 2021, the last troop of USA withdrew from Afghanistan. Furthermore, the research has also highlighted Pakistan's policies towards Afghanistan with reference to strategic depth. Additionally, the research has examined how Pakistan played a role to improve the political economy of war-torn Afghanistan? The



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study has elaborated how USA-Afghanistan conflict created challenges and political-economic options for Pakistan in changing regional dynamics. Finally, the research has explored how Pakistan played a role in peace and stability of Afghanistan?

The researcher has used both primary and secondary sources of data collection by using the method of semi-structured interview via purposive sampling, content analysis and documentary analysis. In content analysis, the researcher extracts meaning from the content of communication. Borelson, defines content analysis as a research technique for the objective and systematic description of manifest content of communication. Baumgartner and Jones in 1993 have also used content analysis to explain agenda setting in the USA to show how the issues are taken up by the media in positive and negative way. The researcher has applied the method of documentary analysis to triangulate the data and to avoid biasness in the research.

The researcher has incorporated Rational Choice Theory (RCT) in his research to explore that how states make decisions based on cost and benefits analysis among their relations with each other? States opt the best among the available options in term of their relations with other states.

Background of the Study

The nature of Afghanistan- Pakistan's relations has been complexed and uncertain throughout the history due to its strategic location Afghanistan has remained the epicenter of foreign invasions of the great powers. The country has also played the role of "Buffer State" between Britain and Czarist Russia. While the communist threat and Indian socialist actions tied USA and Pakistan in a friendly relations. These relations emerged stronger by signing Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) In September, 1954 and Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), The Baghdad Pact was a defensive organization for promoting shared political, military, and economic goals founded in 1955 by Turkey, Iraq, Great Britain, Pakistan and Iran, the defensive pacts against communist USSR.

Significance of the Study

This study has incredibly significant for policy making documents and decision-making processes. Furthermore, the research has provided a road map to new researchers, who are interested in the relations among Pakistan, Afghanistan, and USA' relations. This will definitely provide an insight and will broaden the horizon of mind of the political scientists and they will understand things from new dimensions.

Limitations of the Study

This stud focuses on USA withdrawal from Afghanistan: challenges and political-economic options for Pakistan in changing regional dynamics. Furthermore, this research is limited only on political-economic options for Pakistan with reference to strategic depth towards Afghanistan, the role of Pakistan in the political-economy of Afghanistan and Pak-Afghan efforts in restoring peace and stability in the region, the focus of the research is only the above-mentioned areas. There are many problems that have not been explored yet. The students and academicians need to research on the Afghan-Russia Relations, Pakistan facilitating China's BRI project in Afghanistan, USA-India nexus towards Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Problem Statement

This research emphasizes on power vacuum created by the withdrawal of USA from Afghanistan. This vacuity will give a space to non-state actor that are ISIS of Khurasan province, which is a big threat to Afghanistan. They might be exploiting the deprivation of Afghan people and disturb the political situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The political instability of Afghanistan will be challenging for the political stability of Pakistan. Recently, India has tried to make de facto relations and to open its embassy in Afghanistan without recognizing Neo Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Indian involvement in Afghanistan is dangerous for Pakistan. Moreover, how Pakistan could help Afghanistan, in reforming its education system, improving its economy, and bringing political stability in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of USA from Afghanistan since 2021?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Afghanistan USA Relations

The United States established diplomatic ties with Afghanistan in 1935 (AFFAIRS, 2022). Formal

diplomatic relations between Afghanistan and United has established on June 06, 1942. Afghanistan had not remained important for United State throughout the history because United State considered it under the British sphere of Influence (Jabeen , Mazhar , & Goraya, 2010). In March 1951 George McGhee, who was the United States Assistant secretary of state for South Asian affairs visited Kabul and suggested United Nations involvement in Pashtunistan Issue to keep away Russian participation (Hammond, 1983). The invasion of USSR on Afghanistan changed the geostrategic position of Afghanistan. In 198, Republican Party won the election and Ronald Ragan became the 40th president of the United State. His anti-communist stance gave very tough time to USSR both economically and politically. After USSR's withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989, civil war started in Afghanistan. After the incident of 9/11 United State declared war on Afghanistan (Jabeen , Mazhar , & Goraya, 2010).

Operation Enduring Freedom

After the incident of 9/11 the united State launched a widespread military campaign named "Operation Enduring Freedom" by taking the European countries including Russia into account and other Taliban opposition parties in Afghanistan. With the toppling of Taliban regime in Afghanistan, Ivo Daalder, who is an International Security expert asserted that Al Qaeda is not the priority of United States, but to tackle the basic security challenges in Afghanistan. (Lansford, 2016). USA was not willing to recognize Taliban's government in Afghanistan but to restore peace in the country and to invest the resources in Afghanistan. Later, US relations deteriorated with Taliban over certain issues. For example, Taliban did not handover Osama bin Laden to USA, Taliban continued their support to terrorists and violated Human Rights (Hassan, 2009).

Interest of USA in Afghanistan

First, USA wants to keep a vigilant eye on the terrorist groups like Taliban, Al Qaeda, and the Islamic state. Second, USA does not want to occupy the power vacuum and dominate Afghanistan by major regional powers such as Russia, china and India (Jones, 2017).

