

Impact Of The US Troop Withdrawal From Afghanistan

By Lt Gen VA Bhat

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History of Afghanistan

Mahammed Zahir Shah ruled Afghanistan from 1933 to 1973. Sardar Mohammad Ashim Khan was the first Prime Minister (PM) till 1946. Sardar Shah Mahmud Khan replaced him and was succeeded by Mohammad Daoud Khan cousin of the king and his brother-in-law. Daoud looked for a closer relationship with the Soviet Union and a more distant one towards Pakistan. He advocated Pashtunistan which was not liked by Pakistan. Afghanistan vigorously protested the inclusion of Pashtun and Baluch areas within Pakistan without providing the inhabitants with an opportunity for self-determination. The Durrani monarchy went to the extent of opposing Pakistan's admission to the United Nations and raised irredentist claims to the Pashto speaking areas of NWFP and Balochistan provinces of Pakistan. A 'Pashtunistan' flag was raised in Kabul, alongside the Afghan national flag, as early as September 2, 1947. He was asked to resign in 1963. From 1963 until 1973, Zahir Shah took a more active role.

In 1964, King Zahir Shah promulgated a liberal constitution providing for a bicameral legislature to which the king appointed one-third of the deputies. The people elected another third, and the remainder were selected indirectly by provincial assemblies. Although Zahir's "experiment in democracy" produced few lasting reforms, it permitted the growth of unofficial extremist parties on both the left and the right. This included the communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), which had close ideological ties to the Soviet Union.

In 1967, the PDPA split into two major rival factions: the Khalq (Masses) was headed by Nur Muhammad Taraki and Hafizullah Amin who were supported by elements within the military, and the Parcham (Banner). Parcham (meaning “Banner” or “Flag”) was the name of one of the factions of the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan, formed in 1967 following its split. The basic ideology of the Parchamites was one of a gradual move towards socialism in Afghanistan. The Parcham faction supported this idea because they felt that Afghanistan was not industrialized enough to undergo a true proletarian revolution as called for in the Communist Manifesto.

In 1973 when the King Zahir Shah was outside the country for medical reasons the erstwhile PM Daoud Khan seized power, abolished first the Monarchy and thereafter the Constitution. Afghanistan became a republic under him and Daoud Khan its first President and PM.

On 28 April 1978, the PDPA, led by Nur Mohammad Taraki, Babrak Karmal and Amin Taha overthrew the government of Mohammad Daoud, who was assassinated in a bloody military coup. On 1 May, Taraki became President, Prime Minister and General Secretary of the PDPA. The country was then renamed the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA), and the PDPA regime lasted, in some form or another, until April 1992. Further Coups took place and by the middle of 1979 Hafizullah Amin took over as dictator of Afghanistan having eliminated all others who shared power as a Council. Reforms based on Communism were introduced and Purdah was banned as also Mosques. USSR poured millions of Dollars in Afghanistan to improve the infrastructure and modernise the country. Not satisfied with Amin, the USSR marched its Army into Afghanistan and took over in 1979. Not happy with the events in Afghanistan, the US and Pakistan with other allies supported the rebels who were fighting the Soviet Army with the latest weapons and millions of dollars in cash. This armed insurgency lasted for 10 years and the Soviet Union Withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989.

Once the common enemy USSR was defeated the rebels started fighting against each other to ascertain their superiority over each other and gain control of Kabul. This uncertain state continued till 1994 till the Taliban emerged. A radical outfit with Mullah Omar as its leader, Taliban was fully backed by the deep state of Pakistan and quickly started governing Afghanistan. The Taliban named themselves Islamic Emirates. They introduced the Sharia law and enforced it ruthlessly. Any opposition was systematically eliminated. The irony is the rebels and other terrorist organisation which received unqualified support from the US and other developed western Democracies in their fight against USSR now became the prime target for these radical groups.(The US) Afghanistan became a safe haven for all such Terrorist groups who spewed venom against US and the West. Notable was the protection given to Al Qaeda led by Osama Bin Laden. Ahmad Shah Massoud and Abdul Rashid Dostum formed the Northern Alliance, later joined by others, to resist the Taliban. Dostum’s forces were defeated by the Taliban during the Battles of Mazar-i-Sharif (1997–98); Pakistan’s Chief of Army Staff, Pervez Musharraf, began sending thousands of Pakistanis to help the Taliban defeat the Northern Alliance. Al Qaeda from its shelter planned meticulously and executed a strike in the heart of the US on 9 September 2001. The whole world was stunned to see the World Trade Centre buildings being reduced to dust by Al Qaeda. International condemnation of this dastardly attack followed. US President Bush imposed sanctions on Afghanistan and raised a world task force to counter attack and finish the Taliban and Osama Bin Laden. In October 2001, the United States invaded Afghanistan to remove the Taliban from power after they refused to hand over Osama Bin Laden, the prime suspect of the September 11 attacks, who was a “guest” of the Taliban and was operating his al-Qaeda network in Afghanistan. The majority of Afghans supported the American invasion of their country. During the initial invasion, US and UK forces bombed al-Qaeda training camps, and later working with the Northern Alliance, the Taliban regime came to an end.

