

What does the US exit from Afghanistan mean for Pakistan's future?

After the terrorist attack on United States of America on 11 September 2001, the country blamed Al Qaeda for taking lives of its people and suspected Afghanistan to have provided a place to the Taliban to conduct its operations and spread terrorism. Therefore, in the same year, America decided to invade Afghanistan to deny terrorists a place from which they could operate successfully. This, as a result, started an 18 year long war between the two countries which will soon end.

Pakistan has a critical geographical position in South East Asia and shares border with Afghanistan due to which it became an important pathway for United States and got involved in the war it was not supposed to be part of. The instability in Afghanistan, as a result of invasion, has had a very negative impact on the whole east region, particularly Pakistan, during these 18 long years. Pakistan has continued to pay a heavy price in both economic and security sectors.

After the war between two countries started, a huge influx of Afghan population migrated to Pakistan in the following years and begun settling in Pakistan. During this time period, there was a sudden increase in terrorist attacks in the country. A significant portion of the available resources, both men and material, have been used up in trying to overcome security challenges in the last two decades and a good amount of population, both in the form of security forces and civilians, have rendered a lot of sacrifices including their lives as well. This entire situation had a damaging influence on overall growth rate in all major sectors of the economy. In recent years there has been a hindrance in Pakistan's normal economic and trading activities. Costs of doing businesses have increased, Production cycle of products have been interrupted due to which it is becoming increasingly difficult for exporters to fulfill the orders from across the globe due to inevitable delay. Moreover, Pakistani products have begun losing their market value due to stiff competition from competitors. Investment outflow and negative trends of outsourcing of capital in Pakistan have added to already poor performance of export industry. As a result, Pakistani economy has not been able to make progress as was expected.

For Pakistan, the move by US to exit Afghanistan, after announcement by Donald Trump in 2018, can have huge positive impacts on country. Stability in Afghanistan will create number of economic opportunities for people of the country. A peaceful Afghanistan can provide a direct

land route to central Asia for Pakistan to conduct trade across the region. Moreover, with the elimination of terrorists from Afghanistan, Pakistan will be able to address the security challenges in the China Pakistan Economic Corridor upon which the economic backbone of the country is dependent. The end of war in Afghanistan will also help Pakistan in improving relations with United States and help regaining trust with the country and improving its image. Efforts by Pakistan will help in getting its name removed from grey list (FATF) and would make it easier for the country to get access to loans from IMF on soft conditions. Not only will this help stabilize the government in Afghanistan, but will also help improve the bilateral relations between the two countries and help in countering the rising influence of India over the country.

Due to the ongoing War on Terror, Pakistan has already sacrificed its manpower and natural resources. According to an estimate, the direct and indirect costs incurred by Pakistan between October 2011 and September 2017 due to terrorism incidents were over USD 123 billion. Thus, peace in Afghanistan is only beneficial for the country in the longer run. The end of war between United States and Afghanistan has many benefits for Pakistan as political uncertainty in Afghanistan post-war can force a lot of people of the country to migrate to Pakistan. This in turn will put further burden on an already dismal economy of our country.

In conclusion, Pakistan's geostrategic location places it in the right position to determine the course of decisions that may shape the future of peace in the country but it must devise the appropriate strategy in coordination with other countries to ensure that any war in the region does not happen again.

Youth and Policy Makers