Recently USA has tested a mega bomb named GB-4 against Islamic State in Afghanistan. In August 2019 trump tweeted about the reducing of US troops in Afghanistan and the withdrawal of all of its forces till 2021. Zalmay Khalilzad, who was the former ambassador of US in Afghanistan, appointed a special representative for Afghan reconciliation by Mike Pompeo, who was the secretary of state of USA, for the process of reconciliation with Taliban, Afghan government and other regional governments. Speaking to a TV channel Khalilzad confirmed that we will withdraw five thousand (5000) forces if the Taliban minimize the intensity of violence in Afghanistan. The president of USA Donald Trump officially announced withdrawal of troops and meeting with Taliban's leaders and Afghan government officials in Camp David. This announcement resulted in Taliban's attack in Kabul and the killing of one American soldier derailed the meeting. Mike Pompeo declared that will not stop our support for Afghan security forces. One group of the Taliban is of the opinion to establish Islamic emirate in Afghanistan once again. But this group has no popular support (Thomas, 2019). After the withdrawal of US and NATO forces Taliban declared Afghanistan an Islamic Emirate (Akhtar & Khan, 2021).

American policy towards Afghanistan

President Bush declared that the United States would continue its war against terrorism unless the entire world finishes their support to terrorists. American policy towards Afghanistan deals with issues like international terrorism, non-proliferation, and drug trafficking (Bush, 2001).

USA and Pakistan Relations

The threat of Communism and India's communist oriented behavior brought USA-Pakistan together to develop a cordial relations (Jain, 1953). Pakistan signed a collective defense agreement SEATO on September 8, 1954, and CENTO on September 23, 1955. In December 7-9, 1959, President Dwight D Eisenhower visited Pakistan and met Ayub Khan the president of Pakistan. On December 23, 1967, Lyndon B. Johnson came to Pakistan and met with Ayub Khan. Richard M. Nixon visited Pakistan and met Yahya khan in August 1-2, 1969. USA imposed economic and military sanction on Pakistan from 1972 to 1979 because Pakistan wanted to develop atomic bomb.

In 1977 Carter administration wanted that India should play a dominant role in South Asia. However, in December 1979 USSR invaded Afghanistan and USA changed its policy towards Pakistan (Coll, 2004). On May 28 and 30, 1998 Pakistan exploded its nuclear device against this exacerbated already imposed

sanctioned by USA. After the incident of September 11, 2001, it was difficult to invade Afghanistan without the active support of Pakistan. Pakistan unconditionally cooperated with USA and become the frontline ally of USA in war against terrorism. Once again Pakistan is granted economic and military assistance. USA has failed to establish order in Afghanistan and blame Pakistan for its failure. During his election campaign Donald Trump said USA will revise its policy towards Afghanistan and Pakistan to get complete victory in Afghanistan (Chaudhry, 2018).

US military violated the sovereignty of Pakistan and its military helicopters killed 11 Pakistani soldiers near Afghanistan border in June 2008 (Khan & Wei, 2016). Later in 2011 US army forces conducted a covert operation and killed Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad. According to Pervez Musharraf the former president of Pakistan, Pakistan was coerced to cooperate with USA. It was not a willing Cooperation and this kind of cooperation always have some reservations (Musharraf, 2006).

US policy in south Asia

Since President Bush's administration USA wants India to counter China in South. India is the only emerging economic power in South Asia and USA is making multi-lateral trade agreements. India and Pakistan have hostile relations since its inception and India is taking advantage from its influence in Afghanistan and want to reduce the importance on the other way, USA needs Pakistan as an ally to counter terrorism in Afghanistan. USA is in need of using Pakistan's route to supply logistic and other reinforcement to Afghanistan (Hanauer & Chalk, 2012).

Trump's administration suspended Pakistan's military assistance until Pakistan would take stringent measures against Haqqani network and Afghan Taliban. According to trump's tweet of January 1, 2018, in last 15 years Pakistan has received more than 33 billion dollars but had not fulfilled what it had to do. Trump wants Pakistan to change terrorists supporting policy because for American Pakistan's geography is very important to remain in Afghanistan. However, in Pakistan, Pak-Afghan policy is not dealing by the parliament and by the foreign office. USA is also interested in working with establishment rather than democratic forces. That is why she stopped the military assistance for Pakistan to pressurize Pakistan's military to work according to the wishes of Americans. Currently Pakistan sees beyond American aid. She is working on China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). China is ready to support Pakistan politically as well (Chandran, 2018).

Trump's new policy towards south Asia is highly appreciated by India and Afghanistan. The policy of do more or face the consequences is the trust deficit between Pakistan and USA relations because US officials do not see Pakistan as a trustworthy ally in the global war against terrorism. On the other way, they think Pakistan is harboring terrorist outfits. After the statement of Donald trump, US officials are trying to maintain the pressure on Pakistan, but they are unclear in the achievement of this objective. On the other hand, US is not in the position of declaring Pakistan as its enemy because peace in Afghanistan is only possible due to Pakistan's cooperation (KAURA, 2017).