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REMOVE A SANCTIONS CLOUD FROM U.S.-INDIAN RELATIONS

By Kenneth I Juster

Author served as the U.S. ambassador to India from 2017 to 2021.

India, which is neither an ally nor an adversary of the United States, has a long history of purchasing military hardware from the Soviet Union and later Russia. But India has gradually diversified its inventory of military supplies in recent years, with increased purchases from the United States since 2008, which now total over \$20 billion. The purchases include important naval assets, such as the P-8I maritime patrol and anti-submarine aircraft and the MH-60 Romeo helicopter, which will enhance maritime security in the Indian Ocean region.

Many U.S. defense firms now have a presence in India, facilitating co-production of defense equipment and the integration of Indian companies into the supply chains of U.S. defense manufacturers. The Tata-Boeing joint venture in Hyderabad will soon become the sole location for the production of Apache helicopter fuselages, and the Tata-Lockheed joint venture, also in Hyderabad, supplies all of Lockheed's C-130 empennages and will soon be its source for F-16 wings. These important contributions to the U.S.-Indian defense partnership, along with India's diversification away from Russian equipment, support the broad policy goal of CAATSA.

India believes that the S-400 missile system provides a significant capability against potential threats from China and Pakistan. New Delhi started discussing this system with Moscow around 2012. Although India already had a missile defense dialogue with the United States well before the discussions with Russia began, the Obama administration was reluctant to provide advanced missile defense systems to India. In any event, India announced its intention to purchase the S-400 in 2016, almost one year prior to the enactment of CAATSA. India and Russia formally signed their agreement in 2018. The United States subsequently offered surface-to-air missile equipment to India in late 2018 — the Patriot Advanced Capability-3 and the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense. From the Indian perspective, however, the U.S. equipment does not have the same needed operational capabilities as the S-400 and is much more expensive. Moreover, India felt that it already had a “done deal” with Russia.

In part with India in mind, the U.S. Congress amended the CAATSA legislation in 2018 to permit a waiver of the secondary sanctions under certain conditions, including whether the concerned country is cooperating with the United States on critical security matters and taking steps to reduce its procurement of major defense equipment from Russia. To date, the U.S. position has been that it has not yet granted any waivers under CAATSA and that allies and partners should forgo transactions with Russia that risk triggering the sanctions.

From the U.S. perspective, because India has not yet acquired the S-400 system, and thus not made a “significant transaction,” it is premature to consider either potential sanctions or a waiver. Austin indicated as much after meeting with Indian Defense Minister Rajnath Singh: “There has been no delivery of an S-400 system and the issue of sanctions is not being discussed.”

There may be internal disagreements in the Biden administration, as there were in the Trump administration, on whether to grant a waiver to India for the purchase of the S-400. Or perhaps the Biden administration has decided internally to issue a waiver to India if and when the S-400 is delivered, but it prefers not to state that now to avoid establishing a precedent for other partners considering the purchase of the S-400 or other Russian equipment. The administration may even hope that an intervening event will preclude the delivery of the Russian missile system to India.

Continuing to kick the sanctions can down the road, however, has a corrosive effect on the U.S.-Indian relationship.

It undermines the hard work by both countries during the past 21 years to overcome a lack of trust and, for India, a lingering concern about the reliability of the United States as a defense partner.

Some policymakers, who may be concerned about the precedent of a CAATSA waiver, have suggested that the United States could invoke the CAATSA provisions, but deliberately select five sanctions from the broader menu that have little material impact on India. There is merit to the concern about a precedent. But in the unique circumstances of this particular case, this concern is outweighed by the harm that such sanctions, even if used only symbolically, would do to the U.S.-Indian relationship.

The Challenges Posed by India's Purchases of Russian Equipment

CAATSA's effort to pressure Russia to curb its aggressive activity in Ukraine and elsewhere, as well as deny hard currency to the Russians, is certainly an important U.S. interest. However, the sustained effort by the United States to deepen its relationship with India in forming a pillar of stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific is also critical to U.S. geopolitical objectives. If India ultimately acquires the S-400 and the U.S. government imposes sanctions, the result will be to damage the U.S.-Indian relationship without punishing Russia.

Given the circumstances that led India to conclude its S-400 deal, the best course of action for U.S. officials, in balancing its two foreign policy priorities, is to face up to the issue now. After consultations with Congress to explain its views, the Biden administration should indicate its intention to grant a waiver to India for a transaction that is bound to happen anyway. At the same time, it should emphasize that all waiver decisions will remain strictly on a case-by-case basis. U.S. officials should also begin a frank and open discussion with Indian officials about the broader set of underlying issues that CAATSA obscures — the impact on the bilateral strategic partnership of the S-400 procurement and future Indian purchases of significant Russian military equipment.

In the course of these bilateral discussions, New Delhi can explain why, especially in cases where other countries do not have or will not offer comparable equipment, it wants to continue to make purchases from Russia that it views as critical to its national security. And Washington can make clear its position on malign Russian activities as well as concerns about possibly compromising U.S. technology due to Russian equipment in India's inventory. In this context, the United States should raise topics such as the positive impact that sophisticated U.S. equipment and technology could have on India's overall military capabilities, the benefits of increased interoperability of Indian and American forces, and the constraints that Russian military equipment in the Indian inventory could impose on the U.S. ability to support India in the case of a future military conflict with China.

The United States might also note that China has already acquired the S-400 system from Russia, so that if India is concerned about its defensive capabilities against China, it will be relying on a system that China knows well, including possibly how to circumvent it.

Looking Ahead

As the U.S. government balances its various interests regarding the S-400 issue, it should recognize that the continued threat of CAATSA sanctions against India is counterproductive in terms of the bilateral partnership as well as the broader U.S. strategy in the Indo-Pacific. The United States should therefore indicate now its intention to grant a waiver in this case, while starting a constructive dialogue with India on the impact of future purchases of Russian military equipment. The government of India will ultimately have to decide on its own trade-offs regarding American and Russian equipment, as well as on its long-term strategic orientation. Perhaps there will be technical solutions that mitigate some of India's potential challenges.

It is possible, however, that India's decisions will eventually affect the degree to which Washington will be able to provide special access for New Delhi to its most sophisticated technology. The consideration of all of these sensitive and important issues should not be clouded by the threat of secondary sanctions.

[Above viewpoint was published on War On The Rocks. Visit link for the complete Article.](#)

China's Aim To Install A Friendly Regime In Kabul Is Flawed

By Srikanth Kondapalli

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United States President Joe Biden's announcement on April 14 on a final pull-back of troops from Afghanistan by September 11 this year and the multi-party, multinational conference led by the United Nations, Qatar and Turkey slated for the end of next month have surprised many countries, including China.

As a neighbour of Afghanistan, with acute concerns on the controversy about Xinjiang's internment camps and growing political violence in the region, China has been at the forefront of many initiatives to curb the negative fallout from any US withdrawal of troops. China's multi-billion investment in the contiguous China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) could also be in jeopardy, as the April 21 bomb attack on a hotel in Quetta indicated.

The immediate response of China, which earlier criticised the presence of US troops in Afghanistan since 2001, is for such withdrawal "in a responsible and orderly manner to ensure a smooth transition" in Afghanistan.

China borders Afghanistan through the Badakhshan province for 76 kilometres in Xinjiang. This region was part of the Qing-British-Russian great game in the 19th century. Its national interests include stability in Xinjiang, which has been plagued by violence and drug trafficking. China concluded a border treaty with Afghanistan in 1963 but remains concerned about cross-border movements.

Given the importance of Afghanistan to its western stability and as a gateway to west and central Asia, China took several measures to cozy up to Kabul. In the 1990s, China began the Western Development Campaign, an effort for infrastructure and strategic domination. This has been transformed into the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

China's diplomatic interactions with Afghanistan have intensified over the years. In June 2012, the two elevated ties to "strategic cooperative partnership". President Ashraf Ghani surprised many when he chose China as his first visit abroad in 2014. In May 2016 the two sides signed an MoU on the BRI and in April 2019 the BRI energy partnership agreement was signed.

Secondly, China began activating its security contacts in the region. When the Soviet Union occupied Afghanistan, China's 300-odd military intelligence instructors trained the Mujahideen at Kashgar and Hotan. Later, Beijing made a deal with the Taliban to shield it from international pressure provided the Taliban did not support the Uighur insurgency in Xinjiang.

After the September 11 attacks and Afghan strikes in 2001, China articulated a position for observing the UN Charter, no collateral damage, civilian reconstruction and so on.

Beijing also concluded with Kabul a treaty in 2006 for expanding security and economic relations. However, after six deadly attacks killed several Chinese in different parts of Afghanistan, China began approaching the Hekmatyar Network through its own contacts in the Fata region, assisted by the ISI of Pakistan. China is now pushing the twin policies of making a deal with the Taliban for stability in Xinjiang and supporting a pro-Beijing transitional government.