USA's revised policy towards Pakistan

Both Pakistan and India want to establish their proxy government in Afghanistan. US presence in Afghanistan will minimize the security competition between Pakistan and India. Furthermore, America communicates the message to Afghanistan's neighbors that she will not tolerate to support terrorist groups like Taliban in Afghanistan. Washington's goal is to change Pakistan's supportive nature towards Taliban for this reason USA has reduced the military assistance for Pakistan. Moreover, USA see terrorist's sentries in Pakistan to be demolished. US aid to Pakistan could be increased if Pakistan cut its ties with Taliban, while on the other side Pakistan fears that Indian influence will be increased and Afghanistan will fell into chaos (Jones, 2017)

Nature of Afghanistan and Pakistan's Relations

Afghanistan had been in the influence of Great Britain from (1879-1919). After the emergence of Pakistan in 1947 Afghanistan-Pakistan's relations complicated over Pashtunistan and Durand Line issues (Tytler, 1962). Pakistan joined SEATO and CENTO for military support from USA to maintain its existence (SM Burke). Iskandar Mirza, who was the president of Pakistan visited Kabul in 1956. Later in 1958 king Zahir Shah of Afghanistan visited Pakistan. In 1960 President Ayub Khan of Pakistan met with foreign minister of Afghanistan to restore peaceful relations with Afghanistan. In 1963 Shah of Iran mediated between Afghanistan and Pakistan. As a result, in 1964 President Ayub Khan visited Kabul (Khan A. , 1967). In 1970 Pakistan adopted "Forward Policy" and supported Anti Daud Islamist movements. In July

1973 Sardar Daud overthrow king Zahir Shah because of struggle for power started between PDPA and Islamists in Afghanistan. Pakistan supported Islamist elements. In Afghan-USSR's war Pakistan supported Afghan's liberty and religious freedom. With emergence of Taliban in southwest of Afghanistan, Pakistan provided support at all levels until the Taliban Captured Kabul (Gregorian, 1969).

Afghanistan's government has never accepted Durand line as an international border. That is why the relations between both countries are antagonist since the inception of Pakistan. International community, UN and NATO should cooperate with Pakistan for reduction and elimination of terrorism (Rubin & Siddique, 2006).

Pakistan's Policy Choices towards Afghanistan

Pakistan's Afghan policy is based on strategic interest. First, Pakistan wanted to use Afghanistan as a strategic depth. Second as a gate way to central Asia Pakistan needs a stable Afghanistan for its own stability.

Pakistan could provide any kind of support to Afghanistan to maintain its influence in Afghanistan. For the accomplishment of the goals or being using Afghanistan as a strategic depth. Secondly, it could pressurize America diplomatically to Afghan to practice their faith and freedom. As for as the first option is concerned, Pakistan is not comfortable to work with USA in Afghanistan being their Muslim brothers it will bring internal protest and strife among the Pakistani nation. The presence of USA security forces in Afghanistan is seem a big treat to the national security of Pakistan operation on Usama and Salalah check post incidents are the glaring example of violating Pakistan's sovereignty.

President George W Bush's realistic statements "either with us or with them" we want Usama dead or alive" pressurize Pakistan to become the front-line ally of United States in war against terrorism.

Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan

Located in Asia with population of 35.53 million population, Afghanistan is encircled in civil war the since 1970s then USSR's invasion later in 2001 US invasion. Due to its geostrategic location Afghanistan is the center of attraction for great power. Stable and peaceful Afghanistan is good for Pakistan's security, while unstable Afghanistan is a security threat for Pakistan. These includes terrorism, religious extremism and threat from India. After the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan, it became harbor for terrorist from all over the world.

In 1979 Pakistan supported Mujahidin in Afghanistan against Soviet forces. Pakistan struggled for friendly government in Kabul and strategic depth against India. After Soviet withdrawal Pakistan adopted neutral and non-interference policy and supported UN and OIC's peace initiative in Afghanistan. Pakistan recognized Taliban's government as a legitimate government of Pakistan. Post Bonn conference Pakistan adopted neutral policy towards Afghanistan. Pakistan's relations were very friendly until the incident of 911 took place. On contrary, India had good relations with northern alliance in Afghanistan (Hassan, 2009).

In 2017 Royal Danish Defense college has arranged a conference about the confidence measure building between Afghanistan and Pakistan and the participant of the conference highlighted three areas including border security, economic cooperation, and Afghan refugees. The above issues need the sincere efforts of Pakistan and Afghanistan's governments. As for as the border security is concerned it needs vigilance to prevent transfer of weapons and huge amount of drug supply. Second, economic cooperation is especially important in the improvement of relations of both countries. Projects like APTTA, CPEC, CASA 1000 and TAPI will play a decisive role in near future. Economic interdependence will bring both countries closer. Example of European Union is best example in this context. Third, the issue of repatriation of Afghan refugees living in Pakistan. More than five million refugees came to Pakistan in 1980 both governments should make amicable policies about their repatriation (Vestenskov, 2017).

Gap in the Literature

Despite of so much material available on Afghanistan, Pakistan and USA relations, there are seldom any research about the power vacuum in Afghanistan after USA withdrawal from Afghanistan: challenges and political-economic options for Pakistan in changing regional dynamics. In this research the researcher has tried to explore the complexity of relations among USA, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Furthermore, it has been also explored that the political-economic options for Pakistan, striving for peace and stability in Afghanistan.

The research has also highlighted the policies of Pakistan towards Afghanistan. By using the method of Interviews via purposive sampling, content analysis and Rational Choice Theory, the researcher has found out the real phenomena happening among these states, which are Pakistan, Afghanistan and United States of America. Pakistan has been remained the front-line ally of USA in the war of terror, while on the other hand Pakistan was considering Afghanistan as its strategic depth. There is rarely local scholarly work on the dynamic policies of these countries and Pakistan's political-economic options towards Afghanistan.