China is also taking things into its own hands by establishing a military base in Badakhshan-Tajik borders with reports of frequent intrusions into Afghanistan. It is pushing its trilateral, quadrilateral and multilateral efforts to rope in regional actors, sometimes to the exclusion of others. This is seen in its discussions with Pakistan, Tajikistan, Nepal, Iran or Turkey. Its recent “Himalayan Quad” is to counter the other Quad.

China’s Afghan reconstruction efforts have been kept to a minimum, specifically assistance which remains a paltry \$156 million (as compared to over \$3 billion by India), suggesting that Beijing prefers to have political and security influence in Kabul. Its BRI commitments and bilateral trade and investment in Afghanistan are also minimal.

All in all, China’s approach towards Afghan reconciliation is flawed, self-centric and contradictory in nature with serious consequences to regional security and local well-being.

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Australia, India and Japan Launch Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI)

Commerce Ministers of Australia, India and Japan launched Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI) to mitigate the challenges of supply chain disruptions caused by various factors . Three countries aim to strengthen resilient supply chains with wider use of information technology; along with supporting trade and investment diversification.

The initiative will boost sharing of best practices on supply chain resilience and also promote investment opportunities for stakeholders to explore the possibility of diversification of their supply chains.

The Group of Ministers will meet annually to assess the progress and future course of action along with regular feedback mechanisms between officials of each country. Joint statement noted that the group may expand membership to include like-minded partners for strong, sustainable, balanced and inclusive growth in the region.

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Nation is Indebted to:

**Dr Regi M George and Dr Lalitha Regi
(Who brought hope in life of tribal in Sitheri Hills, Dharmapuri)**



It was a jungle out there in the Sitheri hills of Tamil Nadu. Life was cheap and death swift for the tribal in the area with the nearest big hospital 100 km away at Dharmapuri, the district headquarters. But that was till Dr Regi M. George and his wife Dr Lalitha made it their home. "Before our arrival, one out of five deliveries ended in the death of the child or the mother or both. But since we started working here, there has been no child death at our hospital," says Regi's, who set up the Tribal Health Initiative (THI) in 1993 at Sittilingi in Dharmapuri.

Regi, 51, and Lalitha, 49, who met at the Government Medical College in Alleppey, Kerala, joined the Kasturibai Hospital which served Gandhigram in Dindigul district of Tamil Nadu, in 1987. It was during an all-India tour that they realised that tribal are at the bottom of the development ladder.

Started as no more than a mud hut with only the couple on duty, THI has grown into a hospital with 40 staffers and facilities like an operation theatre, labour ward, scans and an X-Ray. They offer medical insurance to senior citizens among tribal for Rs 30 a year. For others too, the charge is not more than Rs 50-60. After many years of providing medical care, THI has now set its sights on livelihood issues. They are training tribal farmers in organic farming and providing vocational training in crafts, plumbing and welding.

An unbelievable work is being done for more than two decades, by this Malayali doctor couple, through their Tribal Health Initiative (THI) in the tribal hamlet of Sittilingi, Tamil Nadu. There was a time when the duo, both hailing from Kerala, were classmates and completed post-graduation in medicine, and chose to work at Gandhigram.

Soon they were stationed next at an unknown place on earth to serve its people. In 1993, a hospital for the people of Sittilingi was 50 kilometres away. The distance doubled if any surgery had to be performed — 100 kilometres. Regi and Lalitha, with their three-year-old-son and an engineer friend, operated Sittilingi's first 'hospital' in a hut. People looked upon them with disbelief.

"In the first place, they did not believe that we were doctors or we would come and work with them. The problem was of disbelief, not of resistance. That slowly changed as the hospital got bigger with surgical facilities put in place." Dr Regi recalls.

THI is a huge backbone upon which the educational, technological, farming, craft sectors and women entrepreneurship here have developed. Once when asked Dr Regi to give the update on the latest thing happening there, he told, it is women entrepreneurship support, something apart from what Dr Lalitha has been doing to promote the Lambadi handcrafts under the name Porgai (meaning pride in Lambadi dialect).

Meanwhile, from the thatched roof, the Tribal Hospital has grown to offer secondary care with five more expert doctors to assist the team. Philanthropist friends and well-wishers are there to offer monetary support at any moment. “We do all sort of surgeries. There is a full-fledged ICU with a ventilator. Almost all investigations — like endoscopy, ultrasound scan, echocardiography — which regular hospitals would do are performed here. We try and offer them everything that is available in Salem. They are asked to pay what they have and we never felt short of funds as friends’ chip in,” he says. After so many years here, Chengannur native Regi and Lalitha from Tripunithura are indispensable to the village. Even their two boys were home schooled in Sittilingi till class 4. If asked whether they’d come back to their native place, Regi would let out a big laugh and says NO. “Such lovely people here. We are part of the village; we are part of them.” He is content.

A great couple in the service of humanity, let us wish, for a very long life for them to serve the underprivileged in our society.

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