Research Questions

- What policy options Pakistan has in the context of strategic depth towards Afghanistan?
- How can Pakistan play a role in the political economy of Afghanistan?
- What will be the political challenges for Pakistan with reference to changing regional dynamics?

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As far as this research is concerned, the researcher has used Rational choice theory which argues to open the black box of human mind in which there are inputs or demands entering and of course the decisions are made. States are no things but combination of individuals. In rational choice theory, an individual, sets their goals then he or she follows sequence of rational actions to achieve their goals. Historically, the roots of Rational Choice Theory date back to the age of enlightenment project where Thomas Hobbes described the working of political institutions through the choices of individuals in his book named *Leviathan* in 1651. Later, David Hume, Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham further explored the theory in economics. Further, Kahneman and Tversky laid its empirical foundation in Psychology (Oppenheimer, 2008).

The theory gained popularity when Noble Laureate Gary Becker applied rational actor model more widely in 1992. The crux of rational choice theory is that when people come across course of actions, they select the act which has the best utility or consequence. Defining rational choice theory, Friedman argues individuals tries to balance cost against benefits to achieve personal advantage. Furthermore, Green describes rational choice theory is an approach used by political scientist for understanding human behaviors.

Rational choice theory which is called rational action and choice theory as well assists in the understanding of social, economic, political, and individual behaviors. It is adopted as an approach of analysis in political science. In rational choice theory the decisions are made, while keeping the outcomes of actions. Rationality which is a prime assumption of RCT is not fixed and objective as it is a subjective phenomenon. While making decisions, individual acts rationally and sometime irrationally both. Here, RCT emphasizes on rationality. Being central to political science and International Relations, the theory has been used in the discipline of sociology, psychology, and philosophy. The popularity of the theory is associated with Becker's Nobel Prize. Gary Becker who was awarded Nobel Prize for pioneering economics is the study of human behaviors.

He combined economics with other social sciences to understand decision making processes in daily life. Becker more widely applied rational actor model in 1992. Elster argues that the essence of rational choice theory is that people select the option that has the best consequence. Moreover, the rationality stated by the social scientist opposes the rationality defined by the Adam Smith and Emilie Durkheim, the former is influenced by the social norms whereas the behavior of the later one is dependent upon the future rewards (Elster, 1989). The rational choice theorists explain rationality to carry out the option with the best result. Social scientists have provided a narrow definition to rationality. According to rational choice theory, an individual will try to balance cost against benefits to increase their benefits (Friedman, 1953).

Barry Weingast, a professor at Stanford University, says rational choice theory was not immensely popular about three decades before. Naturally, individuals are self-interested they want to increase their wealth and power. Rational choice theory, based on mathematical model and reasoning, compels peoples to opt utilitarian choices. Additionally, RCT is not only discussing economic issues, but it also takes social issues into account. It is used to assess the individual behavior. Becoming base for other theories, RCT is developmental technology for other theories.

The theory is being used in all social sciences for judging human behavior successfully since Behavioral revolution in 1950s (Shapiro, 2006). Scott argues, rational choice theory is successful among social sciences

because it anticipates human behavior. Rational choice theory's success in economics compelled social scientists to bring it into the domain of social sciences. Due to competition in market and politics social scientists are trying to apply rational choice theory in politics and voting behavior (Scott, 2000). There is no difference between voter and consumers because they are same people. Certainly, head of states are interested in the welfare of their public, nevertheless after themselves and their family. Empirical research conducted by Tullock states, average human being is 95% selfish. Among them some are less, and some are more (Tullock, 1976).

Currently, rational choice theory is being applied in broader spectrums and covers the area of legislation, coalition, party politics and International Relations. Examining the functioning of states, the theory claims that states engage in the activities of cost and benefits calculations. From the recognition to ending diplomatic ties states make decisions based on cost and benefits calculation (Harsanyi, 2006). Being rational actors, statesmen make decisions based on cost and benefits analysis. Using for the first-time rational choice for political parties and electoral behavior Anthony Downs Argues, individuals are very smart in making cost and benefits calculation when they have come across the possible available options. States are no but the combination of individuals at large (Downs, 1957).

Rational choice theory has also used successfully in non-economic, social, and particularly in political behavior (Black, 1958). People cast ballot for those candidates and parties as they can see fulfilling their demands (Kanwal, Shahid, & Naeem, 2016). In Levin and Milgrom's view, among the available possible options individuals choose the option of utility and optimization in decision making process. Adam Smith, who is the father of economics, is of the opinion that individuals use the option of utility in making decision and individuals make choices in their interest (Levin & Milgrom, 2004).

Assumption of rational choice theory

Individualism

Behaving as a rational actor, it is an actor who takes social actions or decisions. States are nothing but the combination of individuals. Head of the states are self-interested and self-maximizers in decisions making. The decisions cause in social outcomes. Therefore, States are independent and autonomous in decision making process. They always take decisions which serve their interest. Thus, the factor of self-interest is influential in the decision-making process of individuals rather than taking decisions based on collective interest. Finally, the decisions of individuals are the basis for larger social outcomes (Triandis, 2001).

Optimality

The actions of individuals are optimality based which means facing the course of actions an individual would choose the action which has the best result. An individual, who is a social actor, always strives for achieving the best among better for himself or herself. Moreover, an individual is not senseless as he does not work randomly without any self-interest. That is why Individuals often do some cost and benefits calculation. As for as the definition of optimality is concerned, (Abell, 2000) says, when there is no preferable social action for an individual during social actions.

Self-regard

Individual takes social action for his or her own benefits. They act for their own welfare. There are various kinds of existing sentiments such as charity, collectivity and public welfare which are seem contradictory to rational choice theory. A rational choice theorist only considers that actions which are concerned with their personal welfare and ends in their own benefits.

Rational choice theory has emerged in the field of social sciences. Gary Becher described rational choice theory as an outline for understanding human behavior. In rational choice theory people behave the way as they do. People make choices based on cost and benefits analysis and these choices govern their behavior. Evolving from economics, rational choice theory is being incorporated in sociology and political science. The theory states that people make decisions while keeping the benefits of an action in mind. For example, if a person having hungry children and needs food at that point, may be stealing has no cost for him but the benefit is that he would get the food.

Here, the benefit of food is higher than the cost. So, he would go for stealing (Chegg, 2016). Many scholars have pointed out the shortfall of Rational Choice Theory. According to the critiques, some of the rational choice theorists argue that people are always rational, but they have forgot that some time

people do act irrationally. Here, the element of collectivity is ruled out by the rational choice theorists by arguing that an individual will not work for community unless the work does not fulfill his or her personal interests (Ogu, 2013). In the case of my research the country made decisions based on cost and benefit and analysis in their diplomatic relations.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Content Analysis and Documentary Analysis

The research approach for current study is qualitative research through Interviews by using purposive or judgmental sampling. The researcher is contained both primary and secondary sources of data collection including Interviews, content analysis and documentary analysis. In this research, the researcher has taken the interview of experts via judgmental or purposive sampling because his research topic was about "USA withdrawal from Afghanistan: challenges and Political options for Pakistan in changing regional dynamics". So, for this purpose semi-structured interview questionnaire was developed. Before the commencement of data collection, first and foremost the researcher strived to find the experts, experts are all those who have the knowledge of USA, Pakistan, Afghanistan and about the area of the researcher.

After that the researcher got the access and the experts were interviewed. By purposive sampling the researcher went for the initial contacts, then he knew about the rest of the experts. So, he asked them to name other key individuals who are involved in the process of policy making processes. For achieving the easy access to meet with interviewees the strategies and tactics of text messages, making phone calls, taking time, cordial environment, probing were used. The interviews were taken from experts including politicians, journalists, academician, tribal elders and political workers. Thus 20 interviews were taken from both Pakistani and Afghan experts.

As mostly interviews have taken at the evening time because at that time experts were free. For interview, the time was already fixed via telephone and text messages. Later, the researcher went to their homes and offices to conduct practically their interviews. The experts who were too busy or out of station and vary far especially from Afghanistan were interviewed via telephone call, WhatsApp and Zoom. The researcher has also conducted content analysis and documentary analysis to triangulate the data and avoid the biasness in the research.

In content analysis the researcher extract meaning from communication. Communication means press, media, verbal and nonverbal. There are two main forms of content analysis. First is qualitative method of content analysis, which means when the meaning of words is explained in words by the researcher. Second, content analysis can be done quantitatively (Berelson, 1952). Qualitative content analysis means "A set of procedures to make inferences from text" (meaning from communication or inferences from text. Something in written form or nonverbal form from communication. The researcher will inference from the text (Hermann, 1980).

In Documentary Analysis is a process of reviewing and evaluating the available documents (Bowen, 2009). It is a method of qualitative research. In this method the researcher will examine the bills and act of parliament passed by the parliament regarding policy making. Speeches of the key parliamentarian, who are experts in Pak-Afghan and USA relations. Congressional record. Well known Television programs verifies from PAMERA websites. Concisely, the researcher will apply content analysis and documentary analysis for exploration and triangulation.

Research Design

The design of the research is qualitative and exploratory in nature. Furthermore, liner model would apply in the research.

Data Collection

The research contains primary and secondary sources of data. As it has discussed in the methodology part (interviews via purposive sampling, documentary analysis and content analysis). The researcher interpreted the interrelated text in written form. Including the bills, act of parliament, debates, speeches of politicians, congressional records, party manifestos, publications, and articles in the press, TV programs and academic books and articles. Besides, media talks and practices by the leaders and elites' speeches, which conveys a specific type of connotation.

Pakistan's policy options in the context of strategic depth towards Afghanistan

Interviews of the experts

Senator and former president of Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz, Sardar Yaqoob Khan Nasar, argues “Afghanistan is our neighbour and Muslim brother country. There should be cordial and bilateral relations between both states Pakistan and Afghanistan. An Independent and stable Afghanistan is favorable for Pakistan and for the entire region. Strain relations are neither in the favor of Pakistan nor in the favor of Afghanistan. Both the countries should make good policies towards each other.

Afghanistan should make independent policies which will durable, sustainable and acceptable to its neighboring states. The government of Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz has always played positive and constructive role to bring rapprochement and make cordial relations between the government of Pakistan and Afghanistan. The former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif nominated Mehmood Khan Achakzai a special envoy to Afghanistan, visited Afghanistan on 17-18 June 2014 to seek Afghanistan's cooperation in eliminating terrorism. So, it is often seen that thought out the history that friendly and cordial relations are in the favor of both countries. There should be bilateral relations between both states, one state should not dictate or dominate the other state” (Nasar, 2023).

Aziz Phatan who is the current chairman of municipal Committee Loralai, and has been involved in local politics and resolving Afghan refugees' issues since last 35 years, is of the opinion that “Afghanistan is our Muslim brother country we have to discuss Afghanistan related policies in the parliament, which will be beneficial for both countries and its people. Furthermore, policies made in the parliament will be acceptable for the people of both states. Though there are no prominent political parties in Afghanistan, Taliban's regime has to cooperate work together with Pakistan with to bring stability and peace in Afghanistan. Peaceful and stable Afghanistan will bring peace in the entire South Asia and Central Asia” (Pathan, 2023).

A professor of Pashto, poet, writer and researcher Mr. Karim Aamir says, “Pakistan considers Afghanistan its strategic depth since last 40 years this thing is created misconception among the people of both countries. Moreover, parliamentarian say policies should be made in the parliament while, foreign office responsible say it should be made in foreign office. No one knows where is it made? However, it is essential that all stake holders should be taken onboard. The peace and stability of Afghanistan will lead peace and stability in Pakistan and whole region. Afghanistan has remained a war torn country more than 40 years. War in Afghanistan, destabilized the economy and politics Pakistan and of whole region. In addition, Afghanistan is an independent country it has to make its own independent foreign policy towards Pakistan or any other state located in the region of South Asia or central Asia ” (Aamir, 2023).

Malak Amanat Hussain Kakazai, who is a journalist, travel agent and a successful businessman, says, Taliban's regime has brought pace and stability in Afghanistan. Earlier, Afghanistan was far lagging behind Pakistan in terms of economy stability, but currently its economy is growing. Pakistan needs to make a committee of experts including lawyers, senior bureaucrats, journalists, academicians and tribal elders to revise its policy towards Afghanistan. In 2002 Pakistan hosted 4.4 million Afghan refugees among 1.4 million refugees are registered in national database of Pakistan. So, it was a huge burden in the economy of Pakistan. Besides, it is in the interest of both Pakistan and Afghanistan to bring peace in Afghanistan and start trade between themselves. Restoring peace in Afghanistan is first and foremost responsibility of Pakistan and Afghanistan, after that there would be trade and better economy of both countries” (Hussain, 2023).

A lawyer and district president of Awami National Party (ANP), Manzoor Khan Kakar articulated that “there is no such policy of Pakistan towards Afghanistan except strategic depth. While making of any policy towards Afghanistan the political workers of all political parties should be taken in confidence. In other words parliament is the best option to discuss policy related issues. Awami National Party has a very cordial and sympathetic relations towards Afghanistan. In 1988, the founder of Awami National Party and Khudai Khidmatgar Abdul Ghafar Khan Baba is burried in Jalal Abad Afghanistan. The people of both countries have same religion, culture, language and tradition. The policies of Pakistan towards Afghanistan should be opened and made in the parliament visa Vis of Afghanistan towards Pakistan should be made in Loya Jirga. The relations of both countries should be based on bilateralism and it should not be based on dollars” (Kakar, 2023).

A member of central executive committee of Pashtoonkawa Mili Awami Party (PKMAP) Munawar Khan Aryan argues, “Afghan land should not be used by the terrorists or any other non-state actors towards any

country. However, it is frequently seen that Neo-Taliban regime is neutral so far. Though there are no large political parties in Afghanistan but there are individuals and personalities who are progressive and want change in political system of Afghanistan. As far as my knowledge is concerned I do not think there is any other policy of Pakistan towards Afghanistan besides strategic depth. In the light of 21 century, Pakistan needs to revise its strategic depth policy because all are independent nations no one can interfere in internally or externally in any state. Afghanistan has to stop using its soil against Pakistan. Pakistan has four weathers which are very beneficial for cultivating many crops. If Pakistan and Afghanistan become friendlier and start trade between themselves, it will really boost their economies. The trickle-down effect of this trade will also benefit the regional neighbors. One thing which is very necessary for both countries is to work on human behaviors to maximize trust deficit and eliminate misconceptions. There should be confidence building measures between both countries" (Aryan, 2023).

A Political Scientist, researcher and expert of Pak-Afghan relations, Mr. Sher Ahmed Durani says, Afghanistan is a security complex region. There is political vacuum in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is strategically important for great powers like USA, Russia, China, India, Iran, Pakistan and Central Asian Countries. Every one among the said nations tries to influence Afghanistan, wants to install its own regime to fill the power vacuum. In Afghanistan. Being a land lock country Afghanistan is dependent on Pakistan to access warm water. Pakistan is an atomic and organized country it has maritime borders and access to the world market. Countries like China and India are energy needed countries and Central Asian republics are energy rich countries. So, both sides need Afghanistan and Pakistan as a transit route. Moreover, American presence in Afghanistan was to keep an eye on Russia. Pakistan and Afghanistan are interdependent. This interdependence will certainly play a role in both countries peace" (Durani, 2023)

Pakistan's Role in the Political Economy of Afghanistan

"Pakistan can help Afghanistan and Afghanistan can help Pakistan economically if there is cordial relations and trade between both countries. So, it is necessary for both countries to promote trade relations" (Nasar, 2023). "Pakistan can facilitate Afghanistan via doing trade with Afghanistan. There are many aspects in which Afghanistan can take benefits from Pakistan especially in Medical field, engineering fields and many others and this would only be possible when there is cordial and friendly trade relations. Of course, the relations of Afghanistan and Pakistan is inseparable because the Afghan Pashtuns have tied their knot with the Pashtoon of Pakistan and not only with Pashtoon but also with the people of Punjab. When my second elder son was getting his medical house job in Sheikh Zahid hospital Lahore. He married his Punjabi lady doctor, who was his classfellow. Now, she is living with us in Paktika province in Afghanistan and working in our own Hospital. That is why I said earlier, Pak-Afghan relations are inseparable" (Hashim, 2023). "Currently, Pakistan may not be in the position to help Afghanistan's political economy if there would open trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan it will benefit both countries" (Aamir, 2023). "The only solution for the betterment of Pakistan and Afghanistan's economy is free trade" (Hussain, 2023).

"There should be free trade among Pakistan, Afghanistan, China, Iran and India this thing will boost the economies the above countries and will bring stability in the region. This model will work like European Union. France and Germany were enemies when they started trade of coal and steel they became interdependent and current trade between France and Germany is \$207 billion US dollars. Same was the case with china and India \$ 136 billion US dollars. If these countries make a regional economic forum, it will boost the trade of the above countries" (Kakar, 2023). An Afghan soldier, who worked with Afghan National Army for three year, Abdul Raziq Kharoti says, "during war on terror people have earned too much by carrying and exporting US goods to Afghanistan from Pakistan. People were receiving heavy fares to transport US and NATO's logistics because there was a fear that Taliban may hit the vehicle at any place. So, many time we came under fire but Allah escape us. If there is peace and security the transporter will earn too much in transportation" (Kharoti, 2023)

"Both Pakistan and Afghanistan's economies are war generated economies during war time they receive foreign aid. When war overs their economies start melting down. Currently, their economic conditions is same. They need to bring stability and peace in the region after this foreign Direct Investment will come in Pakistan and Afghanistan and their economies will improve. This thing will also benefit the whole region as well" (Aryan, 2023). "Being a land Lock country, Afghanistan is heavily interdependent on Pakistan. Afghanistan is doing trade via Chaman and Torkham border. Pakistan is home of 240 million people while Afghanistan's population is 4 million. As it is said that you can change your enemy but

you cannot change your neighbour. Pakistan has maritime borders and route to access the international markets. So, Afghanistan is dependent on Pakistan to get transit route to access till International market on the other hand Pakistan is dependent on Afghanistan to get access to central Asian states, which are energy rich countries. This interdependence will bring both countries to work together and restore peace in the region" (Durani, 2023).

USA Withdrawal and Political Challenges for Pakistan with Reference to Changing Regional Dynamics

Muthamim (Nazim) of Jamia Dar uloom Islamia Loralai, Molvi Shams Ul Haq, is of the opinion that USA withdrawal from Afghanistan will bring peace and Stability in Afghanistan and in the region. During US presence in Afghanistan there was war, bloodshed and no one was secure. US withdrawal is a good omen for the citizens of Afghanistan and the people of entire region. The Islami Amarat in Afghanistan is working to restore the justice. Bringing peace in Afghanistan. The peace and stability of Afghanistan is no doubt a big challenge for Afghanistan, Pakistan and for the entire region" (Ul-Haq, 2023). A researcher and political Scientist, Painsa Khan, Who lives in Kabul province of Afghanistan argues that "USA fought in Afghanistan and spent \$ 2.26 trillion in Afghanistan and achieved nothing except casualties, death and destructions. Before the invasion of USA and NATO forces, there was peace and stability in Afghanistan.

US invasion of Afghanistan pushed the whole region in war and instability. Today again there is same government of Afghan Taliban and they started from where they left" (Khan P., 2023). With the withdrawal of USA Afghanistan once again got independence and now Afghanistan is able to make its own decisions and policies. Afghanistan is an independent state no country has the right to dominate or dictate Afghanistan" (Nasar, 2023). "Being our Muslim brother country Pakistan has to help Afghanistan but Afghanistan has the right and choice to make its own independent policies towards any country" (Pathan, 2023).

"The biggest challenge in my opinion is restoring peace in Afghanistan and it depends on Afghan government if there relations with Pakistan was cordial and friend then Pakistan can bring peace in Afghanistan. If the current regime was inclined towards other state then it would be a great challenge for Pakistan to restore peace in Afghanistan" (Aamir, 2023). A professor of Islamic International University Dr. Masood Khattak is of the opinion that "Taliban may not eliminate Tehreek Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in Afghanistan they may play a double game with Pakistan. In this case restoring peace in the region would be a challenge for both governments" (Khattak, 2023). An Afghan journalist living in Paktia district of Afghanistan, Hameed Khan Johar argues that, "the withdrawal of USA from Afghanistan is the symbol of peace and stability in the region. Besides, the reestablishing of diplomatic relations of Saudi Arabia and Iran on March 10, 2023 will eliminate Sunni and Shia clashes in the region.

Furthermore, it will also minimized the intensity of Iraqi and Syrian civil wars" (Johar, 2023). "After the withdrawal of USA, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, India and China have to work together because India can take benefit from China's Built and Road Initiative (BRI) project which is called CPEC in Pakistan. It will also connect India with china, china with Pakistan, Pakistan with Afghans, Afghanistan with Iran and Iran with Moscow. So, the entire region will be connected through roads, sea, air and rails. Their economies will strengthen and improved. Except the regional connectivity it seems difficult for Pakistan to bring peace and stability in the region" (Kakar, 2023). "Afghanistan is a gate way to central Asia. Central Asian countries have surplus resources it can provide energy to Pakistan, India and China. TAPI gas pipeline project worth of \$ 10 billion can achieve its financial closure if these countries can work together. Besides, the regional connectivity and interdependence will restore peace and stability an Afghanistan and Pakistan" (Durani, 2023).

Discussion

Based on the results of interviews the researcher has discussed the findings, as it has been observed that there is no explicit policy of Pakistan towards Afghanistan except, Pakistan was considering Afghanistan its strategic depth and 5th province in the past. After USA withdrawal from Afghanistan now Afghanistan is an independent country and wants to maintain bilateral relations with Pakistan, China, Iran and all its neighboring countries. Currently, Taliban regime wants to maintain cordial and friendly relations with all countries. Foreign Minister of Afghanistan Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi announced on March 23, 2023 that Afghanistan is ready to work with the US, but sanction must go (JAZEERA, 2023). Both states Pakistan and Afghanistan can help each other by doing open and free trade. Afghanistan can provide a gate way to Pakistan for central Asia, which are resource rich countries while Pakistan can provide transit route to Afghanistan. Afghanistan is a land lock country. It needs transit route to reach till International

market. It is only possible when it has cordial and friendly relations with Pakistan.

Furthermore, current Taliban regime is serious to restore peace and stability in Afghanistan, the peace in Afghanistan will lead to the peace of entire region. The whole region was disturbed and destabilized because of US presence in Afghanistan. After the withdrawal of US and NATO forces from Afghanistan, peace is restoring back in the region. Due to China's effort, the diplomatic relations were reestablished between Saudi Arabia and Iran. This will result in the minimization of Iraqi and Syrian civil war and alleviate Sunni and Shia conflict in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen and Syria.

5. CONCLUSION

Historically, Pakistan and Afghanistan's relations has been remained strained and complexed due to Pakistan's strategic interest. First, Pakistan wanted to use Afghanistan as a strategic depth. Second, as a gate way to central Asia. Third, Pakistan needs a stable Afghanistan for its own stability. Moreover, Pashtunistan issue and Durand line were also exacerbated tension between both countries. On the hand, Afghanistan's soil has been used by the enemies of Pakistan time and again. Due to its geostrategic location Afghanistan is the center of attraction for great power. Countries like China and India are energy needed countries and Central Asian republics are energy rich countries. So, both sides need Afghanistan and Pakistan as a transit route. Besides, American presence in Afghanistan was to keep an eye on Russia and to dominate the region.

Being a land lock country Afghanistan is dependent on Pakistan to access till warm water. Pakistan is an atomic and organized country. Moreover, it has maritime borders and access to the world market. Pakistan and Afghanistan are interdependent states. This interdependence will certainly play a role in both countries' peace. Neo Taliban regime in Afghanistan has cordial relations with Pakistan. Being our Muslim brother country we have to discuss Afghanistan related policies in the parliament, which will be beneficial for both countries and its people. Under Taliban control Afghanistan is an independent country it has to make its own independent foreign policy towards Pakistan or any other state located in the region of South Asia or central Asia.

The presence of US security forces in Afghanistan is seem a big treat to the national security of Pakistan, operation on Usama and Salalah check post incidents are the examples of violating Pakistan's sovereignty. Stable and peaceful Afghanistan is good for Pakistan's security, while unstable Afghanistan is a security threat for Pakistan and regional countries. Instability in Afghanistan includes terrorism, religious extremism and threat from India. After the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan, it became harbor for terrorist from all over the world. While the withdrawal of USA from Afghanistan is seen the symbol of peace and stability in the region. When US security forces withdrew from Afghanistan, it got independence once again and now Afghanistan is able to make its own decisions and policies. Currently, Afghanistan is an independent state no country has the right to dominate or dictate Afghanistan. Besides, the reestablishing of cordial diplomatic relations of Saudi Arabia and Iran will also eliminate Sunni and Shia clashes in the region.

It is in the best interest of both Pakistan and Afghanistan to bring peace in Afghanistan and start trade between themselves. Afghan's land should not be used by the terrorists or any other non-state actors towards any country. Taliban needs to eliminate terrorist outfits in Afghanistan this will definitely make the region peaceful. The only solution for the betterment of Pakistan and Afghanistan's political economy is free trade, People to people contact and confidence building measure especially, to work on human behaviors to maximize trust deficit and eliminate misconceptions. Being a land Lock country, Afghanistan is heavily interdependent on Pakistan. Both Pakistan and Afghanistan's economies are war generated economies during war time they receive foreign aids.

When war overs their economies start melting down. Currently, their economic conditions is same. They need to bring stability and peace in the region. Furthermore, they should promote free trade and regional connectivity among Pakistan, Afghanistan, China, Iran and India this thing will boost the economies the above countries and will bring stability in the region. If Pakistan, Iran, India and China collaborate in the projects like China's Built and Road Initiative (BRI) project, APTTA, CPEC, CASA 1000 and TAPI will play a decisive role in near future. This economic interdependence will bring all regional countries closer. Of course, regional connectivity and interdependence will restore peace and stability in the entire region.

Competing Interests

The authors did not declare any competing interest.

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